UNDERSTANDING HOW FIRST-GENERATION, BLACK STUDENTS OF LOW SES EXPERIENCE SUMMER MELT

by

LAWREE GLENN

(Under the Direction of Brandee Appling)

ABSTRACT

College acceptance does not always result in college enrollment for students from marginalized backgrounds. Many of these students traveled a bumpy road to twelfth grade from kindergarten, come from low SES backgrounds and may also be first-generation college students. Students from marginalized backgrounds have a higher probability of experiencing summer melt (Castleman, 2014). Summer melt occurs when college-intending students meet all the criteria set forth by their college of choice, gain acceptance into college, yet fail to enroll in the fall following their high school graduation (Rall, 2016). Not much is known about how students experience summer melt. A vast majority of summer melt research is quantitative and therefore cannot inform the field of counseling about how students experience summer melt. Using qualitative inquiry and a critical race lens, the current study aimed to understand how first-generation, Blacks students of low SES experience the phenomenon of summer melt. These students experience the educational system differently than White students and, in many cases, their other non-White peers. The findings of this study suggest that being both first-generation and low-SES increases the probability of experiencing summer melt and reveal a spectrum of emotions related to how the participants experienced summer melt.

INDEX WORDS: college admissions officers, college-intending, low SES, melters, melting, school counselors, summer melt

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by

LAWREE GLENN

BA, NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY, 2000

M.ED, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, 2015

ED.S, VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY, 2019

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by

Lawree Glenn

Major Professor: Brandee Appling
Committee: Amanda Giordano
George McMahon

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all first-generation college students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Taking the first step towards college enrollment was not easy for me. I had no one besides my sister, who was only two years older than me, to look to for guidance. I had every reason not to enroll in college much like the participants in this research study. Despite my circumstances, I reached deep into my being and used what strength and resilience I had to fulfill my dream of going to college. I want all first-generation college students to know that they have the right to dream; not only to dream but to see their dreams realized. I hope that this dissertation inspires you to push through barriers and shatter ceilings that seems impermeable. It's worth the fight. It's worth the sweat and tears. Be bold. Be brave. Be the first.

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"Nothing reduces the odds against you like ignoring them." – Robert Breault

I am not supposed to be here, but I am. I am here because I ignored the odds that were against me since birth. I was raised, in poverty, by a single mother of 10 children. The odds were against me. I lived in a predominantly White working to middle class community where I had only one Black teacher between grades K-12. The odds were against me. No one in my family had graduated from college by the time I graduated high school. The odds were against me. Though I was born into a life that was plagued with obstacles, trials, and tribulations, I was blessed enough to have a mother and grandmother who helped foster my spiritual connection with God which allowed me to persevere through the challenging times that I faced along the way. I also had the Boys & Girls Clubs of America where I learned about leadership, community, teamwork, and self-advocacy. With love and support, I overcame the adversity in my life and turned it into triumph. I am not supposed to be here earning my Ph.D., but I am.

"You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages."- Michelle Obama

Before I give thanks to the people in my life who made me get this PhD possible, I want to give honor to God who without I am and have nothing. I want to thank my husband and children for their support through this process. This doctoral journey took away a lot of family time, but they all handled my absence with so much grace. I am blessed to have had their love,

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The literature supports the fact that Black students of low SES have a greater chance of failing to enroll in college after high school graduation (Baker et al., 2018; Paolini, 2015). What is even more concerning is that the same is true for Black students of low SES who have applied and been accepted into a four-year college. This failure to enroll in college despite having been accepted is a phenomenon known as summer melt (Castleman & Page, 2014). Students experiencing summer melt are primarily students from low SES backgrounds (Arnold et al., 2015; Castleman et al., 2014; Castleman & Page, 2014). These students experience greater challenges with accessing educational support equitable to their peers from higher SES. Consequently, students of low SES may need support from school personnel when applying to college. School counselors assist students with college applications and applying for scholarships or financial aid (Paolini, 2015; Bryant, 2015). However, once students have been accepted into college, little is done by the school counselor that involves them seeing the student through to college enrollment. According to Arnold et al., 2009, “These students need a more conscious hand-off between high school and college.” This hand-off may consist of a level of communication and coordination that involves the school counselor and college admissions officers working together to support students with their transition to college over the summer. Colleges and universities make their own attempts to combat summer melt and decrease attrition rates among students of low SES while, at the same time, increasing enrollment rates at their

institutions (Hoover, 2009). Some of the summer melt prevention measures used at the collegiate level are text-messaging and emailing students with reminders about the next steps in their admissions process and providing peer mentors from the college (Tackett et al., 2018; Arnold et al., 2015). A collaboration between high school counselors and college admissions officers could prove to be a partnership that is pivotal to changing the existing summer melt data for Black students of low SES and supporting future efforts to decrease the incidences of summer melt.

After reading an article about summer melt and its impact on students of low SES, I became curious about the specific experiences that first-generation, Black students of low SES had that caused them to melt over the summer. It was alarming to learn that up to 40 percent of students melted despite their hard work to meet the criteria for college admissions. I pondered on this statistic for a few years and needed to know more. I was intrigued to find out what prevents a college-intending student from achieving their goal of enrolling in college after being accepted. A review of the literature revealed that there is a scant amount of summer melt research that is centered on first-generation, Black students of low SES. Through my experiences as an educator and school counselor in the public school system, I am aware of the educational equity gap that exists for Black students of low SES (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017). Having awareness about the gap that exists for Black students of low SES only motivated me more to conduct this research in such a way that I could hear from participants about their lived experiences and add literature to the field of counseling aimed at addressing the distressing number of first-generation, Black students of low SES who experience summer melt.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used in this study and have been defined below:

Summer melt- a phenomenon of college-intending students who, despite being accepted, fail to enroll in college after high school graduation

College-intending-refers to students who have applied for and been accepted to college with intentions of enrolling

Low SES- for this study, low SES is defined as a student who received free/reduced lunch in high school and/or students who identify themselves as being from a low SES family

College admissions officers- individuals employed by colleges/universities to determine a student's eligibility for admissions and to assist students with navigating the college's admissions process

Melting-when college-intending students experience the phenomenon of summer melt

Melters- students who have melted

School counselors- is a professional who works in primary (elementary and middle) schools or secondary schools to provide academic, career, college access/affordability/admission, and social-emotional competencies to all students through a school counseling program

Statement of the Problem

Low-income youth frequently encounter several challenges when endeavoring to transition from high school to college (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Youth of low SES face a variety of barriers to equitable access to education such as poor quality teachers (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019), lack of access to resources necessary for success (Sandy & Duncan, 2010), and little

access to familial resources related to education because their families may not have the educational experience to help them meet the standards set before them by the public school system (Bowman et al., 2018). In the summer following high school graduation, many college-intending students find that they lack the essential knowledge, resources, and direction needed for a smooth transition to college (Castleman & Page, 2014). These college-intending students are mostly students of low SES and/or first-generation college students. Disproportionately, students who "get in" fail to enroll in college and are low income racial/ethnic minority students; melters tend to fall into one or more of the following demographics: low-income, urban, non-White, or first-generation college students (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman & Page, 2014).

Programs exist to decrease the incidences of summer melt, but a review of the literature revealed that there is an inadequate amount of summer melt research with a focus on first-generation, Black students of low SES. Due to these findings, the current research study is essential, in that the findings of the research on how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt can be used to develop and implement interventions more intentionally. Some interventions that have been implemented to decrease summer melt include text message reminders, emails reminders, and providing peer mentors from the college (Arnold et al., 2015; Tackett et al., 2018). The problem is that these interventions are not tailored for any particular demographic, so the assumption is that one size fits all. One community college in Denver saw summer melt rates of up to 44% for Black male students (Yi & Alvarez-Diaz, 2020). In response to the increasing incidences of summer melt, the community college began interviewing students to learn about why they melted. Using this data, the college began to create a customized checklist for each student to follow. As a result, the college saw an 8.6 reduction in summer melt from the 2018 to 2019 (Yi & Alvarez-Diaz, 2020). This intentional and individualized planning

for prospective students at the community college in Denver is the type of planning that would be beneficial to all students, especially first-generation students, and students from marginalized populations. Similarly, the current study aims to understand how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt so that more customized interventions can be put in place to prevent these students from experiencing summer melt.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Gaining insight into the phenomenon of summer melt from those who have experienced it will help elucidate the impact of summer melt and, in turn, lead to the development of effective interventions for summer melt for first-generation, Black students of low SES. I believe in the importance of specialized prevention and intervention measures for individuals and for groups. The feedback given by the research participants will be useful for stakeholders such as which interventions they wish they had or best practices when working with first-generation, Blacks college-intending students of low SES. The findings of this research will provide valuable insight into how Black students of low SES experience summer melt and allow individualized prevention measures to be put in place aimed at decreasing summer melt rates for these students.

Research Question

Understanding the phenomenon of summer melt from the perspective of first-generation, Black students of low SES adds to the current literature by providing findings that speak to this population's experience with summer melt. The guiding question for my research is

How have first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt?

This question aims to understand the varying experiences of first-generation, Black students of low SES as it relates to the phenomenon of summer melt. Answering this question will prove beneficial to first-generation, Black students of low SES because the participants' responses will provide a starting point from which intervention can be developed that will be used reduce the percentages of summer melt experienced by first-generation, Black students of low SES.

Theoretical Framework

Because racism is endemic and inescapable (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001), Black students experience racism in schools and therefore are given less access to the academic and social capital necessary to successfully matriculate from high school to the first day of college (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). Without an adequate amount of social capital, Black students who are either first-generation or low SES or both, are at a greater risk of failing to reach their current and future educational goals. This study aims to shed light on how Black students experience the phenomenon of summer melt. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study because of its focus on race and the current study's focus on Black students. CRT theorists emphasize differential racialization which states that dominant social discourses and people in power can racialize groups in different ways at different times (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). This tenet of CRT applies to the way that Black students of low SES are racialized in schools and therefore overlooked or dismissed as disinterested in the career and college readiness process (Abrams & Moio, 2009). This dismissal or lack of interest by school personnel can lead to students experiencing summer melt because if school personnel are not vested in the success of all students and willing to share helpful resources or information, students with less social and academic capital miss pertinent information about the college-going process.

Furthermore, CRT posits that counterstorytelling is key to confronting and breaking down systemic and prejudicial practices (Ladson-Billings, 2013). The current study aims to allow its participants to have a voice and share their personal experiences with summer melt. Current research on summer melt consistently leaves out the actual voices of Black students of low SES and their perception of their individual experiences. A major goal of the current study is to highlight the voices of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon of summer melt and to use their stories to both explicate the reasons Black students of low SES continue to melt and understand how they experience summer melt. Highlighting the voices of the melters will allow for better understanding of how they make meaning of summer melt and the ways in which stakeholders may be able to mitigate the incidences of summer melt as well as develop effective preventions aimed at targeting students at greatest risk for melting. The current study will be a valuable addition to summer melt research in that its findings will bring to light a different perspective about how Black students of low SES experiences summer melt differently than other demographics.

Significance of the Study

As a Black, first-generation college student from a low SES household, I appreciate the impact of having social and cultural capital and understanding how that alone can be the difference between melting or not. I had an older sister who was the first in our family to attend a four-year college and helped me navigate my college admissions process from start to finish. My sister's college knowledge (Gast, 2022) was key to my attending college. Additionally, I was a member of a local Boys & Girls Club and member of a local Black church. These social organizations also helped me realize my dream of attending college by encouraging me and continuously checking on my progress towards enrolling in college. This study can have a

significant impact in the field of counseling as it will allow participants to share their stories of how they experienced summer melt. The results of this study can lead to a better understanding of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt and, as a result, decrease the incidences of summer melt.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study that must be addressed. First, this study is focused on Black students of low SES. This will limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups. For example, the Hispanic population is almost equally as affected by summer melt as the Black population, yet the findings of this research may not be able to be applied to the Hispanic population because these two groups experience life and the educational system differently. For example, Black students are disciplined at higher rates than Hispanic students, and Hispanic students are often faced with educational difficulties resulting from having language barriers (Schneider et al., 2006; Weir, 2016). Next, all but one participant in this study were from the southern region of the United States. Applying the findings of this research to students in other regions of the country may be challenging because educational systems vary from region to region or, at times, state to state.

Chapter Summary

Understanding a person's life experiences from their perspective is part of what makes qualitative research impactful. Providing people with the space to be able to speak their truth shows them that their words have value and that their perceptions of their experiences are being heard (Ahmad et al., 2019). The current summer melt research is primarily quantitative and focused on students of low SES in general and not a particular race. The available literature is

lacking the perspective of students' experiences with summer melt based on the demographic group they identify with making this current study even more necessary. Consideration must be given to how Black students of low SES experience summer melt because of their unique experiences of racism and discrimination within K-12 school systems (Sutton et al., 2018). Collaborative efforts between high school counselors and college admissions officers should be required to support students not only through the application process but also through college acceptance and their enrollment into classes. This study employs Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) as the theoretical framework because of its emphasis on race and the current study's focus on Black students. Additionally, CRT emphasizes the importance of counterstorytelling which aligns with the goals of the current study (Ladson-Billings, 2013). The participants will tell their own stories of their individual experiences with summer melt and their voices will be heard through the findings of the research, thereby allowing interested stakeholders to glean ways to best intervene on the behalf of Black students of low SES. The impact of this study can be far-reaching and lead to decreased incidences of summer melt for first-generation, Black students of low SES and increased opportunities for them to meet their academic goals of enrolling in and graduating from college.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

College degree attainment is proven to reduce poverty and close other gaps such as the wealth gap and the education gap (Bryant, 2015). According to the US Census Bureau, adults with a bachelor's degree or higher experience the lowest level of poverty when compared to other levels such as associate's or technical certificates (2019). For students of color and/or economically disadvantaged students, the path to this solution is fraught with challenges. These students face many roadblocks and setbacks that prevent them from applying to and/or getting accepted into a two-year or four-year college. For students of low SES there may be a cycle of generational poverty which causes them to not attempt to access college due to a lack of college knowledge (Bryant, 2015). A number of Black students of low SES are unprepared for college due to a lack of college preparatory courses being offered at their high school, inexperienced teachers, and school counselors who lack training and are overburdened by their caseloads (Bryant, 2015). What cannot be gleaned from the existing research is how the Black students of low SES experienced summer melt; how it felt for them to make the decision to not enroll in college despite having been accepted. Summer melt is a phenomenon that occurs when college-intending students who, despite being accepted, fail to enroll in college after high school graduation. The intersection of race and class, in this instance (Black and low SES), increases the probability that a student will experience summer melt (Rall, 2016). Black students' melt rate was 71.1% for two-year institutions and 18.5% for four-year institutions (Kirkman et al., 2019).

Research shows that students of low SES face more roadblocks and setbacks in their college admissions processes than do those from higher SES (Castleman et al., 2014). More specifically, Black students of low SES face the greatest challenges, compared to non-Black students, when attempting to realize their dream of becoming a college graduate and creating a different outcome for their lives than their parents were able to create for themselves (Arnold et al., 2009; Shapiro et al., 2017). Not all children go on to accomplish their goals. Many find themselves unable to obtain success because of a lack of exposure, a lack of knowledge, their socioeconomic status (SES), and their cultural background (Ervin, 2016).

