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Access to Higher Education through Community-Based Organizations

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Access to Higher Education through Community-Based Organizations

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Abstract

Although low-income students of color share similar desires as their White, affluent counterparts to attend college, studies indicate that they are at a disadvantage in accumulating the dominant social capital needed to access higher education. Research has yet to explore the accumulation of social capital through community-based organizations to help students access higher education. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to identify the strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education, using a social capital framework. Nine participants from three different types of community-based organizations participated in this study, including staff, students, and alumni. Nine individual semi-structured interviews, one focus group, and a document analysis of textual artifacts revealed that community-based organization staff have the ability to expand students' social networks and connect students with opportunities to accumulate dominant forms of capital needed to access higher education. Community-based organizations also use strategies like providing monetary resources, advising, direct programming, assessments, and empowering relationships to help students access higher education. The findings of this study indicate that further research should explore the relationship between social capital, low-income students of color, access to higher education, and community-based organizations. The results of this study can be used by scholars, educators, and community-based organization service providers to better understand the effect of social capital on access to life opportunities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

Low-income students of color have unequal access to dominant forms of social capital needed to access higher education (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Social capital is the resources that are invested and embedded within social networks that can result in access to life opportunities (Lin, 2000). Dominant social capital has the potential to aid students in accessing higher education because it provides the essential resources needed to navigate the college application process (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013; Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Miller, 2011). Compared to their White affluent counterparts, the social capital of low-income students of color is not valued or the equivalent to dominant forms of social capital. Low-income students of color are at risk for not accumulating dominant social capital because they lack access to networks with knowledge and resources about the dominant culture (i.e. valuable capital) embedded in formal institutions of education (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Stanton-Salazar (1997) stated that "the most important social spheres for children and youth are the extended family, the school, community organizations (e.g., the church), and the peer group," suggesting that students can accumulate social capital through these social networks (p. 6). Yet, factors like low-funded public schools and homogenous family networks can limit the type of social capital and guidance provided to low-income students of color (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Liou et al., 2009). Thus, it is important for researchers to identify additional networks and strategies to help low-income students of color increase their social capital and gain access to higher education.

Rationale of the Study

College attainment is perceived in the United States (U.S.) as a pathway to various life opportunities (Liou et al., 2009; Deterding, 2015). A significant benefit of a college education is the positive correlation between educational attainment and annual income. For example, the median annual income of a young adult in the U.S. ($30,550) increases as an individual completes some college with no degree ($34,640), receives an associate's degree ($36,940), or receives a bachelor's degree ($50,000) (United States Department of Education, 2017). This increase in annual income suggests positive outcomes from higher education. If students pursue higher education, they can gain access to life opportunities like a higher standard of living. Yet, the opportunity to access higher education is not equally distributed. Rather, the proportions of students who successfully access higher education are largely affluent and White or Asian (United States Department of Education, 2016).

While low-income students of color share a similar desire to attend college as their White, affluent counterparts and their college enrollment rates have increased within the past 15 years, low-income, Hispanic, and Black students continue to have low enrollment rates (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; United States Department of Education, 2017). In 2015, the immediate college enrollment rate of Asian (83.2 percent) and White (71.3 percent) students were higher than the national (69.2 percent), Hispanic (68.9 percent), and Black (55.6 percent) immediate enrollment rates (United States Department of Education, 2017). The 2015 immediate enrollment rate of low-income (69.2 percent) students was equivalent to the national immediate enrollment rate (69.2 percent). However, it was lower than the immediate enrollment rate of high-income (83.2 percent) students (United States Department of Education, 2017). These proportions indicate an unequal distribution of college access and enrollment across racial and social class status.

According to Brand and Xie (2010), individuals who are least likely to enroll in college can most benefit from higher education through the economic returns from increasing one's level of education. Of note, the median annual income of young Black adults with a high school education ($27,580) and young Hispanic adults with a high school education ($29,710) are lower than both the median annual income of all young adults ($30,550) and the median annual income of their White counterparts ($34,570) (United States Department of Education, 2017). Yet, if a young Black or Hispanic adult pursues higher education, their annual income increases at a higher rate than their affluent and White counterparts (United States Department of Education, 2017). Thus, higher education can become a competitive tool for low-income students of color to increase their socioeconomic status and access to life opportunities. If low-income students of color have a desire to attend college and can greatly benefit from higher education, it is important for scholars to identify factors that affect or increase college access and enrollment for low-income students of color.

Social capital is important to study because it can increase access to higher education for low-income students of color (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013; Liou et al., 2009; Miller, 2011). Social capital can impact the college planning process through the accumulation of knowledge-based resources. Knowledge-based resources include information about the college admissions process that is received through a student's networks or relationships (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). Students need this information to know how to successfully apply and enroll in institutions of higher education (McKillip et al., 2012). While low-income students of color have membership in various social networks, their accumulation of social capital is not reflective of the dominant social capital necessary to access higher education

(Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Therefore, it is important to identify networks that can build the social capital that low-income students of color need to access higher education.

While school and family networks can help students accumulate social capital necessary to access higher education, various factors can limit this accumulation. This includes "high student-counselor ratios, fewer available resources targeted toward college planning and preparation" (Farmer Hinton, 2008, p. 132), homogenous social networks, and spatial discrimination or isolation (Hillman, 2016; Lin, 2000). In addition to school and family networks, scholars can investigate the accumulation of social capital through community-based organizations. Community-based organizations implement programs for increased social and economic mobility of community residents. This includes community-based programs for students to better access life opportunities, like higher education (Liou et al., 2009). However, few studies have focused on the relationship between community-based organizations' programs, social capital, low-income students of color, and access to higher education (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). To better understand this relationship, scholars can investigate the accumulation of social capital through community-based programs aimed to help students access educational opportunities. The efforts to provide access to social capital can be assessed through the identification of strategies used by community-based organizations to help low-income students of color to access higher education. By investigating these strategies, scholars can expand the literature on how to better support low-income students of color to gain access to higher education.

Background of the Problem

Social capital is the resources that are invested and embedded within social networks that can result in access to life opportunities (Lin, 2000). Literature about social capital and

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educational opportunity has largely been influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). Coleman's (1988) work on social capital highlights an individual's choice to further their own social mobility through the optimization of social capital (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016). Bourdieu's (1986) work on social capital highlights the unequal distribution of social capital that can be used for social reproduction. Scholars have used both Coleman's functionalist perspective and Bourdieu's conflict perspective of social capital to understand educational achievement. This research includes studies about college enrollment, test scores, student retention, and grade point averages (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016). While the contrasting paradigms of social capital can result in diverse implications, literature largely suggests a positive relationship between dominant social capital and educational achievement (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016). When an individual accumulates more dominant social capital, they are more likely to increase their educational achievement (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016). Thus, this positive relationship can provide context to better understanding the necessity of social capital to gain access to higher education.

The expansion of social capital literature rapidly emerged during the 1990s (Fine, 2007). Of note, Lin (2000) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) further expanded Bourdieu's work on social capital inequality experienced by historically marginalized populations. Lin (2000) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) argue that the social capital necessary to increase social mobility is reflective of dominant, affluent culture and embedded in institutions of formal education and middle-class familial networks. The normalization of the dominant culture within the institutions and networks result in the exclusion of the experiences of low-income and racial minority populations (Lin, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). This exclusion makes it difficult for

marginalized groups to develop their networks and accumulate social capital necessary for social mobility because their social capital is not valued (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Although members of marginalized groups can develop their social networks to accumulate social capital, they are at a disadvantage because they tend to only have access to homogenous networks (Lin, 2000). Many of the parents of low-income students of color do not have a college education, making it difficult for them to provide helpful insight, advice, and resources to these students (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hillman, 2016). Students can address this disadvantage through institutional agents (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013).

Institutional agents are individuals that serve as a bridge between students and institutional resources. The connection between social capital and the role of institutional agents is influenced by the work of Stanton-Salazar (2011, 1997). Stanton-Salazar's (2011) framework provides insight on how institutional agents can help low-income students of color to access educational opportunities. This framework has recently influenced scholarship on the role of institutional agents within community-based organizations and programs (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013).

Scholarship from the past few decades suggest that literature about social capital, educational opportunity, and institutional agents should continue to expand. Key theoretical frameworks indicate the existence of social capital inequality (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Students with the dominant social capital have higher access to educational opportunities, while low-income students of color possess less dominant social capital and reduced access to higher education (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Low-income students of color can accumulate dominant social capital and access to higher education through the expansion of their social networks and exposure to institutional

agents (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). Recent literature suggests that community-based organizations could provide the institutional agents necessary to expand students' social capital. Therefore, it is important to develop further literature about the relationship between social capital, low-income students of color, access to higher education, and community-based organizations.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to further explore the relationship between community-based organizations, social capital, low-income students of color, and access to higher education. The objective of this study was to add to the existing literature about social capital and access to higher education, specifically addressing a gap in literature about the role of community-based organizations in the expansion of social networks and development of social capital. To meet the purpose and objective of this study, strategies that community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education were explored.

This study is beneficial to researchers, educators, and community-based organization service providers. This research contributes towards a gap in literature about social capital, community-based organizations, low-income student of color, and access to higher education. The results of this study can help researchers to further explore the role of community-based organizations in the context of access to higher education and the composition of youth social networks. These results can also have practical implications for educators and community-based organizations. Secondary educators can use this study to develop their understanding of the social contexts that affect the college planning process, which can be used to strengthen the resources available to low-income high school students of color. Community-based organization service providers can use this study to further their knowledge about social capital and strengthen

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their strategies to help marginalized youth to better access life opportunities. Community-based organization service provides can also use this study to better understand the barriers and strengths they create for low-income students of color to access higher education. Higher education professionals can use this study to understand and connect with community-based organizations that help low-income students of color access higher education.

Research Questions

This research explored the following question: What strategies do community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education? Additional questions helped guide and answer the main research question.

(1) What sources of knowledge do community-based organization staff refer to when helping low-income students of color access higher education?

    a. This question addresses the knowledge community-based organization staff members have about higher education. Knowing the sources of knowledge helped to reveal the normalized messages community-based organization staff members internalize and shared with current or former students.

(2) What direct services do community-based organization staff members provide to low-income students of color?

    a. This question addresses the role individual community-based organizations have within their community and their organization's responsibility to low-income students of color.

(3) What strategies do individual community-based organization staff members, students, or alumni believe are beneficial to helping students access higher education?

a. This question provides agency to the research participants, centering them as the experts. By asking what they believe is beneficial, I was able to further reflect on my own experiences and challenge my own assumptions about this topic.

(4) How do community-based organization staff members expand, limit, or affect students' social networks?

a. This question contextualizes the role that community-based organization staff members have within student social networks.

(5) What factors affect community-based organization capacity in helping low-income students of color access higher education?

a. This question addresses context within each organization and was used to identify patterns specific to community-based organizations that were addressed in the literature review, along with additional insights.

(6) How do community-based organization staff members act as gatekeepers or institutional agents for low-income students of color?

a. This question assesses community-based organization staff members' potential in serving as institutional agent or gatekeepers.

Propositions

The following propositions helped guide this study.

(1) College planning materials provided to low income students of color largely speak to the experiences of White and affluent students (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Liou et al., 2009).

(2) Helpful strategies to access higher education are possible if the organization receives

adequate funding to implement college-going curriculum within their community-based program(s) (Farmer-Hinton, 2008).

(3) Community-based organizations can help low-income students of color to persist in academic environments and increase social capital through the support of the organization's internal and external institutional agents (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013).

Design, Data Collection and Analysis

Design

This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological design (Henriques, 2014). Transcendental phenomenological research aims to describe the lived experiences of individuals by understanding what is experienced and how it is interpreted by participants (Henriques, 2014). I gathered data on participants from three different community-based organizations, using individual interviews, a focus group, and document analysis of resources. This research design benefited this study because it allowed for engagement in a process to recognize personal bias and encouraged the acknowledgement of the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Henriques, 2014). The responses of the research participants were analyzed, reduced, and compared to describe common experiences and distinguished networks among the strategies that various community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education. The documents provided by the community-based organizations were used to describe common strategies and verify the information or messages provided to students.

Participants

This study used a combination of maximum variation sampling and convenience sampling to identify participants from three different community-based organizations in a

Midwestern city. Maximum variation sampling is a type of purposive sampling that gathers a wide range of diverse participants. This sampling method helped to recruit nine participants from three different kinds of community-based organizations. Internet searches and established community or nonprofit professional networks were used to identify multiple community-based organizations that are representative of the different types of community-based organizations. The three different community-based organizations were identified for this study by using Coles' (2012) classification of different types of community-based organizations.

Directors of programs or services at community-based organizations received an email (see Appendix A). The email contained a summary of the study and contact information in case the community-based organization was interested in participating or hearing more about the study. After establishing interest in the study, the community-based organization was assessed on whether or not it provided programs or services to largely low-income students of color. To qualify for this study, at least 50% of students served by the community-based organization's program(s) had to be low-income students of color.

Upon receiving clearance from Grand Valley State University's Human Research Review Committee, three types of voluntary participants were recruited from each community-based organization. The program coordinator or organization director of each community-based organization helped identify at least one staff member that met the criteria of the study. Each staff member participant and program coordinator or organization director received electronic and hard-copy research flyers (see Appendix B) and copies of the consent forms. The flyers contained information about what the study was about, its purpose, who could be involved, and my contact information. I asked the staff members to share the research flyers in-person and through email to students and program alumni that met the study's participant criteria. Interested

student and alumni participants, or parents of students under the age of 18, were able to contact the community-based organization's staff member (via phone, email, or in person) or the researcher (via phone or email) to ask questions or establish interest. If the student or alumni participant qualified for the study, an interview was scheduled through email or in person contact.

This study aimed to recruit at least nine participants. Recommended research sample sizes for phenomenological studies vary. Morse (1994) recommends at least six participants, while Cresswell (1998) recommends at least five participants for phenomenological studies. By aiming for nine participants, I was able to accommodate the time constraints for this thesis study and support differing sample size recommendations. Thus, the sample size of this study suggests a strong sample size for an exploratory study that provides a rich, detailed description of the data. The following is detailed information about the three types of participants and their level of participation in the study.

Staff member participant. This study aimed for at least three staff member participants to participate in an individual interview. In order to qualify as a staff member participant, each individual needed to be an employee from a community-based organization that currently worked directly with low-income students of color. The demographic background of the employee was not a qualifying factor, but was noted (see Table 1, Chapter 4). Each staff member was asked to provide materials for the document analysis. The staff member was also sked to participate in a staff member focus group, consisting of staff across the different community-based organizations.

Student participants. This study aimed for three student participants to take part in this study. In order to qualify as a student participant, each individual needed to be a low-income,

high school student of color. The student must have been a high school junior or senior and must have participated or engaged with the community-based organization program(s) or services at the time of the study. The student participant was asked to participate in an in-depth interview.

Alumni participants. This study aimed for three alumni participants to take part in this study. In order to qualify as an alumni participant, each individual needed to be a low-income college student of color. The alumnus or alumna must have been enrolled in their first or second year of college and had participated or engaged with the community-based organization program(s) or services at the time of the study. Each alumni participant was asked to participate in an in-depth interview.

Instruments

Four different interview guides were created for this study. Three interview guides were for the semi-structured interviews with the staff participants, student participants, and alumni participants. The fourth interview guide was for the staff participant focus group. Each interview guide contained open-ended questions. Each committee member had an opportunity to provide feedback on the questions and validity of the interview guides. This instrumentation was chosen because few studies address how community-based organizations help low-income students of color to access higher education, making this an exploratory study (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). Although the validity and reliability of the questions were not readily available through previous studies, the committee members had a chance to craft, edit, and assess the content validity of the questions. Other instruments consisted of the nodes feature in NVivo research software. The nodes feature was used to do both initial and focused coding of the documents provided by the community-based organizations. The subjectivity of the qualitative design for all

interviews and the document analysis of resources was guided through the phenomenological approach of describing common themes.

Data Collection Procedures

This study collected data through three qualitative methods. This included a semi-structured interviews with each participant, a document analysis of materials frequently used with students, and a focus group with two of the four staff participants. The sequence of the data collection first consisted of individual interviews with the staff participants and collection of text-materials for the document analysis, followed by the interviews with student participants and alumni participants. The data collection concluded with the focus group of staff participants from two different community-based organizations. This study aimed for triangulation to cross-validate the data by using three different methods (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). At least two of the same staff participants for semi-structured interviews and the focus group, which helped to member- or cross-check the data and reach valid conclusions (Given, 2008). Therefore, by collecting data through individual interviews, a focus group, and a document analysis of artifacts (e.g. text materials), the findings of the study are further validated and provide a rich description of strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education.

Document analysis. A document analysis of the materials shared with students about college information helped collect data. The materials included flyers about workshops, resources about college financial aid, college admissions guidebooks, and any other material developed by the community-based organization about college opportunities or information or text-materials that the staff participants regularly used to help low-income students of color to

access higher education. Staff were notified that materials could be requested if another participant specified a resource not initially provided by the staff member.

Individual interviews and focus group. Data collection was also gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with each participant and a focus group with two of the four staff participants. Each individual interview was set to last approximately one hour, for a total of at least nine interviews. The focus group was set to last approximately 1.5 hours.

Data Analysis

The data from the document analysis of resources and the transcripts from all interviews were coded to reveal statements or patterns that describe what strategies community-based organizations use and how they implement or used the strategies with low-income students of color. The data analysis consisted of initial to focused coding of the interview transcripts and the documents. The findings were organized by the types of strategies, distinguished networks that provide information, and any other notable themes that emerged when comparing the different organizations.

Definition of Terms

The following are key variables of interest and their definitions.

Community-based organizations

Community-based organizations are non-profit or social service agencies that provide services or programs to help populations access life opportunities (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013).

Documents (for document analysis)

Documents, for the purpose of a document analysis, are text or visual materials that are created with no intervention of the researcher (Bowen, 2009). Documents include books, brochures,

flyers, advertisements, letters and memoranda, application forms, and manuals. This study

focused on text materials (documents).

Higher education

Higher education is formal education beyond a high school diploma or General Educational

Development (GED) certificate. This study focused on 2- and 4-year degree granting institutions.

Institutional agents

Institutional agents are individuals in positions of high-status or authority that can facilitate the

transmission of institutional resources (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2016).

