Understanding College “Burnout” from a Social Perspective:

Reigniting the Agency of Low-Income Racial Minority Strivers Towards Achievement

Dr. Anindya Kundu

(submitted and accepted by *The Urban Review*)

Abstract

Research indicates that health problems are becoming increasingly complex and prevalent among college students, while largely going without recognition or treatment. Low-income racial minority students may have additional personal and academic issues associated with demonstrating grit and overcoming barriers to entry (i.e. institutional racism) over the course of their lives. When the campus environment is not socially or culturally supportive of racial minority and first-generation college students, there is an added risk of mental health deterioration stemming from isolation for these students. The struggle to persist in college, and do so alone, can lead many to experience symptoms of impending “burnout,” or disengagement from academic settings. Drawing from a sample of interviews with low-income racial minority strivers—students who were once highly engaged—this paper offers insight into both causes and solutions for college burnout. Findings suggest that it is important to understand how experiences of isolation manifest to better support minority student populations and foster their academic reengagement to achieve at high levels. This paper outlines recommendations for improving the college experiences of racial minority and first-generation students, including examples of resources and recommendations to improve the higher education landscape towards more inclusivity and equity.

Introduction

“This is corny, but my happiness and health are most important—and family. Not so much school, anymore. In high school, I did so much. I would wake up at 6 a.m., go to school, go to work, and do programs. I would get home at 7 or 8 p.m. every day and then I had homework. I was always overwhelmed. I was accepted to my number one college, but the summer entering freshman year I didn’t want to go. I was just...I felt burnt out. I couldn’t tell my mom that I wanted to take a year off. My sister didn’t do that, so that would have been unheard of for me, the star student.”

– Camila, 20, former high school salutatorian who temporarily lost her scholarship and was placed on academic probation at an elite college.

Amongst racial minority students from low-income backgrounds, the struggle to persist in college could lead many to experience symptoms of looming burnout, especially in cases when students are unable to locate and integrate into student support resources on campus. Research on college retention has substantiated the idea that academic persistence requires an interplay between a student’s ability to integrate both academically and socially within a postsecondary environment (Tinto, 1987; Hartley, 2011). Camila’s story is becoming increasingly common within and surrounding an ever-diversifying postsecondary landscape. Bright and once highly motivated students often find themselves, for the first time, feeling isolated and helpless in college environments. Academic priorities can fall to the wayside as these students struggle to retain and reconcile their

cultural identities against newly developing college student identities. During this juggling process, it can become incredibly difficult to notice and cope effectively with mental struggles.

When the culture of the campus environment is not welcoming and supportive of racial minority and first-generation students, the risk of deteriorating mental health can increase substantially. Defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018), mental health includes one's "emotional, psychological and social well-being." Feelings of inadequacy can arise from lacking social and cultural supports, such as having access to a Diversity Center, which could be integral to thriving on campus. This can be particularly true for nontraditional student populations, such as first-generation college students who, according to a recent National Center for Education Statistics (2015) report, make up 50% of college goers in the United States. College persistence remains an issue for these groups, as only 27% of first-generation college goers complete Bachelor's degrees in four years.

Achievement aside, perhaps a more significant and dangerous issue in these cases is that they can culminate into severe physiological complications in students. While suicide rates among college students has been long identified as a serious mental health problem, typically, the mental wellness of college students has been narrowly considered through the lens of how adaptable they are to campus norms and leaving the home (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Hartley, 2011). However, there is much more to successfully navigating college, as students today manage coursework, social activities, employment opportunities, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, social media, partying, and relationships (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Fried & Irwin, 2016; Hammer, Grigsby & Woods, 1998). As such, mental health issues in college students are highly complex. Recent research has even indicated strong correlations between the amount of stress one experiences in college, and adverse

immune system responses, sometimes related to long-term development of anxiety and depression (Atkinson, Mitchell & Muir, 2008; Fried & Irwin, 2016).

Recent research on populations of “strivers,” those defined as “students high in intellectualism and careerism who have strong motivation and a strong positive attitude about college” (Kim, Sax, Lee, Hagedorn, 2010, p. 407), finds that these students can actually exhibit much worse health outcomes than others due to higher stress to perform, even experiencing a faster cellular aging process than their peers (Brody, Yu, Miller, Chen, 2016). Relevant to the investigation at hand, low-income racial minority strivers, such as Camila, who were *once* incredibly driven to attend colleges of their preference, can become disengaged if not supported adequately. These once-high achieving strivers may fail to stay on track for a variety of complex reasons that are not necessarily apparent on the surface. Studies indicate that, despite these students displaying more grit and other behaviors that lead to stable incomes and successful careers, the resilience is only “skin-deep,” hiding latent health complications (Brody et al. 2016). There is a pressing need for new research that looks more thoroughly, to examine how outcomes (i.e. ability to graduate on time) result from a myriad of factors that go beyond individual-level characteristics.

The reasons that certain students get overexerted and burned-out at the college level are complex and deserve to be informed by the voices of these students themselves. Research that qualitatively informs this topic, from a sociological viewpoint, is quite slim. This paper addresses this gap by including the perspectives of low-income racial minority strivers who experienced severe setbacks to their academic trajectories due to stressors leading to burnout, but eventually were able to get back on track. Learning from their perspectives on how to identify, address, and overcome burnout, and which social and cultural supports can help, provides insight on how to make college environments more equitable.

Relevant Background Literature

Broadening the Scope of Grit and Individualism to Understand Achievement

The process of learning and achieving educational milestones requires persistence. The persistence narratives, prominent in positive psychology and the study of human strengths, have become increasingly popular topics in education (Ong, Bergeman, & Bisconti, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Specifically, “grit,” or “passion and perseverance for long term goals” (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007), has emerged as an observable characteristic and major determinant in a student’s likelihood of success through determination. However, rarely has research asked if students could exhibit too *much* grit, and, if there were such a thing, what might its adverse effects be.

Some more public conversations have taken the grit and resilience narrative further, focusing on behavioral traits to claim that even the most disadvantaged students can succeed if they work hard enough (Tough, 2013). However, education research consistently finds that low-income racial minority youth find it more difficult to excel in educational settings regardless of their abilities to meet official and modern standards of achievement due to educators’ implicit biases, tracking, and persistent microaggressions (Delpit, 2012; Ransaw & Majors, 2016; Rist, 1970). Furthermore, racial minority youth may find it more difficult to maintain their cultural identities in academic settings, both K-12 and postsecondary, due to institutional racism and deficit framing of cultural attributes which are associated with perceived subpar abilities (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Carter, 2005; Ransaw & Majors, 2016).

