

Forgotten Students in a Transitional Summer: Low-Income Racial/Ethnic Minority Students Experience the Summer Melt

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The summer between high school and college as a point of intervention to help more students successfully transition from the K–12 sector to higher education is gaining notice. This qualitative study builds on recent research on the “summer melt” and offers a fresh perspective of students from an urban Los Angeles public high school who, despite being qualified for and accepted to college, failed to immediately transition to college after high school. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is used to better understand the challenges that college-intending students encounter between high school graduation and successful college matriculation. An emphasis is placed on the challenges faced by low-income racial/ethnic minority students during the summer before college.

Keywords: college transition, college access, low-income, race, transition theory, summer before college

Graduating high school and attending an institution of higher education is a noteworthy accomplishment for any student (Center for Mental Health in Schools, CMHS, 2010). However, the transition from high school to college is not as routine as may be assumed. Notably, low-income urban youth frequently encounter seemingly overwhelming challenges when endeavoring to transition from high school to college (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Low-income and racial/ethnic minority students have historically faced the greatest academic and financial barriers to acquiring access to higher education yet research rarely considers the supplementary resources and skills they need in order to effectively navigate the educational pipeline (Miller, 2006; Welton & Martinez, 2013). Efforts have been made to address such disparities, however, suggested solutions have disproportionately focused on the school and classroom environments (McDonough, 2004; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Furthermore, a considerable amount of the work on improving college access has concentrated on increasing the number of college-ready students as opposed to assisting those students who have already: qualified for, gained acceptance to, and sent letters of commitment to higher education institutions, successfully transition from high school to postsecondary education (Rall, 2014).

A growing body of research demonstrates that many low-income, college-intending high school graduates encounter barriers to college enrollment (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012; Castleman & Page, 2011; Castleman, Page, & Schooley, 2014). College-intending students are described 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 (Castleman & Page, 2011). Although not enormous in number, college-intending students who do not immediately transition to college offer a finite population with which practitioners such as college counselors, can work with in order to impact inequitable college access figures. With the pervasiveness of disparities in college access, every student matters and education practitioners cannot afford to lose students who have already demonstrated the essential skills and initiative for successful college attainment (Rall, 2014).

Some attention is presently given to students who are simply unprepared for college but in large part, college-intending students who do not successfully matriculate to college after high school graduation have been forgotten in the literature. The term “summer melt” describes 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. A better understanding of why these students do not immediately transition

to college may help to not only prevent others from losing their way, but also provide insight that would facilitate the reclamation and reintroduction of these students to the pathway of college completion. The purpose of this study is to investigate the process of college transition for college ready low-income racial/ethnic minority students and elucidate some of the reasons why these college ready students drop out of the educational pipeline before beginning college despite their prior qualification for postsecondary education. This study contributes to current melt research in that although previous studies have identified potential solutions for the summer melt, this article examines the student perspective of the multiple issues and barriers that low-income racial/ethnic minority students encounter, which may complicate and ultimately prevent their successful immediate transition to college.

In this article, emphasis is placed on the transition to college for racial/ethnic minority and low-income students. The context establishing the importance of studying summer melt and describing the basics of the phenomenon is presented first. Then, new lines of thinking about this issue through the application of Schlossberg's Transition Theory are outlined. Finally data and findings from the study of student transitions to college are offered in order to highlight the typically unnoticed perspective of qualified students who do not immediately enroll in college after high school.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

An integral part of the high school experience is how students are prepared to navigate academic, cultural, and social postsecondary expectations (Conley, 2005; Greene & Forster, 2003; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2004). Horn (1997) described the college pipeline as a term which explicates three specific tasks that a student must complete in order to enroll in college: (a) establish aspirations to go to college, (b) complete the academic preparations to be academically qualified for postsecondary education, and (c) take and complete the required entrance exams and applications for college.

Despite completing such preparation, however, it is clear that every college-intending student does not successfully transition to college. Certain groups experience this reality more than others. Race, ethnicity, and social class have been identified as complicating factors in decisions regarding postsecondary education (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; McDonough, 1997; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). For example, the gaps by income and race in college enrollment are extensive (Goldrick-Rab, Carter & Wagner, 2007). First, college and university access continues to be highly correlated with income (Johnstone, 2001). Income status is thought to be the strongest determinant of educational outcomes for students (Sirin, 2005) and low-income students are more likely to postpone college matriculation after high school than their wealthier peers (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005). Second, research has demonstrated a link between race and higher education access (Bowen, 1998; Nettles, Millett, & Einarson, 2001). There appears to be two distinct pathways to higher education, one for Whites and another Blacks and Latinos (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

Despite knowing the inequities of race and income, the importance of higher education for future earnings, social mobility, and the considerable impact access has on families, adequate priority has not been given to the topic of college access (Breneman & Finney, 2001), and more specifically barriers to successful college matriculation. The pressing need to ensure successful and immediate transition to college magnified when current racial and economic disparities are coupled with United States Census Bureau (2015) projections of a major increase in qualified college students. This estimated increase shows that as many as 400,000 more Latino and 200,000 more Black students will be accepted into college by 2015.

While the notion of the summer as a critical time in student education is not new, this intermediary period between high school and college has still only been sparsely researched (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007). Some contend that high schools should "stay late" and assist students in completing key steps to college entry, such as financial aid applications and entrance exams (Tierney et al., 2009) while others support colleges "starting early" to ensure successful transition. The summer melt results when neither of these options is successful in helping students during this critical juncture. While investigated through various means and with diverse recommendations on how to address the learning loss that occurs during the summer, researchers

arrive at the same conclusion—the summer matters for student learning. This idea is also true for college enrollment and the summer between the time students finish their compulsory education and begin their postsecondary education.