Institutional agents can help students gain access to social capital influenced by the dominant

culture (Stanton-Salazar, 2016).

Low-income

Low-income is defined as "an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year

did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount" (United States Department of

Education, 2017, para. 2). Community-based organizations can collect data on students to

determine if the student is considered low-income. Students could also self-identify as low-

income.

Social capital

Social capital is the "investment and use of embedded resources in social relations for expected

returns" (Lin, 2000, p. 786). This includes access to social networks, information, and resources

necessary for individuals to access life opportunities and increase life chances (Lin, 2000;

Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Social networks

Social networks are defined as social relationships or ties that are "societal entities governed by social structure" and provide individuals "resources and support" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 8).

Students of color

Students of color are defined as any student who belongs to or identifies as part of a racial or ethnic group that is not White.

Delimitations of the Study

The study delimitations are primarily evident in the selection and restrictions of the sample size. The participants of the study were employees of community-based organizations or low-income students of color within a Midwestern city at the time of the study. This condition reflects the convenience of the sample. The exclusion of K-10 low-income students of color was intentional. These students could provide valuable insight on this research topic. However, compared to high school juniors and seniors or first- and second-year college students, these students may be less exposed to the college enrollment and admissions process. As with most qualitative studies, the sample size of this study was small to provide a rich description of the data. The number of participants was small, so I would have enough time to engage in triangulation of the data through multiple qualitative methods and to use a phenomenological approach to "understand the essence of a phenomenon" (Perry, 2013, p. 263).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include the demographics of the identified population, instruments to collect data, and the sample size of the three types of participants. First, participants resided in a mid-size Midwestern city, which could have influence the resources provided to community-based organizations to help communities access life opportunities. The city is also within proximity of several higher education institutions, which could influence the

strategies that community-based organizations used to help low-income students of color access higher education. Second, the interview guides were developed by me, a graduate student studying higher education. Although the interview questions were shaped by the literature of the topic, it was also shaped by my own knowledge or subjectivity. Third, while the overall sample size of this study is similar to other qualitative study sample sizes, this sample was reduced to three different types of participants from various organizations. This small sample size made it difficult to reach saturation, especially because I did not recruit three student, three alumni, and three staff participants. (Marshall et al., 2013).

Organization of the Thesis

This introductory chapter provides initial insight on the issue of low-income students of color lacking dominant forms of social capital needed to access higher education. The remaining chapters will provide insight on the following:

(1) Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the research paradigm selected and a comprehensive literature review of key texts and research findings that have informed the study of social capital, community-based organizations, strategies and models utilized in the college planning process, the needs of low-income students of color, and factors that contribute or limit access to higher education.

(2) Chapter 3 explains the research design, including information about the research participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

(3) Chapter 4 provides the context and findings of the study.

(4) Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the study through the discussion of findings, the broader implications and use of the study, and further recommendations for research, and practice, followed by a list of references.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a synthesis of literature to better understand the relationship between social capital, community-based organizations, access to higher education, and low-income students of color. First, the theoretical framework of social capital inequality is introduced, followed by Stanton-Salazar's (2011) concepts of institutional agents and institutional support. Second, a synthesis of literature is presented to introduce the scope of research findings surrounding barriers to higher education access, effective college access strategies, and the potential role(s) of community-based organizations. Third, a summary reviews the key findings of the literature. Concluding remarks introduce how this study relates to the literature and fills a gap in knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the concept of social capital inequality, institutional agents, and institutional support. The content presented in the social capital inequality section draw from the work of Bourdieu (1986), Lin (2005, 2000), Stanton-Salazar (2011, 1997), and Granovetter (1973). The section on institutional agents and institutional support draw from the work of Stanton-Salazar (2011). These theoretical concepts and Stanton-Salazar's (2011) typology of institutional agents were used to assess the study's findings, identify educational attainment barriers faced by low-income students of color, understand the roles of members within students' networks, and identify effective forms of support.

Social Capital Inequality

Although numerous scholars have expanded literature on social capital, the theoretical framework for this study is influenced by the work of Lin (2005, 2000), and Stanton Salazar (2011, 1997). The following introduces the concept of capital and social capital, including how these contribute to social group reproduction. Social capital barriers specific to low-income

students of color will then be introduced, along with proposed social relationships that can help these students gain access to and navigate dominant forms of capital.

Social capital has developed into a significant theoretical concept in the social sciences and can be used to understand the consequences of the distribution of resources within social networks (Ahn, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Bourdieu (1986) defined capital as a materialized form of accumulated labor that can produce profit, status, and dominance. People accumulate capital over time and reproduce it in an "identical or expanded form" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 46). While economic and cultural capital can be converted into money and understanding of dominant social norms, social capital is unique in its accumulated production of social status, transmission of capital, and economic returns (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is defined as the resources that are invested and embedded within social networks (Lin, 2000). The relationships within these social networks can provide each member a status or credential that connects them to capital across physical, economic, and social spaces (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, social capital provides access to network membership and a collective form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Since social capital is attached to membership within a network, it can result in an unequal distribution of capital and limited social mobility. "Members of a social group tend to form networks involving other members from the same group" (Lin, 2000, p. 787). For members of groups with high socioeconomic status or high-status, they can access capital that is needed for social mobility because of their membership in middle-class networks. This is because the social capital that is necessary to increase social mobility (e.g. receive a college education) is reflective of the dominant, affluent culture that is embedded in the resources of middle-class networks (Lin, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Yet, for members of historically marginalized groups or low-status groups, this can be problematic because they tend to only have access to

homogenous networks that are not reflective of middle-class resources or capital (Lin, 2000).

Thus, social capital inequality exists because the value placed on membership in homogenous

networks can only help members of high-status groups and limit members from low-status

groups to access the resources needed for social mobility and "quality of life" (Lin, 2000, p.

786).

The accumulation of social capital for the purpose of educational achievement can be

difficult for low-income students of color. Stanton-Salazar (1997) explains that this can be

difficult because minority students belong to racial and social class groups that are systemically

marginalized by society. This marginalization creates barriers that limit youth participation in

dominant settings (e.g. school) and help-seeking from the dominant group (e.g. school

personnel). While there may be opportunities for students to further their social capital (e.g.

college preparatory programs), these students are evaluated and recruited by school personnel.

School personnel largely select students for these opportunities based on their perceptions of the

student's willingness to adopt the dominant group's cultural capital, forcing students to assimilate

to the dominant culture (Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). While

these barriers make it difficult for students to accumulate social capital, students may gain access

to educational opportunities through other relationships or networks.

Stanton-Salazar (2011, 1997) and Lin (2005) argue that people from non-dominant

groups can gain access to dominant social capital through different uses of weak ties. Social

networks are composed of interpersonal ties that are considered strong or weak (Granovetter,

1973). The strength of interpersonal ties is influenced by the amount of time, emotional

involvement, and reciprocity within a relationship (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties tend to be

homogenous and weak ties tend to be heterogeneous in nature (Granovetter, 1973). Since

members of social groups tend to have homogenous networks, most of their social capital is preserved through strong ties, which maintains social stratification (Lin, 2005). However, weak ties can be useful for individuals to obtain instrumental resources that can serve as bridges to dominant forms of capital (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2005). Stanton-Salazar's (2011, 1997) work on low-income racial minority student socialization introduces the benefit of one type of weak tie, institutional agents.

Institutional Agents

Institutional agents are individuals in positions of high-status or authority that can facilitate the transmission of institutional support or highly-valued resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, 1997). By being in a position of high-status or authority, agents are familiar with and have access to dominant forms of capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). An institutional agent can use their access to capital and position of power to strategically support an individual. This can include direct forms of support (e.g. providing information) or other forms of networking (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). As a result of this support, an institutional agent has the potential to empower (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The following provides context on institutional agents and introduce two types of institutional agents that significantly impact student agency and educational achievement.

Manifestation of institutional agents. Members in a student's social network tend to come from family, school, peers, and community organizations (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Since individuals from non-dominant groups tend to have networks largely composed of strong ties, family members and peers are usually not considered institutional agents. Individuals that could be considered institutional agents include people that work in "public or private institutions such as the school, community organizations, commercial centers, religious institutions, the media,

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social service agencies, government agencies, and employment sites" or informal mentors (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1069). These individuals become agents by directly providing or accumulating resources to support a student's navigation of dominant spaces (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In the context of educational spaces, this can also include providing resources for other colleagues to empower and support students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

School personnel as gatekeeping agents. While school personnel can support students in educational attainment, Stanton-Salazar (2011, 1997) cautions that they are more likely to be gatekeepers. Gatekeepers work in various public and private institutions that serve diverse groups of people (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Regardless of intention, these individuals are more likely to provide supportive services to individuals who possess dominant forms of capital or "demonstrate institutionalized symbols of merit and ability" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1077). By participating in this restrictive action, gatekeepers do not challenge the system(s) that disadvantage low-income students of color. Thus, gatekeepers are not intentional about challenging social group dominance and stratification (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

School personnel are considered gatekeepers because of their positionality within schools. School personnel can support students in educational attainment through guidance, emotional and social support, advocacy, and mentorship (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). However, their work with students is confined to the bureaucratic restrictions (e.g. policy and rules) of their educational institution or organization (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). If a school staff member resists these bureaucratic restrictions, they can risk losing their job (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, 1997). They are also often obligated to evaluate students through symbolic forms of the dominant cultural capital. This is demonstrated through the reward and punishment merit system in schools that is largely classist and racist (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). This system makes it difficult for students to

engage with and trust school personnel. In addition, limitations in scheduling, funding, and time or availability for one-on-one interaction makes it difficult for school personnel and students to develop long-term relationships (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). These limitations make school personnel gatekeepers through the difficulty of creating authentic, trusting, and empowering relationships with students; especially for marginalized students who could largely benefit from the transmission of dominant capital from school personnel (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Empowerment agents. Stanton-Salazar (2011) uses the concept of empowerment agents to introduce institutional agents that can resist the established stratification of low-status students. Empowerment agents are institutional agents that are critical and aware of sociopolitical context, resist participation in structures that further marginalize students, and use forms of institutional support to empower students to achieve agency (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). While many institutional agents have the potential to be empowerment agents, Stanton-Salazar (2011) claims that they must demonstrate the following characteristics:

(1) Empowerment agents are aware of their institution's and society's structural factors that limit the success of low-status students (e.g. lack of financial resources).

(2) Empowerment agents have a critical understanding of the positive relationship between the success of students and institutional support.

(3) Empowerment agents are willing to resist established rules that designate resources only to "upper-levels of hierarchy" (e.g. advocacy of students with high-academic performance; p. 1089).

(4) Empowerment agents identify themselves as agents who advocate on behalf of marginalized students and institutional support.

(5) Empowerment agents are willing and driven to be identified among colleagues as an

agent for marginalized students. (Stanton-Salazar, 2011)

By demonstrating these characteristics, empowerment agents can use various forms of

institutional support to help students achieve agency and educational achievement.

Institutional support. Institutional support are forms of social support and resources that

establish a student's potential to successfully participate in institutions that result in educational

achievement, social mobility, and agency (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). By combining Stanton-

Salazar's (1997) six key forms of institutional support with literature about mentorship and social

work, Stanton-Salazar (2011) provides the following roles as an introduction to the types of

empowerment provided by institutional agents.

Direct support. Institutional agents can provide students direct support by serving as

resource and knowledge agents, advisors, advocates, and networking coaches. A resource agent

provides their own personal resources to students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A knowledge agent

possesses knowledge about the institution and bureaucracy that can be provided to students to

better navigate "the system" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). An advisor works alongside students to

collect information and effectively develop the student's decision-making skills (Stanton-Salazar,

2011). An advocate publicly supports and protects the interest of the students they work with

(Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A networking coach uses their competency in networking to connect

with people in positions of power and to teach students how to network with institutional agents

(Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Integrative support. Institutional agents can provide integrative support by serving as

integrative agents and cultural guides. An integrative agent helps students integrate into

professional networks and environments. (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A cultural guide uses their

understanding of dominant cultural capital to help students understand dominant or new forms of cultural capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

System developer. Institutional agents develop student's access to systems by serving as a program developer, lobbyist, and political advocate. Program developers create programs that center student resources and access to institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A lobbyist advocates for resources to support students, while a political advocate engages with political action committees that support policy and institutional resources for marginalized student groups (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

System linkage and networking support. Institutional agents can provide system linkage and networking support by serving as a recruiter, bridging agent, institutional broker, and coordinator. Institutional agents can recruit students for beneficial programs or initiatives. A bridging agent has an effective social network that can be used to inform and connect them with key institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A coordinator can identify resources to meet student needs, provides access to resources, and encourages students to use those resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011)

Summary

The above theoretical framework was identified to best capture the understanding of social capital that relates to low-income youth of color. Through the framework of social capital inequality, this study was able to address the network composition that impacts the accumulation of social capital and educational achievement. By using the concept of institutional agents, this study explored the types of network members that may be specifically helpful to low-income youth of color (e.g. high school students). The concept of institutional support helped to identify and evaluate the strategies gathered from the study's participants.

<center>**Synthesis of Findings**</center>

Research about low-income students of color suggests that various factors impact their access to higher education. The following presents key findings from literature about the barriers that low-income, high school students of color face in accessing higher education, along with useful strategies to address these barriers. Key findings from literature about community-based organizations and low-income students of color are also introduced to provide a foundation of understanding about their potential role in helping students access higher education.

Barriers to Higher Education

Homogenous networks created by location. Using national data, Hillman's (2016) study on commuting zones revealed the existence of education deserts, the concept that college opportunities are bound to racial and class divides. Low-income communities and communities of color reside close to fewer opportunities of higher education, whereas White, Asian, and high-income communities reside close to more opportunities of higher education (Hillman, 2016). Low-income communities and communities of color are also more likely to pursue local higher education opportunities (Hillman, 2016). Since an individual's educational attainment level is more likely to increase if they reside in an area near colleges, and low-status communities are limited to fewer local social mobility options, low-income individuals and people of color are at a disadvantage (Hillman, 2016). Thus, low-income individuals and people of color are more likely to have homogenous networks that have lower levels of educational attainment and limited access to social mobility resources (Hillman, 2016). If dominant forms of social capital are tied to high-status individuals, location is a barrier for low-income students of color because education deserts place them in homogenous networks with strong ties to people with low educational achievement.

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Under-resourced schools. Although schools can provide resources to help low-income students of color access higher education (Farmer-Hinton, 2008), high schools create structural barriers that prevent students from fully gaining access to college resources and information (Holland, 2010). High schools with a large enrollment of low-income students of color provide few resources to students because they tend to be underperforming, overcrowded, and understaffed (Liou, et al., 2009). These poor high school conditions limit student access to social and academic support (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). The following provides context to school barriers that limit low-income students of color from accumulating and navigating dominant forms of social capital.

Low-income students of color struggle to access and successfully engage with rigorous curriculum that can increase college access. A secondary analysis of national, longitudinal data revealed significant disparities in access to advanced curriculum (Attewell & Domina, 2008). While prior performance can predict student curriculum, family socioeconomic status has a higher influence of determining student access to rigorous curriculum (Attewell & Domina, 2008). By analyzing two qualitative studies about college and opportunity networks, Welton and Martinez (2014) found that White and affluent students utilized their own networks to increase their chances of enrolling in advanced placement (AP) classes. They also found that students did not enroll in AP or dual enrollment courses because there was a general lack of awareness about enrollment requirements for the courses or students were intimidated to enroll (Welton & Martinez, 2014). These findings suggest that low-income students of color face barriers in enrollment of high-level courses. Even when low-income students of color enroll in these high-level courses, they are at risk of not succeeding. Welton and Martinez (2014) found that students who had attended middle schools with high enrollment of low-income students of color realized

that they were academically unprepared for the classes, once enrolled, compared to their classmates who had attended middle schools with high enrollment of White, affluent students. Thus, low-income students of color face barriers to advanced curriculum that could strengthen their academic background to access higher education.

Students with families who do not have experience or resources about higher education primarily turn to high school counselors for help (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). Emerging in the 1970s, high school counselors have had three main duties: serving as mental health experts, school administrators, and college counselors (McKillip et al., 2012). Yet, high school counselors are of limited help because they often have large student caseloads and limited designated time for college planning activities (Holland, 2010; McKillip et al., 2012). In addition, first-generation, Black, Hispanic, and low-income students are more likely to have difficulties accessing their school counselor (McKillip et al., 2012). Students are also less likely to engage with their school counselor(s) if they attend schools with high levels of poverty (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). For example, the schools that participated in De La Rosa's (2006) study about low-income high school, students of color had student populations that ranged from 1,000 to 5,000 students. Yet, each school had only one counselor. This resulted in less than half of the 11th and 12th grade students receiving adequate information about financial aid from school personnel (De La Rosa, 2006). Lastly, when high school counselors can work with students, much of their meeting time is dedicated to providing information, rather than guidance (e.g. helping students navigate a college application or financial aid process; McKillip et al., 2012). These findings indicate a barrier for low-income students of color because they have difficulties in accessing and receiving help from the school personnel that have college counselor roles.

High school counselors and teachers can serve as gatekeepers (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). For example, Welton and Martinez (2014) revealed that one school involved in their study had high school counselors that would encourage students to pursue minimum graduation plans instead of higher-level courses. Even when students receive guidance from school personnel, it is mostly provided to high-achieving students or not "systemically distributed to students of color" (De La Rosa, 2006; Welton & Martinez, 2014, p. 209). In addition, Liou et al. (2009) revealed that not all school personnel believe that all low-income or students of color should go to college. By discouraging students from rigorous academic opportunities, providing select students access to information, and reinforcing ideologies that limit educational attainment of low-income students of color, some school personnel act as gatekeepers because they influence who can and cannot have access to dominant forms of capital necessary for college access.