Some scholars, particularly sociologists, have argued that attributing achievement to character traits alone (e.g. grit) can largely overlook the socioeconomic and demographic contexts of

students and their backgrounds (Kundu, 2016, 2017; Nathan, 2017). It seems essential to consider a student's social and cultural contexts—such as their class background, college generational status, urban or suburban upbringing, and immigrant status—when determining how constructive the concept of grit can be as a pedagogical focus that fosters achievement in postsecondary settings (Kundu, 2016). College students who are underrepresented or first-generation must often overcome various institutional barriers to entry, such as navigating the high cost of applications or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). These students also have significantly lower persistence rates, once in college, than their comparatively affluent counterparts (Fruchter, Hester, Mokhtar, & Shahn, 2012; Ransaw & Majors, 2016; Swail, 2003). As McGee & Stovall (2015) argue, overemphasis on individual characteristics as the main determinant for success can be detrimental to the health of racial minority college students.

Strivers and Heightened Pressures to Succeed

In particular, racial minority *strivers*, or those who have been heavily college and career-inclined since childhood (Kim, Sax, Lee, Hagedorn, 2010), may experience a phenomenon now being referred to as “John Henryism,”—wherein they overburden themselves, through increased grit and resilience, in competitive academic contexts. These students often have very high expectations set for them to attend college from an early age, whether self-imposed or by others close to them. For instance, research indicates that though academically successful, some racial minority students prioritize their family members' expectations of them and of their future success over their own senses of self and purpose (Carey, 2016). Regrettably, over time, these students can develop severe psychological and physical conditions, including anxiety,

depression, suicidal ideation, diabetes, and heart disease, in spite of what appears to be strong academic performance (Brody et al. 2016; James, 1994; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Understandably, low-income and first-generation racial minority strivers may feel additional burdens associated with the pressures of breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty. The term “John Henryism,” comes from an African-American folk tale in which John Henry wins a race to construct a railroad against a steam-powered hammer, but dies from the stress on his heart. Though this is an incredibly bleak metaphor to apply to college students, below the surface, there may be analogous tolls. There is validity to the term “skin-deep resilience” in low-income racial minority students, where outward indicators of success are accompanied with latent health problems that manifest over time (Brody et al., 2016).

Recent scholarship on first-generation students reveals that these students can feel isolated from vital networks for their entire postsecondary experience, including those that offer critical career opportunities and networking experience (Maietta, 2016; McCabe, 2016). Isolation can occur when students experience great difficulty integrating academically and socially within their college campus environment often from lacking support from peers and/or faculty and from diminishing sense of belonging (DeWitz, Woolsey & Walsh, 2009; Raley, 2007). Navigating scholastic achievement despite feeling isolation, specifically racial isolation, is incredibly difficult for racial minority college students, sometimes causing debilitating physical and mental conditions as well as a variety of issues related to dampened confidence and competence (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Strayhorn, 2012). In maintaining performance without proper social support, racial minority strivers may experience high levels of anxiety and stress that can become chronic. In such cases, the body’s stress-response system remains in high alert; cortisol, the primary stress hormone, does not return to

normal levels, and thus places the individual at higher risk of developing clinical depression (Brody et al. 2016; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Culminating stresses can also lead students to “burn out” (defined in full in the following section), whereby they effectively disengage and feel detached from college and other academic pursuits due to exhaustion; such disengagement brings these students to also be less likely to access to the various resources on campuses conducive to their mental health and wellbeing, such as counseling services. Students may also actively reject or fail to confide in their peer networks, which are among the most important relationships to cultivate for collegiate success (McCabe, 2016). This failure to leverage one’s own agency and to improve one’s college experience is a serious impediment to staying motivated and succeeding in the postsecondary pathway to opportunity. Therefore, only connecting psychological traits such as perseverance or grit to achievement is shortsighted as these qualities benefit from social supports to function at high and healthy levels.

Furthermore, research on character traits, such as grit, and achievement mechanisms, such as student agency, must be supplemented with studies that consider the nuances of the college student transition experience. By better understanding the varied experiences that young people have during these transition phases it is possible to create a more robust discussion surrounding college access and persistence. Applications which extend the grit narrative so far as to imply that students with social and economic disadvantages can succeed if they apply enough grit (Tough, 2013) deserve criticism for overlooking social contexts that affect learning and the motivation to learn. Other research that evaluates grit and its merits largely have also failed to consider the possible unintended consequences of students overworking themselves to the point that they no longer feel a deep connection to long-term goals. Specifically, researchers may need to focus on social and institutional resources that racial minority students can locate to successfully apply their character traits in

postsecondary educational settings (Kundu, 2017). Burnout often results from students trying to sustain high academic performance without having access to an institutionalized support system or a welcoming campus climate and certain deficit perspectives would fail to recognize these connections by placing the onus of achievement solely on the individual and their amounts of effort applied in school.

Premise and Application of the Preexisting Definition of Burnout

As per the recognized leading assessment tool for burnout for over 30 years, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and its prominent application in multiple studies of medical students and early career physicians, this paper utilizes a definition of clinical “burnout” commonly referred to in academic medicine: A syndrome “characterized by emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment (depersonalization), and a low sense of personal accomplishment (Dyrbye, West, Satele, Boone, Tan, Sloan & Shanafelt, 2014, p. 443; Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, Schaufeli & Schwab, 1986). This phenomenon of burnout is most commonly studied in groups of various professions typically in the human health services (including nurses, health aides, social workers, physicians, counselors, therapists), but it has been applied to a certain but quite limited extent in student populations and broad educational contexts.

Burnout has been prevalently applied as a concept in samples of medical students (Dyrbye et al, 2014; Jennings, 2009), but it has also been observed in early career teachers (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). However, in these studies, burnout has primarily been understood and interpreted from a psychological perspective.¹ There is a paucity of research on the burnout of younger adult

¹ It should be noted that sociology also offers a “psychological perspective,” as the discipline was established through one of the landmark studies on suicide by Émile Durkheim. In this

students, specifically those at the undergraduate levels, though this topic has appeared in narrow facets, once again, in the medical field regarding undergraduate nursing students (Michalec, Diefenbeck & Mahoney, 2013). These investigations almost always entail quantitative analyses through survey instruments which do not address topics of race or class nor include particular attention to the experiences of first-generation students from low-income backgrounds (Yang & Farn, 2005; Pisarick, 2009).