Summer Melt

In the summer following high school graduation, a number of college-intending students find themselves to be lacking the essential knowledge, resources, and direction needed for a smooth transition to college (Castleman & Page, 2011). While admission officers acknowledge that a percentage of applicants who intend to go to college will not arrive on campus in the fall (Hoover, 2009), some high school graduates learn firsthand that being admitted to college is not the same as going to college (Arnold et al., 2009). These students fail to enroll, even though they have:

- met all of the requirements for high school graduation,
- gained college admission,
- demonstrated the desire to attend college and
- committed to a postsecondary school (e.g., turned in a deposit).

Disproportionately, the students who learn that the college application, admission, and enrollment processes have vital, yet clandestine steps that must be completed even after “getting in,” 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, 2011).

Many agree that the summer between high school graduation and college matriculation is a critical period for underrepresented students (Arnold et al., 2009). In fact, race and income are highly associated with the immediate transition of students to college (Planty et al., 2009). A key statistic that highlights the inconsistencies in successful transition to college by students who are either low-income, racial/ethnic minority, or both, is the immediate college enrollment rate (ICER). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015) the ICER is the percentage of high school completers in a given year who enroll in two- or four-year colleges by the October immediately after completing high school. The ICER is influenced by family income and race/ethnicity so much so that in each year from 1975 to 2014 this rate was worse for low-income families as compared to high-income families—in 2014 only 52% of low-income students enrolled in college immediately after high school versus 81% of high-income students (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015). Additionally, in 2014 while the ICER of Blacks and Latinos remained relatively unchanged from its 2010 number at 63% and 62% respectively, Asian and White students had ICERs of 85% and 68% respectively. To be clear, the ICER describes *all* students who do not enroll in college immediately after their senior year of high school, not just the students who have qualified for acceptance, applied, and been admitted to college, which is the specific population that the summer melt includes; the focus of this study is on the issue of access for this population of college-ready high school completers.

The rationales of why students do not immediately transition to college are broad. Some scholars categorize it as a changing of the mind—students forfeit their college deposits at one school and go to a different institution in the fall (Arnold et al., 2009). Research has shown that anywhere between 10% and 40% of college-bound, low-income students reconsider matriculation choices (e.g., switch from a four-year institution to a two-year college) during the summer after high school graduation for a variety of reasons (Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012). Other researchers have cited: financial constraints, difficulty understanding or obtaining information, limited access to resources, failure to complete paperwork, struggles with relationships (family and peer), lack of knowledge, and inadequate guidance through the transitional period (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012; Castleman & Page, 2011; Hoover, 2009; Miller, 2006) as explanations for student melt.

Using applicants to ACCESS College Foundation’s Last Dollar Scholarship (<http://www.accesscollege.org/last-dollar-scholarship-information>) and the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002, Castleman and Page (2011) used linear probability models to

investigate whether college-intending students matriculate to college directly after high school graduation and if they enroll at an institution of their choice. The authors randomly assigned summer counseling to 927 high school graduates chosen from 42 schools in the Boston area. The primary result of the study was that summer counseling had a strong and positive influence on on-time college enrollment; those students who received counseling were 4.1% more likely to attend college in the fall. The ACCESS sample was categorized as high school completers, financial aid applicants, highly college-intending and scholarship applicants. The ELS data follow a nationally representative sample of students transitioning from high school to college or from high school to the workforce. The authors found that 18-22% of the ACCESS sample and 10-15% of the ELS sample failed to matriculate at any college in the fall after their senior year of high school (Castleman & Page, 2011). Of these samples, those students who indicated they planned to enroll in two-year institutions had melt rates as high as 40%.

Using data from seven urban high schools, college/transition counselor interaction logs, and the National Student Clearinghouse to inform their regression analysis, Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman (2012) found that having counselors work with low-income students in the summer after high school led to not only higher enrollment rates in the fall, but also higher quality enrollment (enrollment in four-year rather than two-year institutions). Students who worked with counselors (treatment group) showed a 14 percentage point increase in college enrollment. Furthermore, 47% of students in the treatment group enrolled in college full time and 41% enrolled in four-year schools, versus 32% and 26% of the control group respectively. Students who received counselor intervention were also more likely to keep their pre-graduation college plans compared to those students who did not work with the counselor. The data gathered from content analysis of the counselor logs align with the idea that counselors are able to make a positive difference in the lives of these students' college plans and matriculation.

In their qualitative study focused on summer college planning for 500 low-income high school graduates who had already been accepted to college, Arnold and colleagues (2009) found that by the end of the summer of their senior years

- only 30% of students kept their fall enrollment plans without significant wavering,
- 15% of students enrolled in their intended college after considerable deliberation,
- 25% of students decided to change institutions,
- 15% of students moved between four-year institutions and community colleges, and
- 15% of students decided not to enroll in college.

A possible indicator of these findings can be seen in the research by Castleman, Page, and Schooley (2014), which found that college-intending high school graduates respond positively to summer counseling or Hoover (2009), which highlights ways some institutions seek to engage students during this "forgotten summer" including: phone calls from admissions offices, emails from admissions counselors, and the overall sentiment of keeping students excited.