Youth of low SES frequently encounter overwhelming challenges such as an inefficient amount of social capital and access to schools with an established college-going culture, when endeavoring to transition from high school to college (Cholewa, 2015; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). For more affluent or privileged children, the opposite is often true. Students from higher SES families can navigate from K-12 with fewer setbacks and adversity because they have access to "educational cultural capital," making their matriculation to college one that is more efficient and productive (Fischer et al., 2019). In addition, the road from kindergarten through twelfth grade can navigated with fewer barriers and disappointments for students of higher SES because they are more likely to have parents or family members who have access to, or who have gone to and completed college (Fischer et al., 2019).

Summer Melt

Black, college-intending students of low SES are less likely than their peers who are White and higher SES to enroll in and attend college despite having been accepted into the

institution (Tennessee Score, 2021). Castleman & Page (2014) define college-intending as those students who have completed high school requirements, been accepted to at least one college, applied for financial aid, and submitted applications for additional scholarships. Navigating through college applications and financial aid documents can be quite onerous for high schoolers. For more privileged groups, whose family and friends already have prior knowledge of the process because they are degreed, the level of difficulty is decreased (Adams, 2021). However, for many students of low SES, the task seems impossible. Students of low SES are oftentimes the first in their family to go to college; making it more difficult for them to navigate the college application process (Fischer et al., 2019; Roderick et al., 2009). They may not have family members who can assist them and must rely on their school counselors, teachers, and, at times, community members to help guide them through the college admissions process (Castleman, 2014; Rall, 2016).

Being from a family of low SES in the United States is a risk factor for students who "melt" in the summer between their senior year of high school and freshman year of college (Castleman, 2014). They are part of a phenomenon known as "summer melt" (Rall, 2016). The term "summer melt" is used to describe the loss of qualified high school graduates (students who have met the requirements of at least one institution of higher education as evidenced by a letter of acceptance) from the path to college in the period between high school and college (Castleman, 2014; Rall, 2016). Because the data combines summer melt rates for both two- and four-year colleges, summer melt rates for students of low SES vary nationally from ten to forty percent (Tackett et al., 2018); including Southwest districts which encompass Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico where melt rates are up to forty-four percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Although this number is striking it does not include a national demographic breakdown.

There is limited national data on the specific percentage of Black students who melt. What is more, is that there is a limited amount of qualitative data related to summer melt. More research is essential to delve into students' experiences with "summer melt" and to possibly identify more appropriate interventions to reduce "summer melt" in first-generation, Black students of low SES. The purpose of this research study is to explore the phenomenon of summer melt and its impact on college-intending, first-generation, Black students of low SES which will encourage the development of effective strategies to increase success rates for Black students of low SES as they matriculate to college after high school graduation.

Factors Contributing to Summer Melt

Several factors lead to students experiencing summer melt. Some factors include a lack of access to information about post-admissions processes and deadlines (Rall, 2016), being a first-generation college student (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman et al., 2014), being a student of low SES (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman et al., 2014), minimal exposure to or experience with academic vocabulary such as trimester or minimester (Arnold et al., 2015), lack of information about financial aid (FAFSA) and sources of financial aid, lack of collaboration between high school counselors and college admissions officers (Corley, 2017). College-intending students of low SES backgrounds who are also first-generation students; are most at-risk of experiencing summer melt (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman et al., 2014). Many of these students are living in poverty and have no family members to look to for guidance on navigating the college admissions process from start to finish (Fischer et al., 2019; Sue & Sue, 2008).

The dropout rate for first-generation college students is four times higher than that of students who have at least one parent with a degree (Greenthal, 2022). These dropout rates are often attributed to their parents' lack of college experience and the student's lack of

understanding of how to prepare for college (Greenthal, 2022). Without the knowledge of how to prepare for college enrollment after high school graduation, students' risk for experiencing summer melt increases.

Finances/Financial Planning

Many students who are first-generation college students are often from lower-income households and from marginalized populations (RTI International, 2021). This intersectionality increases the likelihood for these students to be met with financial troubles when attempting to prepare for college because these students are often from single parent households and from families who may have little to no experience navigating the college-going process. In some cases, students may have failed to complete the FAFSA application and therefore miss financial aid options available to them (Saunders, 2020). In a study done by Iowa College Aid, the findings illustrated that FAFSA completion decreased summer melt rates by 37% (Moore, 2021). Parents, who may not be trusting of the FAFSA process, are unwilling to share their financial and tax return information with their children, leaving them unable to complete the FAFSA application (Arnold et al., 2015). For so many students of low SES, the financial aid acquired from completing the FAFSA is critical for them being able to pay for college and, being unable to complete the FAFSA due to a lack of their parents' information places the burden to pay on the student.

Additionally, some students get flagged and are required to go through a FAFSA verification process. This process involves the student getting additional information from their parents/guardians who may have already had apprehensions about completing the FAFSA from the beginning. This additional step in the financial aid process is a barrier to college enrollment for Black students of low SES. One FAFSA analysis found that FAFSA verification increased

the likelihood of summer melt by six percentage points (Holzman & Hanson, 2020). The analysis showed that of the study's sample, approximately one-third were flagged. Of the flagged FAFSA applications, 79% were from marginalized populations and of those 34% were Black students (Holzman & Hanson, 2020).

For those who complete the FAFSA application and receive a financial aid award package, the amount of aid they are offered may not be enough to cover the cost of tuition, fees, and room and board. In this case, families may not have the means to pay the difference in cost out of pocket (Arnold et al., 2015). If a student's financial aid award for the semester only covers 80 percent of the cost for tuition, fees, and room and board, their families may not be able to afford to pay the other 20 percent or the expected family contribution (EFC Guide, 2022-2023) because they still need provide for themselves and other children.

Family Issues/Responsibilities

Being the first in the family to attend college can be overwhelming because the people who one may look to for support with the process, such as parents or other relatives, may not be able to provide the support necessary (Castleman et al., 2014). Equally so, being a college-intending student from a low-income household presents its own set of challenges. They apply to college in hopes of a better life than what they currently have and, at times, because they have outside influences (such as parents, teachers, and school counselors) pushing them to apply to college (Arnold et al., 2015). These students may have responsibilities that students from more affluent households do not; including looking after younger siblings while parents work or holding down a job so that they can contribute financially to the household. These family issues and responsibilities can dampen a student's drive to continue to pursue their goal of attending college (Arnold et al., 2009, Kelliher, 2022). Once their motivation is decreased, doubt about the

reality of attending college creeps in and contributes to the student experiencing summer melt. The students feel the pressure of being the first to attend college while at the same time and understanding that they could contribute financially to their households if they stayed home and worked (Fournier, 2022; Gonzalez-Chavez, 2021). The pressure placed on them can drive them to melt because they have no frame of reference about what to expect in college and they understand that all eyes are on them. They understand that going to college means incurring debt and they do not want to be a burden to their families (Hoadara, 2022). They may not want to leave their homes for fear of leaving their parents and siblings in a worse financial situation than they already live in (Arnold et al., 2015).

Academic Issues

Students sometimes naively assume that once they are admitted into college they are "all set" (Arnold et al., 2015) and they can relax until their college classes start in the fall. This misunderstanding leads to students failing to meet the academic requirements of the college. One student's account read, "I let one of my grades slip in the second semester" (Rall, 2016). As a result, the student was not able to enroll because a condition of his enrollment was that he had to pass all his classes. According to the student, this information was not made clear to him, leaving him to assume that he did not have to do anything else because he had already been accepted. Another academic roadblock faced by students who melt is being unable to obtain the classes they want or need (Rall, 2016). This academic roadblock usually presents itself when students fail to register for classes on time or do not pass the college's placement tests. With most college admissions offers of admission being provisional (Sarikas, 2022), students who are not cognizant of the conditions of their acceptance are at susceptible to summer melt.

Difficulty Navigating College Admissions Process

The college admissions process entails a multitude of steps that can prove trying for graduating high school seniors. This can be especially true for first-generation students of color from low-income families (Castleman & Page, 2013). There are deadlines to be met during the summer after graduation and before the start of fall classes that, if not met, lead to non-enrollment. Several students who melt and their families do not completely grasp or may not have been provided the necessary requirements to help transition from high school to college such as deadlines for registration or deposits required for on campus housing (Rall, 2016). The parents of a first-generation college student may not know the amount and time-sensitive nature of work to be done over the summer to prepare for their child to be successfully enrolled in college the fall after their high school graduation. If there are not conversations about next steps over the summer, the students assume that there is nothing pressing for them to do regarding college (Arnold et al., 2015). Not having an adequate amount of support complicates the college admissions process as well. Students who melt have either lost access to their high school counselor after their graduation or never initiated or solidified a relationship with college admissions officers at their intended institution (Rall, 2016).

The most common barrier to successfully navigating the college admissions process is miscommunication. First generation college students do not always know what to expect in the process, so they rely heavily on their school counselors or college admissions officers for direction (Oleka & Mitchell, 2022). If pertinent information about the next steps in the admissions process are not clearly communicated, students may end up failing to enroll. Students who melted have shared that colleges notified them late about their acceptance being rescinded

and, because they had not back colleges lined up, they had to postpone their college enrollment (Rall, 2016).

Understanding what factors contribute to summer melt provides stakeholders with the information necessary to mitigate continued incidences of summer melt. For those who have obtained a degree as neither first generation, having come from a low-income household, nor belonging to a marginalized group, being able to empathize with what many potential melters are faced with as they endeavor to enroll in college can be a challenge. There are interventions that have been put in place to decrease summer melt. Many of the interventions have been effective, yet summer melt continues to be a phenomenon that many first generation, low-income, students of color face. A closer examination into the existing interventions and their success rates by demographic groups may make targeting populations melt rates by race and/or socioeconomic status more effective.

Low SES Students in Education

There is a lot to be said about the success, attrition, and resilience of students of low SES. Low SES or low-income students are defined as students whose household's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty line (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Other definitions can include those families living paycheck to paycheck, those with less disposable income than others, or those who struggle to pay bills (Close the Gap, 2023). These students may come from families that have fewer financial means than others, but that does not mean that their families care for them any less. Parents of students from low SES households strongly desire for their children to perform well in school and to go on to have promising futures (Butler, 2021; Smith, 2008). Family involvement and processes in low SES households may mitigate or protect children's academic success (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Sirin, 2005).

Resilience with low SES students is an ongoing process. One way that these students' resilience is built is through the storytelling of their parents. Parents often share their stories of struggle, loss, and suffering to persuade their children to steer away from the path that they took and take the path of least resistance. This type of resilience leads to them being able to succeed despite ongoing social advantages (Sirin, 2005; Tang, 2016). Another factor that leads to their academic resistance is being encouraged to identify their academic needs by asking for assistance with homework or asking teachers for help clarifying misunderstood concepts.

Also, a strong home/school connection increases the level of success and resilience of students of low SES (Smith-Addock et al., 2019; Watson, 2005). Teachers who invest the time to build positive relationships with their students foster resilience in these students which leads to a greater probability of academic achievement. This is especially true for students of low SES who may not have many positive relationships outside of school and look to adults in their school building to provide a safe space for them to learn and flourish.

Black Students of Low SES in Education

Black familial backgrounds and school systems can be set up for failure for Black students of low SES (King et al., 2021). Systemic barriers such as racism and unfair disciplinary practices are played out before Black students in various aspects of their lives, especially in school. For instance, according to the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection, Black K-12 students are almost four times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions (Civil Rights Data, 2016). Black students of low SES backgrounds are met with varying degrees of racial prejudice and discrimination. Oftentimes, school personnel hold stereotypes about Black students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Okofonua & Eberhardt, 2015; Sue & Sue, 2008), and these stereotypes are barriers to the success of this population.

Black students of low SES may experience marginalization for both their race and their socioeconomic status. This marginalization leaves Black students of low SES vulnerable to education stereotypes such as being Black and poor and therefore not invested in their education (Bonner et al, 2008; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013). Family support is a primary contributor to the success and resilience of Black students. If these students have the support of their families and know that they have an advocate in their corner, they are more likely to have success in the classroom (Paolini, 2015).

Black students are faced with different socio-cultural and systemic issues than other low SES student groups. These issues may include rules and practices followed in their homes that may differ from students from non-Black homes (Bowman et al., 2018), lack of access to the same academic resources as their non-Black peers in their educational settings (Cook, 2015; Smith, 2009;), and the stigma of cultural scripts of Black people as an impoverished group (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015). Black students of low SES attend urban, suburban, and rural schools. Program planning may look different in each school because each school will have access to its own set of resources and each school will present its own set of unique barriers for this population.

There are, however, protective factors in the Black community. Spirituality and religion play a significant role in the Black community (Gordon et al., 2022; Sue & Sue, 2008). This is promising because many Black low SES communities have churches that are willing to assist in the efforts to provide supportive and nurturing environments for the students in their communities through after school programs, scholarship programs, volunteer opportunities, and outreach activities (McIntosh & Curry, 2020; Timmerman & Booker, 2006).

Black Students of Low SES and Summer Melt

Not all cultural groups experience P-12 school in the same way. White students of low SES experience school differently from White students of middle to high SES. Black students of low SES experience school differently than all White students regardless of their economic status (Blevins & Todd, 2021). For this reason, how a Black student of low SES experiences summer melt must be researched so that the most appropriate intervention measures can be established. There is a need for this research because not all low SES students are faced with the same challenge just because they are economically disadvantaged. Parents of students of low SES want what is best for their children's future (Fischer, 2017). They hope for them to graduate high school and have dreams of them graduating from college. Too often, the misconception is that parents of students of low SES; namely Black parents, do not care about their children's future success and are only focused on getting them to finish high school (Huguley et al., 2021; Smith, 2009). This narrative of negligence has been created for them by the very systems and structures designed to portray Black families as lacking interest in their children's education (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015), especially Black families of low SES. Another protective factor for Black students of low SES includes racial socialization and strong home/school connections. Racial socialization among Black students of low SES builds the student's resiliency in school because it creates in them a strong identity and, as a result, better equips the student to advocate for themselves and their educational needs (Doan et al., 2022).

A White student of low SES will have more access to academic and social capital than a Black student regardless of their SES because of the privilege that comes with being White (Blevins & Todd, 2021). For example, a White student of low SES seeking support from school personnel at a predominantly White-staffed school is more likely to be able to access the

resources because they too are White. This Whiteness reveals the way Whites benefit from numerous institutional and social arrangements that often appear to Whites as having nothing to do with race (Bush, 2004; Coleman et al., 2020). A Black student, regardless of their SES, may not have the privilege of being able to access those same resources because they are Black and therefore viewed negatively despite their current academic record (Sutton et al., 2018). The current study will add a perspective to the literature about how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience school differently than their non-Black peers.

Protective Factors for Black Students of Low SES

There are protective factors for Black students of low SES that allow them to successfully navigate these marginalizing identities and experience success at various levels. These protective factors are what help the students build resilience and preserve through tribulations they face (Crouch et al., 2018). Without these protective factors, these students may not have had the persistence to navigate their school years in such a way as to be able to gain acceptance into college.