Low-income students of color are at the risk of antagonistic school environments. For example, Harris and Marquez Kiyama (2013) argue that the Hispanic students in their study were negatively affected by their teacher's low expectations of them. One study found that the majority of the teachers surveyed in a longitudinal study had lower perceptions of Black and Hispanic students' educational attainment, regardless of the teacher's racial identity (Mahatmya, Lohman, Brown, and Conway-Turner, 2016). If school personnel do not have, or are perceived to not have, high academic expectations of students, students are less likely to ask school personnel about college information (Bryan et al., 2011). Hispanic students involved in Liou et al.'s (2009) study expressed feelings about their teachers not caring about them, which prevented them from seeking out guidance from their teachers. Antagonistic environments are not limited to high school settings. Several middle school participants in Wong's (2010) study claimed that

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because their teachers did not actively pursue meaningful connections with the students, they did not think that their teachers cared about them. Lastly, Holland (2013) argues that the bureaucratic structure of high schools creates authoritative environments that prevent students from questioning the knowledge of institutional agents or seeking help. If students do not feel empowered to engage with school personnel or challenge structural bureaucracies, then they may be limited in their accumulation of social capital that can provide them access to higher education.

Students may internalize oppressive attitudes and guilt, regardless of the resources provided to them. When interviewing low-income students of color who benefitted from high-level courses, Welton and Martinez (2014) revealed that some students believed in stereotypes about students of color not setting high expectations of themselves. They also found that not all students were aware of the barriers they face to college access. While some students recognized that individual merit was not the only factor that provided them access to upper-level courses, some students believed that all students had equal access to resources (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Also, students may feel guilty as a result of recognizing the structural barriers that limit access to higher education. Farmer-Hinton (2008) found that students experienced feelings of conflict about whether or not they, as low-income students of color, were deserving of college planning resources compared to students from similar backgrounds that did not attend their school. Thus, even if students gain access to opportunities to help them access higher education, they may face emotional barriers and feelings of disempowerment.

Strategies that Help Students Access Higher Education

This section provides recommendations for strategies that help students access higher education. These recommendations are largely supported by key findings from literature about

social capital, low-income high school students of color, and higher education enrollment or access.

  Family Involvement. Family involvement can positively affect student access to higher education. Enrollment of students of color in 2- and 4-year colleges is positively related with parental involvement (Perna & Titus, 2005). Perna and Titus (2005) found that Hispanic and Black students have higher odds of college enrollment if their parent(s) has education-related discussions with their child, contacts their child's school for volunteer opportunities, or initiates conversations about their child's academics with the school. Farmer-Hinton's (2008) study on social capital and low-income students of color suggested that parents were able to help students through emotional support and some guidance (e.g. reviewing college costs and reminding students about deadlines), when paired with direct college guidance from school personnel. In addition, George Mwangi's (2015) synthesis on nonparent family and community (NPFC) members' impact on college choice revealed that marginalized students can benefit from the guidance of siblings who were currently enrolled or had graduated from college. Yet, while students can benefit from family involvement, it is conditional. Wong's (2010) study about low-income Chinese American youth revealed that their parents' inflexible work schedules prevented them from having much direct contact with their parents. Therefore, the efficacy of parental involvement in helping low-income students of color access higher education can be limited by structural factors and access to family members who possess or are aware of dominant forms of capital (George Mwangi, 2015).

  Intervention or supplementary academic support programs. Intervention or supplementary academic support programs can help students enroll in higher education. Federally funded initiatives, such as GearUP (i.e. a program aimed to help low-income students

graduate high school and enroll in postsecondary education), can result in significantly higher graduation rates, standardized test scores, and immediate college enrollment rates (Morgan, Sinatra, & Eschenauer, 2014). In addition, Domina's (2014) national study about merit aid programs revealed that programs that offer generous financial aid, such as full tuition, can also increase college enrollment. However, not all intervention or supplementary academic support programs result in increased access to higher education. One study of an intervention program that provided various forms of academic support (e.g. standardized test preparation, summer academic programs, and scholarship incentives) to underrepresented students did not result in any significant differences in college enrollment among participants and non-participants (Bergin, Cooks, & Bergin, 2007). Therefore, more studies are needed to identify specific factors or strategies within these programs that could help students access higher education (Domina, 2014; Morgan et al., 2014).

Engagement with high school counselors. Students who visit their high school counselor(s) for college or academic purposes gain further access to higher education. Secondary analysis of a national longitudinal study revealed that students were more likely to enroll in college, especially 4-year colleges, if they visited their high school counselor for college information (Belasco, 2013). Of note, the likelihood of increased college enrollment was most likely to occur and have a greater impact among low-income students of color, compared to their White affluent counterparts (Belasco, 2013). Students can also benefit from early engagement with high school counselors. Students who contact school counselors about college information by the 10th grade are more likely to apply to colleges, compared to students who do not seek out college information as early (Bryan et al., 2011). These findings suggest that effective strategies

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to access higher education include increased and early exposure to college information through high school counselors.

Personalized advising and organizational resources. Institutions can help students access higher education by investing in resources to help students with college-related materials and the accumulation of cultural capital. Hill's (2008) study on school strategies that help facilitate college enrollment revealed that schools that provided services to help students with college and financial aid applications, encouraged college visits, and connected students with college representatives significantly increased college enrollment for students of color. Of note, Farmer-Hinton's (2008, 2008) two studies about one charter school's strategies to help low-income students of color access higher education , suggested the importance of personalized advising, normalized expectations, and integrative support. School personnel adopted a school mission of normalizing college accessibility to all students (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). This included having high academic expectations of all students and including college preparatory classes as required curriculum. School personnel also helped students to complete college applications, essays, and financial aid forms (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). In addition, school personnel helped students understand dominant cultural capital through field trips to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and recruitment into a school-sponsored summer internship program for all students (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). These strategies helped increase the college enrollment rates of graduating seniors to 61%, compared to a 33% high school graduation rate of students that resided in the community (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Therefore, in order to help low-income students of color access higher education, it is important to help students complete college entrance materials and understand dominant forms of capital (Ahn, 2010; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; George Mwangi, 2015; Hill, 2008).

Community-based Organizations

Community-based organizations are non-profit or social service agencies that provide services or programs to help populations access life opportunities (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). While definitions of community-based organizations are limited, the following are definitions of various types of community-based organizations, provided by the Pathways to College Network (2012),

(1) Direct service organizations provide direct services (e.g. provide information about financial aid and organize college workshops) to students during high school and college enrollment (Coles, 2012).

(2) Youth development organizations offer supplemental opportunities (e.g. internships and after-school programming) to students, often during out-of-school time (Coles, 2012).

(3) Integrated student services organizations coordinate with schools to assess and assist students with barriers to academic success (e.g. providing or connecting students to social services; Coles, 2012).

(4) Community mobilization coalitions are partnerships between "public and private entities" that aim for a community-wide educational attainment (Coles, 2012, p. 2).

Although community-based organizations can serve communities in providing access to life opportunities, scholarship that specify strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education is limited. The following shares one strategy utilized by a community-based organization to help low-income students financially access higher education. The following also provides a synthesis of literature about the potential

of community-based organizations to provide academic resources, create safe spaces, and empower students to navigate dominant forms of capital.

Very little scholarship exists on the strategies that community-based organizations use to help students access higher education (Daun-Barnett & Lamm, 2012; Kezar, Lester & Yang, 2009). One method that community-based organizations have used to financially help marginalized students access higher education is the use of individual development account (IDA) initiatives, a type of matching savings account (Kezar et al., 2009). Kezar et al. (2009) found that community-based organization staff, who tried to partner with postsecondary institutions to offer IDAs to low-income families, encountered barriers because they did not have a full understanding of the role and organizational structure of higher education institutions. Specifically, community-based organization staff were unaware of which individuals within a higher education hierarchy to connect with to implement the initiative. From these findings, Kezar et al. (2009) argued that community-based organizations should increase their understanding of higher education organizational structure. While this study suggests a knowledge gap between community-based organizations and higher education, it also suggests the interest of community-based organizations in increasing marginalized student access to higher education.

Of note, Wong (2008) has studied how community-based organizations have provided capital and academic support to low-income Chinese American students. The community youth center (CYC) studied by Wong (2008) helped students build their social and cultural capital. For example, a staff member at the CYC coordinated college campus tours and visits to the public library to gather information about financial aid. Soon after these trips, students would approach staff members to talk about financial aid and potential academic majors (Wong, 2008). They

would also come in to talk with CYC staff about questions they had about financial aid forms

that needed to be filled out (Wong, 2008). In turn, the CYC staff provided support and shared

their own college experiences with the students (Wong, 2008). While this study did not directly

study strategies used to access higher education, the above observations are examples of

recommended integrative support and advising strategies. These observations warrant further

study to identify strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of

color access higher education.

Harris and Marquez Kiyama's (2013) study addressed how community-based

organizations can provide institutional agents to affect Hispanic student high school persistence.

Harris & Marquez Kiyama (2013) noted that more than half of the students in their focus groups

referenced community-based programs as significant resources. Of note, a community-based

organization that provided adult mentors in high schools was crucial for Hispanic student

persistence (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). The adults provided direct support, resources,

and counseling to students. This helped students strengthen their academic, racial, and ethnic

identities (Harris & Kiyama, 2013). While this study explored student persistence, the findings

about staff providing services and resources that empowered students suggests that community-

based organization staff could serve as institutional agents.

In addition to studying how community-based organizations provide academic support,

Wong (2010) has also studied how community-based organizations can be possible sources of

empowerment agents. Wong's (2010) study about community-based organizations facilitating

youth development among low-income Chinese Americans identified authentic and trusting

relationships among CYC staff and the youth. Staff members at the CYC were intentional about

creating a safe space and welcoming environment for the youth (Wong, 2010). They were also

aware of barriers that limited parental contact and student out-of-school responsibilities (Wong, 2010). CYC staff addressed these barriers through various strategies, like providing youth with multiple choices of activities and offering flexible scheduling. This indicates a level of awareness and initiative on behalf of the CYC staff that could be empowering for the youth. The CYC was also a safe space for students to embrace their social identity. Students expressed that they felt the CYC was a safe space because they were able to speak their native language (i.e. Cantonese) without having to fear being made fun of by classmates or told to stop talking by school personnel, an indicator that the school forced students to assimilate (Wong, 2010). By allowing students to talk in their native language, the CYC was creating a space for positive ethnic development. Thus, CYC staff acted as empowerment agents because they had an understanding of the structural marginalization the youth faced and created a counter-space to address youth marginalization. The research above supports the claim that non-parent or non-school members can help fill in social capital and college guidance gaps that students face as a result of attending under-resourced schools and having parents not well-versed in the college-going process (George Mwangi, 2015). Therefore, these findings warrant further study of the potential role of community-based organizations in helping low-income students of color access higher education.

Summary

The theoretical framework guiding this study is from the work of Bourdieu (1986), Lin (2005, 2000), Stanton-Salazar (2011, 1997), and Granovetter (1973). Social capital is a concept that allows scholars to explore access to network membership and accumulation of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2000). While the accumulation of social capital can help individual social mobility, it is limited to capital that is reflective of middle-class resources (i.e. dominant social

capital) and is not possessed by members in low-status communities (Lin, 2000). Thus,

inequality within social capital exists and limits the social mobility of low-status groups (Lin,

2000). In particular, low-income students of color face difficulties in accumulating dominant

social capital needed to increase educational attainment (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). While social

capital inequality is a barrier, network composition may affect how individuals gain access to

resources. Specifically, social networks consist of both strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973),

and weak ties can be beneficial to obtaining instrumental resources (Lin, 2005). A type of weak

tie that can help low-income students of color access social capital include institutional agents

that provide instrumental resources through institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, 1997).

Institutional agents are individuals that can use their positionality to connect students with

dominant forms of social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). By serving as empowerment agents

and not as gatekeeping agents, institutional agents can procure institutional support for students'

educational attainment through strategies like integrative support (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Research about low-income students of color and access to higher education reveals both

barriers and strategies emanating from various networks. Low-income students of color face

location and school barriers. Of note, low-income students of color are more likely to be

geographically placed in education deserts (Hillman, 2016). These students also face school

barriers, such as lack of access to rigorous academic curriculum (Attewell & Domina, 2008;

Welton & Martinez, 2014), lack of guidance or accessibility to high school counselors (Bryan et

al., 2011; De La Rosa, 2006; McKillip et al., 2012), school personnel that act as gatekeepers to

educational opportunities (De La Rosa, 2006; Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013; Welton &

Martinez, 2014), antagonistic school environments (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013; Holland,

2013; Mahatmya et al., 2016; Wong, 2010), and internalized oppression or guilt (Farmer-Hinton,

2008; Welton-Martinez, 2014). Various strategies can help low-income students of color access higher education. Family support can help students enroll in college through parental involvement in schools (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Perna & Titus, 2005) and guidance from family members who have experience with higher education (George Mwangi, 2015). Intervention or supplementary support programs can help students enroll in higher education by providing academic support and generous financial aid, but should be investigated further to understand specific factors that contribute to academic success (Domina, 2014; Morgan et al., 2014). Also, schools can help students through early and frequent exposure to high school counselors (Belasco, 2013; Bryan et al., 2011), helping students complete college-related materials (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hill, 2008), and increasing exposure to dominant forms of cultural capital (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hill, 2008).

Research about community-based organizations reveals that literature specifically addressing the strategies used by community-based organizations to help low-income students of color access higher education is limited. Yet, it is important to note that the work of Wong (2010; 2008) has revealed positive benefits provided by a community youth center to low-income Chinese American students. Of note, the community youth center provided college-related social and cultural capital to the students and provided a safe counter space that empowered these students (Wong, 2010; 2008). Another study revealed that one community-based organization provided adult staff that connected students with academic resources and counseling (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). These findings suggest that community-based organizations have the potential to provide social capital through the use of institutional support and institutional agents.

Conclusion

If low-status groups, like low income students of color, experience social capital inequality and need dominant forms of social capital to access higher education, it is important to study which individuals, institutions, or strategies can help these students accumulate and navigate dominant forms of social capital. Yet, research about low-income students of color and access to higher education suggests that various barriers prevent these students from accessing higher education. While some of these barriers can be addressed at the parental and school levels, some barriers require other individuals that can provide supplemental strategies. The lack of scholarship about community-based organizations indicates that these organizations have not been studied adequately to understand how they can help low-income students of color access higher education. Therefore, the strategies that community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education warrant further study.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between community-based organizations, social capital, low-income students of color, and access to higher education through the following research question: What strategies do community-based organizations use to help low-income students access higher education? A transcendental phenomenological design guided this study. This chapter provides an in-depth description and justification of the research sites and participants, research instruments, data collections methods, and data analysis used in this study to allow for future replication.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenological research aims to describe what participants experience and how they interpret their experiences (Henriques, 2014). It is embedded in the philosophical concept of actively reflecting upon researcher's opinions and judgments to reach a more accurate description of "shared experiences related to phenomena" (Moustakas, 2014; Sheehan, 2014, p. 11). To reach the essence of the phenomena, transcendental phenomenological research has the researcher reflect on their own perspective and judgements (Epoche), describe the data as it appears (phenomenological reduction), explore multiple perspectives that shape how the phenomena is experienced (imaginative variation), and synthesize descriptions of the themes that emerge from the data.

Epoche. The practice of Epoche is a conscious process where the researcher actively reflects on their own understandings or judgments of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By practicing Epoche, the researcher consciously prepares to describe the phenomenon with a fresh perspective and acknowledge it from various perspectives (Henriques, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) believed that the practice of Epoche would increase the researcher's

objectivity to put aside their own judgements and understanding. While complete objectivity was not possible, this research design was chosen to prioritize active reflection. Engaging in Epoche helped to develop an understanding of personal experiences, bias, and opinions of the topic. This will be described further below.

Phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction is the process of describing a phenomenon as it appears (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher describes the phenomenon through a conscious effort of only describing what they see (or hear), not how they personally interpret or experience it. When describing the data, the researcher provides equal value to each statement (or experience) and begins to group statements into themes. Individual and collective descriptions are then made to describe the nuances within the perceptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation. The process of imaginative variation requires that the researcher examine the data through multiple perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation allows the researcher to better understand or discover factors that influence the participants' experiences by actively seeking out multiple perspectives. The researcher then creates individual and collective descriptions to describe the nuances within the perceptions of the phenomenon.

Synthesis of descriptions. The synthesis of descriptions is developed by combining all the individual and collective descriptions, gathered from phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation.

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Researcher Positionality Statement

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The following is the researcher's positionality statement: My positionality as a researcher was paired with a transcendental phenomenological design to offer unique insight to an under-researched topic. I am a low-income student of color who is also a first-generation college

student. As a teenager, I got connected with a community-based organization with the purpose of receiving help to identify job opportunities. While I did not actively engage with the organization, a staff member connected me with monetary resources to fund my undergraduate studies. This experience, combined with my own marginalization within the U.S. education system and volunteer work with nonprofit organizations, sparked my curiosity in understanding the role community-based organizations have in the lives of marginalized youth. In addition, I use disciplines like sociology and interdisciplinary fields of study to inform my scholarship, which led me to ask questions about social capital.

I do not believe in researcher objectivity, but I trust that research methods can be utilized to describe a social phenomenon. I chose transcendental phenomenology as the research design to actively reflect upon my own experiences and challenge myself to explore social phenomena from multiple perspectives. Utilizing my alternative knowledge gathered from life experiences and a transcendental phenomenology research design, I combined different types of knowledge to identify gaps in literature. This also allowed me to build rapport with community-based organizations that led to their participation in a study with no monetary compensation.

Lastly, I argue that scholarship about marginalized communities should center community members and research participants. To center the experiences of the participants in this study, I included a generous amount of direct interview quotes to give participants a voice in shaping the findings of this study. My position is that the design of this study and the manuscript format provides a unique perspective to exploratory research that can be expanded or replicated by other researchers.

Research Sites and Participants

According to Coles (2012), there are at least four different types of community-based organizations:

(1) Direct service organizations provide direct services (e.g. provide information about financial aid and organize college workshops) to students during high school and college enrollment.

(2). Youth development organizations offer supplemental opportunities (e.g. internships and after-school programming) to students, often during out-of-school time.

(3) Integrated student services organizations coordinate with schools to assess and assist students with barriers to academic success (e.g. providing or connecting students to social services).

(4) Community mobilization coalitions are partnerships between "public and private entities" that aim for a community-wide educational attainment (Coles, 2012, p. 2).

Given the diversity in community-based organization types and the lack of literature on this topic, maximum variation sampling was used to identify the community-based organizations. Maximum variation sampling is a purposive sampling technique that aims to capture a wide range of diverse participants. Therefore, to best capture strategies used by different types of community-based organizations, it was necessary to identify community-based organizations that serve low-income students of color that varied in type . Ultimately, I identified three different community-organizations in this study by using the Coles' (2012) classification.