Adequate guidance and support is vital for high school students wanting to go to college (McDonough, 2005). As presented earlier, current melt research suggests that intervention during the summer can yield positive outcomes in college enrollment (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012; Castleman & Page, 2011; Castleman, Page, & Schooley, 2014). However, more needs to be known about why these college-intending students waver and encounter difficulties before college enrollment. Moreover, counseling and financial aid alone may not be sufficient to help college-bound students successfully transition to college (Orfield, 1992). To that end, an applicable theoretical frame that has yet to be considered in the research on summer melting is introduced.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Student development plays a crucial role in the changes students face in life (Evans et al., 2009). Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a useful model to apply to transitions such as entering college. Transition theory typically describes an understanding of adults in transition as they deal with the

extraordinary and mundane aspects of everyday living, but it is also applicable to individuals of all ages (Evans et al., 2009). Transition theory offers insights into the factors related to the specifics of the individual in transition, the transition itself, and the environment in which the transition takes place. This theory can be linked to educational outcomes through the provision of vital information required to create effective supports at the institutional level (Evans et al., 2009) and gives information needed to create institutional supports that can be used for later use in life (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002).

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) describe a transition as “any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). Transitions bring about various changes in the individual’s self-perception or worldview that causes new behavioral patterns (Schlossberg, 1981). A transition is defined by the person who experiences it and that individual’s perception of the transition is more important than the transition itself (Schlossberg, 1981). Some transitions are brought about by conscious decisions by the individual while other changes are pushed upon the individual by other people or circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981). Three factors affect an individual’s ability to adapt during a transition: (a) characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments, (b) characteristics of the individual, and (c) the individual’s perception of the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

As applied to the summer melt, high school is the pre-transition environment while college is the post-transition environment. An individual’s environment is comprised of interpersonal and institutional relationships as well as a physical setting. Schlossberg (1981) noted that interpersonal (e.g., networks of friends, intimate relationships, and family units) and institutional (e.g., community groups, religious institutions, and school organizations) support systems are necessary for successful adaptation. The physical setting can include living arrangements, place of employment, weather, rural/urban location, and so forth (Schlossberg, 1981). Examples of individual characteristics that influence adaptation after high school graduation are college academic readiness, low-income status, race, gender, and interpersonal support.

Schlossberg (1989) outlined four major factors that influence a person’s ability to cope in transition—the 4 S’s (situation, self, support, and strategies). Chickering and Schlossberg (1998) describe the 4 S’s as a “taking stock” process which involves determining an individual’s resources. “Situation” describes the impetus, timing, and person’s views of the transition (e.g., as positive or negative, expected or unexpected, voluntary or imposed, etc.; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1998; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1989, 1990). Control and choice are key concepts to consider within the situation (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). “Self” encompasses the prior experience of the individual, personal demographic characteristics, as well as the strengths and weaknesses the individual brings to the transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1998; Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). “Support” includes all of “. . . the people, institutions, things, and abstract concepts such as faith and spirituality that feel supportive to an individual” (Goodman & Anderson, p. 14). The support variable describes the type, function and level available during the transition (Schlossberg, 1990). Finally, “strategies” describe the approaches to, disposition during, and types of coping an individual has in dealing with transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990). Strategies fall into three categories: “those that change the situation, those that change the meaning of the situation, and those that manage the stress of the transition” (Goodman & Anderson, p. 15).

Transitioning individuals are influenced by numerous characteristics, and different variables have different impacts depending on who is transitioning and the type of transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Although some transition challenges are universal for students, there are still questions as to why some individuals adapt more easily to a transition than others.

Individuals adapt to change in different ways (Schlossberg, 1981). While education research on minority communities is often approached from a deficit perspective, counternarratives do exist (Noguera, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Toldson, 2008). Schlossberg’s Transition Theory takes a holistic approach to also consider the strengths and assets of the individual who is in transition. This is an important distinction because how people adapt to life transitions depends on how they perceive the sense of balance of their assets and deficits (Schlossberg, 1981). Moreover, Schlossberg

put forth that characteristics of an individual such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature all impact adaptation during transition. For example, higher stress levels may be associated with lower-income levels. When faced with the task to come up with additional funds to attend college over the summer, lower-income students may find the adaptation more difficult to navigate than their wealthier peers due to various restrictions of income, space, energy, and ideas for coping (Schlossberg, 1981).

Cultural perspectives propose that many historically underrepresented students face challenges in school that make it difficult for them to navigate usage of their school's resources (McAdoo, 2002). For example, Malone and Barabino (2009) have shown that the racialized environment within certain academic settings can be destructive because it is connected to the exclusion of students from key educational resources and experiences. If an individual's racial/ethnic background is more isolated (in this case, less represented in the pool of qualified applicants for higher education), that person will probably have more difficulty successfully making the transition. Schlossberg's theory considers not only perceived hindrances but also assets racial/ethnic minority students use to navigate the educational pipeline. If for example, a student's racial/ethnic background emphasizes extended family, as is the case with communities of color (Yosso, 2005), that student will probably have more interpersonal support to aid in adaptation (Schlossberg, 1981). According to Schlossberg, the ease of adjustment to a transition depends on the balance of deficits (what may inhibit the successful transition) to resources (what may facilitate successful transition).

