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African Americans and College-Choice:

Case Studies of Four African American Families

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the college-choice influences of African American families. More specifically, this study explored the influence of parents on their children’s college-choice decisions. This qualitative case study used participant responses to family and individual interview questions to gather data.

This study explored one primary question: What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American families? Two sub-questions included: (1) How do African American parents influence the overall college-choice decisions of their children? (2) How do African American parents who attended a PWI or HBCU influence the type of college or university their children chose to attend?

Findings of the study revealed that the college-choice decisions of African American families are influenced in multiple ways. Family influence, outside influences, and personal aspirations and motivations emerged as the common themes as described by the participants. Participants were influenced not only to attend college but also influenced on whether or not to choose a PWI or HBCU by parents, siblings, peers, activities and personal aspiration and motivation. In addition, outside influences such as peers, teachers and location were the biggest influence on the parent participants; parental influence was the most prevalent for the adult children.
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CHAPTER I
Introduction

Over the past twenty years many studies on college selection, exploring the decision-making process of future college students have been conducted; however, these studies have focused primarily on the college-choice process of the general student population. Unfortunately, little research exists that examine the differences in the process for African Americans and even fewer studies that focus on the influence of race and family on a student’s decision to attend a Predominately White Institution (PWI) or a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature designed to examine the effect of race and family on college-choice (Cyprian-Andrews 2004; Freeman, 1997, 1999, 2005; McDonough, 1997). Not only have these college-choice theorists focused on the process used by African Americans, they have also included the thoughts and perspectives of the participants in their studies. The inclusion of participant points of view has proved to be invaluable by allowing the audience to examine the college-choice process through the eyes of the identified group.

Some college-choice theorists and campus policymakers fail to include suggestions, ideas, and perceptions of the individuals who are the focus of their studies in the development of programs and models (Freeman, 2005). It is likely that African Americans have their own ideas about college and the college-choice process but they are rarely asked for their ideas or solutions to their problems which can improve the overall process for the group. In addition, it is also important for college-choice theorists, campus policy makers, college marketers and recruiters to have a clear understanding about the behavior of African American families because it can provide evidence that can lead to an increase in overall enrollment of African Americans in colleges and universities (Freeman, 1997, 1999, 2005).
The foundation of this dissertation was an examination of African American families and their college-choices. Through biographical data forms (Appendix A), observations and interviews with eight parents and their nine adult children, I discussed the factors that affected their college-choice decisions. Moreover, I investigated how race and family influenced the college-choice decisions of these African Americans. More importantly, I provided opportunities for the participants to give voice to their experiences and allowed them to express their opinions and perceptions on this idea of college-choice.

Statement of the Problem

The needs of African American students cannot continue to be overlooked or automatically co-mingled with all other students. Researchers need to recognize that African Americans, as well as other ethnic groups may have characteristics that are unique to that particular group. Furthermore, the viewpoints and perspectives of African Americans are missing from the literature, which causes an additional gap in the research. As previously stated, African Americans have their own thoughts about college and college-choice but the participants are rarely asked for their ideas and solutions (Freeman, 2005). In addition, African American enrollment in PWI and HBCUs continue to significantly lag behind the enrollments of Whites (Cook & Cordova, 2007).

According to Cook & Cordova (2007), 2.1 million African Americans were enrolled in colleges and universities across the US. Of that number, 14.8% were enrolled in private and public HBCUs. Between 1995 and 2005, African American enrollment went from 1.4 million to 2.1 million with an overall increase of 46% over a ten year period. Although the statistics showed a steady increase in African American enrollment over a ten year period, their enrollment was significantly lagging behind the 10.7 million Whites who were enrolled in colleges and
universities during 2005. Between 1995 and 2005, White enrollment went from 9.9 million in 1995 to 10.7 million in 2005 showing an increase of 8% over a ten year period. African American enrollment growth is substantial in comparison to White enrollment. However, Whites still have significant greater numbers of students enrolled in colleges and universities in comparison to African Americans. This discrepancy is disturbing. In order to recruit, retain and increase the overall enrollment of African Americans, college administrators must begin to better understand what influences the college-choice decisions of this group (Freeman, 2005).

**Purpose of the Study**

The educational disparity between African Americans and Whites has long been a sore spot in the history of America. During slavery, it was against the law to educate Blacks. However, slaves who secretly learned to read and write found that being literate could provide them with access to areas of influence and could enable them to both shape and gain access to rights for the freed people (Williams, 2005). Consequently, African Americans have often used education as a means or a catalyst to overcome inequality. The ways in which African Americans make choices about education especially college-choices often have not been captured through research or literature. While much research has focused on the college-choice of all students, very few studies have centered specifically on the college-choice of African Americans. Fewer studies have been found on the influence of family on college-choice for African Americans. This lack of research on the college-choice process of African Americans creates scarcity in the college-choice literature. In addition, much of the literature does not include reflections from the participants. Inclusion of participant perceptions gives voice, provides a personal reflection, and gives the reader a holistic view. The exclusion of participant reflections leads the reader to make
assumptions about what the participant may have been trying to express; once again revealing another possible gap that is not being addressed in the literature.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the factors that influenced the college-choice decisions of African American family members who either attended a PWI or HBCU. This study was used to illustrate the college-choice process for African American families. More specifically, a qualitative case study was used to investigate linkages between parental college-choice and the college-choice of their children by examining similarities and differences in the decision-making process.

Conducting this study gave voice to African American families by providing an opportunity for them to describe their perspectives as it pertained to factors that influenced their college-choice decisions. This study addressed the primary question, “What are the factors that influence the college-choice of African American families?”

Significance of the Study

The intent of this study was to provide a better understanding of the college-choice process for African American families. This research has implications for families and educators who want to better understand college-choice strategies among African American families and will benefit school counselors to assist students in making sound decisions in their college-choice. It will also help families and colleges and universities to better understand and give support to those students while making their college-choice decisions. The findings from this study may also be used to encourage further discussions and additional studies in the area of college-choice and African Americans. This study, then, proposed to contribute to the body of existing literature on African Americans and particularly African Americans and college-choice.
As an African American college graduate and as a college administrator, I have personal and professional interest in how African Americans make college-choice decisions. When making my own college-choice decisions, although very supportive, my parents had very little to do with my college-choice. My personal experience led me to question how other students made their college-choice decisions. As a researcher and a college administrator, I saw the need to delve deeper for better understanding in order to meet the needs of our prospective and current students.