This study included interviews with participants affiliated with a direct service organization, a youth development organization, and a community mobilization coalition. Recommended research sample sizes for phenomenological studies vary. Morse (1994)

recommends at least six participants, while Creswell (1998) recommends at least five participants for phenomenological studies. Nine participants were recruited to accommodate the time constraints for this thesis and to support differing sample size recommendations. Below are the descriptions of the different types of participants, the number of participants affiliated with each organization, and the procedures that were used to recruit participants.

Community-based Organizations Recruitment

An internet search was used to identify eight community-based organizations that could potentially qualify for the study. Search terms included the name of the city and the following terms: community-based organization, nonprofit organization, youth organization, and social service agency. Once over 15 organizations were identified, each organization's online description (via their website) helped narrow down the choices to organizations that served high school students. To minimize potential bias within an organizational structure, a researcher should communicate their proposed research with the top or middle-management of organizations (Henriques, 2014). Therefore, an email (see Appendix A) was sent to eight organization directors or program coordinators of eight different community-based organizations. The email contained a summary of the study and my contact information. From this email, six community-based organizations expressed interest in participation.

Through phone, and in-person correspondence with organization directors and program coordinators, four organizations were identified as qualifying for the study (i.e. more than 50% of the students they served were low-income students of color). However, bureaucratic restrictions prevented one organization from participating in this study. Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, at least one individual staff participant from each of

the three remaining community-based organizations was identified with the help of the program

coordinator or organization director.

Staff, Student, and Alumni Participants

Electronic and hard-copy research flyers (see Appendix B) were provided to each

program director and voluntary staff participant. The staff members were asked to share the

research flyers in-person and through email to students and program alumni. Interested student

and alumni participants, or parents of students under the age of 18, could contact the community-

based organization's staff member (via phone, email, or in person) or the researcher (via phone or

email) to ask questions or establish interest. If the student or alumni participant qualified for the

study, a consent or assent form was provided through email or in-person to the potential

participant and an interview was scheduled.

Staff participants. At least one individual staff participant from each community-based

organization was identified with the help of the program coordinator or organization director. In

order to participate, the staff member must have worked directly with low-income students of

color at the time of the study. A total of four individual employees from three organizations that

worked directly with low-income students of color were identified as voluntary staff

participants.

Student participants. Student participants qualified for the study by identifying as a

low-income student of color who (1) participated or engaged with an identified community-

based organization and (2) was currently enrolled in 11th or 12th grade at the time of the

study. Student participants enrolled in 11th and 12th grade were included in this study because of

their likelihood of increased exposure to the college enrollment and admissions process. A richer

understanding of strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students

access higher education was gained by interviewing student participants. A total of two individual students from two organizations were identified as student participants through referrals from the community-based organization staff.

Alumni participants. Alumni participants qualified for the study by identifying as a low-income student of color who (1) was an alumnus or alumna of one of the three community-based organizations and (2) was currently in their first or second year of enrollment in a higher education institution at the time of the study. Alumni participants were included in this study to increase the validity of the findings. Since alumni participants were asked to recall information, they provided insight on significant strategies used by community-based organizations (i.e. recall strategies they believed made an impact in access to their college education). Their responses supported identified strategies shared by other study participants and provide a nuanced understanding of factors that may affect the implementation of strategies. A total of three individual alumni participants from two organizations were identified as alumni participants.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation of this qualitative study included the researcher, semi-structured interview guides, and NVivo research software. The following provides context on each type of instrument used throughout the study.

The Researcher

The nature of qualitative research makes the researcher the primary instrument in a study. It is important to reflect on one's own conscious in phenomenological research to better describe social phenomena (Perry, 2013). Therefore, it was important to acknowledge the researcher's positionality to reduce interpreting the study's findings only from my own opinions (Perry, 2013). As described above in the positionality statement, critical reflection helped to

recruit and build rapport with participants. Although the researcher had worked at one of the community-based organizations that was interviewed, all the past staff and programs were no longer employed or running at the time of the study.

Interview Guides

Under the consultation of my committee chairperson, four interview guides were created to collect data for the individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group interview. Participants were asked to share information on who they were as an individual and their opinions about the phenomenon that was being studied (Henriques, 2014). Guided by the work of Henriques (2014), the following are descriptions of the different interview guides.

- The questions in the interview guide for staff member participants (see Appendix F) aimed to understand (1) who the participant was at the time of the study, (2) what the participant's role was in the community-based organization, (3) what was the role/context of the community-based organization, (4) how the participant perceived higher education and if it varied by student demographic(s), (5) what opinions the participant had about the students they serve, and (6) what strategies they used to help low-income students of color access higher education.

- The questions in the interview guide for the student participants (see Appendix G) aimed to understand (1) who the participant was at the time of the study, (2) what their (current) plans were after completing high school, (3) how the participant perceived higher education (4) what opinions the participant had on their respective community-based organization and staff, and (5) what strategies they believed have helped them access or apply to institutions of higher education.

- The questions in the interview guide for alumni participants (see Appendix I) aimed to understand (1) who the participant was at the time of the study, (2) how the participant engaged with the community-based organization, (3) how the participant perceived the community-based organization, and (4) what strategies they believed helped them access or apply to institutions of higher education.

- The questions in the interview guide for the staff member focus group aimed to understand what strategies community-based organizations used to help low-income students of color access higher education (see Appendix H).

Although the validity and reliability of the interview questions were not readily available through previous studies, my committee members had an opportunity to comment or advocate for changes to the interview guides.

NVivo

NVivo qualitative software provides tools to conduct content analysis. The nodes feature was used to do both initial and focused coding of interview transcripts and the seven documents provided by two of the community-based organizations for the document analysis.

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Data Collection

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This study collected data through a document analysis of text resources or materials (artifacts) frequently used by the community-based organizations with students, individual semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. First, individual interviews were conducted with community-based organization staff and materials were collected for the document analysis. This was followed by the interviews with student participants and alumni participants. The final stage of data collection concluded with a focus group between two of the four staff participants.

Content Analysis

Once community-based staff members were identified for interviews, artifacts were requested for the document analysis. Specifically, any resources or text materials that were shared with students to better access higher education were requested from the staff member. This could have included flyers about workshops, resources about college financial aid, college admissions guidebooks, any material developed by the community-based organization about college opportunities or information, and any other text-material that the staff participants regularly used to help low-income students of color to access higher education. One additional material was requested from a staff member when an alumni participant specified a resource during their interview that was not initially provided by the staff member. Artifacts were scanned and uploaded into NVivo software for data analysis.

Semi-structured Interviews

All nine semi-structured interviews were conducted during 2017-2018 within a span of three months. All interviews took place in safe and private location. The interview location was based upon the participant's comfort, schedule, and access to transportation. Therefore, participants could choose to have the interviews conducted at the community-based organization they were affiliated with. Seven of the nine individual interviews were conducted at the community-based organization. Two of the nine individual interviews and the focus group were conducted at my educational institution. Student participant interviews took place after regular school hours. While students under the age of 18 had the option to have their parent(s) in the general vicinity of the interview room, none chose this option. Staff and alumni interviews took place during regular office hours or any time outside of regular office hours to accommodate schedules.

Each individual staff, student, and alumni participant was informed of their rights

as voluntary participants. This included their right to anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary

withdrawal, and an opportunity to ask me any questions they had prior to providing consent to

participate in a semi-structured interview. Participants under the age of 18 had one

parent provide consent for their participation. With participant permission, each interview was

recorded by an audio recording device and guided by the appropriate interview guide

(see Appendixes F, G, and I). Notes were also taken during the interview. Throughout the

interviews, pseudonyms were chosen or assigned to protect the participants'

identities. The recordings were transcribed and identifying information was pulled out before the

coding process. The transcriptions were paired with the interview notes for data analysis.

Each semi-structured interview lasted between 34-63 minutes. One recording device stopped

halfway through the interview. However, the last half of the interview was re-recorded by using

notes to guide the interview and verify content that was not previously recorded.

Focus Group Interview

The focus group initially was planned to have three staff members that had participated in

individual semi-structured interviews. External circumstances prevented participation from one

participant, so the focus group was conducted with only two staff member participants from two

organizations. The focus group took place in a safe and private location at my home education

institution. Participants were reminded of their rights as voluntary participants. The focus group

session was recorded with an audio recording device and paired with some field notes.

Throughout the interviews, the same pseudonyms were used to pair responses with individual

semi-structured interview responses and protect the participants' identities. The recordings were

transcribed and identifying information was pulled out before the initial coding process. The

transcriptions were included with the field notes for data analysis. The focus group lasted 60 minutes.

Triangulation

Through the use of these three methods, triangulation was achieved. Triangulation is used to cross-validate data (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). By using three different methods, the errors or deficiencies within each method are lessened to reveal the same findings or possible estimates from data (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). The document analysis of artifacts was chosen as one method to capture the information and content of resources that may not have been verbally communicated with students, but was shared with students as a strategy to access higher education. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method to accommodate the thesis study time limitations, to provide some guidance in conversation, to allow participants to elaborate or extend their responses, and to allow for additional questions that were appropriate in understanding the topic being studied. The focus group interview was chosen to further explore community-based organizations' strategies and identify possible connections or development in social capital among the three organizations. Thus, by collecting data through individual interviews, a focus group, and a document analysis of artifacts, the findings of the study were further validated and provided a rich description of the strategies community-based organizations used to help low-income students of color access higher education.

<center>**Data Analysis**</center>

Interview Transcripts

Text from the individual interviews and focus group were initially highlighted to describe the content of the transcripts. The statements were organized into themes, using NVivo's nodes feature. I wrote a brief description of each theme that emerged by using the cluster of key

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statements. The creation and description of themes were guided by Stanton-Salazar's (2011) typology of institutional agents and different types of institutional support. Once the initial coding was finished, each code was re-examined to create additional codes or restructure the key statements. This process was repeated or continued to aim for saturation. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation occurs when the data provides enough context to replicate the study and no new information or coding is necessary. While data saturation was not reached entirely, responses were validated by identifying pieces of information shared across the different participants for two institutions. Lastly, composite descriptions of the findings or themes were created and are presented in Chapter 4.

Document Analysis

A document analysis of the text materials (documents) provided by the community-based organizations was conducted. Document analysis is a mix between content and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). It requires the researcher to read through text, identify patterns among text, and sort text into codes associated with the research question(s) (Bowen, 2009). Once the documents were uploaded into NVivo, the documents were skimmed, and initial thoughts were noted about the document type. The document text was read to determine if the text provided pertinent information for the study. For the context of this study, pertinence of the information was evaluated by identifying if any of the text within each document addressed the general research question or any of the additional questions created to guide the study. Once pertinent information was identified, a similar process to the content analysis of the interview transcripts was repeated. Themes were created, based on the initial coding of the data to address the research questions. This process was repeated before generating themes, using Stanton-Salazar's (2011) description of different types of institutional support. Once themes and their descriptions were created, the

themes were compared to the themes generated through the content analysis of transcripts. Since the themes from the document analysis and content analysis were similar, the findings from the document analysis were included in the composite descriptions of the findings or themes presented in Chapter 4.

Summary

Guided by a transcendental phenomenological design (Henriques, 2014), this study used document analysis of text materials, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group interview to collect data about what strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education. Maximum variation sampling helped identify three different types of community-based organization research sites. These sites resulted in at least one staff, student, and alumni participant for two of the participating community-based organizations, plus one staff participant from another community-based organization, for a total of nine research participants. While data saturation was not reached, the triangulation of qualitative methods increases the validity of the findings and provides a rich description of the findings through coding strategies and Stanton-Salazar's (2011) typology on institutional agents and institutional support. The results of the study and emerging themes are shared in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings address the overall research question of: What strategies do community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education? The sub-questions listed below are also addressed.

- What sources of knowledge do community-based organization staff refer to when helping low-income students of color access higher education?

- What direct services do community-based organization staff members provide to low-income students of color?

- What strategies do individual community-based organization staff members, students, or alumni believe are beneficial to helping students access higher education?

- How do community-based organization staff members expand, limit, or affect students' social networks?

- What factors affect community-based organization capacity in helping low-income students of color access higher education?

- How do community-based organization staff members act as gatekeepers or institutional agents for low-income students of color?

Context

Location

The study was conducted in a city located in the U.S. Midwestern region. Census data estimated that people of color made up about 40% of the city residents and a total of 25% of city residents were living below the poverty level. More than 10 colleges are located within the city's metropolitan area. While the city has numerous community-based organizations, study participants were affiliated with 3 community-based organizations.

Organization Sites

Three community-based organizations were identified for the study, using maximum variation sampling. A total of nine participants participated in this study. This included four staff members who worked directly with low-income students of color and a total of 5 students and alumni participants who identified as low-income students of color. Below are brief descriptions of the three different community-based organizations involved with the study.

DSC. The DSC is a direct service community-based organization that provides direct services to low-income communities of color. It aims to meet the needs of a surrounding ethnic community, particularly through education and cultural avenues. The DSC has a youth department dedicated to the success of low-income students of color and provides services throughout the entire year. The youth department serves youth between the ages of 14-24, many who are low-income and of Hispanic descent. At the beginning of the study, three individuals were employed by the DSC's youth department. By the time of data collection, only one staff member remained. I was only able to interview this staff member and unable to recruit student or alumni participants.

YDO. The YDO is a youth development organization that contributes to the holistic development and success of youth. It offers supplemental out-of-school opportunities to youth between the ages of 6-18, with many identifying as either low-income Hispanic or Black. The YDO has a national affiliation to a larger network of YDOs, but operates on its own. It has its own board of trustees and does not receive financial aid from its national network. Data was collected from two staff members, one student, and one alumni participant.

CMC. The CMC partnership is a community mobilization coalition between a community-based organization and a local school district. It aims for community-wide

educational attainment by providing scholarship funds to students attending specific schools. The community-based organization involved in the partnership provides funds to create an employee position within the school district. This employee operates within the school (i.e. does not exclude services to students not involved in the partnership), but also coordinates the programming specific to the coalition and community-based organization. The CMC partnership largely serves first-generation, low-income Hispanic and Black students. The partnership is fairly new, so data from students who received the scholarship fund from the partnership was nonexistent. However, because the staff member's services are not exclusive to particular students, one student and two alumni participants who received services and engaged in activities funded by the CMC partnership were interviewed.

Participant Demographic Information

Participants were asked to share demographic information, which included their race, gender, and socioeconomic status. A total of eight participants identified as a woman or girl and one participant was a man. Both student participants were enrolled in their final year of high school, in the 12th grade. Alumni participants were enrolled in their first year at a local community college or university. All student and alumni participants identified as first-generation students. Participant type, community-based organization affiliation, and demographic information for each participant is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Community-Based Organization - Participant Type	Gender	Race	Socioeconomic Status
Amy	DSC – Staff	Woman	Hispanic	Lower Middle-Class
Ashley	CMC partnership - Staff	Woman	White	Middle-Class
Chase	YDO – Staff	Man	White	Lower Middle-Class
Christine	YDO – Alumni	Woman	African American	Low Income
Flower	YDO – Student	Teenage Girl	Latina	Low Income
Kiara	CMC Partnership – Alumni	Woman	African American	Low Income
Leslie	CMC Partnership – Student	Teenage Girl	Hispanic	Low Income
Maria	CMC Partnership – Alumni	Woman	Hispanic	Working Class
Marissa	YDO – Staff	Woman	Multiracial	Low Income

Document (Artifact) Information

Community-based organization staff were asked to provide text materials they used as resources to help low-income students of color access higher education. A total of seven text materials were used for the document analysis. The document type, description of content, number of pages, and affiliation with community-based organization are summarized below in Table 2. Of note, each community-based organization staff member referred to general websites as resources they used to help students access higher education. While the websites were not analyzed, some website URLS are also provided in Table 2 to provide context on the types of documents or text materials community-based organization staff utilize when working with students. The websites provided generic information, not specific to low-income students of color.

Table 2

Document (Artifact) Information

Type	Description of Content	Community-Based Organization	Number of Pages	Included in Document Analysis?
Document	Information about state financial aid	CS Partnership	1	Yes
Flyer	List of free scholarship search engines	CS Partnership	.5	Yes
Flyer	Information for FAFSA workshop	CS Partnership	1	Yes
Flyer	Information for specific scholarship	CS Partnership	2	Yes
Form	Recommendation letter request form	CS Partnership	1	Yes
Guide	Guide of public/private colleges in the state	CS Partnership & DSC	80	Yes
Workbook	Career program workbook	YDO	48	Yes
Website	https://www.google.com/	(ALL)	N/A	No
Website	https://www.xxxx.edu/	CS Partnership	N/A	No
Website	https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip	YDO	N/A	No

Findings

Five main themes emerged from the interviews, focus group, and document analysis. A total of 31 codes were organized into 13 concepts. Themes were developed by grouping concepts into a larger description. The list of themes, concepts, and codes are listed in Appendix L. The five main themes were (1) direct support, (2) shaping/developing systems and institutions, (3) social network expansion, (4) barriers to implementing strategies, and (5) authentic relationships. The findings are organized to expand upon the themes and concepts. Some codes are expanded upon to provide further details on different methods utilized by different organizations. Quotes from interviews are included to narrate the observed findings from the student, alumni, or staff member's point of view. Chapter 5 will expand on the connection between the findings and literature.

Direct Support

Institution-specific resources. Community-based organization staff members have access to institution-specific resources as employees or partners of community-based

organizations. Interviews revealed that staff participants would provide students with institutional resources to help with monetary or basic necessities. The following provides examples of the institutional resources shared by community-based organization staff and how they were distributed to low-income students of color.

Funds. Each community-based organization provided opportunities for students to receive monetary funds. Two community-based organizations provided funds in exchange for student participation in their programs. The CMC partnership provided college tuition to participants who met academic and attendance standards. Since the partnership was established recently, none of the participants had yet graduated and therefore had not received these funds. However, all affiliated participants who received services from the CMC partnership staff member mentioned that tuition funds motivated younger students and would help those students address future college financial barriers. Regarding the DSC, Amy mentioned that students who participated in formal programming received stipends to supplement their time and effort.