Furthermore, to date, burnout has been largely understudied through sociological lenses, which would insist upon the analysis of the social and cultural contexts of both the university and the students' home community. Educational research that focuses on the developmental phase of emerging adulthood continues to show that working-class minority and first-generation college students persist at lower rates at the college level when compared to white students from middle-class backgrounds (Carter, 2006; Somers, Woodhouse, and Coffey, 2004). Yet research shows that college students are often expected to be resilient and demonstrate high levels of grit despite the multifaceted institutional and racial barriers that only some students experience, both within the confines of the college campus and in society (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Drawing from the college burnout experiences of a set of emerging adults, this article constructs a sociological narrative about how academic perseverance as exhibited by low-income racial minority strivers, may not necessarily equate to academic success, social mobility, or wellbeing over the long-term. These strivers initially experienced traditional academic success and were selected for participation along these qualifiers: they were currently attending a selective 4-year college, or they completed graduation and were currently working in a highly professional industry (i.e. law, finance), or attending graduate school.

investigation, burnout is also an issue of psychological importance and perspective, however, this study is grounded upon a sociological analysis.

The data for this study derives from a larger study that examined the relationship between the agency and grit of low-income racial minority strivers. Emirbayer and Mishe (1998) defined human agency as a specific capacity of individuals that is oriented on the past, present and future, to maintain identities and derive courses of action based on circumstances at hand. Participants were asked to speak about challenges they faced in their lives in the pursuit of educational and professional milestones as well as how they overcome certain obstacles they faced. An example question included, “What have been some of the largest challenges you have faced?” To which a substantial number of participants gave answers that were grouped and categorized as “feeling burnt-out,” based on the conditions for clinical diagnosis, and meeting criteria of self-perception of exhaustion, detachment from goals, and/or feeling unaccomplished. Three students explicitly used the words “burnt-out” or “burnt out” in college to explain these experiences, which initially piqued interest in this concept. This paper uses the subgroup of students identified as, at some point, feeling extremely *burned out*, which was further and separately analyzed to locate themes and commonalities between participants who had burnout experiences.

One potential cause of feeling burnout is focusing heavily on achieving through overburdening oneself, or facing challenges without social support, with little attention to one’s genuine passions or purposes along the way. Continuously tapping into reservoirs of perseverance and effort, or traits of grit, while closely associating one’s academic accomplishments with high self-esteem, can be common for strivers (Kim, Sax, Lee, Hagedorn, 2010). This disposition appears to result from working too hard while also being unable to cultivate the types of resources and relationships necessary to exceling at the postsecondary level. In sociology, psychological tendencies of individuals are linked to social structures or institutional conditions; for example, in the 19th century, while many believed suicide to result from inherent qualities of individuals,

Durkheim uncovered associations between suicide and lack of social cohesion and disconnection from organized groups. In this fashion, sociological considerations can offer insights into the foundational psychological question of nature versus nurture, showing that the two are not mutually exclusive in their effects on human activity.

This paper presents and supports the thesis that, among racial minority students from low-income backgrounds, those who at one point could be considered strivers, the struggle to persist in college may lead many to experience symptoms of impending burnout, particularly in cases when students are not able to integrate into or utilize student-support services on campus. When the campus environment is not welcoming and supportive of racial minority and first-generation students, the risk of deteriorating mental health can increase substantially. This paper indicates how students can avoid these pitfalls through the same resources they neglected to leverage prior.

Guiding Questions

This paper accomplishes two ends: (1) Illuminates the characteristics that can lead college students to burnout via isolation, by giving voice to individuals who have experienced these dispositions firsthand, and (2) Provides a preliminary account of subsequent factors that individuals cite as having been influential in being able to reconnect with and reengage in their postsecondary pursuits.

Therefore, the two guiding questions of this research, also structured in this problem-solution orientation are: (1) How do students who are low-income racial minority strivers, describe factors that lead them to feeling “burnout” in college settings? (2) What strategies and influences do these students explain as beneficial to their regaining academic and professional motivations?

Conceptual Framework: Relational Cultural Theory to Support the Gifts of Diverse Learners

In examining research on burnout and the context of achievement of similar populations, a logical question may follow: If overburdening the self is the result of facing challenges without necessary social support, is this the fault of the student for not seeking out help or the university for not providing a better support system for certain student populations? Applying a Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) perspective to this question, this paper asserts that though the word “fault” is perhaps unnecessarily accusatory, there is a serious oversight on the part of colleges that can lead to these student dispositions. Largely, institutions of higher education lack the realization that to conjointly promote the well-being and achievement of diverse learners, it must provide and champion the use of certain resources that rely on a cultural framework (e.g. a support center for racial minority students, or those who are first-generation and from low-income families).

RCT has advanced in counseling fields as a manner to better address the varied, and largely psychological, effects of discrimination. RCT is culturally responsive, with foundations in feminist theory, emphasizing the corrective importance that relationships can play upon a person’s developmental growth and ability to heal, recognizing also that disconnecting from others can cause harm (Cholewa, Goodman, West-Olatunji & Amatea, 2014; Comstock, Hammer, Strensch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar, 2008; Duffey & Somody, 2011). This emphasis on social relationships is key in understanding causes of impending burnout which has connections to isolation. When students feel they are unable to connect to others due to their background, they may aim to reject certain parts of their cultural identities to fit in, but as a result they may end up feeling shame, unworthiness, and unconfident (Cholewa et al, 2014; Comstock et al, 2011).

For these reasons, RCT’s primary goal is to leverage relationships through relatively simple interventions aimed at promoting healing through fostering self-worth (Cholewa et al, 2014;

Comstock et al, 2011). This focus on healing is key to reigniting the motivations of students who have felt burnout because it acknowledges that these dispositions are real ailments brought on by adverse circumstances and environmental conditions. In RCT, students' backgrounds and identities related to race and ethnicity are brought to the forefront as the basis for responsiveness to needs (Cholewa et al, 2014; Duffey & Somody, 2011). Through supports and relationships which emphasize these primary aspects of personhood, students can relearn self-worth, and feel increased confidence in their goals and be empowered through genuine belonging. If institutions of higher education are truly invested in the wellbeing and success of their diverse student populations, they should be considerate of background and consult RCT to inform their practices and resources offered (Quaye & Harper, 2014). The strength of these institutions is reflected in how they are able to serve populations with unique needs and challenges, not those already expected to succeed based on affordances they have experienced in their lives.