The application of Schlossberg's theory to the study of summer melt is intended to aid in improving interventions during the summer so that ultimately the number of students who successfully transition to college is increased.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Given the need to capture students' accounts of the obstacles they face and the decisions they make during the summer between high school and college, this study applies a qualitative approach. In particular, the instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was used to investigate whether a small group of high school seniors in a Los Angeles high school successfully managed the transition from high school to college. Both the high school and the high school students were given pseudonyms. An instrumental case study involves using a typical case that facilitates the translation of findings across similar contexts (Stake, 1995). Specifically, a two-stage sampling approach in which first the school, and then the students within the school were selected, was used. As research on summer melt is merely beginning to burgeon, a thorough, holistic understanding of a small group of participants is a desirable format for uncovering nuance and complexity. Additionally, an instrumental case study design allows for findings to be useful to other researchers and practitioners interested in addressing summer melt. An emphasis was placed on follow up with each participant who melted as an individual case nested within the larger group of participants that initially completed the survey (Stake, 1995). This nested case study design facilitates drawing conclusions not only about individual student experiences but also about patterns that may be present in the larger group of seniors.

Although case study traditionally applies other data collection techniques, interviews were the focus of this research. The data for this article are derived from a study designed to explore the barriers to successful immediate college transition in college-intending high school graduates. In effort to examine how low-income racial/ethnic minority students encounter these barriers, the analysis focused on data from two phases of research. During the first phase of the project, survey data were collected from graduating seniors. Twenty-five open ended questions were posed to assess the following areas: post high school plans, high school resources used (e.g., college office), and financial aid or scholarship eligibility and application status. Survey data were used to identify melters; survey responses to postsecondary plans were compared to follow up responses in the fall of 2012. Those students who listed postsecondary plans on the survey, yet expressed they were not attending college in the fall were classified as melters. During the second phase of the project, follow up with survey respondents between May and September 2012 was conducted to better understand the factors that caused some students to change or delay their post-high school academic plans.

Participant Demographics

Liberty Heights High School, the research site, was selected based on a prior established working relationship with the college counselor in tandem with research on student demographics of high schools in the Los Angeles area. The school had a high number of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch and was predominantly composed of racial/ethnic minority students. According to 2009 and 2010 state data, the Liberty Heights High School student body was comprised of approximately 90% Black and Latino students. A goal of the school is to graduate self-directed students who are prepared for college and will contribute to society. With the help of the college counselor at the site, seniors were identified during their final semester of high school as study participants.

The participants in this study were drawn from a larger group of students who completed an end of the year senior survey. The survey was created by the high school staff and this was the third year it was used at Liberty Heights. Prior versions of the survey were reviewed and edited by high school staff and staff at a local partnering university. Survey information (including participant contact information) was provided for the principal investigator. The students completed the survey online and the responses were accessed by a distinct username and password for the school and the year of graduation for the senior class. In June 2012, two hundred forty-four (244) students graduated Liberty Heights. Of these, 124 students, or approximately 51%, completed the survey, which included items such as college plans, time spent in the advising center and whether or not the students received college scholarships.

Follow up with 116 (94%) of the survey respondents occurred from May to September of 2012 through email, Facebook, phone, and in person. The goal was to understand those aspects that hinder or propel students' college matriculation at two check points—first, in the initial few weeks after high school graduation and second, after the students have either enrolled (or not enrolled) in college in the fall. The two time points were used in recognition that even late into the summer, student plans are changing. Additionally, the later September check-in was intentional to allow all students who were going to college to have an opportunity to start classes (e.g., those on a quarter system with later start dates).

The research presented in this study is the result of interviews with the ten students who ultimately did not enroll in college after graduating high school from the 116 students who responded to survey follow up. These students were selected to participate in interviews based strictly on their post-high school graduation responses in late summer and early fall that they would not be attending college that fall. Student voices are incorporated in order to illustrate the real-life consequences of summer melt. Table 1 provides a summary of the types of colleges the students planned to attend as of June 2012 and Table 2 provides a summary of the types of colleges in which the students had started taking classes as of September 2012.

Table 1

Post-Graduation Plans: Initial Survey Free Response (N = 116)

School Type	Number of Students
University of California (UC)	18
California State University (CSU)	42
California Community College (CCC)	31
Private	13
Vocational	9
Unknown	2
The United States Marine Corps	1
Total Responses	116

Table 2*Post-Graduation Plans: Fall Follow-Up (N = 116)*

School Type	Number of Students
University of California (UC)	17
California State University (CSU)	37
California Community College (CCC)	31
Private	11
Vocational	10
Did not Enroll (melted)	10
Total Responses	116

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Of the final sample of ten melters, seven students switched their intended school (five changed from a four-year institution to a community college). Table 3 reveals that of the ten students (approximately 8.6% of the sample) who did not enroll in college that fall from Liberty Heights, three had planned on attending a California State University (CSU), one had planned on attending a private liberal arts school in southern California, one initially reported plans to attend a vocational school, two had planned on attending community college, two had initially responded that they were undecided (though they had multiple acceptances) and one student had initially indicated she would enroll in the United States Marine Corps (although she had applied and been accepted to college). Each of the 10 participants of the study indicated that they were eligible for federal financial aid and had filled out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid, <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>). When asked how often they visited the college office within Liberty Heights, 4 responded regularly (almost every day), 5 responded sometimes (2-4 times a month) and one responded never. Of the melters, 6 were female and 4 were male and 8 were Latino while 2 were Black.

Table 3*Post-Graduation Plans of Melters in the Sample*

Intended Plan	Number of Students
California Community College (CCC)	2
California State University (CSU)	3
Vocational School	1
Private	1
Undecided (Had not committed to one school over another)	2
United States Marine Corps	1

Note. Despite their graduation plans, all students had been accepted to at least one postsecondary institution.