The Black Church

The Black church is the cornerstone of many Black communities, particularly in communities with families of low SES. The church is seen as a haven; a place where people go to get a feeling of restoration, a sense of peace, and a sense of purpose (McIntosh & Curry, 2020). Black churches are known to offer motivational presentations, year-round college preparatory experiences, assistance with college scholarship applications, and completion of admissions and financial aid forms (McIntosh & Curry, 2020; Timmermans & Booker, 2006) which help first-generation, Black students of low SES better prepare for college enrollment and

reduce incidences of summer melt (Bettinger et al., 2009; Castleman et al., 2014; Tacket et al., 2018). Black churches also serve as community activists as they press for equity in their community (McIntosh & Curry, 2020). Partnerships between local schools and the Black churches in the surrounding area should be considered when implementing interventions for Black students of low SES.

Self-Advocacy

The ability to self-advocate is a skill that is needed throughout life, therefore, teaching students about self-advocacy is vital. Black students of low SES who possess strong self-advocacy skills are in a better position to break down the systemic barriers that they often face in schools (Dowden, 2009; Walker & Test, 2011). School counselors play a pivotal role in college readiness for Black students of low SES (Bryant, 2015) and in teaching students the importance of self-advocacy. A first-generation, Black student of low SES who seeks out a school counselor for guidance through their college going process but gets no response or gets overlooked because of the size of their school counselor's caseload may experience summer melt because they lack the ability to self-advocate. On the other hand, a first-generation, Black student of low SES who possesses strong self-advocacy skills will have the tools necessary to navigate through the barriers that exist with being one of many on a school counselor's caseload. Teaching students from early on that they have a right to "assert their needs and receive support" fosters a sense of empowerment that can lead to a decrease in the incidences of summer melt (Arif et al., 2021).

Summer Melt Interventions

Interventions have been utilized to decrease incidences of summer melt in populations most impacted by summer melt. The following interventions utilized are not an exhaustive list but ones most often used to combat summer melt according to the available research.

Early College

Early College High Schools or what is also called dual enrollment can be an effective intervention for Black college-intending students of low SES. Students who participate in early college/dual enrollment can experience college life before graduation (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016). They can learn their way around campus and learn how the expectations of college courses differ from those in high school. Data from early college/dual enrollment show that these students have better attendance, lower suspensions, and are more likely to remain in high school through graduation (Bernstein et al., 2014). A study by Speroni (2011) found that racially marginalized groups were 6.5 percent more likely to enroll in a four-year college than those who did not participate in dual enrollment. Having early exposure to college life and getting a head start on earning credits through early college participation decreases the likelihood that students from marginalized groups experience summer melt.

Nudging/Text Message Alerts

Colleges have used “nudging” to combat summer melt (Page et al., 2019). Nudging acts as a reminder for new incoming college students. Nudging occurs when a college or university sends text message reminders to accepted students. The text messages include reminders about deadlines, paperwork that needs to be submitted, placement testing requirements, etc. Georgia State University piloted a text messaging program to address the problem they were having with

students melting over the summer (Georgia State University, 2023). The automated messages were sent to students and tailored to their specific enrollment tasks (Jaschik, 2017). This nudging intervention decreased their summer melt rates by 21 percent in the first year (Jaschik, 2017). This indicates that when compared to last year's melt rates, 21 percent more students enrolled in college than did the previous year because they had the opportunity to participate in GSU's pilot program and received individualized guidance designed to remove barriers to enrollment. Additionally, Georgia State's text messaging intervention increased the rate of success in navigating the financial aid process for first-generation college students and increased immediate fall enrollment rates by 3.3% (Page & Gelbach, 2017). These increases are attributed to the ease by which GSU committed students could ask for and receive assistance with enrollment related questions.

Chat Bots

Many first-generation, Black students from low SES households apply and gain acceptance into Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU). HBCUs give Black students more opportunities for acceptance than Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and therefore attract many students who are vulnerable to melting over the summer. To address high summer melt rates, some HBCUs have enlisted the help of chatbots which are also called empathy machines (Panaswich, 2021). These chatbots engage students in a meaningful way and go a step further than text messages do. As a result of chatbot usage, North Carolina Central University, an HBCU, saw an increase of 4.5% in new student enrollment from the previous year (Panaswich, 2021). Students can ask questions in real-time and get answers which helps break down barriers that come with being first-generation.

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs are summer programs that are offered by some colleges to give incoming freshmen students a glimpse into what college life is like. These programs are also designed to help students prepare for placement testing in the fall, build relationships with peers and school personnel, and even take college level courses to give them an opportunity to get a head start. While bridge programs are effective at increasing academic skills and academic self-efficacy (Strayhorn, 2010) and often target marginalized students, they are not always offered at the less selective institutions (Arnold et al., 2009). This type of intervention may not be beneficial to first generation, low-income, students of color because they are not often admitted selective institutions (Glynn, 2017). If the bridge program is not offered at the college they have been accepted to, they would not be able to benefit from what summer bridge programs have to offer.

Summer Advisors

After high school graduation, the relationship between the school counselor and college-intending student typically terminates. This leaves the first-generation student with little guidance related to their next steps in their college planning. Summer advisors are tasked with meeting the students and their families over the summer to meet about and help with any financial aid documents, placement testing needs, course enrollment and other college-related needs a student has (Tennessee Score, 2021). Students at the highest risk for summer melt profit from this type of intervention and are more likely to begin college in the fall as planned. According to a 2014 study, the use of summer advisors increased the overall enrollment rate by 5% (Castleman et al., 2014). The data suggest that having summer advisors has positive outcomes for students most at risk for melting. In a 2012 regression analysis by Castleman,

Arnold & Wartman, the data revealed that students who collaborated with counselors after high school showed a 14 percent increase in college enrollment (Rall, 2016).

School Counselors Role in College Planning

School counselors at all levels (elementary, middle, and high) have access to the information necessary to expose students to different college and career options as well as how to successfully attain those options (ASCA, 2019). High school counselors are tasked with promoting multiple types of postsecondary options to students (Paolini, 2015). An efficient way for high school counselors to ensure that students of low SES have the information necessary to successfully navigate the admissions process from start to finish is to have procedures in place to ensure that information about colleges; including information about financial aid and scholarships, is disseminated to all students equally (ASCA 2012a, 2012b). Current research shows that students of low SES are less likely to have the same informational resources in their immediate families as students of higher SES, requiring them to rely on information from other sources (Brown et al., 2016). This means that students of higher SES tend to be the first to access information about scholarships, financial aid, and other processes related to enrollment in college (Cholewa, 2015). This is a standard path for middle-class students to take after college acceptance and typically results in them enrolling in classes on time (Arnold et al., 2009).

College Admissions Officers and Summer Melt

The onus, as it relates to reducing summer melt rates, cannot lay solely on the high school counselor. Once the school counselor has done their part to support first generation, college-intending students with the application process and provided them with the necessary information designed to increase their knowledge about what to expect over the summer, the

college admissions officer's role comes into play. The college admissions officer is tasked with ensuring that accepted students successfully matriculate to college. There have been attempts at "information sharing" between high schools and community colleges (Corley, 2017), but little information is available about efforts to collaborate between high school counselors and 4-year institutions. A considerable number of entering freshmen do not have a clear understanding of the magnitude of what is expected of them when they enter college (Karp & Bork, 2014). This warm handoff (Samuels, 2022) from the school counselor to the college admissions officer is one that is beneficial for students most at risk for experiencing summer melt.

What We Do Not Know About Summer Melt

With all the information available about summer melt, there is still more to discover such as how different demographic groups experience summer melt. The current literature is saturated with information about the contributing factors of summer melt, which demographic groups are most impacted by summer melt and interventions that have been implemented to reduce the incidences of summer melt (Castleman et al., 2014; Castleman & Page, 2014; Rall, 2016). We know that summer melt most often occurs with college-intending students who are first-generation, belong to a marginalized group, and come from a low-income household. We know that causes of summer melt include a lack of awareness about the financial aid process, missed deadlines, a lack of "college knowledge," and inadequate guidance through the transitional period between high school graduation and college enrollment (Castleman & Page, 2014; Rall, 2016).

What is missing from the literature are the accounts of melters' experiences with summer melt from their perspective. It cannot be assumed that, because a student is first generation, from a low-income family, and a member of a marginalized group, their experience with summer melt

is the same or even similar. The data is also limited to findings about summer melt that are related to low-income students and students of color with none being specific to Black students. A review of the literature yielded no research statistics showing a particular issue with Black students and any specific challenges they face that lead to them melting nor was there any data showing how any specific issue exacerbates summer melt for Black students.

While there is a great deal of research on summer melt in students of low SES, there is a scant amount of research that is focused specifically on first generation, Black students of low SES. Summer melt research estimates national melt rates ranging from ten to forty percent (Tackett et al., 2018). This number varies by region and is focused on students of low SES as a group. The literature is deficient in national statistics that identify the average number of Black students of low SES who melt each year. The current study endeavors to understand how being first generation, Black and from a low SES family impacts the rate at which these students melt by learning about how each individual experienced summer melt. From their firsthand experiences, stakeholders can glean a deeper appreciation for how not enrolling in college impacted this population of students. As a result, the findings of this research study can enable school counselors and college admissions officers can better assess and intervene on behalf of this population. Interventions can be developed that can specifically target summer melt rates with first generation, Black students of low SES. This level of assessment and intervention can aid in decreasing the incidences of summer melt while at the same time provide perspective on the importance of personalizing interventions for certain populations.

Benefits of Qualitative Research on Summer Melt

For a more detailed explanation of how first-generation, Black students of low SES students experience summer melt, more qualitative research needs to be done. There is a need for

the voices of those most impacted by summer melt to be heard because they provide rich descriptions and narratives of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Understanding how these students experienced summer melt will give stakeholders more insight into what interventions may be needed to address and reduce incidences of summer melt. Using qualitative research provides a deeper level of meaning and appreciation for the experiences of melters which will allow stakeholders to expound upon and better explain the results obtained through the quantitative research that has already been done around summer melt. For instance, the available quantitative research identifies issues with understanding and completing the FAFSA application as being a contributing factor to summer melt (Castleman et al., 2012, Castleman & Page, 2014). Data from this qualitative research study will provide a deeper understanding of how it felt to go through the various aspects of the college application process including completing the FAFSA application. Having this information will allow stakeholders to get a better understanding of what first-generation, Black students of low SES melt may need to ensure a smoother process when completing the financially planning for college. Another contributing factor to summer melt is a student choosing to work to help their family financially rather than attending college. Having participants' voices at the forefront (Brinkmann, 2013) will put into perspective how it felt to choose the needs of their family over their desire to attend college. Quantitative research can provide insight into why the students melt but qualitative research can dig deeper and explain how melters experienced summer melt. Using qualitative methodologies allow participants to engage with the research team rather than respond to a survey (Kozleski, 2017). The level of engagement that comes with qualitative research assures more in-depth responses which lead to more clarity and understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Of the available scholarly research articles on summer melt, most of the research is quantitative and generalizes how and why students experience summer melt without regard to race. Of the existing research, the Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) reported findings from TNAchieves 2021 reported that of the Black students who applied for the Tennessee Promise scholarship program 47.4% never enrolled in any form or postsecondary education after high school graduations (Tennessee SCORE, 2021). The same report's findings reveal that, according to TNAchieves 2020, 93 % of Black students who were a part of the class of 2019 summer melt cohort were also economically disadvantaged (Tennessee SCORE, 2021). Other summer melt research done within the school district of Philadelphia revealed the disparities between students of varying race/ethnicity and their summer melt rates at both two-year and four-year institutions. This research study aims to provide insight, from the voice of the Black students of low SES, into the phenomenon of summer melt. This research will allow the participants to tell their own stories about their experiences with summer melt, thus adding a crucial missing piece to the quantitative research already done on summer melt and create a more complete picture of the phenomenon of summer melt. Qualitative research will elaborate on the quantitative findings of other studies and may even encourage additional aspects, related to summer melt, to be investigated that may have never been discovered without hearing from those directly impacted by summer melt (Ahmad et al., 2019). It is critical that the voices of the melters be heard so that stakeholders can understand their experiences and be able to create targeted interventions for not only first-generation, Black students of low SES but melters from other marginalized groups who are also economically disadvantaged.

Chapter Summary

The absence of qualitative literature specific to Black students related to the phenomenon of summer melt warrants the need for additional research. The voices of the students most impacted by summer melt need to be heard and they deserve the opportunity to tell their own stories about how it felt to experience summer melt. The experiences of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt are unknown. The reasons why Black students of low SES experience summer melt are wrapped up in the story of the larger group of students of low SES who experienced summer. Their stories are not the same. Their experiences are not the same. It is not sufficient to implement preventions for all students of low SES who fall victim to summer melt. Each subgroup should be studied and analyzed independently of the others. Homing in on why students are melting and how to prevent them from melting according to their subgroup will prove beneficial and meaningful to each student and, in turn, begin to decrease summer melts rates for those subgroups most impacted.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature revealed an abundant amount of research on summer melt and its impact on students of low SES (Castleman & Page, 2014; Castleman et al., 2014; Kirkman et al, 2019; Rall, 2016). In contrast, existing research indicates that there is a scarce amount of summer melt research with a focus specifically on Black students of low SES. Also noteworthy is that the current summer melt research is mainly quantitative. While quantitative findings have identified causes of summer melt, a major component is missing that allows people to be able to thoroughly understand behavior or phenomenon, student voices. A students' voice cannot be heard through quantitative research as in-depth as through qualitative research. More specifically, the limited amount of qualitative research that has been done has not given any specific attention to Black students; in particular, Black students of low SES.

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt. This chapter describes the study of the phenomenon of summer melt and how it was experienced by Black students of low SES, the research design, and the methodology used for this study. I will begin by sharing my rationale for choosing a qualitative study using a hermeneutic phenomenological research design. Next, I will explain my use of Critical Race Theory as a lens through which to view the phenomenon of summer melt and why CRT was a fitting theory for this topic. At the end of this chapter, I will acknowledge my subjectivity and personal experiences related to the phenomenon of summer melt.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research

This study used a qualitative methodology to gain a deeper look into the how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Understanding a person's experience from within their lifeworld allows the researcher to write the findings in a way that the reader can better understand a phenomenon such as summer melt (Schneider et al., 2016). A review of the literature suggested that more quantitative research existed on summer melt than qualitative. The findings from the quantitative studies gave researchers in the counseling field enough numerical data that shows the "What?" in summer melt as well as enough data to warrant the need to discover the "How?" through qualitative research methods (Castleman & Page, 2014; Castleman et al., 2014; Kirkman et al, 2019; Rall, 2016). Qualitative studies give a more three-dimensional view of the phenomenon than what is discovered through quantitative studies. Qualitative studies have been described as holistic because of their focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of human behavior (Ahmad et al., 2019) Results from qualitative research can be the answer to the "How?" and "Why?" of summer melt because the participants are telling the researcher details about how and/or why they experienced a phenomenon. Qualitative research is subjective whereas quantitative research is objective. For example, a subjective inquiry aims to find the reason behind a behavior by exploring and engaging with the participants through meaningful conversations while an objective inquiry takes an "outside looking in" approach and makes deductions based on the numerical data (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to understand the lived experience of the individual and collective perspectives of research participants. To prevent summer melt, stakeholders need to understand the causes of summer melt more effectively from the

perspective of the research participant and not from inferences gathered using quantitative data. The findings of the study provided insight into helpful and unhelpful prevention measures already taken to reduce summer melt. The impact of this research could lead to a reduction in the percentage of first-generation, Black students of low SES experiencing summer melt. The information gleaned from the results of this research provides stakeholders with specific details that can be used to develop and implement appropriate summer melt prevention measures for first-generation, Black students of low SES.