The way in which African American families influence their children’s college-choice is noteworthy. According to Freeman, the way in which African American families value education has everything to do with the way they influence their children’s college-choice process (Freeman, 2005).

Research Questions

This study contributed to the current body of literature that has been conducted with African Americans and college-choice by responding to the primary research question for this study, which was “What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American families?” and the sub-research questions:

- How do African American parents influence the overall college-choice decisions of their children?
- How do African American parents who attended a (PWI) or (HBCU) influence the type of college or university their children chose to attend?

Theoretical Framework

Historically, college-choice research has primarily focused on sociological and economic factors that influenced college-choice but did not take into consideration race or ethnicity. The
Model of Predetermination developed by Freeman (2005) provided some insights into the role of race and ethnicity in college-choice influences. This model formed the foundation of this study and was the theoretical framework used to support this study. Although this model has been identified as an adaptation of the Hossler and Gallagher model (1987), the Freeman model provided a lens that allowed for the exploration of variables such as race, family and kinship influences on college-choice that are not included in Hossler and Gallagher’s model.

*Operational Definitions*

The following terms and concepts were used throughout the study.

*African American/Black*: terms used synonymously in the study and defined as American citizens with African ancestry (DeLarge, 2003).

*Channeling*: environmental forces (whether individuals, institutions, or circumstances) that influence the direction of students’ postsecondary choices (Freeman, 2005).

*College-Choice*: “a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training” (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989, p.234).

*College Portrait*: provides consistent, comparable and transparent information on the characteristics of institutions and students, cost of attendance, student engagement with the learning process, and core educational outcomes. The information is intended for students, families, policy-makers, campus faculty and staff, the general public, and other higher education stakeholders. (Voluntary System of Accountability, 2007)

*Cultural Capital*: a form of capital or assets used to transform aspirations into educational credentials (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).
Habitus: a social status-based (in this case, race-based) set of subjective perceptions (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997).

HBCU: [Historically Black College or University] a college or university that in the past has had a student body population of 50% or more Black.

HIS: [Hispanic Serving Institution] a college or university that has a student body population of 50% or more Hispanic.

Jack and Jill of America, Inc.: a family organization that provides cultural, social, civic and recreational activities that stimulate and expand the mind to enhance life (Jack and Jill, 2007).

PWI: [Predominately White Institution] a college or university that has a student body population of 50% or more White.

Upward Bound: “provides support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. Upward Bound serves: low income and first generation high school students.” (Upward Bound, 2009).

VSA: [Voluntary System of Accountability] “is designed to improve public understanding of how public colleges and universities operate. (Voluntary System of Accountability, 2007).
CHAPTER II
Literature Review

Introduction

This review revealed that there is a growing body of literature that specifically focuses on the connection between African Americans and college-choice; however given it’s scarcity, more research is needed to understand how race and family influence the college-choice decisions of African Americans. In addition, it is necessary for college administrators and the public to have a clear understanding of how the college-choice process differs for African Americans in comparison to other groups. For example, Freeman (2005) stated that African Americans consider cultural factors and contemplate whether or not to attend a mixed PWI or a predominately African American college environment when contemplating college-choices. The existing body of literature primarily explores low academic persistence among African Americans and the African American students’ experiences in academic settings (Thompson, 2005).

This review explored literature related to the influences of the college-choice process for all students with an emphasis on African Americans. Due to the small body of literature on African Americans and college-choice, non-race specific literature was included in order to provide a more comprehensive review. Past research indicates that in the search and choice phases several factors such as parents, institutional size, location, and academic programs have been identified as being influential on the college-choice decisions of college students.

In order to truly understand just how far African Americans have come in education, it was important to briefly illustrate their educational journey from slavery to educational freedom. It was hoped that the exploration of the access to education by African Americans provided a
stronger linkage for their participation in higher education. Therefore, a historical overview of the relationship between African Americans and education began the dialogue in this review. To provide an even broader perspective, an examination of African American participation and enrollment trends in PWIs and HBCUs was also provided. In addition, a discussion on family involvement in education was included. According to Freeman (2005), it was necessary to understand the framework of how African American families influence the college-choice process for their children. Lastly, an exploration of studies conducted on African Americans and college-choice and examples of college-choice models was included to provide a framework for the development of the college-choice process for all students.

*African American Participation in Education*

In order to understand the overall college-choice of African Americans, it was important to first understand the historical importance of acquiring education, from slavery to freedom, to the African American community in the United States. This included a historical and current day overview of African Americans, their participation in higher education, and the college enrollment trends of the identified group.

Historically, education for African Americans hasn’t been without its challenges. Early in American history to the end of the Civil War, formal instruction of slaves and free Blacks was against the law in the South and socially unacceptable in the North (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The desire for literacy and formal education became a core value in the Black cultural value system as a result of the experience of enslavement and legalized oppression and discrimination in the United States (Franklin, 2002). In spite of many obstacles, Blacks managed to enroll at some White colleges in the North. It was estimated that about 28 Blacks graduated from U.S. Colleges before the U.S. Civil War (Gurin & Epps, 1975).
It was during the Civil War in which the Morrill Act of 1862 was passed. The passage of this act granted each state and territory thirty thousand acres of land for each congressman and senator. The proceeds from the sale of the land was to be used to support and maintain at least one college for the purpose of teaching agriculture and the mechanic arts. In addition, because the Morrill Act was passed during the Civil War it did not apply to eleven Confederate states and it did not benefit Blacks during that time. However, after the Civil War, in 1871 many of the Southern states were recipients of the Morrill Act monies and three of the Southern states used the funds to subsidize African American land-grant institutions. In 1890, an amendment to the Morrill Act mandated the inclusion of Black institutions which provided the framework for the countries seventeen historically black land-grant colleges (Jones-Wilson, 1996).