Data & Methods

Qualitative interview studies are appropriate for learning about the internal contexts and rationales behind human behavior (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). These projects are based around understanding the meanings people assign to their choices, and in this particular project, qualitative framing helped identify how individuals think about new situations in and leading up to college. In this paper, I elaborate upon and support the specific theory of "burnout" which arose in a larger, qualitative sociological study I conducted on the success of postsecondary students of color who grew up below the poverty line ($n = 48$). The data for this paper were collected as a part of that larger study. Though traditionally grit has been studied through quantitative methods, these research

projects informed social and cultural supports that low-income racial minority strivers credit in developing long-term goals.

Individuals with social disadvantages typically experience racial, ethnic, or cultural prejudice. In this paper, I make an additional assertion that socially disadvantaged students are those without access to strong social capital, which can connect them to higher education or employment opportunities, in their immediate networks. Students who are economically disadvantaged are defined by the standards regulated by Federal Poverty Guidelines, and who, under the National School Lunch Program, qualify for free and reduced-price school meals (Schacter & Bo, 2005). Every individual in the larger study met both of these social and economic disadvantages qualifications.

Students were chosen to participate from the help of two after school programs that aim to send New York high school students to college, through the aid of enrichment programs. Both programs select students by the same need-based criteria described above. All participants graduated from these programs, and at the time of their interview were either attending a Bachelor's degree granting institution, or, had graduated with a Bachelor's degree and were working in a professionalized field, or, were attending graduate level study. See Figure 1.1 for the list of anonymized participants whose experiences inform this paper.

In initial email outreach, participants were told that this project sought individuals who have faced a variety of challenges in their lives and aimed to learn about overcoming these obstacles and achieving goals. In interviews, participants were asked broadly about challenges they faced and continue to face, and without specific prompting, a significant number of them described multiple instances that would be traditionally associated with burnout (Dyrbye et al., 2014). They described experiencing physical and mental exhaustion, "dealing with depression and/or anxiety," and "loss of

motivation” from goals previously described as important to them, most commonly at the college level. Two participants (Camila and Nadira) offer a slightly different retrospective as they described feeling characteristics of burnout right before attending college, though they both also described their mental and physiological states worsening over time as college students.

Interviews typically lasted 70 minutes, generated from a semi-structured interview protocol that would follow natural trends and progressions in dialogue (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The interview format allowed for flexibility with the direction the interview would take and elaborate on ideas in the moment, though each interviewee was asked the same set of root questions (Underwood, Satterthwait, & Bartlett, 2010). I transcribed all interview audio and also recorded analytic memos after each interview to map and chart commonalities. I used Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software, to organize and code interviews.

Positionality

My positionality as the researcher in this study is important to note given the absence of triangulating data with others. As Morrell (2004) suggests, it is impossible to be completely removed from one’s subjects in qualitative work, whereby questions asked and conclusions drawn are often partially the product of a researchers’ own social contexts; value neutrality should not be necessarily be an objective need, though it should be considered how the researcher plays even a slight role in supporting an argument (Morrell, 2004). My background likely played a role in how I interpreted some of the meanings from this data, yet at the same time, my lived experiences as a man of color seems to have allowed me a deeper level of comfortability with the individuals I interviewed. While I refrained from interjecting myself and my opinions into our conversations as much as reasonably possible, I likely signaled through

verbal and non-verbal cues that I understood what my participants meant. I also have experienced racial prejudice in schools from peers and teachers while reconciling multiple identities to fit in and project myself as academically competent and worthy of inclusion in a predominantly White context.

I introduced myself to participants and described my stance: I wanted to learn about their accomplishments and struggles so that we can hope to create better more equitable systems for students who also experience marginalization. Perhaps as a result of this, the participants felt freer to open up to me about their gravest fears, deepest traumas, and unguarded ambitions, for which I am incredibly grateful. While this may have kept conversations from being as objective as one might find in a highly structured interview, I do not believe I played any part in these individuals overcoming their symptoms of burnout. At time of interview they were all experiencing traditional success (having come back to college after a leave of absence or having graduated and working in professionalized fields) based on my selection criteria, overcoming many of these challenges by the time we met. I had not expected to learn about the phenomenon of burnout and hearing about these specific challenges brought me to further investigate this topic. If these individuals benefitted by avoiding similar pitfalls after our interviews, from having reflected on their journeys and achievements, then I consider that a bonus value that I am happy I was able to provide.

Classification of Burnout

Memos were checked against other memos and interviews, building a database of keywords that supported or challenged initial findings in transcripts. During the coding process, memos were particularly useful in helping locate emerging patterns through an inductive reasoning process. This

inductive process situated participants' lived experiences in a wider context of strivers, while building on and challenging existing theory (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2013; Griffiee, 2005). In particular, this method informed and nuanced the theory that grit and perseverance are inherently desirable qualities in successful students by showing these traits can be accompanied by mental health issues and burnout when students are not socially and culturally supported. Code co-occurrence charts in Dedoose showed for a very specific subset of individuals, burnout was prevalent, most closely associated with their continued challenges, goals, college experiences, and feelings of self-worth (or lack thereof).

From an initial sample of 48 individuals, 25% ($n = 12$) were identified as having experienced some form of this serious burnout, typically right before college or during early stages of college. For all of these students, feelings of burnout were reported worsening over time while being a college student. The data from which this paper is derived consists of transcripts from twelve face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (~15 hours of audio) with a sample of emerging adult participants, ages 18-27 (Arnett, 2004). This subset was analyzed separately after the emergence of burnout as a key theme to learn more about common factors that lead to burnout and mitigate it. Burnout was identified if students explicitly mentioned one or more of the following: feeling serious cases of anxiety and/or depression during college; feeling unmotivated towards previously important goals; feeling isolated in college and disinterested in participating in activities; feeling seriously stressed and unsure of one's life plans, directly leading up to attending college or during college. In a few instances, participants used the words "feeling burnt-out," which first brought my attention to this specific terminology.

Each participant in this study was further recognized as experiencing "burnouts" if they also faced real consequences which harmed their college trajectories; some participants failed college

courses, or in more extreme cases, some were placed on academic probation, and/or even dropped out. Eventually, however, all of the individuals included in this research were able to in some sense *reframe* their struggles in the context of their original motivations. This paper also reflects what students describe are factors to potentially confront and overcome burnout to regain the motivation to succeed at the college level.