Alternatively, the YDO staff encouraged students to participate in their leadership competition for scholarship money. Students could compete with students from affiliate organizations at a local, state, and national level to showcase their leadership through essays and speeches. According to Marissa, this competition helped students by reducing the cost of college. Each time a student wins a competition, they would receive scholarship money. Flower noted that this competition motivated her to continue engaging with the YDO throughout her junior and senior year, even though she had competing extracurricular activities. She won scholarship money during her junior year and was currently competing again this year.

Incentives. Each community-based organization provided students an incentive to voluntarily participate in college or academic preparation activities. According to the

participants, these incentives motivated students to do well in school and engage them in further college activities.

The YDO hosted report card parties for students to voluntarily bring in their report cards at the end of an academic term. On the day of these parties, students would either bring or print out their report cards to show their progress to YDO staff. Regardless of their grades, students would receive pizza and small prizes (e.g. nail polish). According to Christine, this would motivate students or keep them accountable with their academic studies.

> **Christine**: We used to do things like you bring your report card, no matter what your grades were, and they would reward you for it. Just for bringing your report card in, for showing, "this is what I did in school." Even if you didn't have great grades, they would talk to you, "We need to get this up next trimester. You cannot go through high school failing because you won't make it through high school." …If your report cards was all E's, you would still get a slice of pizza, but you're going to get talked to.
>
> **Interviewer**: It sounds like it was an opportunity for you to bring in your report cards and get rewarded for that. Then if you didn't do so well, you'd get talked to?
>
> **Christine**: No, sometimes, if they saw it was a B, it was like "Why is this a B, when you can get that up?" There was always room for improvement. Any situation. Even if it's an A, if it's 82%, "What did you not turn in? Because it could have been 100." It wasn't really criticism, it was just, "We know you can do better than whatever you had. Even if you did have A's, it was like, "Why aren't you helping (your peers) get their grades up, if you all got the same class?"

CMC students are provided opportunities to be recognized for their academic achievements. Part of Ashley's role is to coordinate celebrations to recognize students who do

well in school. This includes students who have good grades, have good attendance, and are on track to graduate. Ashley believes these celebrations help students by publicly recognizing their achievements and setting a good example. Leslie shared a similar perspective.

> I know that with the (CMC), they make the kids more involved in school. They do competitive things also. They have a black and red team. I guess (Ashley) does something like that with them. I know one time they gave awards for having good grades and stuff like that. I think that giving awards to students will make some kids change their minds or like, "I should do good at school, so I can get an award or something."

Other incentives consisted of actively engaging in extracurricular opportunities. According to Amy, the DSC's college preparatory program would award students who actively engaged with their curriculum.

> We also did activities and worksheets with them through the curriculum, so every time that they completed one they would receive a certain amount of points on that, and then that would accumulate into a certain amount of money for them.

This money would be in addition to a monthly attendance stipend of $60. Therefore, students could make money, while engaging in college preparatory activities.

Necessities. While the CMC partnership provided access to school resources, the YDO and DSC participants talked about meeting the basic needs of students. The DSC provided computers for students to use for homework or college activities (e.g. college applications and research). They also utilized additional departments within the DSC to help students with families that struggled economically (e.g. helping pay utility bills). The YDO participants also talked about meeting student basic needs by providing winter clothing, school supplies,

transportation (e.g. bus passes), and food to students. When asked how this could help students access higher education, Flower responded with the following:

> Because there's always a saying that says, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away", and that helps them get into college because they're healthy and have a healthy mind. Eating healthy foods, but also (so that) their family doesn't have to spend a lot of money.

Having access to institution-specific resources allowed community-based organization staff members to address immediate and future barriers to higher education. Staff members utilized their organization's resources to provide scholarship money and stipends, host recognition ceremonies or celebrations, and distribute basic necessities to students. Stipends and scholarship money helped students stay engaged with college preparatory activities. Recognition ceremonies or celebrations normalized high academic standards. Distributing basic necessities addressed immediate financial needs. The interviews suggest that these institution-specific resources helped students gain access to higher education by reducing financial barriers and motivating students to do well in school.

College material resources. Most community-based organization staff members often turned to the Internet to access higher education resource materials, like major search engines (e.g. Google) or college websites. Since internet webpages have a transitory nature, only a few material resources were provided for a document analysis. Usually, community-based organization staff members would share scholarship opportunities with students when they heard about them or encouraged them to look up the scholarship using the Internet. For example, Ashley provided students a half sheet flyer with nine websites of free scholarship search engines. In some cases, community-based organization staff shared specific scholarship flyers. Leslie mentioned that Ashley presented her with a flyer for a scholarship that targeted Hispanic

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students. The flyer provided eligibility requirements and application instructions. This included student transcripts, a letter of recommendation, and a personal statement that outlined student achievements, suggesting that the scholarship was for top-performing students.

Both Amy and Maria referenced a "binder" that was coauthored by the researcher of this study in 2016 for an AmeriCorps project. It is an 80 page guide to Michigan postsecondary institutions and financial aid options. This guide has 25 profiles of public and private postsecondary institutions, which includes the school's application procedure(s), an academic profile of incoming first-year students, the general estimated cost of attendance, its TIP eligibility, and a list of merit scholarships for incoming students. Amy shared this resource with students to compare and contrast the differences between different types of institutions (i.e. 2-year vs. 4-year institutions and public vs. private institutions). Ashley also had a copy of the guide in her office. Flower stated that she and her high school peers sometimes used it to learn information about specific colleges.

Advising. Community-based organization staff directly advised low-income students of color about their higher education needs and options. The following quote captures Ashely's day-to-day experiences with advising students.

"So on a daily basis I'll have a student come in my office and say, "Miss, what school has a good veterinarian program? Or does [this institution] have this program?" Or different questions like that and of course, in my four years here, I've learned the answers to those questions, but it's not like I came in just knowing them all. And the way I've learned them is by looking it up and talking to people. So, I kind of show them all, "Here let me show you". So you want to know if [this institution] has a medical assistant program. So we'll Google [this institution] medical assistant program. What do you know? Here it is. Let's

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read about it. Let's read about what the requirements are to get accepted, what classes you would take, what the mapping of those classes per semester look like."

Advising students required community-based organization staff to engage in several processes. This included helping students to collect information, understand information, weigh college options, fill out application materials, make informed decisions about higher education, and holding students accountable. The following provides examples of these processes in action.

Collecting information. Students utilized community-based organization staff to gather information about their college options. According to Amy and Ashely, high school students often come to them during the academic school year to gather information about individual schools and scholarships. Amy mentioned that she got about 10 students each week who will drop-in or call her to ask for college pamphlets and scholarship flyers. Seeing this need for individual pieces of information, Ashley created a bulletin board with various flyers for scholarship and other opportunities. Both Leslie and Maria mentioned how they would frequently approach this board to find out about further opportunities they could apply for. Maria stated,

> I remember that outside of her office, [Ashley] would have a bulletin board. [Ashley] would put scholarship opportunities, even job opportunities or internship opportunities, all of that. She would have it out there on the bulletin board. So that's kind of more like, once you walk in, it catches your attention. It wasn't just a plain bulletin board either, she would decorate the whole thing or in her door, she would decorate it, depending on if it was Christmas or whatever. She would decorate it, but she would also put flyers on top, so it kind of catches your attention, too.

Understanding information. Although students received college information from various sources, they received additional support from community-based organizations in understanding college information. According to Amy, low-income students of color have trouble navigating college information because it is written in a language that is hard to understand. To address this, she met with students and their families to better understand college jargon and the application process.

> We try to bring in the whole family, and we just break down the steps and information for them so that they can understand. And if we can't get through it in one session, we have them come in again and whenever they have questions they are always reaching out, through phone calls or text messages. I think it's very important for them in having someone who if they text them, they can quickly answer.

By helping students understand college information, students gained access to additional opportunities to apply and fund their studies. Of note, Kiara talked about an instance when Ashley helped her understand the logistics of a state financial aid program, the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP).

> I didn't know what TIP was at all. It was kind of like one of the things that they're telling us how we can get free money for college. She brought up TIP for low-income families who get food stamps and stuff like that. You just call them and see if you can apply. She broke it down for me, saying like when I can use it. Since I go to a four-year [college], I can use it for my last two years, and if I went to community [college], the first two.

Ashley also provided the information Kiara shared above in a one page document. This document provided instructions on how to verify TIP eligibility and create an account for state funding. It also noted key information about when a student could access money, including the

following statements, "If you attend a community college, you will be able to use your TIP money immediately. If you attend a 4-year university, your TIP money will not be accessible until your junior year."

College options. Each community-based organization staff member shared that they are intentional about exposing students to different college options. During the focus group, Ashley and Chase agreed that it was important to individualize student options for each student. For students who struggled academically or did not meet minimum college admissions requirements, community-based organization staff preferred to be honest about the student's chance of getting accepted to the school. Through individual conversations, community-based organization staff also made students aware of their financial options. This was evident with student and alumni participants who successfully articulated the differences between types of higher education institutions. For example, Kiara recalled that Ashley taught her the differences between two and four year institutions.

Application materials. Students and alumni asked community-based organization staff to help them fill out college forms or application materials. According to Ashley and Marissa, students would often approach them or other community-based organization staff members to guide them through college application or financial aid forms. Leslie, Kiara, and Maria referenced a college application week coordinated by Ashley. During this week, high school seniors learned how to access the Common Application and received individual help from Ashley. Christine shared that the YDO staff individually helped her and her peers to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and TIP forms. Some community-based organization staff also provided knowledge on scholarship essays. According to Kiara, she received a local scholarship with the help of Ashley. Flower also revealed that a YDO member

was currently providing feedback on a scholarship essay, at the time of the interview. Although most community-based organization staff were not assigned duties to help students with college applications, the individual interviews revealed their willingness to help students with college application materials on an individual basis. As Amy summarized, "I sit down one-on-one with students if they have questions on how to fill out a college application or how to do scholarship essays or personal essays and things like that."

Informed decision. In addition to providing access to college information and options, community-based organization staff helped students with their decision making process. Ashley believed that making an informed decision about college would lead students to being successful in their endeavors.

> They need help processing where they want to go. Because a lot of them are first-generation, they're not having those conversations at home of, "What are the questions you should ask when trying to figure out what college is a good fit for you? Size, location, does it have the program you're interested in?" All those kinds of questions to make sure that it's a place that's going to be a good fit for them and a place where they'll be able to be successful academically.

Amy believed it was important to be prepared for the culture of higher education. During her interview, Amy reflected on the impact of higher education culture.

> As I started talking more to students, a lot of their interests and questions were more revolving around college life in general. So I went from just focusing on having a college recruiter mindset and just focusing more on what the student really have questions on, which was living on campus. Like, 'What are your classes like? If you go to a predominantly white school, how does that change? How am I going to be affected by it?'

The alumni interviews suggested that students benefitted from these conversations. In particular, alumni from CMC shared examples of how Ashley helped them make their college decisions. For example, Maria received help in choosing which college to attend.

I was struggling a lot in my senior year with deciding where to go and how to pay for it. Ashley helped me a lot with that. It was more like narrowing down my choices. Everything that I had, my pros and my cons of [Institution 1] and [Institution 2]: "Why should I go there? Why shouldn't I?" And she was narrowing it down for me.

Ashley also helped students choose their academic field of study. Kiara shared that Ashley helped her choose a field of study.

She actually helped me in a way to find out what field I want to go into for study, between two different jobs. I'd say, "I want to do that after graduating." She'd actually bring out all the criteria I needed in order to get to that field and whatnot. She would help a lot. For [making] my decision.

Accountability. Community-based organization staff members had access to student academic progress through different methods. While the YDO gains access through voluntary student participation in their report card parties, the DSC has a formal process. Amy had student's parents sign a waiver prior to participating in formal programming. Amy used these waivers to collect grades and attendance. If students were struggling, she would let parents know.

I feel like a lot of the times, when a student gets home and mom and dad ask, "Oh, how was school?" They're just like, "Oh, it's great, it's fine." They're always very generic answers. So, when we take a look at grades, we want to make sure that our students are, obviously, academically being successful…We try to make sure that they are involved, so

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we can push the students and let those grades keep going up.

Ashley had access to student information because she works for the CMC partnership. When Kiara initially did not do well on a standardized test, Ashley reminded her that the school could pay for her to retake it. Kiara did better on this test and it changed her college admission status. Kiara's new score met a minimum college entrance requirement. According to an admissions representative, this allowed Kiara to attend her current institution.

Students and alumni shared that community-based organization staff helped them with the college application process through consistent reminders. At the time of the interview, Flower mentioned that a YDO staff member was currently helping her through follow-up conversations. Flower said, "whenever I'm here [at the YDO], she reminds me. Sometimes you'd just forget about it, but she mostly reminds me every time I come here." When describing her role for the CMC partnership, Ashley mentioned that a big part of her role was making sure that students met application deadlines. She believed it was especially important to remind first-generation students.

Some students, they just need me to guide them along the way with what to do and they are good at carrying that out. But for a lot of them it is a lot of hand-holding. And I think that's because they're coming from families where they are first-generation college students. For me, my parents were saying, "Oh, you gotta apply now. Oh, you gotta send in your deposit now." And they probably actually just did it for me. For a lot of students here, that's not the case for them. So I'm the one that's doing that for them and making sure they know what their next steps are and that they're taking them. Otherwise, I'm not sure that those steps would be taken for all of our students.

Maria provided examples of this in action. She said that Ashley would often remind her and her peers of deadlines.

> I used to go to [Ashley's] office a lot, so she would always ask me, "Did you get the scholarship done?"… She would go to classrooms and she would tell us about [a scholarship]…She would probably mention it in one month. Then the next month, she would come into the same class and be like, "Did you guys do this? There's another opportunity on this website."

Through these reminders, students felt they were held accountable throughout the college application process.

Staff members actively advised students before, during, and after the college application process. Staff members were intentional in helping students learn how to collect college or scholarship information, understand college jargon, and weigh their college options. During the application process, students received guidance on filling out college forms or feedback on their scholarship essays. Although students were expected to take initiative during the college application process, community-based organization staff were consistent in reminding students about college application details or upcoming deadlines. Throughout this process, community-based organization staff regularly advised students to help them make informed decisions about college. These actions demonstrate how staff members helped students access higher education through individual advising.

Overall, students received direct support from staff through institution-specific resources, advising, and material resources. The institution-specific resources reduced student financial and academic barriers to higher education, while the material resources provided students college information. Individual advising helped students navigate the college application process and

make informed decisions about their college options. These forms of direct support suggest that community-based organizations incorporate their resources, knowledge, and advising efforts into strategies used to help students access higher education.

Shaping/Developing Systems and Institutions

Community-based organization staff embedded students into spaces that contained various forms of support, resources, and opportunities. Interview responses suggest that community-based organization staff provided physical spaces for students to relax and do homework. Community-based organization staff also developed short-term and long-term programs to prepare students for future academic and career opportunities, while advocating on behalf of students. Through these actions, community-based organization staff continuously crafted the spaces and systems that students gained access to.

Space. Students utilized community-based organization space as their own. Students and alumni expressed that they felt welcome in Ashley's office. Leslie, who has a free class period, shared that she often goes to Ashley's office to do homework or "just relax." Maria and Kiara also recalled frequently visiting Ashley's office during their free periods. Of note, Maria highlighted that Ashley often made students feel comfortable by offering them tea.

Both YDO staff members talked about designated rooms for different student age groups. Students over the age of thirteen participated in after-school programming in a room separate from the younger students. In addition, the YDO designated a time slot in the late evening specifically for teenagers. Christine remembered this designated time as an opportunity to "hang out" and receive dinner from the YDO. To physically protect this space, the YDO checked-in each visitor and installed video cameras in each room.

Formal programming. Students had access to a variety of short-term and long-term

programs to assist them with current and future activities. The DSC and YDO implemented both long-term and short-term formal programs, while the CMC partnership provided short-term programs. These programs served as an opportunity for students to receive academic help, gather college information, and learn about (middle-class) activities.

Homework and academic help. Every year, the DSC provided a middle school and high school program to address summer learning loss. This program bridged academic curriculum, so students could retain information learned from the previous academic year. According to Amy, this program embedded students in college environments. This included receiving instruction at college institutions, going on college visits, and several paid internships at local colleges.

The YDO club provided both after-school and evening homework programs for high school students. All YDO students could attend the homework help sessions after school to receive academic help from staff members. According to Chase, the YDO intentionally recruits college students or college-educated staff to assist students with their homework. Teenage students also got a designated evening time one day of the week to work on their homework and eat dinner. Chase stated that this designated evening time was intentional to help students who many not receive adequate support during the after-school homework help program. Both Flower and Christine participated in these programs.

College information events and visits. Each community-based organization implemented formal short-term college information programs, workshops, or visits. Both the CMC partnership and the DSC coordinated FAFSA workshops with local community colleges to help students better understand how to fill out a FAFSA application. Ashley and a high school counselor provided a flyer for the FAFSA workshop, which invited parent participation. The flyer did not state if language accommodations would be made for parents who did not speak English. Other

opportunities included a financial aid night hosted by the DSC and the CMC.

Individual interviews and the focus group interview revealed that all three community-based organizations coordinated college fairs and visits for students. For example, Christine recalled a YDO college fair that brought in YDO alumni to talk about the importance of attending college and sharing their own college experiences at local institutions. The college visits mentioned in the interviews were limited to institutions within the state. Yet, community-based organization staff expressed the importance of exposing students to different types of institutions. Thus, students visited trade schools, two-year institutions, and four-year institutions.

College preparatory programs. Interestingly, Chase discussed changes to YDO's college preparatory program, while Amy talked about a former college preparatory program. While the YDO received their program curriculum from their national affiliate, Chase excitedly shared the importance of upcoming changes to the YDO's individual program.

So now that we're looking at 2018, we decided that we wanted to do more with college, actual college visits. Instead of just sitting in a room and talking about college, let's go see one. 'Cause as we know, with anything, adults or teens: [if] you go see it, you're going to be a lot more excited about it or motivated about it. So it's more about creating those actual tactile experiences. Real-world experiences [that] teenagers can actually be those spaces and maybe get to know some other kids and talk to the admissions people. So, we'll reach out to the universities individually to set up a group tour. Letting them know that we're from the YDO, so it's more formalized. Not just that we're hanging out on campus, but we have a tour and we talk to admissions, and they get to talk to some students and things like that.