Those students who melted demonstrated one overarching reason for not beginning college—lack of college knowledge with five subcategories: (a) financial struggles, (b) failure to meet requirements, (c) inability to obtain the classes wanted/needed, (d) inadequate support, and (e) unclear communication. In summarizing the literature on summer melt in conjunction with the study described, the categories are presented through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Transition theory is appropriate as college non-attendance of students represents a nonevent—something the students wanted and expected, but did not happen (Schlossberg, 2011). In this case, a nonevent describes the situation when a high school graduate expects to go to college, but does not successfully transition to an institution of higher education despite having prepared to do so. For

example, while some Black and Latino students who attend urban schools may possess the aspiration and expectation to attend college, sometimes these plans do not come to fruition (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). These students involuntarily transition into the state of guidance isolation. The effects of this transition are detrimental because according to Schlossberg (1981), choices unknowingly pushed upon an individual make adaptation more difficult. Moreover melting fits into three of the four classifications for nonevents—(a) personal (tied to the individual desire to go to college), (b) resultant (caused by the abrupt removal of key resources at the same time they graduated), and (c) delayed (as the interview participants expressed that they still plan to try to take college classes at a later time).

Reasons for the Summer Melt

Schlossberg (1981) views high school graduation as an “obvious” life change. Literature, however, supports the idea that the transition to college is not equally obvious. Based on Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, the difficulty melters face in the summer could be due to the juxtaposition of an anticipated and an unanticipated transition. Anticipated transitions encompass those events that are usually expected such as high school graduations while unanticipated transitions describe unexpected, oftentimes disruptive events such as an accident or illness (Schlossberg, 2011). At the same time they experience the predicted transition of high school graduation, the students find themselves without guidance from high school or college personnel—a shift they did not predict. Examination of the transition these students fail to make requires analysis of both internal and external issues (Schlossberg, 1981). One particular student voice predominates the findings because her experience incorporated pieces of all of the various reasons for the melt. I use her voice, supplemented with the voices of a few of the other melters to provide a sense of what the broken transition to college was like for the ten melters in the sample.

Limited college knowledge. The major reason for student melt is the lack of college knowledge. The problem of summer melting is not about academic preparation or higher education goals, it is about “aligning aspirations, knowledge, relationships, and resources so that students receive a necessary escort into the opportunity they have prepared for, sought, and won” (Arnold et al., 2009, p. 32). Some research has demonstrated that marginalized communities are disconnected from vital information for college preparation (Dumais & Ward, 2010; McDonough, 1997). Hooker and Brand (2010) described this knowledge as:

Meaning that students have an understanding of the complex college admission and selection processes, the options available to help pay for postsecondary education, the academic requirements for college-level work, and the cultural differences between secondary and postsecondary education. (p.77)

The students who melt and those closest to them are unaware of or unclear about such knowledge. They do not completely grasp, or have not been provided with the academic and logistical requirements to navigate the move from high school to college.

As mentioned before, “self” (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1989, 1990) defines the individual’s strengths and weaknesses that are brought into the transition. The lack of college knowledge was a limitation for students in this study. The overwhelming majority of Liberty Heights’ students who completed the survey said they frequented the college office and met with college counselors at their high school, yet many of them still were ill-informed. They had no way to assess how different their pre- and post-transition environments would be (Schlossberg, 1981). Students need to understand and cope with a number of transitions, and receive support during the move from high school to college (Evans et al., 2009).

Financial struggles. Lower-income students are more susceptible to financial challenges of college matriculation than those students in families with greater incomes; limited finances pose increased difficulty and even crisis during transition (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, the college financial process is complicated by the fact that many low-income students cannot anticipate their

financial situation nine months in advance as currently required by application forms (Orfield, 1992). One low-income, female student, Sterlace, who was planning to attend a private liberal arts college in southern California experiences this firsthand. She comments in the midsummer:

I may not be able to attend [College] this year since the whole tax process has to be cleaned up. In order for my mother to apply for a TIN number and redo her tax[s] would take time and therefore would mean I would need to start college until next year. I hope that I won't have to be put back by a year but it's better than not attending college at all.

The TIN (Tax Identification Number) is issued by the Internal Revenue Service to individuals regardless of immigration status, who are not eligible to obtain or do not have a Social Security Number. Sterlace thought she was all set for college and even had selected a major, registered for classes, been assigned a dorm, attended freshmen orientation, and met her assigned roommate, before she was notified that some of her financial aid paperwork that was based on her mother's status would prevent her from enrolling. This is a student who noted that she was accepted to four CSUs, three UCs and three other private universities including Wellesley. I mention Wellesley by name to demonstrate that her potential for college was recognized outside of her home state and that she was accepted to one of the top liberal arts colleges in the nation but still was not able to immediately transition to college.

Students are not just influenced during this time by external factors. Schlossberg (1981) posited that all people have an internal social timer by which they evaluate whether their transitions are on-time or off-time. Sterlace provides an example of Schlossberg's taking stock of one's "situation" as she perceived her transition as off schedule. Any transition that is perceived to be asynchronous carries both psychological and social penalties for the individual. Students who melt may be left to deal with the mental as well as social consequences of not attending college with their peers. When asked how she was notified of the change in her enrollment status Sterlace replies:

Initially [the school] had already received the taxes and all that and they thought the situation was that I was still living with my dad and my mom but I had already told them that my dad was not living with us as of now. Then she said 'ok, well we won't look at your dad's taxes but we'll look at your mom's.' And then all I had to do was get the transcripts but then they saw that my mom's taxes didn't have the TIN number, or the right number we would say . . . that's when the whole charade of having to have to defer for a whole year came into the conversation . . . and that was on a Monday.