Findings

The aforementioned larger study relied on an epistemological foundation between sociology and psychology, uncovering relationships between individuals' agency and grit. All students have initial levels of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), that if supported and fostered through specific social and cultural capital resources, can give way towards increased grit and accomplishment of goals (Kundu, 2017). However, low-income racial minority strivers, who work incredibly hard to make it to college, can also be susceptible to burnout if these supports are not offered or made clearly available in new settings. Instead of feeling motivation, these students may be led towards isolation and helplessness, which appear to be critically destructive emotions on the path of forming and pursuing goals. The process and relationship between agency and grit is illustrated in Figure 2.1, and the point of burnout is shown when social and cultural resources are missing.

Two major findings emerged from these interviews, around the research questions listed above. First, for low-income racial minority strivers who experience high levels of success before college, burnout can result from overburdening oneself to succeed without looking to social resources (i.e. mentors, peers, counselors) for help at an early enough point to make an intervention. Sometimes (and ironically), this overly independent attitude comes from a desire to fulfill *others'* expectations, both societally and from one's close relationships, at the expense of cultivating one's own wellness. Second, students can benefit from guided self-reflection, in which mentors, through

genuine attention to a mentee's personhood (aligned to RCT), help young adult students understand and cope with their feelings, manage stress, and remember the original motivations behind their original goals.

Losing Sight of Purpose through Independent Attitudes and Desires to Fulfill Others' Expectations

All participants mentioned that they took on more responsibilities than they believed to be reasonable, often due to a developed mentality that no burden could be too heavy to handle. This disposition came from dealing with many challenges and responsibilities from very young ages. For example, Alicia, explained that from the age of six she helped her mother with a variety of tasks; these ranged from helping to pay bills to directing repairmen around their apartment, since at the time, her mother was not very literate in English. These types of experiences can cause individuals to believe that they are overly resilient and can succeed without help, an idea illustrated in this quote from Nadira:

I had acclimated to doing things of my own accord instead of looking for help. That has been my downfall, because I need help. That's what my therapist has told me.

Nadira grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, which was described as a tough neighborhood. At the time of interview, she stated that her father continued to struggle with alcohol abuse and she did not speak highly of him. Despite having peers who were less academically successful than she, Nadira described working hard and caring about maintaining her good grades. She went to a community college to pursue an Associate's degree in liberal arts and joined the Honors Program, which helped her get into an elite college in New York for her Bachelor's. During her junior year she described experiencing tremendous burnout, aligned to the clinical definition, and mentioned that she was unable to perform academically or physically able to even show up to class.

When racial minority strivers forgo seeking outside help while continuing their upward trajectories, it appears that they can start to lose sight of their initial motivations and rationales for academic pursuits, which further manifests in mental and physical tolls, often characterized by experiencing exhaustion and extreme fatigue by the Malsach Burnout Inventory. These ailments are also associated with a diminished sense of purpose. Camila says:

But I honestly feel like part of me didn't want to be in college. I was dragging my body to do stuff that I knew that I *had* to do, but I didn't really *want* to do. And that was very counterproductive.

Camila describes the diminished energy during her first semester in college. Camila (whose quote is used at the beginning of this paper) had started to experience an earlier onset of feeling burned out at the end of high school. This manifested in what Camila illustrates as “dragging” her body to class. Due to this lack of energy as well as motivation, she started missing classes and not turning in assignments for the first time in her life. From working tirelessly by herself up until this point, she seemingly lost a sense of purpose which was explained as forgetting why college mattered to her, even though she was attending her top-choice institution.

For this group of low-income racial minority strivers, feeling burnout is associated with a deep desire to please by living up to the perceived standards of others. Camila wanted to take a break before college, but ultimately decided not to because she did not want to disappoint her mother, placing expectations that her family held for her above her own desires (Carey, 2016). This type of appeasement has been described as being accompanied by heavy stress as well as attempts to work harder immediately to complete tasks. Princess elaborates on this idea:

I had an anxiety attack on the train, which was completely new to me. I was doing too much. My first semester, I took five classes, and I didn't know that was allowed. Second semester I said, “Let me take four classes,” but they were intense. I did extracurricular activities, and because I was doing so well, I got more

responsibilities. I was fulfilling other people's expectations so much. One day, I had an exam, a research paper, and an event. Right before my class, I was on the train and I was crying. I couldn't breathe. I cope better with my anxiety now, but I still struggle.

In these narratives, there is a common sense of hopelessness, rooted in attempting to do too much by oneself, as well as a loss of purpose and inability to rationalize one's efforts. Students will likely feel further isolated and distraught if their college institution is not informed by a Relational Cultural approach. Princess mentions taking on more and more, pushing the limits of her own resilience, due to a type of self-worth closely associated with individual accomplishment and pleasing her mentors. She may or may not have had anxiety prior to college and the buildup of these stressors manifested into an anxiety attack which caused Princess to realize that she could be prone to such outbursts.

Students who grow up amongst severe financial constraints and stressors may hold multiple responsibilities, perhaps including after school jobs, or taking care of siblings at the expense of their own interests, and this may manifest in dropping out of school (Rumberger, 2011). Over time, inattention and lack of cultivating one's genuine interests might lead to a broader absence of purpose up until attending college or into one's career. The concept of purpose is well documented in grit research as a primary component to passion and, as such, in the subsequent formulation of grit. In *Grit*, Duckworth (2016) says, "Interest is one source of passion. Purpose—the intention to contribute to the well-being of others—is another. The mature passions of gritty people depend on both" (p. 143). Duckworth's definition of purpose is compelling because purpose colloquially typically relates to an individual's desired objectives behind action. Duckworth has implied a social-minded aspect of purpose and adding to her definition, I assert that while one's purpose can be fueled by a desire to help others, it can be equally reinforced through the help of others.

Low-income and racial minority college students, many of whom are first-generation, may feel largely accustomed to accomplishing things on their own accord. If these students are not supported by the adults who shape the cultural environment of their postsecondary institutions, their college experiences are more likely to be unfruitful. Approaches informed by RCT are needed to respect and find value in the diverse backgrounds of students so they can then develop the ability to routinely realize their purposes for pursuing a college education and think critically about what college offers them (Cholewa et al, 2014; Comstock et al, 2011). If students lack a sense of belonging, then their self-confidence may diminish and burnout to the extremes of physical and mental illness are more probable (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Attempting to cope with intense pressures, along with the counterintuitive strategy to overexert oneself instead of seeking help, is common among low-income racial minority strivers (McGee & Stovall, 2015), but can have gravely adverse health-related effects over one's life course (Gaydosch, Schorpp, Chen, Miller, Harris, 2017).