At the end of the U.S. Civil War, organizations such as the Freedmen’s’ Bureau, Northern philanthropic and religious missionary organizations, and African Americans took it upon themselves to provide education for the newly freed ex-slaves of the South (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Between 1865 and 1900, 51 Black colleges and universities were founded and produced most of the educators and professionals who served the Black community in the first half-century following emancipation. It was during this time that Black private colleges and universities graduated more than 1000 Black college students and it was estimated that Northern White institutions graduated another 200 Blacks (Gurin & Epps, 1975). Public colleges and universities for Blacks were established in Southern and Border States after the expansion of public school education in the South during and following Reconstruction. It was also during this time that, by law, Blacks were not permitted to attend White public or private colleges and universities (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).
There were also landmark Supreme Court Cases that led to the integration of Blacks into not only elementary and secondary schools but also public and private colleges and universities. It was important to note that in 1896, whether or not public facilities could be segregated based on race first came about in the framework of transportation, not education. In the landmark case of *Plessy v Ferguson of Louisiana*, the Supreme Court decision upheld the concept of “separate but equal” by concluding that the Louisiana law requiring Whites and Blacks to ride in separate railroad cars did not violate the Equal Protection Clause (McNeese, 2006; Supreme Court of the United States, 1896).

In 1954, fifty-eight years after *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, concluded that racially segregated schools were essentially unequal; stating that no public institution may discriminate in admissions on the basis of race. Although this case concerned elementary and secondary schools, it clearly applied to postsecondary education as well (Kaplin & Lee, 1995; Martin, 1998). These landmark cases opened the doors of opportunity for postsecondary education for many Blacks during this time.

Until the civil rights era began after World War II, education for Blacks represented the most evident sore spot of American life (Billingsley, 1992). The landmark Supreme Court Cases and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were pivotal moments in history for the African American community because they lead to a rapid increase of Black enrollment at White institutions, it also created greater efforts to enroll Blacks in White colleges and universities (Wilson, 1998). During the first half of the twentieth century, Black colleges continued to provide higher education for the majority of Blacks who attended college. Partially this was because Black enrollment at White institutions was still very limited (Gurin & Epps, 1975). Enrollment trends began to shift with two federal initiatives: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the passage of the GI Bill. The
Civil Rights Act of 1964 increased enrollment opportunities for Blacks at PWI (Wilson, 1998). The GI Bill helped to increase by the thousands the number of African American veterans able to attend colleges and universities. In 1980, African American enrollment in higher education doubled from 600,000 in 1965 to 1.2 million in 1980 but only 20% attended HBCUs. In more recent years, African Americans have had more choices in the colleges and universities they can attend. As of 2002, there were 4,216 public and private colleges and universities in the US (Freeman & Thomas, 2002).

Because there are so many choices, it is important for college administrators to understand the characteristics of those African American students who choose to attend a PWI or HBCU (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). It is equally important to also understand what or who influences those decisions.

*Cultural Capital and Habitus*

Pierre Bourdieu, defined cultural capital as an important form of resources used by individuals to transform their aspirations into educational credentials (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The concept of cultural capital is figurative; it has no fundamental value other than ways in which it can be converted to secure other resources such as economic value (Bourdieu, 1977; Horvat, 2001; McDonough, 1997). Cultural capital is passed on by parents through attitudes, preferences and behaviors to achieve a desired social outcome (Walpole, 2003). It was necessary to address this concept when exploring African Americans and college-choice because it considered one’s family background in order to understand how individuals are affected by their environmental culture (Acker-Ball, 2007). For example, McCurdy (2003) conducted a study examining African American student’s choice of a private or public HBCU within a cultural capital framework. This study was significant because it not only emphasized the importance of
viewing cultural capital from a family standpoint; it also exemplified the need to examine cultural differences as an essential part of the African American’s college-choice decision making process.

McDonough, Antonio and Trent (1997) defined *habitus* as the way people make sagacious aspirations by observing the people around them and examining what is regarded as being high-quality. It referred to attitudes and perceptions that unintentionally influenced one’s actions. In addition, it is considered to be a learned behavior that is inadvertently passed on through a particular social environment (Bourdieu, 1996). For example, McDonough et. al (1997) conducted a study to investigate if there were a distinctive African American habitus that assisted students in creating common aspirations about good college-choice outcomes; strategies about what makes a good college-choice; and awareness and predisposition to the choice of an HBCU.

Utilizing a Bourdieuan Cultural Capital Theory, researchers (McCurdy, 2003; McDonough and Antonio, 1996; Horvat, 1996) conducted studies developing a college-choice model that consisted of four principal constructs: *Capital Endowment, Past Capital Accumulation, College Choice, Anticipated Capital Reinvestment and Conversion Variables*. The study conducted by McDonough and Antonio (1996) examined how students chose colleges and how the college-choices of those students differed by race and ethnicity across four groups: African American, Asian American, Chicano, and Caucasian. Measurements of the above mentioned principal constructs were obtained by gathering data from the 1994 Cooperative Institution Research Program (CIRP) freshman survey. This survey contained questions that provided data on a variety of student characteristics and experiences. The following provided a
brief description and outline of the cultural capital concepts as defined by McDonough and Antonio (1996).

*Capital Endowment* is a cultural concept that uses intangible resources to form student’s habitus or a student’s perceptions and attitudes about their college-choice. These resources often obtained at birth include the following variable: parent’s income, parent’s educational level, parent’s immigration status and gender.

*Accumulated Capital*, according to McDonough and Antonio (1996), is a construct that represents cultural capital obtained by an individual while in high school. The accumulated variables are: high school activities such as community service, visits to cultural events such as art galleries or museums, and communication with a teacher and student outside of the classroom such as a visit to the teacher’s home. Other variables include, number of years of foreign language courses completed, student’s college admissions tests scores and their average grades. However, in the study conducted by McCurdy (2003), the accumulation of cultural capital of both high school and parental influences were examined and treated as separate constructs with their own separate set of variables.