She was scheduled to start school two days later. Schlossberg (1981) argued that sudden, unexpected changes, with no certain end complicate transitions. Sterlace experiences all three of these complications. Instead of experiencing her first year in college, she volunteers at her former high school three days a week and plans to take two courses at the local community college in hopes that she will be able to enroll at the desired liberal arts institution next fall.

Failure to meet requirements. Financial aid is just one dimension of the complicated process of college access (Orfield, 1992). A male student who intends to major in biological sciences, Jesus, notes that it was invaluable college knowledge that prevented him from enrolling:

I let one of my grades slip in the second semester. I didn't know I would not be able to enroll because of that. I thought I was ready to go. Then I just found out 2 weeks ago that it was a condition of my enrollment. I didn't apply to any other schools, so I guess I'm out of luck. No one told me about this and I didn't know I was supposed to do anything else after I was accepted.

Jesus simply did not know about the final conditions for his admission until it was too late. With transition theory, "self" takes into consideration whether the individual believes there are options within the situation. At this point in the summer, Jesus did not believe he had any options to continue with his education plans. He did not have any back up schools because he thought his admission and

enrollment were already solidified. He found out his status at the school in early August. He says he may get a job and will try to enroll in school next year, but he is not sure where.

Sterlace highlights the lack of knowledge she and her mother had about tax forms:

. . . in all honesty it was the first time that my mom ever did taxes but even if she did . . . she did ask the tax lawyer for a TIN number but he ended up saying no, you don't need that. Like I didn't know for instance that the TIN number was supposed to start with a 9 and I assumed that maybe she had already gotten her TIN or whatever. So it's just more of the technical tax thing that it has to do with because if that number had been the TIN or had it been resolved . . . because everything got too technical this year with the financial aid policy. Numbers have to match.

Another student, Rebecca, states:

I haven't started school. I missed my summer classes, but I want to start school . . . Yeah I was supposed to be at [a four-year college in the area] . . . I was a day late of signing up for the classes . . .

While there were parts of the transition that students controlled themselves (e.g., missing summer classes), others parts were imposed. Each of the students expressed that not having pivotal information or receiving that information too late contributed to their delay in college attendance. They mention that they simply do not know or are not informed about the occurrence or gravity of certain requirements that occurred after they were already accepted. Taking stock of "self" according to transition theory takes into consideration the previous experiences of the individual. Many of the students in this study come from families in which they are the first to go to college which makes it so they often do not have the experience with or knowledge of the specific conditions of the summer between high school and college.

Inability to obtain the classes wanted/needed. Another student, Maria, is not able to obtain the classes she needs to be a full-time student. She says:

I decided to start next semester because I was too late to get my classes and since I didn't get a high score on the placement test for English I couldn't get the classes I needed to be a full time student and I need to take another part of the math placement test. I might be going to [community college], but that's going to be hard since they don't have what I want to major in.

Maria wants to major in dance but is not sure of the requirements for the major. She originally was supposed to go to one particular community college but is now considering other community college options. When asked how she might find out about the requirements of her intended major, she is unsure of the resources at her disposal.

While she wants to start school, Rebecca is not sure of how to make her enrollment a reality. She asks, "Do you think I can start in the winter or spring? I've applied to a few places. No luck though."

When asked in October if she had started the community college classes she planned on taking, Sterlace responds, "Um, I'm going to do it in the spring because by the time I found out I wasn't going to [college] in the fall, the classes were full."

When speaking of his future school plans Jesus mentions:

Um right now I'm just planning to get a job, so I'll have something to do this semester. When the next one starts I'mma attend [2 local community colleges] at the same time so I can make up the lost time. But for [one community college] I'm only going to take a class on Saturdays. I'm going to take 4 courses at [the other community college] when semester begins . . . my goal is to transfer to [a Cal State or a UC] if possible.

These students are unaware of how difficult getting transferable classes at community colleges and transferring to a four-year institution can be for low-income racial/ethnic minority students in California. They do not know that many inequities in educational attainment may derive from the likelihood that low-income and racial/ethnic minority students will attend community college rather

than four-year universities. They are unaware that community colleges have not served as a gateway to bachelor's degree attainment for many low-income racial/ethnic minority students (Arbona & Nora, 2007). In taking stock of "strategies," the students will need to manage their reactions to the stress of the transition and remain flexible (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1998; Schlossberg, 1990). These qualified college-intending students are forced to spend a semester (maybe more) away from the seats they had earned in the lecture halls while clinging to the hope of enrolling in classes that may never be available.

Inadequate support. Difficulty finding key institutional support complicates successful transition (Schlossberg, 1981). "Support" (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1998; Schlossberg, 1990) describes sources of support available to the student in transition. This support can come from family members, friends, or the school and can be positive (helpful) or negative (detrimental). Even when transitioning individuals are able to locate and contact staff members, these personnel are generally unable to efficaciously provide the institutional support and guidance (Schlossberg, 1981). This was the experience of some of the melters interviewed for this study. They had questions about who to contact regarding their enrollment status and options for future matriculation. When asked about what he did after he was notified of his GPA error, Jesus said, "I had one of my counselors check it but I guess they checked it based on the graduation requirements for my high school and not the requirements for the university." He assumes the high school counselor he contacted knew what needed to be done on his behalf. He was misled (even if innocuously so) by a resource he believed would be able to help him and suffered for the counselor's error in the GPA calculation.