Phenomenology

For this study, I chose a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology was most fitting for this study because the study aimed to gather information about the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that is focused on an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenology removes the objectivity that comes from other types of research and provides more subjective data that can be used to highlight the voices of participants and replace otherwise quantitative interpretations made by researchers. A foundational premise of research involves scholars learning from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). Scholars learn about others' experiences by reading qualitative research articles as well as conducting qualitative research themselves. Whether through reading scholarly articles or participating in the research process, the goal of the research has been met because the findings have been read, and/or new insights about a phenomenon are gleaned through participating in the research process. A phenomenon can be discovered through quantitative research but what phenomenology aims to reveal is the essence of the phenomenon detailed from the perspective of the person who experienced it (Teherani et al., 2015). To obtain new awareness about a particular phenomenon, detailed studies, such as one

which uses a phenomenological approach, are needed (Neubauer et al., 2019). These new insights could not be achieved without the researcher investing the time to learn the more intricate details about a person's lived experiences in the world.

Phenomenology is described as the study of phenomena as they manifest in our experiences, of the way we perceive, understand, and make meaning of the phenomena in our subjective experience (Smith, 2018). A best practice for meaning making is to gain an understanding of a behavior or a phenomenon. When aiming to study a phenomenon for a specific demographic of people, it is necessary to allow the voices of that demographic of people to be heard in the research findings. The phenomenon is part of a significant whole and there is no possibility of analyzing it without the holistic approach to the experience to which it belongs (Fuster-Guillen, 2019). Oftentimes, Black participants are left out of research studies for various reasons such as a distrust for the research process or poor advertisement of research (Knopf et al., 2021). Their stories are told for them but not by them and based on research that did not always include or specifically focus on them. In this study, the participants' subjective experiences were revealed. These young adults who are negatively impacted by the phenomenon of summer melt had their voices heard and, as a result, stakeholders can implement more effective intervention measures to reduce the number of first-generation, Black students of low SES experiencing summer melt. The use of phenomenology in this study revealed new meanings and explanations about how and why first-generation, Black students of low SES melt during the summer preceding their freshman year of college.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The current study utilized hermeneutical phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology, also known as interpretive phenomenology, focuses on the lived experience as

an interpretive process situated in an individual's lifeworld (Nebauer, 2019). Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation (studying the processes of interpretation) (Kakkori, 2009). The hermeneutic experience allows us to see something different than we had in the past (Kakkori, 2009). Martin Heidegger was a philosopher who was integral in developing the hermeneutics of phenomenology. He was trained by Edmund Husserl, often referred to as the father of phenomenology (Cohen, 1987; Koch, 1996) but later disassociated himself from Husserl and his work (Laverty et al., 2003). Heidegger was interested in humans as actors in the world and focused on the relationship between the individual and his/her lifeworld (Lopez et al., 2004). He believed that to be human means to be constantly interpreting the world around us, and to live within a world made up of interpretations (Heidegger, 1982). Heidegger focused on 'Dasein' which means the mode of being human or the situated meaning of a human in the world (Laverty, 2003). Using Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology in this study gave an in-depth look into how the students' experiences with summer melt happened in the context of their lifeworld. Understanding how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience the world in comparison to how non-Black students experience the world is invaluable in the field of education. Educational stakeholders now have insight into how to best intervene with this population of students as they navigate high school and their college admissions process.

The Heideggerian approach is concerned with understanding the participants' lived experiences. Heidegger's approach brings to phenomenology the importance of context. He especially asserted that giving appreciation to a Beings/'Dasein's' historical context increases our understanding of our present and future (Hellman, 2016). In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is a great focus on the language and the need to be sensitive to the subtle undertones of language; everything has its being in language and interpretation (Kakkori, 2009). Because

hermeneutic phenomenologists believe that everything has its being in language (meaning that language explains everything) and interpretation, a strong emphasis must be placed on what participants are saying both directly and indirectly. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is a part of the world and not free of bias and they endeavor to understand the phenomenon by interpretive means (Neubauer et al., 2019). The researcher reflects on essential themes of participants' experiences with the phenomenon while simultaneously reflecting on their own experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Heidegger believed that one cannot separate a being ('Dasein') from their past which includes their experiences, culture, and beliefs (Hellman, 2016). Equally so, Black people cannot separate themselves from the racist, discriminatory, and prejudice world into which they were born. The researcher must be aware of the individual's background and account for the influences they exert on the individual's experience of being (Neubauer et al., 2019). This awareness, on the part of the researcher, created a more in-depth analysis of the participants' perspective on why they experienced the phenomenon of summer melt.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was most fitting for this research study as the research aims to understand how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Critical research intends to advocate for and facilitate the social, political, and economic changes that exist in a variety of institutions, policies, and organizations (Creswell, 2013). As indicated in the tenets of CRT, racism is real and occurs in the lives of Black people every day. Social constructs such as race, wealth, and education function as barriers to success for first-generation, Black students of low SES. These social constructs, individually as well as combined, stimulate

prejudices and stereotypes in the field of education which can create barriers for Black students of low SES including interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Appling & Robinson, 2021). These barriers, in an educational setting, perpetuate the disconnect that occurs in Black students of low SES who melt.

Additionally, CRT places strong value on counterstorytelling (Ladson-Billings, 2013) which is seated in the belief that the long-silenced voices of Black people are the culprit of many misinterpretations about how and why they experience phenomena and therefore critical research posits that their voices need to be the ones telling their own stories. Counterstorytelling encourages marginalized populations to expose discriminatory and oppressive practices they have encountered (Sisco, 2019). The current research study aimed to end the silence and highlight the voices first-generation, Black students of low SES by conducting in-depth interviews that allowed the participants the space to expound upon their personal experiences with summer melt. The findings of the current study gave a different perspective for stakeholders to consider because what is available in current qualitative summer melt literature is limited specifically focused on how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt.

CRT and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Combining the theoretical framework of CRT and hermeneutic phenomenology allows the voices of the participants to be heard at a deeper level. Consciousness is a formation of historically lived experiences including a person's individual history and the culture in which he/she was raised (Lopez et al., 2004). An individual cannot step out of his/her lifeworld (Neubauer et al., 2019). Hermeneutic phenomenology studies individuals' narratives to understand what those individuals experience in their daily lives in their lifeworlds (Neubauer et

al., 2019). Heidegger argued that individuals have *situated freedom* which conceptualizes that individuals are free to make choices, but their freedom is not absolute; it is circumscribed by the specific conditions of their daily lives (Lopez et al., 2004). Knowing the experiences through stories and anecdotes is fundamental because it allows us to understand the nature of the context dynamics and even transform it (Fuster-Guillen, 2019). In the current study, I gathered and kept the participants' stories in the context of how each person had experienced summer melt because, although the participants were all first-generation, Black students of low SES, they did not all have the same experience. Considering each participant's story individually allowed for a deeper understanding of their experiences and more meaningful results that can later be used for the development of summer melt intervention protocols.

Procedure

Participant Sampling and Recruitment Techniques

I used a combination of purposive sampling, and snowball sampling to determine which participants would be selected for the study (DeCarlo, 2022). In purposive sampling, the researcher selected participants who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied (Gill, 2020). Using purposive sampling was beneficial in this study because unqualified participants were not solicited for participation. Snowball sampling involves current research participants recommending other people who might be willing to participate in the study (Gill, 2020). Because this research involved recent high school graduates, it was a challenge to find research participants. Being able to rely on current participants to invite other friends or former classmates who melted over the summer gave me access to a group of participants that might not have otherwise seen advertisements for the study on social media or inside high schools. For this

research study, I created a flyer to share via email, to post in schools, on social media, and hand it out where possible.

I sent emails to other school districts in the metro Atlanta area asking for their assistance in identifying participants that meet the criteria for this study. I also emailed mentoring groups and other social organizations in the metro area asking that they share the research recruitment flier with anyone they encountered who meet the criteria of first-generation, Black, and low SES. Finally, I posted a copy of the recruitment flier on my Facebook social media page to solicit participants for this study. I also, shared the flier with other people in the targeted age range for the study and asked them to share it on their social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat.

The participants in the research were college-intending and had graduated from high school. They were all either accepted into a two or four-year college and failed to enroll in classes by the late registration deadline for their institution of choice. The participants were all at least 18 years old. They all identified as first-generation, Black or African American and as coming from a low SES family. The participants' low SES was determined by their classification in high school as having received free/reduced lunch and by the participants' self-acknowledgment of being low SES. There was a total of 10 participants in this study. Four participants were acquired through purposive sampling and six were acquired through snowball sampling.

Institutional Review Board Process (IRB)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) was designed to prevent research studies from using human research participants in an inhumane manner (Grady, 2015). Researchers must

receive IRB approval before data collection. An IRB application was submitted by me once I successfully defended my dissertation prospectus. Once I received approval from the IRB, I provided all participants with an informed consent. Informed consent is the cornerstone of ethics when it comes to research (Kadam, 2017). The informed consent contained necessary information about the research study and empowered participants to make a rational and informed decision about whether to participate in the research study. I reviewed the informed consent with each participant and requested their signatures. Once I received each participant's signed consent form, I began data collection.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection approaches can include participant observation, observation, documentary analysis, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, biographical methods, case studies, interviews, and focus group discussions (Klem et al., 2022; Ritchie, 2003). Before I began the data collection phase, I formed a research team that consisted of myself and two doctoral students earning a counseling Ph.D. For this research study, I conducted semi-structured interviews because of my interest in understanding how first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt (Siedman, 2006). I used an online transcription service to transcribe the interviews. After receiving the online transcription, I read the transcripts and made corrections to any typos or incorrect transcriptions. I also elicited the assistance of my research team with reading transcripts to get a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of summer melt as experienced by Black students of low SES. The transcriptions provided insight into each participant's experience with summer melt.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was used in this study as a first step in the data collection process. The questionnaire was used to confirm that the participants met the criteria for this study. This allowed me to ensure that each participant was fitting for this research study and could offer insight into their experience with summer melt. Ensuring an appropriate fit for participation in the research study reduces the chances of interviewing participants unnecessarily.

Once I confirmed all participants' eligibility through the data collected from the demographic questionnaire, my next step was to conduct individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. Before the interviews, I chose a pseudonym for each participant. The use of pseudonyms is necessary for qualitative research as it provides an added level of anonymity and shows that the researcher values the importance of their confidentiality. The participant's identity needs to be protected throughout all stages of research from recruitment and data collection to analysis and publishing (Creswell, 2013).

Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary form of data collection I used was the semi-structured interview. The most common means of data collection in a phenomenological study is through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013). Using the semi-structured interview provides the researcher the ability to ask probing questions from which the participants' answers can provide context to their experiences with summer melt (Newton, 2010). The semi-structured interview method allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Being that most of the participants were young adults, I felt that they would feel more comfortable meeting in a place most comfortable to them. The plan was to meet with the participants in a place where they felt comfortable, be it

individually (virtually or in-person), to relax the atmosphere, and become acquainted with them on a personal level (Dixon, 2015). All participants chose to meet virtually. I scheduled an interview date and a time convenient for the participants. The interviews were recorded and lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. I used a pre-written list of semi-structured interview questions. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed each interview using an online transcription service. As we read the transcriptions, the research team looked for any statements or phrases that participants had in common to code and identify themes in their responses. At this point, I enlisted the assistance of one research team member who served as an auditor. The auditor reviewed all 10 transcripts and confirmed the themes identified in the codebook. Once interviews were transcribed, each participant was emailed their transcription to make any corrections or provide clarification. Using the identified themes and categorized data, I provided a detailed description of the phenomenon.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Data Analysis

Hermeneutic data analysis centers around the development of an organizing system (Tesch, 1990). The purpose of developing an organizing system is to identify predominant themes and make the interviews meaningful, organized, interpreted, and presented. In hermeneutic data analysis, the process of developing an organized system is the “analysis” and the final organizing system is the product of the analysis (Patterson et al., 2002). The organizing system is different from content-analysis in that it makes the analysis more holistic as opposed to reductionistic/multivariate in nature (Patterson et al., 2002).

I used the following steps based on Tesch’s (1990) description of an organizing system that promoted a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of summer melt. Once I recorded and transcribed the interviews, which were necessary for the hermeneutic circle

(Bontekoe, 1996) to take place, I went on to the first step of developing an organizing system. The first step I took was to read the interview transcriptions and develop an indexing (numbering) system that was used to reference the location of specific units of text. Next, I read the transcription one more time before coding. Then, I began identifying and marking meaning units within the transcript. As I began to get a feel for the nature of the meaning units, I was able to move on to the next step which was developing thematic labels. These thematic labels were used to group meaning units. To provide a more holistic and insightful interpretation, I developed visual aids to explain any underlying meaning in the responses of the participants. These visual aids were done in the form of tables. The next step was for me to write a discussion of the interpretation that incorporated the empirical evidence which served as justification for the interpretation. I led the reader through the interpretation which included introductions, transitions, and summaries. This interpretation included sufficient empirical evidence that would allow the reader to make independent judgments about what warrants the researcher's interpretation. The final step was to analyze each interview immediately after its completion and before conducting the next interview. The purpose of this immediate analysis was to glean any insights from one interview that could help improve the next interview (Patterson et al., 2002).

Hermeneutic Circle

Hermeneutic circle is an integral part of data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology. The hermeneutic circle is an ongoing process with movement from the whole to the part and back to the whole (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Bontekoe, 1996; Gelweiller et al., 2018). The hermeneutic circle occurs when the researcher reads the transcribed interview, finds portions of the interview that need further dissection, gains a more in-depth understanding of the portion of the interview, and then places the portion taken out back into the transcribed interview to be

reread for a more thorough understanding of the participants' responses. I read carefully through each transcription to provide a detailed interpretation of the participant's viewpoint. I endeavored to gain a more holistic understanding of their lived experiences by placing value on each word as it related to the whole interview rather than each paragraph or section.

Epoche

The definition found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is the methodological attitude of phenomenology in which one refrains from judging whether anything exists or can exist as the first step in the phenomenological recognition, comprehension, and description of sense appearances: transcendental reduction (Webster, 2022). One reaching the epoche is reaching the highest level of objectivity. Edmund Husserl's posited that epoche is becoming aware of conscious processes that usually go unnoticed (Husserl, 1977). I attempted to reach the epoche by removing myself and my relevant experiences and focusing solely on the participants' responses to the interview questions.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Ensuring that research data is trustworthy is necessary for proving the validity and reliability of qualitative research. With the number of research participants being significantly less in qualitative research than the number of research participants in quantitative research, critics of qualitative research are reluctant to accept its trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). According to Guba (1981), researchers should seek to satisfy four criteria when trying to assess for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I followed Guba's four criteria when establishing trustworthiness in this study.