*Anticipated Capital and Conversion* takes place once the student has made his or her college selection. Students will begin to utilize their cultural capital by developing expectations and making decisions and eventually reinvesting the capital in order to maintain certain returns on their investment. Capital investment variables based up the McDonough and Antonio (1996) study includes: the amount of aspiration and motivation they possess in order to be successful in college, the distance of their chosen college, the amount of financial and the aid resources, the students expectation for their own college-experience, the chosen college’s religious affiliation and the residence of the student while in college.
African American Families and Churches

Although it has been argued that it is not necessary to understand African American parental involvement in their children’s elementary and secondary education in order to understand their college-choice; most college-choice theorists believe that family plays a large role in influencing the college-choice decisions of their children (Freeman, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Jackson; 1982).

Parental encouragement, parental support and parental involvement in their child’s or children’s education were important indicators of postsecondary educational aspirations. According to Hossler, Schmit & Vesper (1999), parental encouragement was demonstrated through regular conversation and communication between parents and children about the dreams and aspirations for their children and what the parents expected and hoped for their children. Parental support, according to Hossler et.al (1999), is support in the form of financial support and encouragement.

Evidence suggested that the level of parental education has a strong positive influence upon predisposition toward post-secondary education, more than either socioeconomic status (SES) or student ability. Children of highly educated parents rely on their parents for information; however children of less educated parents rely primarily on teachers, guidance counselors, and others for information (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Several researchers contended that parental level of education combined with parent’s education aspirations for their children, may be the best predictor of student postsecondary plans. In addition, parents’ orientation toward college and expectation of their children are major influences on college attendance (Coleman, 1990; Hossler & Stage, 1992; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997).
African American families use education as a means to find their place in life. After finding it, they try to repeat their experience through their children (Billingsley, 1992). The research provided evidence that parents have a large influence on the college-choice of their children. What the research hasn’t shown is how African American families have influenced the college-choice decision making process for their children. It is necessary to understand channeling in order to better understand not only who influences college-choice but also how they influence the college-choice decisions. Freeman (2005) defined channeling as “the environmental forces (whether individuals, institutions, or circumstances) that influence the direction of students’ postsecondary choices” (p. 60). For example, there are influences that are internal to home such as family and economics. The influence of family is different among cultural groups which make it even more important to expound upon the influence of family as it relates to African Americans (Freeman, 2005).

In a study conducted by Hrabowski, Maton, Greene, and Greif (2002) family was mentioned most often as the primary source of support. They also indicated that it was not always a particular person but rather the entire family that was credited with being supportive of the child’s academic accomplishments. Freeman (2005) supported the aforementioned study and agreed that family is a source of support in education aspirations. Freeman (2005) also stated that, in order to understand the African American family’s role in the college-choice process, it is important to first review the value that these families have placed on education and in what ways they have passed on their value of higher education to their children.

Families that do not have a background of college attendance still encourage their children to go further than their own level of education. However, Hsiao (1992) indicated that parents and other family members who did not attend college may not be supportive because
they did not understand the advantages of a college education. Moreover, McDonough’s (1997) college-choice study, found that students whose parents have attended college were often ahead on college preparations as early as elementary school by taking the right courses and maintaining good grades; their families also conveyed information to them about the different types of colleges and universities. In addition, in a study conducted by Freeman (2005), the participants identified three factors that influenced their college-choice decisions (Figure 1); automatic expectation in their family, going beyond the family level, and self-motivation. Students who had the automatic expectation to attend college instilled while growing up were often students from parents or families of college graduates but was important to note that in African American families, the value of higher education was often instilled even when family members have not participated in higher education. According to Freeman (2005), it was not an automatic expectation for the majority of African Americans that they attend college. But, the participants in Freeman’s study also reported that they were often encouraged to go beyond their parents or extended family’s own level of education. This response often came from students whose parents or family members did not attend college. Lastly, there were some participants in this study who indicated that no one influenced their college-choice decision; their decision to attend college was primarily from aspiration and motivation alone. Freeman (2005) illustrated that even though these students may not have been encouraged to go beyond their parents or family member’s level of education doesn’t mean these students didn’t have college potential. Instead, these students seemingly used the negative home environment and influences as motivators even more than those who were surrounded by positive influences. The study conducted by Cejda, Casparis, and Rhodes (2002) discussed the college-choice decisions of Hispanic students. Thirty Hispanic students selected from three different Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) were
interviewed about their college-choice decisions. Sixty percent of the participants in this study mentioned family as being a major influence in their college-choice decisions. The findings from this study were parallel to the findings from the Freeman (2005) study.

Historically, immediate family members, other extended family, and church members, have consistently been involved in the education of African American children (Freeman, 2005). Extended family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and the like can also play a critical role college-choice process. According to Freeman (1998) when are parents are knowledgeable or not in a position to influence the college-choice process; it is important to note that extended family quite often play a pivotal role in the decision making process.

The African American church has been pivotal in providing a sense of community and belonging for African American people. It has long been a sense of strength and support for the African American community; a resource for those that are struggling to make a better life (Evans-Everett, 2000). According to Morris & Robinson (1996), African American churches have supported African American businesses, taught moral and religious values, protected from racial injustices and promoted education. It is important to note that many HBCUs were founded or were affiliated with a church or religious organization. Cheyney University, located in Cheyney, Pennsylvania, is the oldest HBCU, it was founded by the Quaker church. In addition, HBCUs such as Wilberforce University, in Wilberforce, Ohio, Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina and Edward Waters College in Florida and Rust College in Mississippi were all founded by or affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal church (The HBCU Network, 2003). South Carolina Institutions such as Livingstone College and Clinton Junior College were all founded by or affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME, 2007). There are also Baptist affiliated HBCUs such as Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina,
Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina and Morris College Sumter, South Carolina. However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the influence of church or church going on college-choice or college attendance. Some studies (Maquire & Lay, 1981; Tierney, 1983; Tweedell, 1987) indicated that involvement in church may increase youth participation especially in religiously affiliated colleges and universities. In addition, Tweedell (1987) found that youth who were active in church were influenced by more than parental pressure but also the church members themselves. According to Evans-Everett (2000), African American parents highly valued child rearing outcomes such as hard work, religion, and self-esteem. These same parents also placed a high value on education with hopes of their children completing high school and going further to attend college. The research reveals implications that further research is needed in the area of religion and college-choice. The next section provided a discussion on the college-choice models. It is important to note that only one framework model included religion as a background characteristic to consider when examining college-choice.
Figure 1. The Influence of Family on Students’ College-Choice

African Americans and College-Choice Studies

1 From African Americans and college choice: The influence of family and school, by K. Freeman, 2005, Footnote continued on the next page.
Historically, African Americans have not been the focal point in many college-choice studies, however there is a growing body of literature that has turned its attention to the college-choice decisions of this identified group. A few studies, (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Freeman, 1997, 1999, 2005; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; McDonough and Others, 1997) have found multiple factors that influenced the college decision-making of African Americans. This review provided specific factors found in these studies.