Amy talked about a former college preparatory program implemented until the previous

academic year. Amy described the former program as the following:

> We had students start off in their junior year, and then we were with them up until the end
>
> of their senior year, so we went through a curriculum that was provided to us and we
>
> basically went through preparing them for college, the college application process,
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> scholarship, FAFSA, getting them to understand the differences between a two-year,
>
> four-year, vocational. Helping them understand what career path they wanted to go
>
> into…We just provided them with as much information as we could so that by the end of
>
> their senior year, they were able to decide on a college and have all the knowledge behind
>
> it to make the best decision for them.

While the DSC lost funding to continue providing this program, Amy believed it helped students
to access and further understand higher education.

Career preparatory programs. Both DSC and YDO staff oversaw career preparatory
programs aimed to help students identify potential career paths through research and hands-on
experiences. The DSC received funding from an external foundation to provide students with
paid internship opportunities. According to Amy, the goal of this program was to expose students
to various fields outside of minimum wage occupations. The YDO staff oversaw three career
preparatory programs.

One of the YDO's programs provided materials for students to explore and research
career options. Students received a workbook that prompted them with questions about their
skills, interests, and values. Christine said she was given prompts to help her research different
career paths. The document analysis revealed that the workbooks prompted students to write
down short-term and long-term goals. Within the goals section, students were asked to relate
their education to their future goals. Students wrote down the postsecondary education or

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training programs they needed to explore and apply for, so they could reach their career goals. The workbook also included resume and cover letter examples, which Flower noted as helpful to create her own resume. According to Chase and Christine, this program mostly encouraged students to research career paths. Yet a section of the workbook also encouraged students to find mentors through family members, school professionals, and community members. The workbook stated that having access to mentors could help students get jobs, as long as they listen to their mentor's advice, took advantage of their mentor's expertise, and showed "gratitude."

The second YDO program connected students with the local police department to explore law enforcement occupations while the third program aims to expand the first career preparatory program. Chase described it as an opportunity for students to be exposed to a variety of occupations.

> We're exposing kids to people who look like them and are from their community and have had a similar upbringing. Exposing them to what they do, how they got there. Understanding that it's very rare for anyone to have a linear career path. Being able to understand when you want to say yes to something 'cause you want the experience. Being flexible, and being ready to role with the punches and changes that come up organically. To understand that there are lots of different careers, especially in [this area of the state], where there's a need for a future workforce. So then, they go, "Oh, I had no idea I would really like radiology. I only ever thought about being a doctor. I didn't realize there's other things." Then they can have more formalized ways to have experiences in those careers and to understand what kind of accreditation or degree they would need to do that

While the CMC partnership does not offer a formal career preparatory program, Ashley is

intentional about integrating it into her work. This includes exposing students to career cruising software, searching for guest speakers to talk about their career paths with students, and providing individual advising about career options.

Advocates. Three community-based organization staff participants discussed how they served as advocates for their students. Amy and Ashley shared that they advocated on behalf of students who were often overlooked by colleges. Ashley shared that she advocated on behalf of students with weak academic profiles to college admission representatives. Amy talked about advocating on behalf of students with educators.

> If I have a student that comes in [that's] having a misunderstanding or something with the professor, even a teacher if they're in high school, I'd sit down with the student. We go over what's happening. And then, depending on how that's affecting them academically, if their grades are really declining, I send out an email to the teacher, just tell them that I'd just had a conversation with the student. And just break down that conversation with [the teacher] and ask them to see if we can sit down and have a conversation, the three of us, so that we can figure out what's really happening there. How all of us can try to address it and make sure to fix it so that it's not affecting the student.

Chase talked about advocating for further student resources. This included raising money for transportation funds and using empirical data to convince stakeholders to invest in partnerships that could connect students with job opportunities. By serving as advocates for their students, community-based organization staff were able to expand the immediate and future access students had to resources and higher education.

Staff members shaped the types of spaces and institutions students had access to at the community-based organizations. First, community-based organizations embedded students into

physical spaces designated for homework or as a place to relax. Second, community-based organization staff developed formal programs aimed at student success. Formal academic programs helped students stay on track or catch up in their academic studies. Students gained further college information and exposure to college environments through formal college programming. They also gained information and exposure to careers through formal career programming. Lastly, community-based organization staff's advocacy shaped which resources or college admissions students gained access to. These findings suggest that staff members were essential in shaping and developing the larger systems or institutions that provided resources to students.

Social Network Expansion

Community-based organization staff helped students expand their social networks. The following provides examples of how community-based organization staff are essential to, and intentional, about connecting students to high-status social networks. This includes making connections, using student feedback, and consulting other networks to expand student opportunities.

Bridging networks. Students, alumni, and staff talked about instances when community-based organization staff would connect students with other individuals. This included facilitating introductions and referring students to individuals who worked for community partners and supplemental education programs. As a result, students secured jobs or participated in extracurricular activities.

Jobs. Community-based organization programs and staff members connected students with job opportunities. Both Christine and Maria attained jobs through community-based organization staff connections. Maria received a summer job at YDO through staff

recommendations. This job led to her current part-time position at the YDO. Maria attained her current job by using Ashley's social network. Ashley introduced Maria to an upper management employee at a bank. Through this introduction, Maria was able to get an internship that led to a permanent job. Maria described this job as an opportunity she never thought she would attain, noting that her wage is more than minimum wage and helped minimize college costs. In addition, Amy mentioned that two students were offered jobs after interning with a local law firm. She believed that this occurred because supervisors saw the potential in the students once they obtained access to these spaces.

Other connections. Community-based organization staff referred students to various community partners. Chase and Amy talked about referring students to someone at a city partnership that provides college preparatory advising. According to Chase and Amy, this individual connects students with college representatives and assists students with college applications. While Maria did not talk about this connection, she did reveal connections to another community-based organization and an academic support program. Ashley referred Maria to the DSC's college preparatory program. Maria said that both Ashley and the DSC connected her with volunteer opportunities. Maria also mentioned that Ashley would often refer her to the director of their local GearUP program, where she claims to have created strong bonds with the program director.

Coordinating. Community-based organization staff assessed student needs and identified individualized resources for them. Community-based organization staff members talked about continuous assessment and improvement of their programs. They also talked about identifying resources and information for students to use.

Assessment. The YDO regularly engaged in program assessment, guided by student

feedback and surveys. In addition to assessing the YDO's institutional needs, Chase actively

created formal and informal opportunities for students to provide feedback about the YDO's

services. He combined student feedback with his own research to encourage improvement.

> The more I read, the more I know and understand; the more professional development I
>
> get; the more I come back to my work at the organization and say we can do more or we
>
> can do this better or we've been putting too much emphasis here and it's not working.
>
> Because a lot of nonprofits see this all time, we all decide something is super important,
>
> we shift our focus to it or the funding goes away and it doesn't work, or it takes longer
>
> than we expect.

Flower recognized this intentional effort by stating that "they [the YDO] try their hardest to help

kids here [by asking] 'What can we do better around here?'"

> During the focus group, Ashley talked about assessing intentionality with the CMC

partnership. Although she did not provide specific examples of assessment, she mentioned the

importance of assessing program outcomes beyond quantitative measures.

> I think for us, it's making sure there's intentionality behind everything that we're doing.
>
> And making sure that we're not doing this so we can say that we did this, but genuinely
>
> each year continuing to ask what those needs are. And making sure that we're doing what
>
> we can to reach as many students as possible, with the goal of each year having more
>
> students apply than the last year and more students take the steps necessary to go through
>
> orientation and actually start the college classes. Because I think that's what's important.
>
> I mean I can tell you that x% of our students applied to college last year, but anyone can
>
> sit in front of a computer, I mean a [community college] application takes like five
>
> minutes, so actually making sure that they are applying and taking the steps necessary to

start would be something I would like us to focus on.

Consult. Community-based organization staff continuously sought out additional resources to assist their students. The interviews revealed that they did this through networking and consulting external resources. Amy talked about how she initiated her own research. She actively looked for financial aid resources that she could provide to the students she served.

> I print out a lot of available scholarships, so I do my own research on my end just to make sure that I'm always up to date on what the different scholarship requirements are if there are scholarships that I've been promoting for a while, but some requirements have changed. I try to make sure that I'm up to date on those, and that's what we use [with the students].

When Ashley noticed that multiple organizations were attempting to help students, she took action.

> So last year, I had realize that there were a lot of people coming in and out of our building from external organizations that had the same goal. We're trying to do the same thing with our students when it comes to college and career readiness. So, I organized a meeting with all those people with the intention of having everyone meet each other, learn what everyone does and what their capabilities are...It was good because we could all get an idea of what each other does, and if what a certain organizations does with a certain student limits them to be able to do so much, then they would know who to refer that student to if they needed additional help.

Although Ashley was able to gather information from similar organizations and programs, she realized that she needed to learn more about students who do not have legal citizenship in the U.S. Therefore, she consulted with staff from the DSC to learn "how to navigate situations with

students that are undocumented, or students that are citizens, but maybe their parents aren't."

Individual community-based organization staff members expanded student networks to include key agents. Staff members facilitated introductions or connected students to community members that provided additional opportunities for students. These opportunities included jobs, additional college advising, and academic support programs. As a result, students gained access to advantageous positions or resources that resulted in the accumulation of capital. Students continued to expand their network because staff members would regularly assess and expand their own networks. Thus, community-based organization staff helped students access higher education by expanding student social networks to accumulate social capital.

Barriers to Implementing Strategies

Funding and staff. Throughout the interviews and focus group, community-based organization staff shared their struggles with building capacity. Funding was referenced by several community-based organization staff participants as a barrier to sustaining and implementing youth services. Amy said that the DSC depended on external funds to implement formal programs. The DSC lost its funding to implement its formal college preparatory program. To address these funding issues, the DSC attempts to use community partners to help fund short-term programs. For example, the DSC's annual college fair is funded by having colleges pay a fee to have a table present at the fair. At the time of the interview, Amy was the only staff member working with DSC youth. She was left to coordinate all programming and drop-in sessions, which made it difficult to seek out additional funding. Ashley also talked about finding external funding. For the CMC partnership, the community foundation and high school provided funding for students to participate in activities like college visits. However, Ashley mentioned that she applied to external grants to help fund these experiences, so that all students at the high

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school could continue to participate in these activities.

In an exchange during the focus group, Chase and Ashley summarized the relationship between funding, staff, and the implementation of quality programming.

Chase: I think, for us, the resource we need is just capacity. I think it's challenging because we're serving a population from 6 years old to 18 years old, and so what happens…is that when your short-staffed the first thing cut is the teen programs because it's the lowest amount -- it's the smallest demographic that you have in the building -- so you have to try to serve everybody. I am always advocating for us to be able to pay staff more, so that we can attract better talent, not that our staff aren't great, but at the pay grade, there's only so much I can expect in the hiring process. That's just reality. And I think when you're talking about youth development in general, the big sticking point is that it doesn't pay very well. So, how can you have these really high-quality programs that are expected of us, when we're paying people less than they could make at McDonalds? That's a real struggle.

Ashley: Or expect to keep quality people.

Chase: Right, that's the other thing. Most of our positions are part-time: tons of turnover, especially with teens when the staff leaves, and they liked that person. "See ya." They're not coming back anymore. So, how do we find or recruit teens or staff that will stay long?

The community-based organization staff implied that without adequate funding, community-based organizations continued to be understaffed and programming suffered.

Authentic Relationships

The interviews revealed that community-based organization staff and students created strong bonds with each another. Community-based organization staff talked about providing

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students agency, while students and alumni referred to community-based organization staff as their friends. These bonds revealed that community-based organization staff are aware of factors that contribute to low-income student success. By recognizing these barriers and attempting to address them, students felt empowered to persist in academic spaces and engage in community-based organization programming. As Maria summarized,

> I guess it was just [Ashley] personally. She would believe in me, she knew that I could be at a university. I guess that it's just the way she would look at me. She would believe in me. I don't know how else to say that…So it's like I had somebody that knows I can do it because she sees it in me. [Now] I know I can do that.

Agency. Community-based organization staff provided students with opportunities to take ownership of their experiences and advocate for themselves. At the YDO, students had the option to drop-in or actively engage with programming. Chase was intentional about providing students agency. Chase believed that students could take ownership of their experiences.

> It's all about letting teens design their own experience, I think that's what we try to do with our staff. It's very important that teens don't feel forced 'cause then you're going to damage the relationship…I see it starting in middle school they feel like adults tell them what to do all the time. "Everybody's trying to make me make these decisions, I'm not ready to make them." So, the more I let them come to me, the more ownership they're taking out of it and it doesn't feel like I'm telling them to do it. They're asking me for help with something they already want to do, if that makes sense. So then they are driving the car.

Ashley allowed students to advocate for themselves when they asked her for recommendation letters. She provided students a form to fill out. Students were asked to provide information

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about their personal achievements, future plans, and any other information they believed was significant about their individual qualities.

Representation. Both the YDO and the CMC partnership were mindful of exposing students to people with marginalized social identities because they recognized that people from dominant populations made students feel uncomfortable. For example, Flower said she sometimes experiences discomfort being surround by White staff members, who she sometimes referred to as "Americans." Her responses suggested that she appreciated the YDO's racially diverse staff.

> Sometimes, when I'm just around White people, I feel like I don't know what they're doing. I just sometimes feel uncomfortable, because it's just them, not someone else like a different [skin] color or something like that. Sometimes I do act weird around [race] specifically…I don't know. I do get along with the White people around here. I feel really weird saying that. But also, I like to get along more with people who know my language, sometimes in Spanish. [Some staff] actually talk Spanish with me, or they have a different heritage behind them, instead of just being Americans or White.

According to Chase, several of the YDO employees were former students. He suggested that having this representation in staff would allow for mentorship.

> We're lucky to have a few employees who were club members as kids and teenagers and now go to [local colleges] and work for us as well. That's a great resource for them to say, "Hey, I'm 20 now, but when I was your age this is what I did. I didn't know what I was doing either, but this is how it worked. This is my advice to you." And kind of just having that built-in mentorship with people and kids that are like that: who have the same

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experience and can share people [future] pathways. 'Cause I can say all the stuff all day long, but it's not always relatable to them.

Ashley stated that students often made informal visits and shared their college experiences with current students.

Oftentimes we'll have students that just show up to visit…It is valuable to them to be able to talk to the students as well, even just to say things like, "Man, I wish I would've taken high school more seriously." I think that's huge for the younger students to be able to hear. I think that means way more coming from former students than coming from me because they feel that they can relate to the former students more than me.

Strong bonds. Community-based organization staff created strong bonds with students. This was demonstrated through caring and strong relationships. They listened to students. Students and alumni also talked about additional help outside of high school and attempts to return the favor.

Community-based organization staff cared about the students. Christine remembered that she and her peers would be shocked at the level of the care they received from YDO staff. She said, "some of the students would be like, 'you really care like that?' …You could really tell they wanted to be here and work with you." Regarding the CMC partnership, Maria described Ashley as a caring individual with all students. She suggested that many students had similar relationships with Ashley, like she had during her senior year.

I know my best friend, she used to have the same relationship with her, too. It was just certain students, I guess, if you would go to her office a lot, you would get close to her. But she would also seek out students, too. If she noticed that a student was struggling, you know, "Come to my office and I can help you with that."

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Community-based organization staff actively listened and learned from students. Amy reflected on her experiences at the DSC. She stated that it was important to listen to student concerns. "I think as the months have gone by, I've definitely learned to listen to everything that the student has to say and just really try to express their concerns." When asked how she has built meaningful relationships with YDO students, Marissa responded, "We get to know them. That's how we learn, we learn from communicating with them." Flower recognized that staff made an effort to listen to students.

> I feel like the staff are more like friends to me than just the staff of the club. Like friends. You could talk to them like you could really tell your whole day and they will just listen to you. You even tell them simple jokes and they will listen to you, laugh about it and they try to engage with us, basically, they try to be like our age sometimes, they just hang around and ask what's going on.

Students and alumni referred to community-based organization staff as their "friends." When reflecting on her relationship with Ashley, Maria described it as a friendship. "With Ashley, I just look back and I'm like, we do have a good relationship. It was more like, instead of just like a staff and student type relationship, it was more like a real friendship. We got closer." While students would often ask for help from their "friends," they were willing to return the favor. For example, Flower referred to one staff member as her friend by stating, "He's a really good friend. We still talk to each other. I talk to him about everything I need help with, whatever he needs as well." Maria's relationship with Ashley extended beyond her time in high school.

> It's not like she would just ignore me because I graduated and that's it. But she would still help me during the summer. I want to say... It had to do with college, but I don't

remember what it was. But she would help me with that. Or when she needed a volunteer

to go talk to a different group (of students) or whatever, then I would go.

Belonging. Students and alumni expressed a sense of belonging. When describing her

past experiences, Christine mentioned that YDO made her feel valued.

I don't know. I always thought it was cool, just different to go somewhere where all the

workers would accept you, talk to you about anything. They wouldn't really say, "You

don't know what you're talking about." It didn't matter. They always made me feel like

everything I said was important

While some students struggled to express their feelings, their responses indicated a strong sense

of belonging. Flower summarized these thoughts and feelings by stating, "The YDO has always

been something like home. I always felt like it was home."

The relationship between community-based organization staff members and students are

strong and authentic. Community-based organization staff helped establish trust by providing

students agency to shape their experiences and engagement with community-based

organization's services or programming. Staff showed students that they were aware of diverse

student experiences by exposing students to alumni or community members with marginalized

identities. These actions helped develop strong bonds between students and community-based

organization staff, described as caring and nonjudgmental. Ultimately, students expressed a sense

of belonging to the community-based organizations and a sense of friendship with the staff. This

indicates that community-based organization staff members play a significant role in students'

social networks.