Guided Self-Reflection: Support to Realize One's Passions and Regain Agency

The participants in this research, similar to the broader spectrum of racial minority students from below-poverty households, experienced challenges such as homelessness, incarceration, neglect, substance abuse, violence, or other traumas. Students who experience such extreme struggles in their lives may develop weakened self-efficacy, or less of the belief in their own abilities, over time losing sight of the long-term value of education for life outcomes, even if they are already in a college environment (Bandura, 1986; Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Cultural disparities and unfavorable racial climates in college can increase feelings of isolation and further diminish students' self-confidence (Chavous, 2005; McCabe, 2016; Comstock et al, 2011; Quaye & Harper, 2014).

Recent research on young adults' cerebral development has revealed that when students can think about their personal vision, particularly through forms of mentoring and coaching, they can improve their cognitive functioning (Boyatzis, Jack, Cesaro, Passarelli, & Khawaja, 2010). Furthermore, coaching related to academic and professional goals has been proven to lower cortisol and stress levels, especially in first-generation students (Boyatzis et al, 2010; Creswell et al., 2005). It stands to reason that if and when college students can be taught to remember their purposes for forming certain academic goals in the first place, with the help of constructive mentorship that is culturally respectful (Cholewa et al, 2014), they may be better able to tap into the types of successful character traits, such as grit, which allowed them to initially succeed and also regain much needed confidence (Kundu, 2017).

In particular, when college students are experiencing burnout, or are rapidly losing motivation towards academic pursuits, one way to regain self-efficacy may be through "guided" self-reflection with the aid of mentors and role models. Positive affirmation from individuals akin to role models helps to improve one's self-efficacy, especially when these individuals act in accord with the basic principles of Relational Cultural Theory. Just as racial minority students can lose a sense of purpose by tirelessly working to win the approval and meet the expectations of others (Carey, 2016; McGee & Stovall, 2015), they can regain purpose through the support of others (Kundu, 2017). Participants described and credited forms of "guided self-reflection," for helping them regain academic and professional motivations. Guided self-reflection can be beneficial when it is directed by a close mentor or family member, who values a student's existing interests and goals, as well as by an institutional agent such as a college wellness counselor, who has expertise on mental health and familiarity within a postsecondary context (Quaye & Harper, 2014). The following quotes highlight this thematic finding:

Participant	Quote
Rose	At [Community College], I eventually told my mentor in the lab my story. She tells me I can't give up, and it makes me feel better. 'You've come so far.' Sometimes you need a reminder. Sometimes I forget. I'm 24! You can't do it completely alone. Even if it's verbal support from someone saying, 'Hey, you're smart, you've got this!' I didn't realize that before. Before I would have said, no one's going to help you.
Princess	One of the things that my counselor told me was that it seemed like my self-esteem and my achievements depended on how well I did in school. That kind of hit me.
J-Stud	Mentorship is huge. From my mentor from high school to my mentor in [Professional Development Program] who I'm very much in contact with. I've known this guy ten years. I'm always seeking out mentors trying to learn something from somebody who is in a senior position, or to get a different perspective, or words of encouragement. Being able to tell my story and have people say, 'J-Stud. You know what? It sounds like you've been through a lot, but you've persevered. I like that about you and I want you to stay in touch and let me know how I could help you.'

These quotes describe the positive influence that another person—a mentor, counselor, or colleague—can have in improving a student's sense of self. Rose, who experienced violently traumatic experiences during childhood into young adulthood, needed the encouragement of her lab mentor to see that she was in fact on the right track. The mentor's recognition of Roses' affinity towards biology eventually allowed Rose to open up to her mentor about her difficult childhood. Trust between the two developed over time, slowly built upon mutual interests in science, and helped Rose feel accomplished and re-motivated. This is a form of cultural competency, which can come from mentors simply paying genuine attention to student backgrounds and valuing students' interests and various strengths (Comstock et al, 2011; Gorski, 2010).

For Princess, guided self-reflection helped her realize her self-esteem was connected to academic achievement and pleasing others. Five other participants corroborated similar sentiments, mentioning that what most helped them overcome burnout was overtly setting aside time to focus on their wellbeing amidst responsibilities. Princess, who was helped by a school counselor, credits this realization as being particularly useful in considering her own goals in life as well as managing her anxiety. Seven participants, including Princess, cited counseling as a needed resource for improving their mental wellness. J-Stud actively seeks out mentors in the workplace for positive words of encouragement to stay motivated—a practice which was daunting at first, but one that he refined over time. As one of the few Black men from an incredibly low-income household, currently working in investment banking, he described feeling out of place from time to time. His example shows that effective mentorship and guided reflection can foster individuals' continued development of help-seeking behavior, even beyond academic settings, by strengthening critical skills such as networking.

Discussion

The empirical evidence presented in this paper informs existing theories on college achievement and sheds light on types of environmental supports that are needed for students to perform and persist. Though the problem-solution orientation and highlighted factors in this paper are relatively simple, these collective approaches to achievement are important in combatting the stigma around mental health issues which are more prevalent than commonly assumed. Though burnout has been notably documented from a psychological and quantitative perspective, it has been relatively absent in sociological studies, especially in qualitative work which samples students who have grown up in low-income households. While the burnout of teachers and graduate students has

been studied in educational research, this phenomenon is much less prevalently observed in populations of college students (Embich, 2001; Farber, 1991). I myself only learned about this topic when probing the racial minority strivers in this research about challenges they face and experience as students. Had I probed more specifically on challenges related to maintaining motivation and mental wellness in college, I believe more individuals would have mentioned experiencing some form of a similar burnout phenomenon.

Additionally, the current discourse around psychological traits for success, specifically in the frame of positive psychology—or studies relating to the potential of individuals—tends to have potential limitations from a sociological perspective by not addressing social and cultural contexts of students. This may lead researchers to unintentionally advance societal beliefs around individualism as sufficient for college success, without attention to the disparate levels of social support and cultural understanding that some students have greater access to, but that all students need to thrive at the postsecondary level. To support the continued upward trajectory of low-income racial minority college students it is important to consider how they can attain both social capital (through formal and informal networks and dependable relationships) and cultural capital (by leveraging their ability to navigate institutional and social settings). Thinking more deeply about the varied experiences and backgrounds of college students may work to offer resources that can strengthen the character traits they already have, which are necessary for achievement.