According to Maxey, Lee, and McClure (1995), by the time most African American high school students become juniors and seniors, they begin to consider where to go to college, which is much later than for their White counterparts. Many prioritize their decisions by considering, location, programs offered, quality of on campus housing, cost, available financial aid and location. In the registration materials of the 1993 American College Testing (ACT), students were asked to rank a list of factors in order of importance that influenced their college-choice. Among African Americans, tuition and cost were found to be the highest on the list of factors that influenced the first college-choice for the participants in this group; cost was the second highest factor for White participants in this study (Maxey et al., 1995).

Freeman (1997, 1999) conducted a study that included interviewing 70 African American high school students in order to understand their decision-making process to participate in higher education. She found that parental education and parental income were major influences in participant’s college-choice decisions. In addition, Bateman (1993) conducted a study examining several factors that were identified by other researchers as being influences on college-choice decisions. The researcher compared African American and White students during the predisposition stage of the college-choice process. It was found that the
influence of parents had a greater effect on African American participants than White participants. Both parents’ expectations and parents’ educational level appeared to be major areas of influence for the African American group.

Cyprian-Andrews (2004) studied the factors that influenced African American students’ decisions to attend a community college by interviewing twelve African American students enrolled in a community college in Louisiana. This researcher found multiple factors that influenced the participants’ decisions to pursue higher education and discovered that family, high school and church had the most significant influence in the participants’ decisions to attend a community college.

Freeman (1999) conducted a study interviewing 21 high achieving African American students and found no distinguishable differences between the background characteristics of those students who chose to attend a PWI and those who chose to attend an HBCU. In addition, Thompson (2005) investigated differences in the racial identity attitudes of students who chose to attend PWIs or HBCUs. This researcher administered the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) for African American populations to 50 African American students enrolled in PWIs and 50 African American students enrolled in HBCUs. The researcher then randomly selected participants to be interviewed to discuss factors that influenced their decision to attend a PWI or an HBCU. The researcher found no significant relationship between racial identity and an African American college student’s decision to attend a PWI or an HBCU and was consistent with Freeman’s (1999) findings. However, in the study conducted by Jones (2002) the participants who chose to attend a PWI and those who chose to attend an HBCU had some discernible differences in their background characteristics. For example, the students that chose to attend an HBCU either had a parent or other relative that attended an HBCU and the students
that chose to attend a PWI did necessarily know anyone that went to that institution but chose to attend because of financial aid or scholarship opportunities.

Other College-Choice Studies

Many college-choice studies have been conducted that examined the college-choice decisions of all students. However, some of these studies did not discuss the effects of race and ethnicity on the participants’ college-choice decisions. For example, Sztam (2003) conducted a study examining the college-choice process of six high-achieving high school students and their parents. In that study, the researcher recognized the various ethnic backgrounds in the descriptions of the participants but failed to discuss or even mention whether or not ethnicity had any influence on the student’s college-choice. In addition, Allen (2007) conducted a study to identify factors that influenced student’s college-choice decisions at five different colleges and universities in Illinois and Missouri. The researcher identified several factors including a discussion on parental influences. However, the researcher did not include any exploration of ethnic or cultural influences on college-choice decision. This missing piece left the reader to believe that all students experienced the same process and had the same influences.

College-Choice Models

The concept college-choice has been defined as a “complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training” (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 234). Over the years, several models of college-choice have been created to better understand the process for students. These models have produced significant data with status attainment, persistence and economic theories at the forefront of these frameworks (Cyprian-Andrews, 2004). Many of these college-choice
models have been organized into three categories: sociological, economic, and combined models of choice.

The sociological models originated from the social theory of status-attainment. These models focused primarily on the elements that influence college aspirations of students such as family socioeconomic background, student academic ability, parental educational expectations, the influence of significant others and high school performance (Hossler & Stage, 1992).

In contrast, economic models also known as econometric models were based on the idea that students use a cost benefit analysis by weighing the costs of their choice (e.g., attend college, join the military, go into the workforce) against the perceived benefits (Hossler, et al., 1999). These models viewed college-choice as an investment decision and assumed that students who maximize perceived cost-benefits in their college-choices had perfect information and were engaged in a process of rational choice (McDonough, 1997). In addition, the combined models of college-choice utilized components of both economic and sociological studies of college-choice to explain the college-choice process (Bourdieu, 1997; Coleman, 1990; McDonough, 1997). Each perspective had its strengths and weaknesses; however, models that utilized a single perspective versus a combination of both the sociological and economic processes did not provide a comprehensive explanation of the college-choice process. Combined models offered more opportunity for intervention and were more useful to the college administrators and the public than the sociological and economic models alone (Hossler et al., 1989).

This next section described the four models of college-choice that have served as the framework for college-choice studies over the past twenty-years: Chapman, (1981); Hanson and Litten, (1982); Hossler and Gallagher, (1987); Jackson, (1982). This outline described the phases and stages of each model and how the phases and stages interact or coincide.
The Chapman Model

The Chapman (1981) model (Figure 2) involved both an individual perspective and an institutional perspective and suggested that the student characteristics and external influences interact to form a student’s general expectation of college life. It also stated that, in order to understand student college-choice, colleges and universities must take into account background and current characteristics of the students, their families, and the characteristics of the college. The Chapman model presented that student college-choice was influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences. The student characteristics included socioeconomic status, aptitude, educational aspirations, and high school performance.