Credibility is described as the ability to demonstrate that a true picture of the

phenomenon being investigated is being presented. Throughout the data analysis process, I ensured that the findings of the study portrayed an accurate picture of the phenomenon of summer melt as experienced by those who melted.

Transferability aims to prove the ability of the findings to be applied to other settings. The findings of this research can be applied to first-generation, Black students of low SES in a variety of school settings i.e., rural, or suburban.

Dependability has been difficult to prove in qualitative work but should strive to allow future investigators to repeat the study. This research study produced findings that will not only give insight into how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt but also to encourage future researchers to use my study to begin to understand how other demographics experience summer melt.

Confirmability Researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their predispositions. While hermeneutic phenomenology allows space for the researcher to acknowledge their preconceptions and subjectivity (Moran, 2000), I still took all measures to demonstrate that the findings aligned with the data because the objective of this research study was to highlight the voices of typically unheard participants.

Member Checking When member checking, the emphasis should be on whether the participants consider that their words matched what they intended (Shenton, 2004). After I transcribed each participant's interview, I provided them with an electronic copy of the transcribed interview for their review. Each participant was

asked to make any corrections they deemed necessary to increase the accuracy of the findings of the study. This step was an important part of the data collection process because it was intended to remove any misconceptions or misinterpretations that I may have derived from my analysis.

Audit Trail The purpose of the audit trail is to establish trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry. The audit trail allows readers to trace through a researcher's logic and decide whether the study's findings are reliable and able to be used for further inquiry (Carcary, 2009). I maintained an audit trail of all documents related to the research process in a locked cabinet in my home office.

Researcher's Context As mentioned in chapter four, in hermeneutical phenomenology, the researcher is a part of the process and not free of bias as they endeavor to understand the phenomenon. The researcher reflects on essential themes of participants' experiences with the phenomenon while simultaneously reflecting on their own experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Heidegger believed that one cannot separate a being ('Dasein') from their past which includes their experiences, culture, and beliefs (Hellman, 2016). The researcher being able to use their own experience during analysis allows for a richer interpretation of the findings. Therefore, it is necessary for me to provide context for the interpretation of this study. I must acknowledge that several factors may have affected my interpretation. The first being that, but for the experience of the Black College Tour in my life, I would've melted. I am a first-generation, Black student who came from a low SES family. Although this shared experience may have helped to build a connection and enhance rapport between myself and the participants, I may have inadvertently

shared information with participants related to my own experience as a first-generation, Black student who came from a low SES family which may have impacted some participants and their responses. Second, having to discuss one's low SES status can bring about a sense of shame which is something with which I am familiar. When asking questions related to their SES, I may have allowed participants to move on after a simple one-word response to keep their sense of dignity in-tact. Had I probed more with these questions, more richer responses may have been given. Third, my experience as a novice phenomenological researcher, may have limited their responses and stifled the probability of discovering evoking even deeper emotional responses from the participants. Lastly, due to most of the participants being young adults, I may have been hasty with some parts of the interview process to avoid making the participants uncomfortable with some of the questions and/or becoming impatient with the interview process. This hastiness, while more comfortable for the participants, may have taken away from the participants being able to provide more rich responses. Perhaps had I met with the participants in person, I would not have felt the need to be hasty because I would not have had to wrestle with the thought that the participant would abruptly disconnect and end the interview because that would not be likely to occur during an in-person meeting.

Chapter Summary

When trying to understand the essence and origin of a phenomenon, the most appropriate research methodology is phenomenology (Neubauer et al., 2019). In this study, there was a specific goal to provide an opportunity to those, who have had their stories told for them others, to share about how they experienced the phenomenon of summer melt. Because of this, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology was the best fit for this research study. In hermeneutic

phenomenology, emphasis is placed on language and on how language is interpreted (Guillen, 2019; Mackey, 2005). In this study, the researcher collected rich and deep descriptions from the participants about how they experienced the phenomenon of summer melt (Al-Raisi et al., 2020). I interpreted their experiences by thoroughly examining not only what they said but how they said it.

Thoroughly examining the language used by the participants created a more authentic counterstory and a thick rich description of the participants' experiences that can be added to the summer melt literature. In this study, I used Critical Race Theory as my theoretical framework. Counterstorytelling is a core tenet of CRT (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) because it speaks to the need for marginalized people to tell their own stories about how they have been impacted by life experiences (their lifeworld). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I operated through a CRT and Hermeneutical phenomenological lens. Doing so ensured that the findings of the research were communicated in such a way that readers would be able to better appreciate the need for this research and recognize how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. This chapter gives a thick rich description of the research approach and a roadmap to understanding how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

First-generation college students often face insurmountable barriers when applying to and preparing for college (Castleman & Page, 2014). In fact, college-intending students from marginalized groups such as people of color and people from low-income backgrounds are commonly met with roadblocks that prevent them from enrolling in college. The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Using hermeneutical phenomenology, this study endeavored to highlight the voices of students who experienced summer melt. Using hermeneutical phenomenology this study endeavored to understand a person's lived experiences by attending to the words they say and by making meaning of any undertones present in their statements. Hermeneutical phenomenology helps the researcher gain better insight into each participant's experience with summer melt. The following research question was the central focus used in investigating this phenomenon: How do first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt? The semi-structured interview questions sought to elicit thick rich descriptions of how the participants experienced summer melt.

The major findings from the semi-structured interviews are presented in this chapter. The chapter begins with a brief description of the participants including their given pseudonym, age, participant number, region, and whether they were accepted into a two or four year college which are also displayed in Table 1. Next, the findings are summarized using the 10 participants' interviews where five common themes emerged among participants. The themes were Need for

Individualized Advisement, Encouragement vs. Action, Financial Barriers to Enrollment, Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status, and Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting. Then, Table 2 is displayed to provide a snapshot of the subtle language undertones used by the participants as well as the researcher's interpretation of the undertones as described in hermeneutic phenomenology. Lastly, the chapter ends with a summary of the findings which will be further expounded upon in chapter five.

This study included 10 participants who all identified as first-generation, Black, and low SES. All 10 participants were, at one point, college-intending students who experienced summer melt. All participants were under the age of 30 except for one participant who was 45.

John was a 21-year-old man. He was accepted into a university in Georgia but never ended up enrolling. He aspired to obtain a career in theater but later changed course and enrolled in a technical college to pursue a career in culinary arts.

Yari was a 29-year-old woman. She was accepted into several colleges and universities in Georgia but did not enroll in any of them. She initially wanted to have a career in information technology but later changed course and pursued a career in education.

Joan was a 19-year-old woman. She was accepted into a university and a community college in Louisiana but did not enroll in either of them. She was pushed to apply to colleges and universities, but her true desire was to go to cosmetology school and become a hair stylist. At the time of the interview, she had not yet enrolled in cosmetology school.

Tina was a 19-year-old woman. She was accepted into two universities and a community college in Louisiana. She aspired to attend college but did not enroll. She changed course and

decided that she wanted to become a cosmetologist. At the time of the interview, she had not yet enrolled in cosmetology school.

Sara was an 18-year-old woman. She was accepted into two universities and a community college in Louisiana. She wanted to attend a college away from home but could not afford to do so. She changed course and planned to enroll in a trade school to become a welder.

Bell was a 22-year-old woman. Bell was accepted into a university in Georgia. She aspired to become a nurse but decided to enter the world of work when her college plans did not work out. She worked at the local hospital as patient technician. At the time of the interview, she was making plans to take advantage of a program offered through her employer that would pay for her to take classes and work towards her degree in nursing.

Jona was a 22-year-old man. Jona was accepted into a college in Mississippi. He never wanted to go to college but applied at the request of his mother and school counselor. Jona never enrolled and did not have a concrete plan about his next steps in his career or work plans but said that college is not in his future.

Dani was a 22-year-old woman. Dani was accepted into a university in Louisiana but did not enroll. She changed course, enrolled in, and graduated from a cosmetology school. She was a hairstylist and planned to remain in the field of cosmetology.

Tony was a 45-year-old man. Tony was accepted into a college in North Carolina. He did not enroll. He changed course and pursued a career in the culinary industry as a chef. He worked as a chef and no longer had plans to pursue a college degree. While Tony's was much older than the other participants, his account of how he experienced with summer melt was comparable to how the other participants experienced summer melt. In fact, his responses were highly insightful

and filled with what seemed like persistent and raw emotions about his decision to not enroll in college.

Kane was a 23-year-old man. Kane was accepted into several colleges and universities throughout eastern United States. He did not enroll and stayed in Georgia to work. He later enrolled in college and obtained an associate degree.

Table 1

Participants' General Information

Pseudonym	Participant #	Age	Region	Two/Four Year College
John	1	21	southern	Four
Yari	2	29	southern	Four
Joan	3	19	southern	Both
Tina	4	19	southern	Both
Sara	5	18	southern	Both
Bell	6	22	southern	Four
Jona	7	22	southern	Four
Dani	8	22	southern	Four

Tony	9	45	northern	Four
Kane	10	23	southern	Four

Discussion of Themes

Several themes emerged from the participants' responses to the in-depth interviews including Need for Individualized Advisement, Encouragement vs. Action, Financial Barriers to Enrollment, Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status, and Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting. These themes derived from the participants' voices and represented their individual experiences with summer melt.

To best answer the fundamental research question of: "How have first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt?", Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology was selected as the most-fitting method. In hermeneutical phenomenology, the researcher must be aware of the individual's background and account for the influences they exert on the individual's experience of being (Neubauer et al., 2019). This awareness, on the part of the researcher, allows for a more in-depth analysis of the participants' perspectives on how they experienced the phenomenon of summer melt. Because hermeneutic phenomenologists believe that everything has its being in language, when isolating a statement, it is necessary to interpret the meaning attributable to the statement to be able to write a comment or begin to interpret the experience in a manner that is representative of the phenomenon which the researcher wishes to bring to light (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The following themes were verified by the researcher and confirmed by the research team. The themes represent a compilation of what the participants said

directly as well as what was understood by the researcher when providing an accurate and meaningful interpretation of the subtle undertones in their responses.

Need for Individualized Advisement

The first theme that derived centered around the participants' need for a more individualized approach from their school counselors and college admissions officers at different points in their pursuit to enroll in college. The responses from participants related to their perceptions of their school counselor's level of involvement. Their experiences ranged from very favorable to not favorable at all. Some recognized the heavy workload of school counselors and excused them because they were "really busy". Others shared that more one-on-one time with their school counselor could have been the difference between them going to college and melting. Kane describes his experience with the school counselor as pretty much hands-off:

> I didn't get a lot of help in high school. It wasn't a lot of, "Hey we need to do this, we need to do that." We need to plan this out. It was pretty much all of myself.

Sara had a similar experience to Kane, in that, in her experience, she did not have a lot of assistance in high school when planning for college.

> …they'll gimme some sort of stuff, but won't be like specific stuff that I need. I feel like if I would've had a one-on-one session with maybe somebody that's experienced in the college enrollment process [I would have been more aware of what was expected of me].

To the contrary of both Sara and Kane, John shared about having a positive experience with his school counselor during his college planning. He understood that there were not many school

counselors, in comparison to the number of students in the school, but he knew that they were trying to help despite their large caseloads.

> …I will say, especially at [participant's high school], I think, at least from what I've been shown, they're really involved. But they're there, you know, they make sure [that they help us], and the truth of the matter is there was only one or two that probably handled it [college and career guidance] because, you know, it goes by last name and all this other stuff. So, it stays organized.

The participants responses to the question regarding what they needed that they didn't get, from their school counselors were similar in nature. Most participants expressed a need for more one-on-one time and desired to understand what the next phase looked like after being accepted into college. Dani's account speaks to the needs of most of the participants:

> "I, I think it may have been more one-on-one time. Like, if they could have set up our, even if it was like small group meetings with all of us and talked about our plans as far as when we leave high school and being more, more proactive with the enrollment into colleges and what, what'll happen as far as the enrollment process when you are enrolled into college as well.

Kane was eager to attend college but left confused and alone despite having been accepted into several colleges. He shares what he needed most from his school counselor that would have made the process more seamless:

> I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know what questions to ask. I didn't know how to navigate the whole college process. Honestly, I didn't know when or what to say. Once I got acceptance letters, it was, your accepted. Okay, now what? And there was never an

> answer to that. Now what? So, if, if I would've, I feel like if I would've received just an answer to that question of what comes next, that would've helped a ton.

As with school counselors, the participants shared their account of the level of involvement their college admissions officers had with their college enrollment planning. Several participants discussed traditional practices universities used to connect with prospective students such as mailings or emails rather than being what they described as “individualized”. While these practices may benefit most students, they did not prove beneficial with these participants. Joan shares about the communication she received from the college to which she was accepted:

> …and they sent some stuff in the mail and stuff and that's about it.

Jona shared about the limited efforts made by the college to which he was accepted:

> They invited me to a campus tour. That's basically it.

Kane describes his failed attempts at communicating with the colleges he was accepted to:

> …once I was accepted into those colleges, I kind of didn't hear anything else. After that, I would reach out, but no one would ever, ever really take the time to say, okay, this is the next step for me.

Knowing what the next steps are after acceptance and having someone available to answer questions about those steps along the way is critical for those most at risk for experiencing summer melt. For these three participants, a more personalized approach from the college admissions officers could have been prevented them from melting.

Encouragement vs. Action

This second theme can be paralleled with a runner on the starting block of a race. The runner has all the potential (encouragement) but cannot move without first hearing the starter pistol (action). These participants all shared about the person or people who encouraged them to apply to college. Some people had counselors who pushed them to apply, and others had a coach, teacher, or family member encouraging them to apply to college. This encouragement was not enough to see these college-intending students through to college enrollment. While the encouragement they received from those closest to them may have inspired them, something more was needed to catapult them over that period between high school graduation and the first day of college classes in the fall. More action on the part of the encourager was needed. While these participants needed more than encouragements, for some, even having someone there to answer their questions kept them motivated to at least attempt to navigate the college going process. John recounts the people who were instrumental in is college planning:

> I can remember my teachers saying it [go to college], you know, uh there's a couple, select few definitely my theater teacher. …of course, they were, you know, in my ear about it [going to college] and trying to make sure [I went to college]. …but also, actually one of, or two of our, uh AP or assistant principals, uh, I think it was [participant's assistant principal] and I can't remember the other one's name, but they were both really, really helpful, at my appointments and everything.

Tina's shares about who assisted her and how their assistance wasn't personalized to her goals or plans:

> We had a Quest for Success teacher. ...she just wanted us to be enrolled in, I think, two colleges and to be eligible for FAFSA or something. They never really helped us with the schools we wanted to go to.