Sterlace may have relied on an ineffective resource to help her transition to college. When asked about who she contacted to try and find out the specifics of her potential matriculation interruption she explains:

I also talked to someone from one of my programs . . . she was my counselor . . . she was kind of like the mediator to talk about the technical stuff and what I could do if I do end up leaving from [intended school] and want to come back . . . I was always in contact with [the extracurricular program] but I just sent an email to the financial aid office [at the intended school] to tell them that I want to accept the deferment but they still haven't replied.

In addition to the relationship with the individual outside of school, she also talks about her mom as someone who may help her situation, "Yes as of right now I have been talking with them to see if there is any way I can clean all this. Tomorrow I will have a meeting with my mother and [extracurricular contact] to see what can be done to have me return as soon as possible."

Sterlace attempts to make contact with individuals she thinks can help her. Instead of establishing a firm relationship with personnel at her intended college or working to maintain relationships with individuals at her high school, Sterlace depends on a non-school affiliated counselor from a program which may or may not have the influence to provide assistance in her situation and her non-English speaking mother who did not go to college.

Transition often results in new relationships and networks (Schlossberg, 1981). For melters, however, these new relationships are neither initiated nor solidified prior to the relinquishing of old relationships; these students lose access to key high school personnel (e.g., counselors) before establishing a working relationship with influential college personnel (e.g., admissions officer, advisor, etc.). Individuals such as college counselors are often the principal purveyors of college-going cultures in high schools (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Corwin et al., 2004; Venegas, 2007) and various studies examining the complexities of college access for Black and Latino students indicate the importance of school personnel in providing information and support for students (Martinez & Cervera, 2012). The amount of support available to the students who melt in the summer depends to some extent on their social supports.

Students' school support networks are not the only relationships compromised in the summer after high school graduation. Friend and family relationships face potential disruption during this

pivotal time. Schlossberg (1981) noted that interpersonal (e.g., networks of friends, intimate relationships, family units) and institutional (e.g., community groups, religious institutions, school organizations) support systems are necessary for successful adaptation. An individual's environment is comprised of interpersonal and institutional relationships as well as a physical setting. These relationships can positively or adversely affect student transition to college. Loss of relationships, the impact of graduation and possible relocation present additional challenges during the transition of these students (Evans et al., 2009).

Unclear/(mis) communication. If students in this study were able to establish a contact with staff that could help them with their college enrollment, there was often miscommunication. Sterlace talks about how she wishes the personnel at her intended university would have been more direct in what they needed from her:

Well, when I was already in the office, [they] could have sent an email directly that said you needed to fix this specific problem not just a general message . . . about the taxes . . . What about the taxes? Or what about the financial aid do I have to clear up? . . . I'm not sure why they waited to tell me [I wouldn't be able to enroll] but for one thing I contacted them but I think they assumed that I wasn't going to know what they were going to talk about. . .

As the first person in her family to go to college Sterlace does not have prior experience with the requirements she needs to fulfill even after she had already been accepted. She responds to the information the best way she knows how but feels the requests from the school were neither specific nor timely enough for her to take the necessary steps that would allow her to start college on time.

Jesus replies:

Well currently I'm not attending school right now because the university I planned to attend notif[ied] me late that I couldn't attend, therefore I didn't have any backup schools, so I'm not going to attend til next semester or winter, at [one of two local community colleges].

He continues:

Well apparently I got provisional acceptance based on the GPA and SAT I put on my application . . . This was okay based on the eligibility index they had, but once they reviewed it good they told me on August 16 that my GPA wasn't 2.8 but in fact it was 2.73 and based on the eligibility it wasn't high enough therefore I got rejected.

Even if these students were still unable to attend their intended college because of certain requirements, had they been notified earlier and in a more direct fashion, they might have had more options available to them. When change happens unexpectedly, preparation to deal with the change is not possible (Schlossberg, 1981).

Taken together, the students provide a glimpse of some of the obstacles students face when trying to attend college. When deficits outweigh resources, adaptation is more challenging. The students deal with a number of issues that may have been avoided or remedied with some initiation of effective instruction, intervention, and follow-up. As this is only one small study, it is worth further investigation to understand why non-dominant groups (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009) melt more than other groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There are seven key acknowledgments from the literature that make this a compelling area for research:

- All students who say they are going to go to college, are not going
- The students more likely to "melt" are: urban, low-income, non-white, first generation college students (the demographics with steadily increasing numbers and potential human capital for the nation)

- Delayed enrollment is a risk for student dropout in college
- Having a college degree has greater returns for students
- Low-income students enroll in and complete college at significantly lower rates than their wealthier peers
- Students “melt” for a variety of reasons: struggles with relationships, resources, lack of knowledge (family instability, inadequate support, peer relationships, finances, mixed, confusing or unfriendly signals about admission, housing or financial aid)
- Students oftentimes need access to accurate and sustained academic guidance over the summer yet programs are rare in the summer after senior year (and some of them are financially difficult).

Based on these considerations and the data provided in this text, advancing scholarship around student melting should focus on four key areas: (a) specific and thorough explication of why these students do not go to college, (b) what these students do in lieu of going to college, (c) whether any of these students go to college at a later time (as early as the spring semester following their graduation) and if so, at what rate?, and (d) extended studies that outline intervention methods to reduce the number of “melters.”