According to Chapman (1981), students from families with different socioeconomic backgrounds entered college at different rates and were also distributed differently across different types of colleges and universities. Often, students tended to self-select institutions with enrolled students of similar aptitude as themselves. In addition, prospective students used high school performance as an indicator to judge whether a particular college would be of interest to them (i.e., level of competition at the particular college or university, the aptitude of other students attending the college, their chances of being accepted to the college). The external influences were grouped into three general categories: (1) the influences of significant persons such as guidance counselors or peers; (2) the fixed characteristics of the institution perhaps the location and the aesthetics of the campus; and (3) the institution’s own efforts to communicate with prospective students by phone, email, information in the mail (Chapman, 1981).
According to Chapman (1981), significant persons, such as peers and family, in a student’s life tended to influence student’s decisions by their comments and advice. Prospective students tended to use the fixed characteristics of the institution that included location, cost, campus environment, and available programs, to define the institution. The final category in this model was the institutions efforts to communicate with prospective students. This reflected the college and university efforts to develop a process in which they were able to attract more students or a particular student through marketing strategies.

Chapman (1981) contended that student and family background and characteristics had the biggest influence on college-choice, second was external influences such as significant persons, fixed characteristics of the college, and the college and universities efforts to communicate with prospective students. Although the Chapman Model included student characteristics such socioeconomic status, aptitude and so forth, Chapman failed to include race as a possible influence to be included in the student characteristic category, again, leaving a gap in the models for college-choice. Another limit to this model is that it only described the pattern of influences that affected traditional aged (18-21) prospective students. Although this study did not discuss traditional aged students; there a more non-traditional aged students returning to college. Therefore, it is important that there is a college-choice model that recognizes the necessity to also develop a college-choice model that examines non-traditional students. This reveals yet another gap in the college-choice research.

This model, believed to be one of the earliest models developed on college-choice, provided a framework for continued research on college-choice as outlined in the remainder of this chapter.
Figure 2. The Chapman Model: A Model of Student College Choice²

² From Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make. Footnote continued on the next page.
The Jackson Model

Jackson’s (1982) model (Figure 3) is divided into three stages: preference, exclusion, and evaluation. The preference stage emphasizes the sociological aspects that influence college-choice while the exclusion and evaluation stages emphasize college cost and college characteristics.

In the preference stage, according to Hossler & Gallagher (1987), is where the student develops thoughts about attending college. This is where it is determined if a student is interested in attending college. In addition, how students did academically in high school have a major impact on their intent to attend college and is a major component of this stage. Students who do well academically in high school generally develop a preference to attend college. Family background such as socio-economic status, parental educational status, and peer influences are included in the preference stage. However, it is during this stage that Jackson neglected to include race, ethnicity, or gender as possible influences on college-choice decisions of students; negating the possibility that any of these demographic variables could have an impact or influence on college-choice decisions. Although gender was not the focus of this study, it did present further implications for future research studies. The inclusion of family background is pivotal in this stage; informing future college-choice researchers that the influence of family and their background is key in examining college-choice influences.

In the exclusion stage, students made a choice to attend college but are considering their options by reviewing their resources, financially feasible choices and information learned from others to exclude the unfeasible. The main components of this stage include location of college, information and college cost. At this stage students began to reduce their list of colleges make, by D. Hossler, J. Schmit, & N. Vesper, 1999, p.147
based upon these components. According to Jackson (1982), students often exclude colleges on their list of choices with limited knowledge or information about those colleges. When instead, students should gather more information and carefully evaluate those choices. Jackson (1982) indicates location and availability of accurate information as being the strongest influences on college-choice in this phase of the model.

*Evaluation* is the last stage in this model where students began to evaluate from their narrow list of college-choices and assess the final list based upon college characteristics and college cost. It is during this stage that students make their final college-choice selection. It is important to note that not only were students contemplating their college-choices they considered non college options as well.

According to Jackson (1982), overall, academic achievement is the strongest correlate for student’s aspirations to attend college, the next strongest correlate is context variables such as peers, neighborhood, schools and the third strongest correlate is family background. The phases of the Jackson model are clearly necessary in examining college-choice however there is an apparent void in the variables. Although, the Jackson model did include family background as a strong correlate for college-choice decisions, this model did not include race as a possible variable to consider. The gap in the model suggested that this model could be used to assess the college-choice decisions of all students without considering the effect or influence of race and ethnicity.
Figure 3. The Jackson Model: A Combined Student Choice Model

Phase I: Preference

Family Background

Social Context

Academic Achievement

Aspiration

Resources

Choice Set

Phase II: Exclusion

Choice

Phase III: Evaluation

Rating Scheme

The Hanson and Litten Model

Footnote continued on the next page.

3 From “Public efficiency and private choice in higher education”, by G. Jackson, 1982, Educational
According to Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith (1989), the Hanson and Litten (1982) model could be viewed as a cross between Jackson’s (1982) student-based model and Chapman’s (1981) institution-based model. As previously described, Jackson’s Model primarily suggested that combined socioeconomic and econometric perspectives were used jointly to describe college-choice as a single process. Chapman’s model suggested that student college-choice is influenced a combination of student characteristics and a series of external influences (Chapman, 1981).

Hanson and Litten (Figure 4) argued that the college-choice is a continuing process that includes five major steps: having college aspirations, starting the search process; gathering information; sending applications; and enrolling in a college. These five steps can be condensed into three stages: the decision to participate in postsecondary education, the investigation of institutions and the development of sets of institutions to consider and the process of applying and enrolling (Litten, 1982).

Hanson and Litten’s model (1982) identified sets of variables that affected the college-choice process that included student background, personal attributes, environment, public policy, college actions, college characteristics, technology/media used, and high school attributes. According to Hanson and Litten, high school attributes and policies had the biggest influence during the search process.

Student background and attributes influence the decision to attend college and help to develop the student’s college aspirations. College actions such as recruitment, activities and admissions policies and technology/media affect the student during the information gathering stage. College characteristics and technology/media impact the actual completion and
returning the application. College actions whether they choose to admit or deny the student and how much aid was granted determined if the student enrolled at that college. Out of the four framework models, the Hanson and Litten model is the only model that includes race, family background, and parent’s education as possible influences of college-choice decisions.