Overall, participants expressed positive feelings about being accepted into college. This confirmation that all their hard work paid off resulted in feelings of relief, excitement, and pride. Despite their acceptance into college and, for most, the excitement that came with it, more than encouragement was needed to ensure that these participants would follow through to enrollment. Bell shared how her acceptance meant that she was at least on the "starter's block":

> ...it's very exciting because I mean, when you get accepted or when you get good news like that, that's just like, okay, that's a start from somewhere.

Yari had mixed feelings about her acceptance. As a first-generation college student, she had positive feelings about her acceptance but also some reservations because of the unknowns that came with the acceptance:

> It felt good and it felt a little overwhelming.

All participants were left at the starter's block waiting for the starter pistol to be fired. Actions such as assistance with contacting college admissions officers, guiding students to apply to colleges that have degree programs in which they show interest, reviewing financial aid award packages with students and exposing them to other options to help finance their education would have proven beneficial for these students and could have mitigated their experiences with summer melt.

Financial Barriers to Enrollment

This third theme emerged from all participants' lack of understanding of how to pay for college. The mounting expenses associated with college tuition, room & board, fees, and supplies can be daunting for prospective students but especially so for first-generations students of low SES (Ash, 2021). Some participants struggled with completing the FAFSA application

and others simply did not understand how to make sense of their financial aid award package. Having to take out loans to cover their family's expected family contribution (EFC) was just not something they were interested in doing. Jona's experience with having to finance his college expenses by taking out loans was and functioned as an immediate barrier to enrolling in college.

> That's the part, that's the part where I stopped and was like, I remember just the whole FAFSA situation and the loan. That's what made me give up.

Yari knew that attending college meant additional debt for herself and her family which would bring unwanted strain on them.

> ...the financial burden would be on me or my family.

Dani's account of how financing college would leave her in debt gave insight into the fear around how the cost of college leads to students melting:

> So that was part of the reason why I didn't choose to go to university cuz I would be even more in debt. ...I just made the decision not to mostly cause of the, the debt. …and cause I wanted to do, and I figured that I could do without the debt and try to do business on my own without college.

These participants lacked the financial literacy needed to navigate the challenges presented when paying for college such as having financial award packages that do not cover their costs. These findings support the research which asserts that first-generation college students have lower financial literacy than do continuing generation students (Rehr et al., 2022). Financial literacy when planning for college helps students increase their awareness about the expenses related to attending college and, in turn, be able to make informed decisions about where to attend college. This barrier to enrollment existed for all participants.

Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status

The fourth theme deals with the intersectionality of the statuses of being both first-generation and from a low SES background. Their attitudes and beliefs, as first-generation college students, around the financial hardship associated paying for college impacted their enrollment decisions (Rehr et al., 2022). The participants responses were interlaced with experiences and perspectives from within their lifeworld. It was evident that their understanding of costs associated with attending college and the risks associated with trying to cover those costs came from their lived experiences being both first-generation and low SES. They had fears and apprehensions about the burden that would be placed on their families were they to take out the necessary loans and leave home to attend college. Tony described the barriers he faced as a college-intending, first-generation college student:

> Coming from a family, like where other people really haven't went to college and graduated college. I feel like that's a very big obstacle in any household. Like you're trying to get somebody to teach or push you to something that you have never done yourself. My mom and dad, you know, they wished the best for me, but that's, that's about it. It's hard to think about and hard to, to push through when you don't have other people in your, I feel like immediate family or your immediate circle helping your decision-making and pushing you to take, you know, pushing you toward trying to go to school and, and get a degree.

John shared about his first-generation status and the pressures that came with being the first in his family to accomplish things:

> Because in my family, the furthest that it had went, or at least for the men in my family on my father's side, it went as far as not even a full high school, so I was the first one to get a high school diploma. I'm the oldest as well, which makes me the first-generation, you know, going to college. …and I guess I just never enrolled or anything like that because that fear of money.

The participants were all from low SES backgrounds. This label denotes a serious financial need and would seem to translate into enough funding for students in this demographic to attend college. There are options for them to qualify for the Pell Grant, federal work-study, and scholarships available specifically for first-generation college students. Nonetheless, these students felt that they could not afford to attend college and made the decision to not enroll. Tony's understanding of his family's low SES background made him understand and cope with the main reason he would not be able to attend college after high school graduation.

> And I know we didn't have any money to send me to school.

John also expressed his apprehensions about paying for college. He was unsure of how things would turn out considering the financial standing his family was in.

> Also, I was concerned about more like money-wise because my family doesn't have [money], I was like, I don't really know how this is gonna go.

John also shared his concern for how pursuing his college dreams would impact his family:

> ...and it's a sad thing, but it's really hard to continue to get your education when your family does not have the money to be able to do things like that. If money was not an option or if it wasn't a problem then, you know, I wouldn't have been like, oh, you know I, I can't go to [participant's college of choice] cuz housing costs too much or, or, just

> schooling itself. The books and tuition, if I would've had, or me or my family would've had money would've changed [The situation would have changed if his family had money to pay for college]. It would've been a completely different tune. Yeah. It's like, you know, also trying to find a way for me to go to college without financially devastating parents.

Bell's perception of how being from a low SES background impacted her decision to not attend college differed from others who may have seen it as more of a struggle:

> …as growing up I'd see my mama doing work and working and working and working to make sure, you know, she got everything and got everything we needed. So, I feel like I had that spark, that fire in me to go to work and get things done more than school. …because that's what I was raised around.

Being college-intending and identifying with intersecting statuses such both first-generation and low-income most often comes with facing what seem like insurmountable challenges along the path to college enrollment (Castleman & Page, 2014). The key is that the challenges of college enrollment are not insurmountable but seem that way because of this population's attitudes and beliefs about the negative impacts of taking out loans to pay for college. These participants changed course because their desire to protect themselves and their families superseded their desire to attend college. With more college knowledge and financial literacy, they could have made more informed decisions about whether or not to enroll in college.

Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting

The final theme is the most poignant of themes related to the participants' experiences with melting and the emotions they grappled with. Their voices were especially highlighted in

this theme. Their detailed accounts were rich, and the range of emotions expressed were raw and heartfelt. Their descriptions were not all negative which gives credence to the fact that not everyone who melts regrets their decision. The participants used words such as “worried”, “depressed”, “devastated”, “shut down”, “glad”, and “felt good” to express how they felt when they made the decision to not enroll in college after high school graduation. Hearing the voices of the participants added a necessary component to understanding the phenomenon of summer melt. Yari’s feelings about summer melt were not as negative as many others’ feelings:

> I didn't feel like I probably missed out, I didn't feel that pressure, so I got to get a break mentally because it seemed like they [friends that went right to college] partied.

On the contrary, John’s experience with summer melt was very emotional for him:

> ...mentally I was like kind of devastated, you know. ...it's scary because you don't wanna let down the people around you. ...I just didn't care to talk to people around me or anything like that. …especially my teachers because I, I, you know, it was very hard for me to face somebody when I wasn't even, cuz they expected me to do all these big things and you know, and I'm not even on the road to college. ...you know, seeing my friends on, on social media and everything like that in college at their campus and, and everything like that just was both socially and mentally holding.

Once he realized that he was not going to be able to attend college, Kane experienced a mixture of negative emotions as well:

> So, knowing that I couldn't get right after the path I set for myself, it was, I felt defeated. I tried to bury myself with work. I stopped being so social. I kind of distanced myself from all my friends who did go to college because I was envious of them actually being

> there, experiencing college. Honestly, I was, I was pretty depressed. I was pretty sad. I was in a pretty down state mentally, socially.

Tony, who was 45 years old, felt and continued to feel negative emotions related to his decision to not attend college after high school graduation:

> I was depressed about it for a while. I still think about it to this day, there's (*sic*) definitely just a bad decision that I still live with, and I regret. Yeah. It still hurts though.

Tina had mixed feelings about melting. For her, the decision had its pros and cons, still she struggled with how to move forward with her future career plans:

> So, like sometimes I feel like it was a good decision and the sometimes I do wanna get the college experience and then go on a campus and stuff like that. Cause I know the more I keep waiting, the more I'm not gonna wanna go.

Jona came to peace with his decision to not attend college. He had given thought to attending college because of he encouraged to do so by his school counselor and his mother, but ultimately, he made the decision that he felt was best for him:

> I was like, maybe I should've went (*sic*) to college. I'm glad I didn't go to college. But maybe the next year when life wasn't going exactly how I, I planned it to go. …I was like, maybe I should've went (*sic*) to college. Bus as the years kept going, I realized that college wasn't for me.

Some students who apply to college do so because of outside pressure and not because they are college-intending as seen with Jona. For him, not attending college was not as emotionally devastating as it was for most of the other participants. He was comfortable with his decision to

not enroll and even came to the realization that college was not for him. For other participants, the negative emotions that resulted from melting made them second guess their ability to persevere and even caused some to isolate themselves from their peers who were able to enroll as planned. These findings both illustrate a picture of the aftermath of melting for this population and answer the main research question "How do first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt?"

Undertones Used to Describe Participants' Experience with Summer Melt

In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is a significant focus on language and the need to be sensitive to the subtle undertones of language; everything has its being in language and interpretation (Kakkori, 2009). Many undertones were discovered by the researcher that will be noted and interpreted in Table 2 below. The researcher identified the undertones after reviewing each transcription and the research team confirmed the undertones. Each noted undertone had a different meaning as interpreted by the researcher. Identifying the meaning of these undertones added depth to the analysis of the participants' responses to how the experienced summer melt.

One participant made the statement "…try to make a way out of no way." For some, this phrase may mean that one would find a way to make something happen no matter what it took. My analysis of this statement, in the context of this study, came from my own personal experience with feeling and understanding the hopelessness the participant felt as first-generation students of low SES. This level of relatedness helped me connect with the participants' experiences and provide a richer and more detailed awareness of the phenomenon of summer melt as experienced by this population.

Table 2

Participants' Undertones Explained

Theme	Quote	Underlying Meaning
Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting	"It is what is."	There's nothing I can do about it.
Individualized Advisement Needed	"Your questions seem very small to them."	My lack of knowledge wasn't a priority.
Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status	"I knew I could too and still make it happen."	If I work hard like my mom did, I can provide for my family without college.
Financial Barriers to Enrollment	"It just wasn't the route I was trying to go down."	I wasn't interested in accumulating debt just to go to college
Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status	"Blind leading the blind."	Someone who hasn't been to college can help someone (who wants to go to college) navigate that process.
Individualized Advisement Needed & Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status	"…left to fend for myself"	There was no adult available to help me figure these steps out.
Financial Barriers to Enrollment	"I'm hearing people still in debt."	It scares me to think that I would go to college to make a better life and end up being in debt.
Financial Barriers to Enrollment	"...try to make a way out of no way."	There was just no way that I could think of that would make it possible for me to enroll in college.
Financial Barriers to Enrollment	"It's coming from that type of family."	Coming from a first-generation family makes it hard to dream or believe that going to college can happen for you.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the in-depth accounts of 10 college-intending participants who experienced summer melt. This study was guided by the central question: How have first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt? Several powerful themes were discovered through the findings of this research. The themes included Need for Individualized Advisement, Encouragement vs. Action, Financial Barriers to Enrollment, Status-Related

Barriers to Enrollment and Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting. Utilizing the participants' voices to describe how it felt for them to experience summer melt allows for a deeper understanding of how this population of students experience this phenomenon. Additionally, their voices shed light in other areas such as what they needed that they didn't get from school counselors and college admissions officers, why they melted, and issues around financial planning for college. Having the voices of these participants be heard allows stakeholders to better understand both the impact of summer melt as well as appropriate interventions for this population of students. In the next chapter, a more concise description of the findings of this research will be discussed as well as implications for school counselors and college admissions officers and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter details the findings of the research and elucidates the impact that experiencing summer melt has on first-generation, Black students of low SES. This study's hermeneutical phenomenological research design was implemented to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of summer melt and to answer the research question of "How do first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt?" To allow the participants' voices to be heard through this qualitative research study, semi-structured interviews were administered and analyzed by the research team. The findings provide detailed accounts of the participants' first-hand experiences with summer melt and begin to fill a void in qualitative summer melt research. First, the chapter expounds upon the five themes developed from the analysis of the in-depth interviews. Next, the chapter shares the implications for future research as well as implications for school counselors and college admissions officers. After that, social justice considerations are discussed. Then, the limitations of the study are presented. Lastly, the researcher's context is shared to disclose any researcher bias.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. According to hermeneutical phenomenology, understanding a person's experience from within their lifeworld allows the researcher to write the findings in a way that the reader can better

understand a phenomenon (Schneider et al., 2016) such as summer melt. In this study, the participants' subjective experiences from with their lifeworld were revealed. This study's methodology revealed new meanings and explanations of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt through in-depth analysis and interpretation of the participants' responses completed by the research team. These individuals who were impacted by the phenomenon of summer melt had their voices heard and, as a result, provided feedback that will allow interventions to be developed that can reduce the number of first-generation, Black students of low SES experiencing summer melt.

Discussion of Research Findings

An analysis of the findings using a Heideggerian hermeneutical phenomenological approach allowed for a deeper dive into and understanding of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Employing hermeneutical phenomenology affords me as the researcher the opportunity to experience the lifeworlds of the participants firsthand and participate in a meaning-making process that generates new ideas and understandings about the phenomenon of summer melt. Heidegger's ontological assumption is that a person's lived experience is an interpretive process that is situated in an individual's life world (Neubauer et al., 2019). Heidegger's approach brings to phenomenology the importance of context. Heidegger asserts that giving appreciation to a Beings/Dasein's historical context increases our understanding of our present and future (Hellman, 2016). The findings of this study reveal the participants' lived experienced in context to where they were in their lives at the time they experienced summer melt and provides and in-depth understanding of how they experienced summer melt.

This study's findings yielded five prominent themes between the participants. The themes are Need for Individualized Advisement, Encouragement vs. Action, Financial Barriers to Enrollment, Status-Related Barriers to Enrollment, and Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting. These themes were derived using the firsthand account of the melters in this study. Through a thorough discussion of each theme, a deeper understanding is gained and will enlighten stakeholders on how summer melt is experienced with first-generation, Black students of low SES. This level of understanding will allow for more personalized approaches and interventions for students fitting this demographic.

Need for Individualized Advisement

All the participants expressed a need for a more individualized approach from their school counselor or college admissions officer during their college planning process. First generation students, students of color and students of low SES tend to rely on their school counselors for guidance with college admissions processes because they do not typically have anyone to guide them otherwise (Cholewa, 2015). Many of them shared that, while their school counselor was somewhat involved in the process, the school counselor's efforts seemed most fitting for all and not personalized to them. They required more intensive support. In this instance, if the entire graduating class of a school were considered as being placed into tiers, much like the tiered interventions used in K-12, these participants would have required Tier 3 interventions. When using multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) (Hollingsworth, 2019), students are place into three tiers. Tier 1 is where all students start at the beginning of the school year. As it relates to college and career readiness, Tier 1 interventions would be those such as advisement lessons, college fairs, emails and text messages being sent to the entire graduating class. If school data suggests that some students are not responding to what is being implemented

at Tier 1, then they are moved to Tier 2 to receive additional support. In Tier 2, as it relates to college and career readiness, interventions may include small group meetings geared towards first-generation students and creating student success plans. Again, if there are students who are not responding to Tier 2 interventions, they are moved to Tier 3. Tier 3 interventions are those interventions that are more one-on-one such as individualized transition plans or one-on-one meetings with the counselor to address any questions or concerns the first-generation college student of low SES has. The literature supports this finding that first-generation students of low SES require more intensive support when endeavoring to apply to and enroll in college (Arnold et al., 2009). Thus, a more one-on-one approach for this population is imperative to addressing issues identified as contributing factors to summer melt.