Summary

The findings of this study indicate that community-based organization staff use various sources of knowledge, materials, and resources to help students access higher education. Community-based organization staff members utilize knowledge from their own experiences, their networks, and the Internet to provide college information to students. Through the use of direct services and formal programming, community-based organizations equip students with resources and insight about high-status networks. This insight helps students to make informed choices about their postsecondary options. In addition, community-based organization staff members use their own networks to bridge students, which allows students to expand their networks and accumulate social capital. Furthermore, the constant support and engagement with students have created strong relationships between students, alumni, and community-based organization staff members. Students, alumni, and community-based organization staff members believe that the methods above help low-income students of color to access higher education. However, community-based organizations face barriers with funding, which affects the amount and type of support that they can provide to low-income students of color. These findings will be assessed using social capital theory in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary

Low-income students of color have unequal access to dominant forms of social capital needed to access higher education (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between social capital, low-income students of color, community-based organizations, and access to higher education because few studies have identified the role of community-based organizations as sources of social capital. The following question was explored, using a transcendental phenomenological approach: What strategies do community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education? The framework to address the study included social capital inequality theory and Stanton-Salazar's (2011) institutional agent typology. The research question was also addressed through the following six questions:

(1) What sources of knowledge do community-based organization staff refer to when helping low-income students of color access higher education?

(2) What direct services do community-based organization staff members provide to low-income students of color?

(3) What strategies do individual community-based organization staff members, students, or alumni believe are beneficial to helping students access higher education?

(4) How do community-based organization staff members expand, limit, or affect students' social networks?

(5) What factors affect community-based organization capacity in helping low-income students of color access higher education?

(6) How do community-based organization staff members act as gatekeepers or

institutional agents for low-income students of color?

This exploratory study used three qualitative research methods. This included individual semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a document analysis of text materials. Participants were recruited using maximum variation sampling. Three community-based organizations were identified as serving students that were largely low-income students of color. Three different types of participants were requested from each organization. This included staff members who worked directly with youth, low-income high school junior or senior students of color, and low-income first-year or second-year college students of color (alumni). Nine participants participated in individual semi-structured interviews, two participants were involved in the focus group, and 7 text materials were provided for the document analysis. Data collection and analysis resulted in 31 codes, 13 concepts, and 5 themes. The five themes that emerged were (1) direct support, (2) shaping/developing systems and institutions, (3) social network expansion, (4) barriers to implementing strategies, and (5) authentic relationships.

Discussion

Institutional agents are individuals in positions of high-status or authority that can facilitate the transmission of institutional support or highly-valued resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, 1997). Stanton-Salazar outlined the different roles and types of institutional support agents promote for the social mobility of marginalized youth. This study revealed that community-based organization staff served as resource agents, knowledge agents, advisors, coordinators, and bridging agents within their positions serving low-income students of color. Community-based organization staff provided various forms of social support and resources to prepare students to successfully access higher education. They also empowered students through the creation of

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authentic relationships. However, the bureaucratic organization of community-based organizations can also influence staff to act as gatekeepers to resources. The following expands on the conclusions of the study, using Stanton Salazar's (2011) typology of institutional agents. Unless noted otherwise, alumni participants are included under "students" because they were, at one point, high school students who received support from community-based organizations.

When providing institution-specific resources to students, community-based organizations engaged in a mix of gatekeeping and empowerment methods. While community-based organizations provided monetary resources for college funds, students were expected to meet specific participation or merit requirements to receive money for college funding. This could be considered a gatekeeping activity because low-income students of color face additional barriers to academic success, which could affect how successful they are in meeting merit requirements. A resource agent has the ability to provide resources to students without needing authorization within an organization (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Community-based organizations provided some funds and physical resources that did not require students to meet standards set up by a bureaucracy. By providing stipends or scholarships in return for participation in formal programming, students were not forced to compete with one another for funds. Community-based organizations were also generous in providing resources like food and winter clothing without any penalty for the students. Although some resources were limited to student performance, community-based organization staff acted as resource agents that did not require students to compete for basic necessities.

Community-based organization staff acted as knowledge agents by helping students navigate the college application process. A knowledge agent has, and provides, knowledge to students so they can better understand how to navigate "the system" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

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This was most noticeable with staff helping students with college application materials. According to Hill (2008), an effective strategy to help students enroll into college is providing services to assist students with college and financial aid forms. Community-based organization staff helped students fill out college applications. Some staff even provided feedback on scholarship essays, a method that Farmer-Hinton (2008) described as helpful for college enrollment. Student participants of this study, who were all first-generation students, expressed these methods as helpful to accessing or applying to colleges.

Students received individual advising from community-based organization staff members before, during, and after the college application process. An advisor worked alongside a student to gather information, assess problems, and make decisions about the education system (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Within a high school setting, this role is typically the responsibility of high school counselors. According to Belasco (2013), low-income students of color are more likely to enroll in a 4-year college if they visit their counselor(s) for college information. Instead of discussing the role of high school counselors, research participants mentioned several instances when community-based organization staff served as advisors. Of note, community-based organization staff would help students identify methods on how to gather information, in addition to providing material resources, like flyers and a college guide. Community-based organization staff highlighted the importance of individualizing discussions about college options with students, a method that Farmer-Hinton (2008) found as beneficial to low-income students of color. While this study did not measure the efficacy of community-based organization staff advising methods, student and alumni interviews verified the significance of community-based organization staff acting as advisors to students to make an informed decision

about college. In particular, two of the three alumni participants attended a 4-year institution at the time of the study.

Community-based organization staff developed, coordinated, and implemented programs that benefitted students in various ways. Formal short-term and long-term programs provided students an opportunity to succeed academically in high school, prepare for college, and explore or experience different career pathways. These programs exposed students to dominant cultural capital and promoted academic success. According to Farmer-Hinton (2008), providing students with opportunities to visit colleges and participate in internship experiences allow students to accumulate dominant (middle-class) forms of cultural capital. The DSC academic program paired students with internship placements in institutions, like local colleges, which would help students accumulate and experience the norms of middle-class networks. All community-based organizations took students on college visits across the state, which helped students to connect with college personnel and witness college norms; an experience particularly beneficial for first-generation students. In addition, academic programs served as resources to students to improve their academic achievement. By improving their academic achievement, students would have greater access to colleges and education support services (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Stanton-Salazar (2011) describes a program developer as someone who creates a program(s) that "embeds students/youth in a system of agents, resources, and opportunities" (p. 1100). Providing students access to spaces with formal programming aimed at supporting student and career success suggests that community-based organization staff members largely served as program developers.

Students used community-based organization staff as their connections to high-status social networks. A bridging agent is an individual with a social network that can be used to

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connect students with key institutional agents or networks (e.g. college personnel; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Community-based organization staff and alumni shared examples of students attaining jobs through community-based organizations. Staff members connected students with individuals employed in high-status spaces (e.g. banks and law firms). By introducing students to these spaces, community-based organization staff bridged a connection between students with non-dominant forms of capital and individuals with dominant forms of capital. Community-based organization staff also referred students to individuals with knowledge about high-status institutions and expansive social networks. For example, community-based organization staff referred students to a city partnership that was connected to various college representatives. Hill's (2008) study found that students are more likely to enroll in college if they make connections with college representatives. Therefore, by serving as bridging agents, community-based organization staff increased the likelihood of student college enrollment through opportunities to diversity and expand their social networks.

Community-based organization staff were intentional about identifying and providing resources to meet the needs of low-income students of color. Community-based organizations used formal and informal methods to assess their programs and services, with an emphasis on gathering student feedback. Community-based organization staff members also consulted the Internet and their networks to identify potential resources and intentionally understand student structural circumstances (e.g. immigration status) that affected what resources they could provide to students. According to Stanton-Salazar (2011), a coordinator identifies resources to meet student needs, provides access to resources, and encourages students to use those resources. Therefore, community-based organization staff served as coordinators because they made efforts

to increase their awareness of student realities and provided numerous resources tailored to student needs.

While community-based organization staff did not meet the empowerment agent criteria created by Stanton-Salazar (2011), they did empower students through the creation of authentic relationships. Empowerment agents are institutional agents that resist the established stratification of low-status students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Interview responses indicate that community-based organization staff are aware of structural factors that limit the social mobility of low-income students of color and advocate for further institutional support to promote student success. This is evident through responses regarding immigration status and access to basic necessities. It is also evident through community-based organization efforts to expose low-income students of color to individuals with similar backgrounds as them and the creation of safe spaces (Wong, 2010). Community-based organization staff also created authentic relationships, built on providing student agency and friendship. Students felt a sense of belonging and trust with community-based organization staff members, which they believe led to their success.

Empowerment agents are willing to resist established rules that designate resources only to "upper-levels of hierarchy" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1089). Community-based organization staff responses did not indicate that they actively resist only designating resources to high-academic performing students. Instead, they engaged in some gatekeeping actions. Gatekeeping agents reward and punish students, based on merit (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). While the YDO and DSC staff resisted punishing students by providing incentives to participate in programming, the YDO encouraged students to compete for scholarship funds through their leadership competition. In addition, the CMC partnership rewarded students who displayed academic achievement through recognition ceremonies. According to Ashley, this helped to recognize students and

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motivate their peers to do well. While this may motivate the students being recognized, it may limit the student engagement of students who do not display similar forms of achievement. Students who do not demonstrate this form of achievement are at risk of losing trust with school personnel and not developing long-term relationships (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). However, it is important to note that since the CMC partnership places a staff member within a school, the staff member faces bureaucratic obstacles. It is plausible that resisting this process of "reward and punishment" could penalize the staff member.

Effective strategies to access higher education are possible if the organization receives adequate funding to implement college-going curriculum (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Yet, community-based organizations involved in this study faced funding barriers to support formal youth programming. Interview responses suggested that lack of funding can eliminate or reduce formal programming. It can also result in high employee turnover or limit the pool of candidates that can effectively work with marginalized students. These structural funding barriers stretched employee responsibilities, such as Amy's situation at the time of the interview, which resulted in overworked staff. It is possible that these structural funding barriers prevented staff from actively engaging in resisting gatekeeping procedures because it would be another responsibility added to their overextended duties.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

Recommendations for Practice

The study's findings warrant the public attention and support of community-based organizations to help low-income students of color access higher education. In particular, this study revealed that students are highly engaged with college preparatory programming and other activities when they feel a sense of belonging with a community-based organization. Students

felt a sense of belonging within their respective community-based organization when they were provided agency within the community-based organization, established strong bonds with staff, and were exposed to individuals with similar backgrounds as them. Community-based organization professionals should identify spaces or procedures that allow students to make their own choices. Community-based organizations should consider providing a platform for students to express their opinions of community-based organization services, whether through formal (e.g. survey) or informal methods (e.g. conversation). Community-based organization professionals should attempt to create strong bonds with their students. One way to do this is to follow Marissa's advice: to learn from students by communicating with them. Also, community-based organizations should identify activities that allow students to connect with former alumni or community members with similar marginalized identities.

The other relevant finding is that community-based organizations encountered barriers with funding. Without sufficient funding, community-based organization programs get cut, they are understaffed or employees are underqualified, and current staff members are overextended in their duties. All of these consequences affect the type and quality of support community-based organizations can provide to students. Various stakeholders can address this issue. Community-based organization's upper management or board of trustees should provide internal funding so that programming does not need to rely on external grants or risk getting eliminated. Community-based organization's upper management or board of trustees should agree upon raising employee salaries or wages. By providing a higher salary, community-based organizations can attract competitive talent and reduce issues with turnover. Government funders or philanthropic organizations should consider providing additional and less competitive grants to support community-based organization formal programming or scholarship funds that can be

distributed to students engaged with the community-based organizations. Lastly, the public should consider donating money or physical resources to a local community-based organization. Any gift could be helpful, such as the bus tickets or coats distributed by the YDO. This study reveals that community-based organizations help low-income students of color to access higher education. Therefore, community funds and investment should be utilized to support and expand community-based organization efforts.

Higher education professionals can integrate the research findings into their own practice. Community-based organizations shape some of the college information and resources students have access to. If higher education professionals want to recruit or increase low-income student enrollment, they should create strong relationships with community-based organizations and their staff. Higher education professionals could provide further information, resources, or knowledge to staff, so that students have access to accurate information about particular colleges. Higher education professionals could also assess the existing materials and resources community-based organization staff use to help students access higher education. By assessing these materials and resources, higher education professionals can have a better idea of the college content that students consume or value. Lastly, higher education professionals should create partnerships with community-based organizations to provide opportunities to students. Opportunities could include support for college visits so that community-based organization staff do not have to continue applying to external funding. This could also include internship or employment opportunities through the community-based organizations career programs, so that students can accumulate dominant forms of capital and earn funds towards their future college educations. By connecting with community-based organizations, higher education professionals

have the potential to access student populations they could miss by only engaging with school staff or parents.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are multiple opportunities to expand this exploratory research about the relationship between community-based organizations, low-income students of color, social capital, and access to higher education. The following will provide limitations of the study, along with recommendations for future research.

Sampling and saturation. The maximum variation sampling method utilized by this study limited the potential to reach saturation with the data. Future research studies should identify one particular type of community-based organization. For example, a researcher could identify multiple youth development organizations and interview multiple participants. Studies could also identify one type of participant, like community-based organization staff. Another alternative is to conduct a case study of one particular community-based organization to interview different types of participants and collect rich, in-depth, context-specific data.

Materials for Document Analysis. This study revealed that community-based organization professionals rarely created or used static text materials to help students access higher education. Instead, most participants referenced the Internet. While websites are subject to change, future studies should ask community-based organization staff which websites they frequently visit or utilize with students during the college application process. A content analysis of webpages could be beneficial in providing more current findings.

Efficacy of strategies. While research participants expressed the strategies identified in this study as helpful for low-income students of color to access higher education, this study did not measure the efficacy of the strategies utilized. Future studies should use statistical analyses to

test the efficacy of some of the strategies listed above, within the context of a community-based organization. By studying this within the context of a community-based organization, researchers can contribute to literature that is mostly representative of strategies utilized by families or schools.

Limited literature. The limited amount of scholarship regarding the role of community-based organizations in accessing higher education was a challenge to create data collection instruments. Future research should continue to study this topic and develop research instruments. Additionally, scholars should acknowledge that community-based organizations provide unique social networks to students. Social capital literature about college access and youth development should explore the role that community-based organizations have in reinforcing, expanding, or affecting low-income students of color's social networks.

Conclusion

Community-based organizations help low-income students of color to access higher education. Community-based organizations use strategies like providing monetary resources, advising, direct programming, assessments, empowering relationships, and exposure to dominant forms of social and cultural capital. Community-based organizations play a larger role in the social networks of low-income students of color. While bureaucracy and funding can limit the type of support community-based organization staff can give to students, staff members have the ability to expand students' social networks and connect them with opportunities to accumulate dominant forms of capital needed to access higher education. The findings of this study indicate that further research should explore the relationship between social capital, low-income students of color, access to higher education, and community-based organizations. Scholarship has not

adequately explored how community-based organizations can fill in a gap and contribute to the

success of low-income students of color; however, it is needed.

Appendix A

Email to Community-Based Organizations

Hello _____,

My name is Irma Ramirez, and I am a graduate student at Grand Valley State University. I am reaching out to you because _____ referred me to your organization, specifically about the _____ program you oversee.

I am working on a master's thesis that will identify community-based organizations (i.e. non-profit or social service agencies that provide services or programs to help populations access life opportunities) that work with low-income students of color. My thesis will aim to address the following question: What strategies do community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education?

I have read the content on your website and believe that your organizations would be a great fit for this study. I would like to connect to share further details about my proposed thesis, learn more about your program(s), and (if appropriate) gain your support/participation in the study.

I can be reached at ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu or 616-929-0092. I look forward to your response.

Best,

Irma Ramirez

Appendix B

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn about the strategies that community-based organizations* use to help low-income students of color to get into college.

*Community-based organization: a non-profit or social service agency that provides services or programs to help people

Eligibility:

- Low-income student of color
- High school junior/senior OR enrolled in your 1st/2nd year of college

AND

- You currently are OR have participated in a community-based program/receive services from a community-based organization

Involvement: You will be asked to participate in a private interview. Your identity will be kept private.

Benefit: You will help researchers understand how community-based organizations help low-income students of color to get into college.

Questions?

Principal Investigator	Co-Principal Investigator
Dr. Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury	Irma Ramirez (Graduate Student)
College of Education	College of Education
Grand Valley State University	Grand Valley State University
(616) 331-6485	(616) 929-0092
baileych@gvsu.edu	ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Appendix C

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Research Informed Consent Form for Staff Members

Title of Study: *Access to Higher Education through Community-Based Organizations*

Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury | (616) 331-6485 | College of Education, Grand Valley State University | baileych@gvsu.edu

Co-PI: Irma Ramirez, Adult & Higher Education Graduate Student | (616) 929-0092 | College of Education, Grand Valley State University | ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Study purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn more about what strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education.

Reason for invitation: You are invited to participate in this study because you meet the criteria of being a staff member of a community-based organization that works directly with low-income students of color.

Selection of participants: Participants of this study are recruited through Internet searches and established community or nonprofit networks. To qualify for this study, at least 50% of students served by the organization's program(s) are low-income students of color. The staff member of the community-based organization that will participate in this study must work directly with low-income students of color.

Purpose of this form: This consent form provides information you need to help you decide if you would like to participate in this study. You are welcome to ask any questions about this study, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a voluntary participant, or anything else that is not clear. After reading through this consent form and after all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you would like to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, I will need written consent.

Your role in the study: This study has four parts. You will be asked to participate in three parts totaling approximately 2.5 hours.

- The first part is an *individual interview*, where you will be asked questions about the strategies you use with the low-income students of color you serve. This interview will be approximately 1 hour.
- The second part is a *content analysis* of the materials, resources, or other text documents you use when working with low-income students of color. You will provide these materials to me, and I will destroy or return them upon completion of the study in April 2018.
- The third part is a *group interview*, where you will join 2 other staff members from 2 different community-based organizations to discuss the strategies you use with low-income students of color. This group interview will be approximately 1.5 hours.

Benefits: You may not see immediate or direct benefits to you. However, information from this study may benefit other individuals in the future.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks related to this study.

Study costs: There are no costs to you as a participant in this study.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: All information collected about you during this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records through a pseudonym or participant number ID. However, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Grand Valley State University or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight may review your records. The results of this study will not provide any information that could reveal your identity.

Taking part in this study is voluntary.

- You have the right to not participate in this study. You can later change your mind or withdraw from this study at any time.
- You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer.
- Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Grand Valley State University or its affiliates.

Study Results: You have the right to learn about the results of this study. If you wish to learn about the results of the study, you can request that information by contacting Irma Ramirez at ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Questions: If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Irma Ramirez at (616) 929-0092. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee at (616) 331-3197.