This model is very complex in that it seems to try to cover every possible variable that could influence college-choice. This model is the only framework model that includes both race and family as possible student background characteristics to consider when examining college-choice. Although there is an eight year difference between the development of the Jackson model (1982) and the development of the Hanson and Litten model (1989); this model was a clear example of how the college-choice models evolved.

Even though the Freeman Model of Predetermination (2005) was selected as the theoretical framework for this study, the Hanson and Litten model could have been used as a lens for this study as well. In addition, Litten (1982) discussed the importance of examining college-choice by different groups (i.e. race, class, gender) in order to suggest where different recruiting strategies might be appropriate. However, Litten clearly states, “It appears that parental education has stronger effects on the conduct of the college selection process than attributes such as race or gender, with the greatest effects on the way information is obtained” (Litten, 1982 p.400).
Figure 4. Hanson and Litten: An Expanded Model of the College Selection Process

The Hossler and Gallagher Model

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) (Figure 5), the most cited model of college-choice, developed a simplified three-stage college-choice model based upon a combination of previous work. This model contains a manageable framework of three stages: (1) predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice with an emphasis on the student rather than the institution.

The predisposition stage refers to post-high school plans students make in regards to education or work. During this stage, peers, high school experiences, student’s family background and academic performance play a major role as factors that influenced the development of the student’s post high school plans.

In the search stage, students explore and evaluate possible colleges to attend. During this stage students determine if certain colleges have the particular characteristics they are seeking. How large are the classes? Do they have residence halls or is it a commuter campus? Hossler and Gallagher identify this stage as the most important stage because of the increased interaction between students and institutions during this stage.

In the choice stage, students who create a list of choice schools will make their selection from their list. There are, however, those students that did not have a list of schools and have only one school in mind. As the academic performance of students and the socioeconomic status of their families increase, the number of colleges considered also increase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Various models previously discussed were useful for understanding and analyzing the college-choice process. Each of these models has been the framework for many college-choice studies over the past twenty years; however, they have primarily focused on the college-choice of students in general.
Figure 5. Hossler and Gallagher: The Combined Model of College-Choice

The Freeman Model

\textsuperscript{5} From Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make. Footnote continued on the next page.
Over the past twenty years, the college-choice has evolved. Researchers have begun to recognize that the framework college-choice models has holes and are lacking all the necessary variables needed to examine choice-choice decision making and influences. Recently, Freeman provided a deeper analysis of college-choice for African Americans and recognized the need for the development of a college-choice model that addressed characteristics that may be specific to cultural groups. The Model of Predetermination, developed by Freeman (2005), as previously mentioned, was used as the framework to support this study.

This model included race, cultural characteristics, school characteristics and family and kinship as variables to consider when exploring influences on college-choice. As Freeman (2005) pointed out, it was not enough to mention that significant others and parents influenced college-choice. Models based on one perspective do not allow for the exploration of how families (single, dual or extended) influenced college-choice. In Figure 6, Freeman (2005) went further by developing a model that expanded the predisposition stage of the Hossler and Gallagher Model (1987).

In this model, Freeman (2005) referred to Phase One of the college decision-making process as “predetermination” because of environmental circumstances that often have a large impact on whether or not a student chooses to go to college. These environmental circumstances are usually out of the control of the student. According to Freeman (2005), in order to better understand African American student college-choice, we must examine in greater detail what influences students and how they are influenced. For example, parents who are college-educated are more likely to initiate the idea of going to college than are those who did not go to college.

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Further, college-educated parents are more likely to start a college-education savings account for their children. In contrast, first generation students report receiving less family support for their college aspirations and often have less information about college (Freeman, 1997). Although parental income does not influence predisposition, parents’ educational levels do. As parental education level increases, their children are more likely to plan for college. Parents with college education are more likely to value education and to transmit their values to their children.

In the college-choice study conducted by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) parental influence was described as sending signals. They found that the time frame parents have the most influence on the college-choice process was during the earlier stages of the process. This time frame may begin at birth for some students.

As previously mentioned, African Americans now have more choices in where to attend college as ever before. The next few sections will describe additional college-choice models and illustrate the inclusion of multiple influences in the phases and stages of college-choice models and how they have increased over time. However, the competition of attracting students is still stiff among colleges and universities. College administrators continue to operate from an incomplete understanding of the multiple influences that affect students’

Although this model directly focused on African Americans, it could easily be adapted to examine college-choice for other ethnicities as well. In addition, it is important to note that out of all the models previously described the Freeman Model was the most appropriate model to be used as the framework for this study.
Summary

The literature clearly illustrated the need to understand college-choice as it pertained to race and family. The combined models have all incorporated sociological and economical college-choice factors, however the combined models of Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), and Hossler and Gallagher (1989) did not show any implications that race or ethnicity was a factor to be considered when examining college-choice. Hanson and Litten (1982) and Freeman (2005) both included race and family as factors to consider when examining college-choice decisions.

The final section of this chapter provided an overview of the Voluntary System of Accountability. This was an attempt to encourage colleges and universities to be more accountable and to play a larger role by in assisting students and their parents in college-choice decisions.
Figure 6. Freeman: Model of Predetermination

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Voluntary System of Accountability

Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) was implemented and developed by policymakers and academic leaders for the purposes of assisting students and their families with the college-choice process. This system provided consistent, analogous, apparent information for higher education stakeholders and exemplified more institutional accountability for student learning and student development (VSA, 2007). VSA was important in that it compelled public colleges and universities to examine its practices and student outcomes in an effort to become more accountable. In addition, this system communicated information on the college experiences of undergraduate students. It also provided a single portal, the VSA website, for students and their families to obtain information on colleges and university in an effort to assist them in making sound decisions on their college-choice.

It was obvious that the developers of this system recognized the influence of families primarily parents on the college-choice decisions of their children. Prospective students, current students, parents, policymakers and stakeholders are listed as constituents of this system. The language on the official VSA website clearly tells the reader that the information provided is not only written for the student but also for the families (VSA, 2007).