Encouragement vs. Action

The findings revealed that all the participants had at least one person encouraging them to go to college. There were people telling them that they had to attend college which, for some, caused added pressure to apply. There were others who, in their household, it was implied or understood that the expectation was for them to attend college because their families wanted better for them. Others were encouraged all the way through being accepted into college only to be left to fend for themselves from that point on. One participant, who was raised by his single mother, had a father who attended college and encouraged him to attend as well. He recalled his father's stories of his college days and the benefits of graduating college. Still that participant experienced summer melt. Another participant described this encouragement from parents or family members who did not graduate from college as "the blind leading the blind." This suggests that someone who has not had the experience of navigating the college-going process cannot lead someone else in a direction that ends up in college enrollment. Because the

participants all experienced summer melt, the findings suggest that simply encouraging or rooting from the stands (Rall, 2016) for them to attend college does not suffice; especially for students at most-risk for experiencing summer melt.

What was missing for these participants was action-oriented guidance through each phase of the college-going process. They got accepted into college which, for them, may have felt like doing their part. The next and most crucial step in helping them cross the bridge from high school graduation to enrolling in college was for those who encouraged them, where possible, to apply to also assist them with navigating through what was required of them over the summer. The parents of a first-generation college student may not have the tools to act upon and explain what was expected of their child to ensure they successfully enroll in college. However, the counselors, teachers, coaches, and others who have graduated from college neglected to follow up with these participants and coach them over the summer which could have been the difference between them experiencing summer melt or not.

Financial Barriers to Enrollment

One of the most prominent findings of the study involved how difficulties with the financial aid process and a fear of being in debt acted as barriers to these participants enrolling in college. Most of the participants expressed that they did not want to be in debt and add to their family's financial burden. Most completed the FAFSA application and still felt that they could not afford to attend even community colleges. An assumption can be made that, given their low SES status, many of the participants could have qualified for the Pell Grant and other financial aid based on their first-generation status and SES. This supports the literature that suggests that additional steps can be taken from the accepting college's end to ensure that students most at-risk for melting understand their financial aid packages. Smith (2014) asserts:

Staff from financial aid offices bring an expertise about grants, loans, and financial aid options that go beyond what a website might provide. In addition, staff working with this student population can learn additional contextual information about their circumstances, which may help the counselors understand the multifaceted experiences students have during the summer prior to starting college.

Collaboration between school counselors of college-intending seniors and admissions counselors/officers encourages more efficient communication with graduating seniors and eliminates the confusion that comes from misinformation and a lack of access to information including deadlines, online systems, and financial responsibilities (DePaolis-Metz, 2019). If the participants had a better understanding of the available grant money and not having to pay back grant money, they may have at least attended the community college. This finding is in line with the current research which suggests that financial aid process acts as a barrier to enrollment for first-generation students of low SES (Corley, 2017). These students could not see a path to college enrollment that did not involve them having to cross the hurdle of taking out a loan. They wanted to avoid loans at all costs; even if that one of the costs was forgoing what for some was a dream of attending college.

Attitudes & Beliefs Related to Family Status

The research findings suggest that being both first-generation and low SES are significant barriers to enrollment for these students. The participants had a strong sense of responsibility to protect themselves and their families from incurring any more financial debt. Their attitudes & beliefs related to taking out loans and the impossible task of paying for college stemmed from their ideals created by people in their social and familial networks; most of whom never attended college. They were reluctant to leave home and attend college because of not only the financial

burden it would place on the family, but also the burden their absence would place within the home. Some of the parents were the eldest child and that came with responsibilities to their younger siblings. They believed that they would be alright without college because their parents were doing just fine. Their low SES status and the attitudes and beliefs that they held as they weighed out the cost of going to college or melting lead them to choose their families over college.

The existing literature supports that being first-generation and from a low SES family contributes to the incidences of summer melt. A primary concern is that students most likely to "melt" are urban, low-income, non-White, and first-generation college students (Rall, 2016). Because of their first-generation status, many participants felt alone, confused, and helpless when it came to navigating through the next steps after being accepted into college. They "didn't know what questions to ask" or they felt like their "questions seem very small for them [counselors]." In most cases, they did not have anyone in their families with college knowledge that could help them navigate. On the other hand, a few participants had at least one close family member who attended college yet still they melted. This ties back to previous theme about encouragement not being enough for these students. Their family members with college knowledge encouraged them to go to college but were not helpful enough with educating them on what to expect next after college acceptance. Although none of the participants expressed a belief that their race played a role in why they melted, most shared feelings related to them being first-generation and/or low SES as contributing factors to them melting. With more sufficient support through each phase of the college enrollment process and less self-inflicted pressure around financially burdening their families while attending college, many of the participants

would have had a more positive outlook on the prospect of attending college and their experiences with summer melt could have been prevented.

Melters' Range of Emotions with Melting

The most profound findings from this research study are centered around the emotions experienced by the participants because of them melting. These very findings provided the answer to the central research question of "How do first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt?" The literature does not support this finding because the literature is void of qualitative research that focuses on how students experience summer melt and specifically how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. The participants experienced a variety of emotions related to their experience with melting. What they said directly and what they said indirectly lead to these findings. Most participants expressed negative emotions about their experiences with summer melt because, for some, they felt like they made the wrong choice and others felt like they failed to meet their goals. A few participants expressed feelings of relief and happiness about their experiences with summer melt because they felt a sense of release from the pressure they were under to attend college.

Understanding how deeply impacted the participants were, who experienced negative emotions around melting, provides a greater insight into why more personalized interventions are needed to prevent these vulnerable populations from experiencing summer melt. What most participants identified as being absent from their college-going processes was one-on-one attention from a school counselor or other person with college knowledge (Poynton et al., 2021). Not having that personalized guidance led to many participants' feelings of sadness, depression, and hopelessness as they witnessed their peers go off to college who, according to some, had more guidance from people in their families, schools, or communities. This feeling of being left

behind, left out, and looked over was common among several participants. However, the findings from the current study do suggest that not all students who experience summer melt associate negative emotions with their experience. A few participants noted that they were "relieved" or that the decision was "100% their decision". This leaves to reason that, although most of the current summer melt literature suggests that students experienced summer melt due to a negative and outside influence, some students intentionally choose to not enroll directly after high school graduation and may even go on to enroll in college later in life. Furthermore, a finding of this nature can only be uncovered through qualitative research which give its participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences with a phenomenon through counterstorytelling as opposed to having their experience or story told for them. This new insight around students who intentionally melt will provide a different and less oppressive narrative on the phenomenon of summer melt.

Implications

To prevent students of low SES from experiencing summer melt, preventative measures such as ensuring connections and collaborations between students, school counselors, and college admissions officers must be taken on the part of their families, school personnel, community members, and the students themselves. A collaborative effort between school counselors and college admissions officers must be established that fosters an environment designed to protect first-generation students of low SES and prevent them from "melting" over the summer. One such collaboration would be a P-16 collaboration that places an emphasis on college and career readiness across all levels and includes a special focus on the transition from twelfth grade to becoming a college freshman and throughout college graduation. A push for continuity and collaboration between levels (elementary, middle, high, college) may seem far-

fetched, but it can be integral when considering prevention/intervention measures for summer melt. Collaboration between P-12 makes it so that students have consistent exposure to and experiences with a variety of postsecondary options. Collaboration between school counselors of college-intending seniors and admissions officers encourages more efficient communication with graduating seniors and eliminates the confusion that comes from misinformation and a lack of access to information including deadlines, online systems, and financial responsibilities (DePaolis-Metz, 2019).

School Counselor Implications

School counselor advocacy can be key to reducing summer melt in first-generation, Black students of low SES. These advocacy efforts can include partnering with college admissions officers and developing summer melt prevention plans. College degree attainment is regarded as a primary solution to reduce poverty and close wealth gaps between people of color and White in the United States (Bryant, 2015). For college-intending students, counselors must view the educational continuum as one that begins in Pre-K and ends upon completion of a baccalaureate or other certifying program. They must advocate for first-generation, Black, college-intending students of low SES so that they can successfully move along the P-16 continuum. However, it must be understood that the ability to advocate for students may not come easy to all counselors (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Part of their pre-service training should focus on when and how to successfully advocate for students. Advocacy cannot be optional for school counselors because what is deemed important to one counselor may not be important to another. This is the reason that clear advocacy guidelines have been made available by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2018).

School counselors must view first-generation, Black students of low SES through a CRT lens. This will increase their ability to be intentional about the interventions they use with or develop for this group of students. The social constructs of race and class in isolation as well as when they intersect, can foster prejudices and stereotypes in the field of education which can create barriers for Black students of low SES including interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Appling & Robinson, 2021). These barriers leave some students in this population left to their own limited devices as they try to navigate the college-going process. Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies guidelines, school counselors can advocate for first-generation students of low SES at the microlevel and the macrolevel. At the microlevel, school counselors can foster student empowerment among this population by sharing resources and tools related to their first-generation status such as a detailed breakdown of what is expected of them over the summer that will better prepare them for college enrollment.

School counselors can also train students to self-advocate so that they can have their needs met. Some of the participants shared about their experiences of failed attempts at soliciting assistance from their school counselors and college admissions officers. Being armed with the ability to self-advocate will enable these students to persevere even when turned away or overlooked by those responsible for assisting them with their college-going processes. This perseverance could consist of the students continuing to schedule appointments to meet with their school counselors or, if necessary, climb the chain of command until they have answers to their questions related to college enrollment. At the macrolevel, school counselors can assist students who are first-generation and low SES through social/political advocacy. At this level, school counselors can identify which college-intending students belong to the community of first-generation college students as well as which students are low SES. The school counselor

can then consult with these students and their parents to determine their level of need and to collaborate with them to find out best way to support them. Lastly, the school counselor can provide information, support, and expertise to this population of students and parents and create alliances with them and with other schools who may have similar supportive programs for first-generation students of low SES.

Students of low SES benefit from early interventions and ongoing exploration opportunities because without the experiences provided in P-12 settings, many of these students would not have the awareness necessary to understand that they too can attend college (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016). The participants in this study noted that both a lack of one-on-one attention from their school counselors and a lack of financial aid were contributing factors to them experiencing summer melt. School counselors often have access to information about a variety of college funding options that are to be shared with their students. When school counselors gather information about scholarships and other financial aid resources for any student, they should have a plan in place to disperse that information to all students who can benefit from it. Again, a tiered intervention geared towards reducing melt rates in first-generation students of low SES requires strategic planning and attention to populations who are most often faced with barriers to college enrollment. Such interventions at the Tier 3 level include individualized academic and career plan advisement, individualized parent/guardian conferences, and small group programming aimed at addressing the needs of first-generation college students. This can help college-intending students of low SES have equal access and increased opportunities in their college admissions process.

Finally, summer melt is often viewed in a negative light. However, a few participants shared feelings of relief and content around their decision to not enroll in college. For this

reason, school counselors should check their biases about summer melt and hold space for those students who are comfortable with their decision to not enroll in college. In cases where students aren't negatively impacted by their experience with summer melt, school counselors can offer other post-secondary options such as vocational programs or the military. These are options may be ones that these students may not have otherwise considered.

College Admissions Officer Implications

The research findings suggest that the preventative measures, aimed at decreasing summer melt, taken by the college were not sufficient for these participants. Colleges took measures such as emailing or sending letters in the mail to invite them to a tour of the college or to tell them about scholarship opportunities. A few participants shared how minimal the college's efforts were in assisting them with and guiding them through the post-college acceptance process. These participants were eager to enroll in college and made attempts to self-advocate by contacting their college admissions officers, but their attempts failed. For them, these failed attempts were a part of a pattern that began in high school when seeking assistance from their school counselors. They felt unseen and unheard which, in turn, caused their road to college to diverge and lead them down a different path which ultimately led to them melting.

First-generation college students rarely have family or friends who can guide them through the steps that have to be taken after high school graduation onto the first day of college. For this reason, like school counselors, college admissions officers must also view these students through a CRT lens when supporting first-generation, Black students of low SES. Looking through a critical lens will assist with college admissions officers with being able to create targeted and more intentional efforts to reach first-generation college students who also identify

as Black and low SES during the summer after their high school graduation. College admissions officers should take advantage of the current summer melt interventions available to target the populations most at risk for summer melt such as chat bots that send automated personalized emails and text message reminders that are individualized to each student (Jaschik, 2017; Panaswich, 2021). These interventions have proven beneficial at decreasing melt rates for this population as evidenced in the text messaging reminder intervention piloted by Georgia State University (Jaschik, 2017; Page & Gelbach, 2017). Summer bridge programs are another intervention that can be accessed through college admissions officers. These summer bridge programs can be used to target first-generation college students and introduce them to college life before the fall semester begins. One participant from the study attended a summer bridge program but only stayed for one week because she felt like was left to fend for herself after arriving to campus. This finding supports the need for more intensive and individualized interventions from the colleges for this population. While attending the summer bridge programs, students can meet with their college admissions officer and establish a sense of connection to the college through participating in mentorship programs. These interventions can ensure that they are on track for enrollment in the fall.

Counselor Educator Implications

Counselor educators ensure that school counselors in training have knowledge of college transition tasks and processes (Tremblay, 2013). Through career counseling courses, counselor educators can impress upon school counselors in training the importance of addressing varying demographics during college and career planning. Understanding that each demographic experiences schooling differently and require varying levels of support will enhance the aspiring school counselor's level of efficacy when engaging with college-intending students from diverse

backgrounds. Counselor educators can also ensure that school counselors in training have a thorough understanding of the college & career readiness needs at each level (elementary, middle, and high). This allows the largest component of the P-16 continuum related to college and career readiness to be cohesive and meaningful for students.

Social Justice Considerations

There are multiple social justice and multicultural concerns within this research because the participants are first-generation, Black students of low SES. A primary concern is that students most likely to "melt" are urban, low-income, non-White, and first-generation college students (Rall, 2016). Preventing summer melt in students of low SES is crucial to their overall academic success in the future. The students are already at a disadvantage due to financial adversity not brought on by themselves. Income status is thought to be the strongest determinant of educational outcomes for students (Papay et al., 2015; Sirin, 2005). More should be done to protect and promote their opportunities for postsecondary certificates, diplomas, and/or degrees as well as a brighter, more sustainable future. This results in more promising futures which can break the generational cycle of low SES statuses in their families.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory is often used to contextualize disparities in educational attainment among educational groups (Cholewa, 2015). Such disparities exist and typically affect marginalized populations. Social capital refers to a student's access to knowledge and resources about postsecondary education relayed through relationships that comprise a student's social network (Acar, 2011; Cholewa, 2015). Students of low SES do not have much social capital which leaves them at a disadvantage when compared to their middle-class peers. Students from

privileged backgrounds have some knowledge of the process of applying to and attending college (Cholewa, 2015). They have seen family members and friends apply to college, get accepted, and have a successful start to their freshmen year or they have at least heard stories of such events. Students of higher SES and/or whose parents have obtained a post-secondary degree(s) may have more social capital due to their increased access to information about college and the college admissions process (Cholewa, 2015).