Consent to participate in this study: To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form. By signing this consent form below, you are stating the following:
- The details of this study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and any anticipated risks or benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have all my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study as described on this form;
- I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.
- _____ (Initial here) I have been given a copy of this document for my records.

_____	_____
Name of Participant	Time
_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date
_____	_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Time

Research Informed Consent Form for Students

Title of Study: *Access to Higher Education through Community-Based Organizations*

Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury | (616) 331-6485 | College of Education, Grand Valley State University | baileych@gvsu.edu

Co-PI: Irma Ramirez, Adult & Higher Education Graduate Student | (616) 929-0092 | College of Education, Grand Valley State University | ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Why am I here? You are here for a research study. Only people who choose to take part are included in research studies. You are invited to participate in this study because you meet the following criteria.

- You are (1) currently a high school junior or senior, (2) you identify as a student of color and a low-income student, AND (3) you participate in a community-based program or receive services from a community-based organization.*

                    OR

- You are (1) currently in your 1st or 2nd year of college, (2) you identify as a student of color and a low-income student, AND (3) you have participated in a community-based program or received services from a community-based organization

*A community-based organization is a non-profit or social service agency that provides services or programs to help people (access life opportunities).

After reading through this consent form and after all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you would like to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, I will need written consent.

What is this study about? The purpose of this study is to learn more about the strategies that community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color to get into college.

What is my role in this study? You will take part in a one-on-one interview with me. I will ask you several questions about your experiences thinking about, talking about, or applying to college. I will also ask you questions about the services or program you participate in at _(*will insert name of community-based organization*)_____. After the interview, I will thank you for your participation and will remind you how your answers and information will be used for the study.

If you have a question during the interview, you can ask me. You also have the right to tell me that you do not want to answer a question or that you do not want to participate in the study. There will be no penalties.

How long will I be in the study? This interview should take approximately 1 hour. After this, your participation is over.

Will the study help me? You may not see immediate or direct benefits to you. However, information from this study may benefit other individuals in the future.

Will anything bad happen to me? There are no anticipated risks related to this study. You have the right to ask any questions, not answer a question, or stop participating in the study. Again, there will be no penalties.

Do I have to pay to participate in this study? There are no costs for you to participate in the study.

Do I get paid to participate in this study? You will not get paid to participate in this study.

Will my information remain confidential?

- All information collected about your during this study will be kept confidential, unless I am required by law to share any information.
- Your responses will be identified in the research through a pseudonym (a false name) or participant number ID. The results of this study will not provide any information that could reveal your identity

What if I have any questions? If you have questions about this study, please call Irma Ramirez at (616) 929-0092. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, please call the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee at (616) 331-3197.

Study results: You have the right to learn about the results of this study. If you wish to learn about the results of the study, you can request that information by contacting Irma Ramirez at ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Do I have to participate in this study? Taking part in this study is voluntary.

- You have the right to not participate in this study. You can later change your mind or stop participating in this study at any time.
- You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer.
- No one will be mad or in trouble if you decide to stop participating in this study.

Consent to participate in this study: To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form. By signing this consent form below, you are stating the following:

- The details of this study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and any anticipated risks or benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have all my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study as described on this form;
- I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.
- _____ (Initial here) I have been given a copy of this document for my records.

_____   _____
Name of Participant   Time

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Time

Appendix E

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Parental Permission/Research Assent Form for Minor Students

Title of Study: *Access to Higher Education through Community-Based Organizations*

Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury | (616) 331-6485 | College of Education, Grand Valley State University | baileych@gvsu.edu

Co-PI: Irma Ramirez, Adult & Higher Education Graduate Student | (616) 929-0092 | College of Education, Grand Valley State University | ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Why am I here? You are here for a research study. Only people who choose to take part are included in research studies. You are invited to participate in this study because you are (1) currently a high school junior or senior, (2) you identify as a student of color and a low-income student, AND (3) you participate in a community-based program or receive services from a community-based organization.*

*A community-based organization is a non-profit or social service agency that provides services or programs to help people (access life opportunities).

After reading through this consent form and all your questions have been answered, you and your parent/legal guardian(s) can decide if you would like to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, I will need written consent from one of your parent(s)/legal guardian(s).

What is this study about? The purpose of this study is to learn more about the strategies that community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color to get into college.

What is my role in this study? You will take part in a one-on-one interview with me. I will ask you several questions about your experiences thinking about, talking about, or applying to college. I will also ask you questions about the services or program you participate in at _(*will insert name of community-based organization*)_____. After the interview, I will thank you for your participation and will remind you how your answers and information will be used for the study.

If you have a question during the interview, you can ask me. You also have the right to tell me that you do not want to answer a question or that you do not want to participate in the study. There will be no penalties.

How long will I be in the study? This interview should take approximately 1 hour. After this, your participation is over.

Will the study help me? You may not see immediate or direct benefits to you. However, information from this study may benefit other individuals in the future.

Will anything bad happen to me? There are no anticipated risks related to this study. You have the right to ask any questions, not answer a question, or stop participating in the study. Again, there will be no penalties.

Do I have to pay to participate in this study? There are no costs for you to participate in the study.

Do I get paid to participate in this study? You will not get paid to participate in this study.

Will my information remain confidential?

- All information collected about your during this study will be kept confidential, unless I am required by law to share any information. The law requires that I share your information if you might hurt yourself or someone else.
- Your responses will be identified in the research through a pseudonym (a false name) or participant number ID. The results of this study will not provide any information that could reveal your identity.

What if I have any questions? If you or your parent/legal guardian(s) have questions about this study, please call Irma Ramirez at (616) 929-0092. If you or your parent/legal guardian(s) have questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, please call the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee at (616) 331-3197.

Study Results: You have the right to learn about the results of this study. If you or your parent/legal guardian(s) wish to learn about the results of the study, you can request that information by contacting Irma Ramirez at ramireir@mail.gvsu.edu

Do I have to participate in this study? Taking part in this study is voluntary.

- You have the right to not participate in this study. You can later change your mind or stop participating in this study at any time.
- You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer.
- No one will be mad or in trouble if you decide to stop participating in this study.

Please take some time to decide if you would like to participate in the study. Talk to your parent/legal guardian(s) and be sure to ask me questions about anything you do not understand.

Consent to participate in this study: To voluntarily agree to have your child take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to have your child take part in this study, you may withdraw your child at any time. You are not giving up any of your or your child's legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this assent form.

By signing the assent form below, you are stating the following:

- The details of this study have been explained to me and my child, including what my child is being asked to do and any anticipated risks or benefits;
- My child and I have had an opportunity to have all our questions answered;

- I am voluntarily agreeing to allow my child to participate in the study as described on this form;
- My child or I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.
- _____ (Initial here) I have been given a copy of this document for my records.

_____   _____
Name of Participant   Age

_____   _____
Assent Signature (children age 7-17)   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name of Parent/Legally Authorized Guardian Granting Consent   Time

_____   _____
Signature of Parent/Legally Authorized Guardian Granting Consent   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Time

_____   _____
Signature of Translator   Date

_____   _____
Printed name of Translator   Time

Appendix F

Adverse Impact Reporting

If you notice or experience adverse impact in human subjects research, contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity immediately!

Office Address: 049 James H Zumberge Hall

Email: rci@gvsu.edu   Phone: (616) 331-3197

Additional Information

http://www.gvsu.edu/hrrc/about-us-62.htm

http://www.gvsu.edu/hrrc/hrrc-policies-procedures-guidance-17.htm

Appendix G

Staff Member Participant Questions for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

** The goal of the questions is aimed at gaining an understanding of (1) who the participant is, (2) what the participant's role is in the community-based organization, (3) what is the role/context of the community-based organization, (4) how the participant perceives higher education and if it varies by student demographic(s), (5) what opinions the participant has on the students they serve, and (6) what strategies they use to help low-income students of color access higher education. Therefore, the following questions are meant to help guide the Co-PI and the participant throughout the interview to describe the participant's experiences. Not all questions may be asked. **

(Pseudonym), I am going to start by getting to know you.
1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. How do you identify racially?
3. How do you identify your socioeconomic status?

I would to like to know more about your job and your organization (please tell me about)…
1. Please tell me about your role at your organization.
2. How did you get into your role at _____?
3. Please describe what you believe is your primary goal in your position.
4. Please describe what you believe is the primary role of your program.
5. Please describe what you believe is the primary role of your organization.
6. How do you believe that your organization serves high school students?
7. How do you believe that your organization helps high school students access opportunities (whether it is education, jobs, etc.)?
8. How do you believe that you help students access higher education?

I would like to know more about your perceptions of higher education related to the students you serve.
1. What types of higher or postsecondary education do you/your organization promote to students, if any?
2. Do you think there are any specific types of higher education that the students you serve should pursue? If so, what types of higher education?
3. Do you think there are any specific fields of study that the students you serve should pursue? If so, what fields?
4. What differences, if any, do you notice about the types of education that you or your organization promote particularly to low-income students of color?

I would like to know more about your perceptions of your students.
1. Please give me a general description about the students you/your organization serves.

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(Are there any notable differences between the low-income students of color you serve and the other students you serve?)
2. Please describe to me the success of your students (whether it is education, jobs, etc.)
3. Please describe to me the needs of your students.

Now, that I have better understanding of your perceptions of your organization, higher education, and your students, I would like you to walk me through what you do, and have experienced, working with low-income students of color to access higher education.
1. How do you engage students in thinking about or applying to institutions of higher education?
   a. On a daily/weekly basis, what materials (if any) do you use to promote or teach students about higher education?
   b. On a daily/weekly basis, what programming (if any) do you use to promote or teach students about higher education?
   c. On a daily/weekly basis, what do you do to help low-income students of color to access higher education?
   d. On a daily/weekly basis, please describe any other strategies that you or your organization use to help students access or enroll in higher education.
2. Please describe anything you may do differently from your organization to help students access higher education (if any).
3. Are there any differences between what you do for the low-income students of color you serve and the other students when helping them access higher education? If so, what are they?
4. What experiences have changed or maintained your approach to helping students access higher education?

As we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to share? (Can remind participant of the purpose of the study).

Appendix H

Student Participant Questions for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

** The goal of the questions is aimed at gaining an understanding of (1) who the participant is, (2) what their (current) plans are after completing high school, (3) how the participant perceives higher education (4) what opinions the participant has on their respective community-based organization and staff, and (5) what strategies they believe have helped them access or apply to institutions of higher education. Therefore, the following questions are meant to help guide the Co-PI and the participant throughout the interview to describe the participant's experiences. Not all questions may be asked. **

(Pseudonym), I am going to start by getting to know you.
1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. How do you identify racially?
3. How do you identify your socioeconomic status?

I would like to know more about your education.
1. What grade are you currently in?
2. Please describe to me what your plans are after high school.

I would like to know more about your thoughts on postsecondary or higher education, which is any form of education that is pursued beyond the high school level. Throughout this interview, I will refer to higher education as college.
1. When you hear "college", what thoughts or opinions come to mind?
2. I am going to provide a few descriptions of types of colleges. Please tell me what thoughts or opinions come to mind.
    a. trade/vocational schools or certificate programs – programs that typically provide a certificate of completion in a trade (e.g. cosmetology school). What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of trade/vocational schools or certificate programs?
    b. 2-year colleges – colleges that typically award an associate's degree (e.g. community college). What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of 2-year colleges?
    c. 4-year colleges – colleges or universities that typically award a bachelor's degree (e.g. any 4-year college/university outside of Michigan). What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of 4-year colleges?
3. Now that you were reminded about three main types of college, please describe any goals you may have about college, if any.

It is my understanding that you participate/are a part of _____(specific community-based organization program or service(s))_____. I would like to know more about your thoughts on this organization.
1. What do you do at _____?

2. How often do you participate/visit _____?
3. What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of _____?
4. What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of the staff at _____?
5. What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of the type of work that _____ does for you? Your neighborhood/community?

Now that I have a better understanding of who you are, what your thoughts are about college, and what your thoughts are about _____, I have some more questions about what _____ does for you to better access/enroll into college.

1. On a __(insert frequency, based on participant's response to participation at the community-based organization)__ basis, what materials does the staff at _____ use to promote, teach, or help you apply to college?
2. On a ____ basis, what types of programs or activities does the staff at _____ use to promote, teach, or help you apply to college?
3. On a ____ basis, what does the staff do to promote, teach, or help you apply to college?
4. Please describe anything that _____ or its staff has done that you think is beneficial to applying or learning more about college.
5. Please describe any experiences (if any) you have had at _____ that provided information or resources to college that your parents or school has also provided.
6. Please describe any experiences (if any) you have had at _____ that provided new information or resources to college that your parents or school did NOT provide to you.
7. Please describe any experiences (if any) you have had at _____ that may have turned you away from college? Overwhelmed you about college?
8. Have you had any other experiences at other organizations (not school) that have helped you learn about or apply to college? If so, can you please describe these experiences?

As we finish this interview, are there any other things that you would like me to know about? As a reminder, I am trying to identify what strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education. You, as a low-income student of color, have chosen to share your knowledge/expertise about this topic with me. Would you like to share anything else?

Alumni Participant Questions for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

** The goal of the questions is aimed at gaining an understanding of (1) who the participant is (2) how the participant engaged with the community-based organization, (3) how the participant perceives the community-based organization, and (4) what strategies they believe helped them access or apply to institutions of higher education. Therefore, the following questions are meant to help guide the Co-PI and the participant throughout the interview to describe the participant's experiences. Not all questions may be asked. **

(Pseudonym), I am going to start by getting to know you.
4. Please tell me about yourself.
5. How do you identify racially?
6. How do you identify your socioeconomic status?
7. What year are you in college? (e.g. 1st year, sophomore)
8. What type of college do you go to? (e.g. community-college)

It is my understanding that you participated/were a part of ____(specific community-based organization program or service(s))_____. I would like to know more on how you were involved with the organization and your thoughts about it by asking you to recall some information. It is okay if you cannot remember entirely. I want you to share what you can recall and are willing to share.
6. If you remember, what age were you in when you got involved with _____? What grade?
7. What did you do at _____?
8. How often do you remember participating/visiting _____?
9. When you were involved with _____ before college, what opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of _____? What about now?
10. When you were involved with _____ before college, what opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of the staff at _____? What about now?
11. What opinions or thoughts come to mind when you think of the type of work that _____ does or did for you? Your neighborhood/community?
12. Do you continue to participate or engage with _____? If so, to what extent?

Now that I have a better understanding of who you are and what your thoughts are about _____, I have some more questions about what _____ did for you to better access/enroll into college. Again, I am going to ask you to recall some more information. It is okay if you cannot remember entirely. I want you to share what you can recall and are willing to share.

9. On a __(insert frequency, based on participant's response to participation at the community-based organization)__ basis, what materials did the staff at _____ use to promote, teach, or help you apply to college(s)?
10. On a ____ basis, what types of programs or activities did the staff at _____ use to promote, teach, or help you apply to college(s)?
11. On a ____ basis, what did the staff do to promote, teach, or help you apply to college(s)?
12. Please describe anything that _____ or its staff has done that you think was beneficial to applying or learning more about college.
13. Please describe any experiences (if any) you have had at _____ that provided information or resources to college that your parents or school has also provided.
14. Please describe any experiences (if any) you have had at _____ that provided new information or resources to college that your parents or school did NOT provide to you.
15. Please describe any experiences (if any) you have had at _____ that may have turned you away from college? Overwhelmed you about college?
16. Have you had any other experiences at other organizations (not school) that have helped you learn about or apply to college? If so, can you please describe these experiences?
17. Overall, to what extent do you think _____ helped you to get into college?

As we finish this interview, are there any other things that you would like me to know about? As a reminder, I am trying to identify what strategies community-based organizations use to help low-income students of color access higher education. You, as a low-income student of color, have chosen to share your knowledge/expertise about this topic with me. Would you like to share anything else?

Appendix J

Staff Member Participant Questions for Focus Group

** The goal of the questions is aimed at gaining an understanding of what strategies they use to help low-income students of color access higher education. Therefore, the following questions are meant to help guide the Co-PI and the participants throughout the focus group to describe the participants' experiences. Not all questions may be asked. **

We are going to start by getting to know each other. Please tell us about yourself, including which (or what type of) community-based organization you work for and what your role is in the organization.

(If no conversation is sparked by introductions): Now that we have introduced ourselves, I may ask you a couple of questions… (explain to participants that they are not obligated to answer every question and that the nature of focus groups will allow them to ask questions/prompt discussion from each other).

- What is the role of your organization for your community? The city?
- What types of higher or postsecondary education do you/your organization promote to students, if any?
- Please tell us what strategies you use to help low-income students of color access higher education.
- Please describe how you engage students in thinking about or applying to institutions of higher education.
- Please describe the primary resources or materials you use (if any) to help students learn about or apply to college.
- Are there any differences between what you do for low-income students of color you serve and the other students when helping them access higher education? If so, what are they?
- Please describe any strategies you would like to use in the future to help low-income students of color access higher education.

As we conclude this focus group, is there anything else any of you would like to share?

Appendix K

HRRC Approval

This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. Study No. 18-041-H Expiration: December 03, 2019.

Appendix L

Themes, Concepts, and Codes

Theme	Concepts	Codes
Direct Support	Institution-Specific Resources	Funds
		Incentives
		Necessities
	Advocates	Advocate
	Utilizing Staff Knowledge	Frequent Visits
		Share knowledge
		Forms
	Advising	Collecting information
		Understanding information
		College Options
		Making informed decisions
		Providing accountability
	Providing Material Resources	Internet
		Binder, flyers, and handouts
Shaping/developing systems and institutions	Space	Free time
		Space
		Hang out
	Formal Programming	Homework and academic help
		College information events and visits
		College preparatory programs
		Career preparatory programs
Social Network Expansion	Bridging	Jobs
		Connections
	Assessment	Data Collection
		Feedback
	Consult	Search for resources
		Consult networks
Barriers to Implementing strategies	Funding	Cutting programs
		Hiring employees
	Staff	Turnover
		Incentive to work
Authentic Relationships	Agency	Choice
		Control
	Representation	Exposure to people
		Alumni returning

Theme	Concepts	Codes
	Strong Bonds	Care
		Listen and Learn
		Friends
	Belonging	Non-judgmental
		Home

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