Because the transition to college for non-dominant and dominant groups is different (Andrade, 2006), research may also expand the investigation to ways in which race, ethnicity, income, and culture affect the transition to college (Rall, 2014). While most efforts to admit and retain racial/ethnic minority students in U.S. postsecondary education take place on college campuses, there are other means to think about how to prepare racial/ethnic minority students for collegiate success that oftentimes begin even prior to their arrival on campus (Tierney, 1999). For example, the examination of the transition to college has not used a critical approach which presents issues of race, gender, and SES (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007). Rucker and Gendrin (2003), for example, argued that race is a defining determinant of social interactions in academic settings while Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2005) stressed the importance of the influence of cultural diversity on coping with transitions. Further research has not investigated the ways in which agents outside of the school including family, friends, or personnel of extracurricular programs may be used as reservoirs of knowledge and support for students during the summer.

The purpose of this study was to elucidate the melt experience of low-income racial/ethnic minority students. While stopping short of making specific recommendations on how to improve equity in higher education access, the findings, and theoretical application provided suggest and direct further analysis of access (and melt) data so that practitioners can effectively address the role they play in perpetuating inequitable and unequal gaps in higher education access, particularly for those students who have already demonstrated an ability to attend. I conclude solely with implications for research because it is imperative to better understand the influential factors involved in the student transition to college, how this change impacts students, and how practitioners might apply the learned knowledge to better facilitate student transition to postsecondary education prior to program implementation.

As evidenced by the research presented, current scholarship pertaining to summer melt can be advanced in two key areas: (a) addition of the student centered perspective (including the outlook of students who actually melted) and (b) intervention prospects that target the students’ communities.

A Student-Centered Perspective

The current literature surrounding the summer melt focuses on the role counselors have in stemming the summer melt. A student-centered perspective, as introduced, allows students to share in their own words the challenges and triumphs to college matriculation, would prove useful. I do not wish to diminish the vital role that high school and even college personnel can play in helping students matriculate to college. Colleges and high schools should assist students in completing key steps to college entry such as financial aid applications and entrance exams (Tierney et al., 2009). However, it is important that the stories of the students are shared so that it can be determined if the students’ perspectives of what helps/hinders them to enroll in college aligns with that of the reports of the researchers. Extending from this point, it may prove beneficial to follow those students who melt for

at least one year after they were supposed to enroll in college in order to better understand what college-intending students who do not go to college do during the first year after high school graduation and whether (and when) they eventually enroll in postsecondary education. Not enough research focuses on students who drop out of the college-going process (Orfield, 1992) and additional studies in this area may expand the focus on retention to one of reclamation.

Intervention Focused on the Community

When thinking of students who either never utilize school resources for college or those who prioritize other relationships over school-based personnel, it may prove informative to investigate the opportunities for intervention outside of the school environment. For instance, intervention may start with the community in which these students live due to the importance of family to racial/ethnic minority students. Roderick and colleagues (2009) assert that the academic qualifications of students could not change the fact that they were the product of environments that were less able to provide them with the information and understanding to navigate the college admissions process. Recognizing the strength of neighborhood and family effects on student opportunities for success (Nettles, Caughy, & O'Campo, 2008) future study could target both the neighborhoods and families of these students in effort to better understand why they "melt."

A better understanding of summer melting is important because strategies for melt-reduction may yield promising investments in retention (Hoover, 2009) and despite commonly held assumptions that those high school seniors who send deposits to a particular college by a certain deadline will immediately begin classes at that college in the fall after their senior year, this is not the case for all students (Arnold et al., 2009). Overwhelmingly, such is not the case for low-income racial/ethnic minority students (Castleman & Page, 2011). However, it appears that intervention over the summer months demonstrates potential for reducing the melt (Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012; Castleman & Page, 2011; Castleman, Page, & Schooley, 2014). We cannot however, only focus on those students who do ultimately start college on-time. It is just as important to monitor the trajectory of those students who melt as that of students who successfully enroll in college. These students may be able to attain college attendance in the future but presently their college future is uncertain.

The application of Schlossberg's Transition Theory offers a vehicle for educating practitioners about the summer melt and the challenges students encounter during this pivotal summer. The transition framework can be a useful strategy in assessing and creating a counseling plan for students, preparing for transition (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). Specific attention to better understanding college-intending students in transition to college and the interventions (be they emotional, academic, interpersonal, etc.) should be augmented. Thoughtful, intentional, and sustained attention and action in this area can be useful in helping more students successfully matriculate to college in the fall. At present further investigation of why this transition is difficult is needed to better assist those students, who might otherwise remain forgotten, successfully start college even if it is at a time later than originally planned.

As we expand knowledge of the reasons why students melt in addition to the ways we might better serve these students, we can push past the two-way spectacle sport of this crucial summer; we can move to getting both secondary and postsecondary educational sectors out of the stands "rooting" for these students to making actionable efforts to demonstrate that we can no longer leave these students to fend for themselves. Finally, in using the summary of the literature, this article puts forth implications summer melting has for the future of higher education access for low income students with specific emphasis on underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities. This time in students' lives is important because "even having a dream and feeling worthy, competent, and confident of achieving does not mean students necessarily understand the steps to make it happen" (Arnold, et al., 2009, p. 27). The time is now to fashion approaches that can help these students escape the summer melt.

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