If students do not have social capital, they are often overlooked or misunderstood as uninterested in gaining the knowledge necessary to successfully enroll in and attend post-secondary schooling. When in fact, these marginalized students with low social capital simply may not have the tools, know the right people to talk to, or have a foundational understanding of the college application process (Castleman & Page, 2014). For a first-generation college student, all these unknowns can prove intimidating and lead to their failure to embark upon the journey to postsecondary education (Ervin, 2016). Students belonging to groups that are underrepresented in higher education may have varying degrees of access to social capital related to the pursuit of postsecondary education within their social network (Cholewa, 2015).

Understanding how social capital impacts students' academic success can be beneficial to educators, families, and community stakeholders in their planning and development of new strategies and plans for improved educational success for all students (Acar, 2011). Each year, schools are tasked with developing school improvement plans. Those in charge of developing these improvement plans spend time identifying existing gaps or disparities in student and school performance. Understanding the phenomenon of summer melt from a social capital theoretical perspective would give great insight into planning focused on reducing/preventing summer melt. The more social capital a student has the higher their potential for educational success. Research

has shown that social capital and school attainment and school achievement are positively linked (Dika & Singh, 2002; Mutawally, 2018). Increasing social capital related to college preparedness and preparation, in students of low SES, entails and integration of family, peer, and school relationships (Crawley, 2019). These relationships require networking between students, parents, and school personnel. Student networking involves a peer-to-peer network among high school students who all share the same focus on enrolling in college. These groups can meet and discuss the pros and cons of their college-going processes and support one another by sharing how they may have handled a similar situation they faced. A parent-to-parent network would involve parents of college students reaching back and supporting parents of college-intending students. Schools send mass emails, text messages, or post flyers on their webpages, but having a parent with college knowledge disseminate that information in a small group can help improve parental engagement and begin to break down barriers that some low SES parents face because they may have limited college knowledge. Finally, networking involving school personnel requires the implementation of a mentorship program where the school's high school alumni who are attending college connect with college-intending students and mentor them by exposing them to college life, meeting with them regularly to address any concerns, and guiding them through the summer to college enrollment (Crawley, 2019).

Collaboration with the Black Church

Another way to address the social justice and multicultural concerns of this research is to collaborate with the local Black churches. Enlisting the help of churches in the community will benefit the students at risk of summer melt. Another protective factor in the Black community is the extended family network (Sue & Sue, 2008, Williams et al., 2017). Students can be referred, by their school counselors, to the local Black churches that provide college and career readiness

programs. For some Black students of low SES, going to their local church after school to participate in their activities may not be an option due to lack of access. They may have parents who work in the evenings leaving them responsible for caring for younger siblings or family members. For this reason, schools may have to provide a space for the church to come to them.

It is one thing to encourage students to participate in their local churches' activities after school, it is another to bring the local church into the school. Bringing the church into the school removes the need for students to stay after school if they are unable to. A recent study conducted on a group of Black students of low SES who participated in a school-church collaboration with a local Black church (McIntosh & Curry, 2020), reported students to be more engaged and more likely to seek out support in areas of academics and college/career planning. The level of confidence and self-pride instilled in these students after receiving support from their local church can increase the likelihood that they will have the tools to successfully navigate through the steps of college enrollment and avoid experiencing summer melt.

Educating Low SES Parents

A final approach that can be taken to address the social justice and multicultural concerns of this research is to educate parents of low SES students on matters related to their children's college-going processes. Parents of students of low SES want what is best for their children's future (Fischer, 2017). They hope for them to graduate high school and have dreams of them graduating from college. Too often, the misconception is that parents of students of low SES; namely Black parents, do not care about their children's future success and are only focused on getting them to finish high school (Huguley et al., 2021; Smith, 2009). This narrative of negligence has been created for them by the very systems and structures designed to portray Black families as lacking interest in their children's education (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015),

especially Black families of low SES. All involved stakeholders should work together to change this cynical narrative and create a new and more accurate narrative that is centered around parents of low SES students being parents who desire a better future for their children than they had for themselves (Huguley et al., 2021; Smith, 2008).

Some strategies that can be used to increase parental involvement for students of low SES include providing workshops on financial aid awareness, promoting communication between parents and college admissions officers (Benson, 2021; Smith, 2008), encouraging collaboration between the parent and their students on college choice and planning, and providing workshops on computer literacy to increase their proficiency with navigating the college's website. When parents of low SES know that the school and the college see value in them and believe that they want what is best for their child, they are more likely to become more engaged in the workshops and other prevention-type measures put in place to decrease the likelihood that their child will "melt" and not enroll in college. What is most important is that parents understand that they are valued and be seen as partners in their child's education (Benson, 2017; Smith, 2009).

Limitations of Study

Several limitations exist with this study. All but one participant resides in the southern region of the United States. This raises the question on whether how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt in other regions across the United States differ from this study's participants. Another limitation is that all the interviews were done using an online platform. This could have factored into a few participants not being fully engaged in the interview which therefore led to responses that lacked depth. A final, and major limitation of this study was the participant recruitment process. Participants were initially recruited using various forms of social media. This method of recruitment brought about hundreds of fake participants

being orchestrated by scammers. This caused quite a delay in the recruitment process because the researcher had to sift through the demographic questionnaires to determine which ones were authentic or fraudulent. In the end, the researcher had to rely on recruiting through snowball sampling and emailing friends and family for assistance with recruiting potential participants. Additional security measures need to be developed to prevent scammers from completing online questionnaires in research.

Recommendations for Future Research

A few recommendations for future research exist because of the findings of this study. First, additional research can be done with other races to determine how their experiences with summer melt are alike or different from that of Black students. Second, this study explored first-generation, Black students of low SES and how they experienced summer melt. Future research could explore Black students of higher SES who experience summer melt and determine why (quantitative) and or how (qualitative) they experience summer melt. It would be interesting to discover whether they feel that their race played a role in them melting considering that they did not have the barriers of being first-generation and low SES. Lastly, future qualitative research on the efficacy of existing summer melt interventions could add to the existing quantitative literature on summer melt interventions. As with this study, a qualitative study on summer melt interventions will highlight the voices of those most greatly impacted by summer melt and provide stakeholders with a better understanding of why some interventions are more effective for certain populations than others.

Chapter Summary

This study provided a deeper insight into how first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt. An overarching message from the participants was that their lack of understanding of how to pay for college was a barrier to their enrollments as was the lack of information about what a college-intending student should expect after high school graduation. Most of the participants expressed negative emotions around not enrolling in college after high school graduation. Their negative emotions included sadness, confusion, depression, and feelings of isolation. A few participants were content with their decision to not enroll because they understood that it was not the right time or the right path for them. They expressed feelings of gladness and relief because they were no longer under pressure to attend college.

Many of the findings were supported by the existing summer melt literature such as being first-generation, non-White, and low SES increasing the risk of summer melt (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman & Page, 2014). Some of the findings will be the beginning of qualitative research related to summer melt including research on Black students of higher SES who experience summer melt and additional qualitative research involving students of other races and how they experience summer melt. The use of Heideggerian phenomenology allowed both an in-depth understanding of how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt and for the researcher to use their own experiences during data analysis in such a way as to enhance the meaning of words used by participants both conspicuously and inconspicuously. The voices of a population most impacted by summer melt have been given the opportunity to be heard by interested stakeholders so that more appropriate summer melt interventions can be implemented with this and potentially other populations. This study's findings have highlighted the voices of melters that fit this demographic and contribute to the current summer melt

literature in such a way as to elucidate how these first-generation, Black students of low SES felt to experience summer melt.

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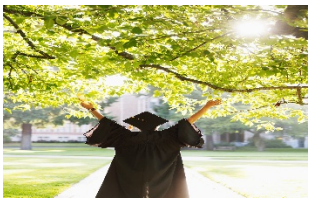
APPENDIX A



Understanding How First-Generation, Black Students of Low SES Experience Summer Melt

Are you 18 years or older?

Have you or had you been accepted into a 2 or 4-year college and considered a first-generation college student, but not enrolled?

Do you identify as Black or African-American?

Did you receive free/reduced lunch in high school?

If so, you would be the perfect candidate to participate in this research project designed to learn more about how first-generation, Black students or low SES experience a phenomenon called summer melt. Summer melt occurs when college-intending students don't enroll in college the fall following high school graduation. This research project aims to understand the experience from your perspective.

Participation in this research study will involve a 45-60 minute interview followed by you reviewing the interview transcript and reviewing of preliminary data results (optional).

Participation in this study is voluntary.

If you will be a first-generation college student, identify as Black or African-American, and received free/reduced lunch in high school, click the following link to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Once the questionnaire is completed, we will contact you to schedule an interview date/time/place. Thank you for your time.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1di8ZeRTM2zqtjVXxpQwxyHH0Uz2ttKdaSIRmK6foJLI/edit

APPENDIX B

Telephone Recruitment Call

Researcher: Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is Lawree Glenn and our team is conducting a research project aimed at understanding how first-generation, Black students or low SES experience summer melt. Summer melt occurs when college-intending students don't enroll in college the fall following high school graduation. The research project aims to understand how it feels to experience summer melt from your perspective. Do you think that you would be interested in participating in this research project?

Potential Participant (example): Yes, I think that this topic is interesting. I would like to participate.

Researcher: Great! Can you please provide us with an email address so that we can send over a demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form for you to complete? The demographic questionnaire will have so items for you to respond to that inform the inform the team that you meet the criteria for the research project. The informed consent form will have information about the research project for you to read and then decided on whether you would like to continue as a participant in the research project. Once I get those documents back, we will call or email you to set up a date/time that works for your schedule to complete the interview. We really appreciate your willingness to participate in the research project and look forward to working with you. Thank you.

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

UNDERSTANDING HOW FIRST-GENERATION, BLACK STUDENTS OF LOW SES EXPERIENCE SUMMER MELT

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: Brandee Appling Co-Investigator: Lawree Glenn

University of Georgia University of Georgia

bappling@uga.edu 225-226-0789 (cell) or

lawree.glenn@uga.edu

We are doing this research study to learn more about how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Summer melt occurs when college-intending students gain acceptance into college but do not enroll in the fall semester following their high school graduation. Our research aims to answer the question: "How have first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt?" We want to know how it felt for you to not enroll in classes this fall.

You are being invited to be in this research study because you will be a first-generation college student who identifies as Black and who received either free or reduced lunch in high school.

If you agree to participate in this study:

• We will collect information about your demographic background and free/reduced lunch status.

• We will ask you to meet in person or via an Zoom. During this meeting, you will be asked questions pertaining to your experience with summer melt. The interview will be recorded and will take about 45-60 minutes.

• We will follow up with the research findings within 2 months by email using the email address you provided.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your right to stop will be respected and will not have any bearing on whether or not you receive the Amazon gift card being offered to participants. We understand that people become uncomfortable at times when being asked personal questions, so please let us know that you wish to stop participating and we will stop asking you questions. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your participation in any future programs.

There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

Your responses may help us understand how it feels to "melt" despite having been accepted and prepared for college. Your participation in this research project allows us to add the findings of this research to the counseling literature. From your experiences, stakeholders can learn new ways to provide support and interventions for others who identify similarly to you.

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally

disclosed to people not connected to the research. There is a limitation of data security that is inherent when using online platforms. To reduce this risk, we will never use your name. You will be asked to provide us with a pseudonym. It is necessary to retain direct identifiers after data collection is complete because the recordings are kept until transcription is complete and the demographic questionnaires collect direct identifiers. We will only keep information that could identify you in a locked file cabinet in my locked home office until the research project is completed. These identifiers will be shredded after data analysis is complete which will take up to one month after all recordings are obtained.

Your information will not be used for future research.

Incentives/compensation for participation

You will receive a $25 Amazon gift card for your participation in this research project. If you should decide to discontinue participation in the research once you have started, you will still receive the gift card with a pro-rated amount. The gift card will be emailed to the email address you provided directly after the interview is completed.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Brandee Appling at bappling@uga.edu or the Co-Investigator, Lawree Glenn at 225-226-0789, lawree.glenn@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____ _____ _____

Name of Researcher Signature Date

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Signature Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

First & Last Name

_____

Email Address

_____

Enter your phone number and the best time of day to contact you (morning, afternoon, evening)

_____

Are you 18 years or older?

o Yes

o No

Do you identify as Black or African-American?

o Yes

o No

Will you be a first-generation college student?

o Yes

o No

Did you receive free or reduced lunch in high school?

o Yes

o No

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Hi. My name is Lawree Glenn, and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of Georgia. We are conducting a research study on how first-generation, Black students of low SES experience summer melt. Summer melt occurs when college-intending students are accepted into college but end up not enrolling in school the fall following their high school graduation. What we are looking to explore specifically are the feelings and emotions you felt when you made the decision to not enroll in college this fall. Please feel free to share your perspective on your own personal experience with summer melt in as much detail as possible.

I appreciate you meeting with me today to talk more about your experience with summer melt. Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you that might allow someone to figure out who you are. Feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer and at any time you may end the interview. I anticipate that the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Though I will be asking you questions, if at any time you have questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask. At this point, do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Interview Protocol

Main Research Question: How have first-generation, Black students of low SES experienced summer melt?

Before we begin the actual interview, I am going to collect some demographic information from you (begin demographic questionnaire).

1. Tell me about who you were as a student (K-12).
    a. What was school like for you?
    b. What were your experiences like with the adults in your schools?

    Probe: What positive experiences did you have with the adults in your schools?
2. Tell me about how you made your decision to attend college.
    a. Was there anyone who was influential in your decision?
3. How did it feel to be accepted into college as a first-generation college student?
4. Who helped you with navigating your college planning?
5. Describe your school counselor's involvement in your college admissions process.
6. Describe your college admissions officer's involvement in your college admissions process.
7. What, if anything, did you need from your school counselor or college admissions officer that you did not get?
8. How did you feel about your decision to not enroll in college this fall?

    Probe: How did your decision impact you (emotionally, socially, psychologically,

relationally)?

9. What role, if any, do you feel being first-generation, Black and from a low SES family played in you not enrolling in college this fall?
    a. How, if it all, did one or more of these identities impact you experiencing summer melt?
10. Have your plans to enroll in college changed? Tell me about your next steps.
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with the college admissions process and your experience with summer melt?
12. Are there any experiences, concerns, or thoughts that we have not discussed regarding your experiences with summer melt?

Again, I really appreciate the time you took to participate in my research project. If I have any follow up questions later, may I contact you again?

Lastly, I want to remind you that you will receive a digital copy of a $25 Amazon gift card to the email address you provided. Please confirm the email address to which you would like to receive the gift cards.