Perhaps the most important implications from this study are around the benefit of mobilizing institutional resources to better support student endurance. Campus initiatives which work to destigmatize issues of mental health, specifically for lesser represented students such as those who are first-generation, are investments into the health of students throughout their lifetime. As is well understood, the achievement gap extends to life outcomes that manifest beyond years of formal

schooling, with less-privileged students persistently facing poorer life outcomes, including health and income expectancy (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ransaw & Majors, 2016; Reardon, 2013). Despite these trends, there remains an appeal to fetishize students of color who are successful, often to the effect of blaming those who fail, rather than addressing systemic policy and practices that contribute to disparate outcomes along racial lines. “Exception” cases are often used to justify the existence of an unrealistic working meritocratic system of equal opportunity and place the onus of academic achievement entirely upon the individual (Henry, 2015; McWhorter, 2000; Tough, 2013). However, this research complicates those theories and validates evidence that even the most accomplished strivers might deal with severe physiological ailments which may in fact be preventable (Gaydos et al, 2017).

Limitations

The scope and data of this research are limited and therefore so are the implications of it. Foremost, this paper draws from a larger study on the academic success and challenges of low-income racial minority strivers. In that study, burnout emerged as a significant theme to be further investigated. For this reason, one limitation in this paper is that participants described experiencing burnout at various vantage points that surrounded college. This research would benefit from a design which probes at issues of wellbeing and persistence at a specific point in the college experience, perhaps through a sample of college juniors or even those who are on a leave of absence. Also, while the former study administered the Grit Scale (Duckworth et al, 2007) survey to triangulate data sources and strengthen trustworthiness, this study does not include that data due to irrelevance with the research questions. This study would benefit from similar triangulation, perhaps through the form of conducting focus groups, allowing participants to share their stories with one another and

uncover more commonalities and differences in data. Currently, this paper serves to inform a topic which has been studied in limited contexts and provide examples through student voices.

Significance & Implications

It is well documented that first-generation college goers, many of whom are racial minorities, graduate at significantly lower rates than others (Ishitani, 2006). However, to influence practice, research on college persistence must also consider the ways in which students' goal formation is assisted by asset-based pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching (Carter, 2005; Cholewa et al, 2014; Freire, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lopez, 2017). When college students are supported by the adults in their institutions to be able to routinely consider their own purposes for pursuing a postsecondary education, and critically think about what college offers them, burnout to the extremes of physical and mental illness is less likely (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Studying how low-income racial minority strivers overcome burnout and continue to achieve academically offers valuable insights. Currently, the existing research on the transition phases of young adult racial minority students can fail to acknowledge the varied experiences that might lead to mental and physical exhaustion and demotivation. By learning how students can re-motivate and reclaim healthy ownership of their educational pursuits, we can better understand another contributing aspect of the achievement gap and better advise educators and institutions on how to address this issue. Thinking above grit and perseverance is needed to create knowledge for practitioners who aim to improve the postsecondary experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Though the data emphasis in this study is on postsecondary student agency and lack thereof, it is important to note that for outcomes to change, any individual effort must also be

supported by other individuals, groups, and institutions at all levels in order to benefit the college persistence of low-income racial minority and first-generation students.

Finally, it is important to understand that from a wellness perspective, college completion and professional success should not necessarily be in and of itself a metric of accomplishment and fulfillment. On the contrary, it has been found that the college completion of low-income racial minority students is associated with greater stress over the life course, perhaps from pressure to perform and resulting overwork (Gaydosh et al, 2017). This is a bleak reality and an understudied health cost to social mobility. Scaffolding opportunities and support systems that allow students to routinely monitor their own happiness and sense of purpose is important in order to ensure that students are able to lead healthy lives as they strive towards meeting their goals.

Works Cited:

1. Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. Oxford University Press.
2. Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Irvine, C. K. S., & Walker, D. (2013). Introduction to research in education. Cengage Learning.
3. Bandura, A. (1986). The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 4(3), 359.
4. Brody, G. H., Yu, T., Miller, G. E., & Chen, E. (2016). Resilience in adolescence, health, and psychosocial outcomes. *Pediatrics*, e20161042.
5. Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Ascd.
6. Boyatzis, R. E., Jack, A., Cesaro, R., Passarelli, A., & Khawaja, M. (2010). Coaching with compassion: An fMRI study of coaching to the positive or negative emotional attractor. In *Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, Montreal*.
7. Byrd, D. R., & McKinney, K. J. (2012). Individual, interpersonal, and institutional level factors associated with the mental health of college students. *Journal of American College Health*, 60(3), 185-193.

8. Carey, R. L. (2016). "Keep that in mind... You're gonna go to college": Family influence on the college going processes of Black and Latino high school boys. *The Urban Review*, 48(5), 718-742.
9. Carter, Prudence L. *Keepin' it real: School success beyond Black and White*. Oxford Press, 2005.
10. Carter, D. F. (2006). Key issues in the persistence of underrepresented minority students. *New directions for institutional research*, 2006(130), 33-46.
11. Comstock, D. L., Hammer, T. R., Strentzsch, J., Cannon, K., Parsons, J., & Salazar, G. (2008). Relational- cultural theory: A framework for bridging relational, multicultural, and social justice competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 279–287.
12. Chavous, T. M. (2005). An Intergroup Contact-Theory Framework for Evaluating Racial Climate on Predominantly White College Campuses. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 36(3-4), 239-257.
13. Creswell, J. D., Welch, W. T., Taylor, S. E., Sherman, D. K., Gruenewald, T. L., & Mann, T. (2005). Affirmation of personal values buffers neuroendocrine and psychological stress responses. *Psychological Science*, 16(11), 846-851.

14. Delpit, Lisa D. *"Multiplication is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*. The New Press, 2012.
15. DeWitz, S. Joseph, M. Lynn Woolsey, and W. Bruce Walsh. "College student retention: An exploration of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and purpose in life among college students." *Journal of College Student Development* 50, no. 1 (2009): 19-34.
16. Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Simon and Schuster.
17. Duckworth, Angela L., Christopher Peterson, Michael D. Matthews, and Dennis R. Kelly. "Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1087.
18. Dyrbye, Liselotte N., Colin P. West, Daniel Satele, Sonja Boone, Litjen Tan, Jeff Sloan, and Tait D. Shanafelt. "Burnout among US medical students, residents, and early career physicians relative to the general US population." *Academic Medicine* 89, no. 3 (2014): 443-451.
19. Embich, J. L. (2001). The relationship of secondary special education teachers' roles and factors that lead to professional burnout. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 24(1), 58-69.

20. Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency?. *American journal of sociology*, 103(4), 962-1023.
21. Farber, B. A. (1991). *Crisis in education: Stress and burnout in the American teacher*. Jossey-Bass.
22. Freire, Paulo. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans." *Myra Bergman Ramos*. New York: Continuum (1968).
23. Fried, R. R., & Irwin, J. D. (2016). Calmly coping: A Motivational Interviewing Via Co-Active Life Coaching (MI-VIA-CALC) pilot intervention for university students with perceived levels of high stress. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 14(1), 16.
24. Fries-Britt, S., & Turner, B. (2002). Uneven stories: Successful Black collegians at a Black and a White campus. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25(3), 315-330.
25. Gaydos, L., Schorpp, K. M., Chen, E., Miller, G. E., & Harris, K. M. (2017). College completion predicts lower depression but higher metabolic syndrome among disadvantaged minorities in young adulthood. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 201714616.

26. Griffee, D. T. (2005). Research Tips: Interview Data Collection. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 28(3), 36-37.
27. Gorski, P. C. (2011). Unlearning deficit ideology and the scornful gaze: Thoughts on authenticating the class discourse in education. *Counterpoints*, 402, 152-173.
28. Hammer, L. B., Grigsby, T. D., & Woods, S. (1998). The conflicting demands of work, family, and school among students at an urban university. *The journal of Psychology*, 132(2), 220-226.
29. Hartley, Michael T. "Examining the relationships between resilience, mental health, and academic persistence in undergraduate college students." *Journal of American College Health* 59, no. 7 (2011): 596-604.
30. Henry III, William A. *In defense of elitism*. Anchor, 2015.
31. Ishitani, T. T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the United States. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 861-885.
32. Jacobs, S. R., & Dodd, D. (2003). Student burnout as a function of personality, social support, and workload. *Journal of college student development*, 44(3), 291-303.

33. James, S. A. (1994). John Henryism and the health of African-Americans. *Culture, medicine and psychiatry*, 18(2), 163-182.
34. Jennings, M. L. (2009). Medical student burnout: Interdisciplinary exploration and analysis. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 30(4), 253.
35. Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., ... & Velez, E. D. V. (2015). The Condition of Education 2015. NCES 2015-144. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
36. Kim, Karen A., Linda J. Sax, Jenny J. Lee, and Linda Serra Hagedorn. "Redefining nontraditional students: Exploring the self-perceptions of community college students." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 34, no. 5 (2010): 402-422.
37. Kundu, A. (2016). "Roses in Concrete: A Perspective on how Agency and Grit can Foster the Success of All Students Especially those Most Disadvantaged." *The Journal of School & Society*, 3 (2), 18-21.
38. Kundu, A. (2017). Grit and agency: A framework for helping students in poverty to achieve academic greatness. *National Youth-At-Risk Journal*, 2(2), 69.

39. Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. John Wiley & Sons.
40. Lopez, F. A. (2017, January). "Altering the trajectory of the self-fulfilling prophecy." *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol 68 (1) 1-20.
41. Ong, A. D., Bergeman, C. S., Bisconti, T. L., & Wallace, K. A. (2006). Psychological resilience, positive emotions, and successful adaptation to stress in later life. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 91(4), 730.
42. Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., Leiter, M. P., Schaufeli, W. B., & Schwab, R. L. (1986). *Maslach burnout inventory* (Vol. 21, pp. 3463-3464). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
43. McCabe, J. M. (2016). *Connecting in college: How friendship networks matter for academic and social success*. University of Chicago Press.
44. McGee, E. O., & Stovall, D. (2015). Reimagining critical race theory in education: Mental health, healing, and the pathway to liberatory praxis. *Educational Theory*, 65(5), 491-511.
45. McWhorter, John H. *Losing the race: Self-sabotage in Black America*. Simon and Schuster, 2000.

46. Michalec, B., Diefenbeck, C., & Mahoney, M. (2013). The calm before the storm? Burnout and compassion fatigue among undergraduate nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 33(4), 314-320.
47. Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: Literacy and empowerment for urban youth* (Vol. 227). Peter Lang.
48. Nathan, L. F. (2017). *When Grit Isn't Enough: A High School Principal Examines How Poverty and Inequality Thwart the College-for-All Promise*. Beacon Press.
49. Pisarik, C. T. (2009). Motivational Orientation and Burnout among Undergraduate College Students. *College Student Journal*, 43(4).
50. Ransaw, T. S., & Majors, R. (Eds.). (2016). *Closing the Education Achievement Gaps for African American Males*. MSU Press. Chicago.
51. Raley, Yvonne. "Why we quit." *Scientific American Mind* 18, no. 4 (2007): 74-79.
52. Reardon, S. F. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. *Educational Leadership*, 70(8), 10-16.
53. Rist, R. (1970). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard educational review*, 40(3), 411-451.

54. Rumberger, R. W. (2011). *Dropping out*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
55. Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage.
56. Schacter, J., & Jo, B. (2005). Learning when school is not in session: a reading summer day-camp intervention to improve the achievement of exiting First-Grade students who are economically disadvantaged. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 28(2), 158-169.
57. Somers, P., Woodhouse, S. R., & Cofer Sr, J. E. (2004). Pushing the boulder uphill: The persistence of first-generation college students. *Naspa Journal*, 41(3), 418-435.
58. Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Positive psychology: An introduction. In *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology* (pp. 279-298). Springer Netherlands.
59. Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.
60. Swail, W. S. (2003). *Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass, 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741.

61. Tinto, Vincent. *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*.

University of Chicago Press.

62. Tough, Paul. *How children succeed*. Random House, 2013.

63. Underwood, M., Satterthwait, L. D., & Bartlett, H. P. (2010). Reflexivity and minimization of the impact of age-cohort differences between researcher and research participants. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(11), 1585-1595.

64. Quaye, S. J., & Harper, S. R. (Eds.). (2014). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. Routledge.

Tables and Figures:

Figure 1.1 Participant Chart

<u>Alias</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Status</u>
Camila	Latinx	20	In College
Alicia	Black	20	In College
Joe	Latinx	20	In College
Mario	Latinx	21	In College
Princess	Latinx/Dominican	22	In College
Rose	Latinx	25	In College
MP	Black	25	College Grad
Stephanie	Latinx	25	College Grad
J-Stud	Black	26	In College
Jonny	Latinx	26	College Grad
Nadira	Latinx and Asian	26	College Grad
Hector	Latinx/Dominican	27	Master's Grad

Figure 2.1: Agency to Grit Relationship, and Where Burnout Occurs