Currently, participation in this system is voluntary and only includes College Portrait pages for 321 public colleges and universities. It is hoped that more colleges and universities will see the critical nature of this information in assisting students and their families on the college-choice process and join forces. In addition, it is hoped that similar VSA models and College Portrait pages will be developed for private colleges and community colleges. This will ensure
that students and parents have the most accurate and up-to-date information on colleges and universities when making college-choice decisions.

Summary

This study provided a more in-depth exploration into the influence of race and family on the college-choice decisions of those students that chose to attend a PWI or an HBCU. This review began with a historical and current day overview of African American’s participation in higher education. It was important to include a historical point of view in order to provide a foundation as to the importance of education to African Americans. In addition, African American enrollment trends in PWIs and HBCUs and the college enrollment gap between African American enrollment and White enrollment provided the basis for the inclusion of race and family in this study. It also provided another reason why it was necessary to explore the college-choice decisions of African Americans. Cultural capital and habitus represented a concept that detailed the need to examine family background and the environment of study participants when examining college-choice and African Americans. An explanation the VSA, which is a fairly new accountability vehicle for colleges and universities, provided an additional rationale as to why college administrators clearly need to better understand the influence of family on the college-choice decisions of their children.

This chapter also included an examination of prevalent college-choice models and variables that influenced the college-choice process of students. Most of those models did not include race or family as a variable to consider when examining college-choice. Only one model distinctly supported the inclusion of race and family as variables to explore when examining college-choice for African Americans: the Freeman Model of Predetermination. Therefore this model was used as the framework for examining the college-choice decisions of the participants
in this study. The information from this study contributed to the small body of literature that focuses on the college-choice decisions of African Americans.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This qualitative study explored the influence of race and family background on the college-choice decisions of African Americans who chose to attend a PWI or an HBCU. In addition, this qualitative design helped to guide the research design through individual and family interviews by investigating the following primary research question, “What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American families?” and two sub-research questions:

- How do African American parents influence the college-choice decisions of their children?
- How do African American parents who attended a PWI or HBCU influence their children’s decision to attend a PWI or HBCU?

This chapter presented the following information: rationale, research design, population and location, access and sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical concerns, and significance of the study.

Rationale for a Qualitative Case Study

This study sought not only to reveal ways in which families influenced the college-choice process but also provided a venue in which African Americans could share their thoughts and perspectives on college-choice in general. It was important to recognize that not only has there been a lack of research on African Americans and college-choice, the qualitative approach has seldom been used in previous studies on college-choice.
Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the feelings, knowledge and perceptions of people by conducting in-depth, intensive interviewing and allowing one to understand the world as seen by the participants (Patton, 2002). This design is most appropriate when conducting case studies and seeking the thoughts and perspectives of study participants.

Consequently a qualitative case study design was the best approach to conduct the research in this study. Yin (2003) stated that, “Case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). The point of case studies is to collect in-depth, comprehensive information about a case or cases of interest. According to Patton (2002), utilizing a case study approach allowed the researcher to organize the data by specific cases to allow for in-depth study. Stake (1995) stated, “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is be study…We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods.” Case study methodology allows the researcher to develop themes and categories based upon the testimonials of the participants. In addition it allows the implementation of participant descriptions of experiences (Maxwell, 1996). Case studies focus on specific cases and study the participant’s point-of-view (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). This research is not statistical and is typically not an experiment however; it does focus on the process, and discovery as opposed to particular variables or outcomes. (Acker-Ball, 2007). For this research study, the case study approach was most appropriate because it was designed to addresses specific instances such as events, persons, processes or other things of interest (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). It is important to note that case studies can be a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative evidence however in this study, the objective was to capture the
thoughts and perspectives of the participants and gather direct quotes as described by the participants; therefore a qualitative approach was employed. (Yin, 2003).

Other Research Methods

In addition to qualitative case study research methods, there were other methods such as quantitative, action research, ethnographic, or grounded theory that could have been employed to conduct this study.

Quantitative methods make it possible to measure the responses of a large number of people to a limited number of questions. In addition quantitative research generally consists of numbers, statistics and proportions. (Patton, 2002). Although, this method could have been used, its use would have changed the scope of the study by producing broad findings and presenting an expansive view of the data. Action research was another possible research method that could have been used to analyze the data from this study. However, action research tends to focus on solving the problems of specific programs or organizations by actively involving the people in the programs in examining their own problems (Patton, 2002). This research study did not focus on a particular program or organization; it focused more on the participants and their thoughts and perspectives on college-choice. Although, action research often uses case studies and qualitative inquiry methodology, its focus was too narrow for this study. In addition, there were other qualitative methods that clearly could be used such as ethnography and grounded theory. Ethnographic research is the study of a cultural or social group in its natural setting. The researcher examined the learned and patterned behaviors of this group. Grounded theory, rooted in sociological perspective, seeks to discover a theory emerged from the researcher’s observations and interviews (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). Case study method comparably seemed to be the most appropriate in studying the phenomenon of African Americans and
college-choice. It allows the researcher to capture and remain true to the perspective of the participants also called the emic perspective (Patton, 2002).

Methods Used in Previous Studies

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a growing body of research that focuses on African Americans and the factors that influenced the college-choice decisions of this group. These college-choice researchers (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Cyprian-Andrews, 2004; Freeman, 1997, 1999, 2005; Maxey, Lee, & McClure, 1995; McDonough & Antonio, 1996;) utilized a variety of methods to explore and analyze the data from their research.

There are some college-choice researchers who have begun to understand the need to capture the voices, perspectives and opinions of their participants and chose to investigate the questions raised in their studies by employing a qualitative research design. Freeman (1997, 1999, 2005) and Cyprian-Andrews (2004) both utilized a qualitative research design method with groups in their studies. Freeman conducted in-depth group interviews with high school juniors and seniors capturing their thoughts on their college-choice influences. Cyprian-Andrews conducted in-depth interviews with African American community college students enrolled in a freshman English composition course or a first-year experience course capturing their thoughts on choosing to attend a community college.

Other researchers chose to employ a quantitative design by utilizing data from existing surveys and databases. For example, Maxey, Lee and McClure (1995) examined and compiled the college-choice questions and answers of the African American students who completed the survey that was administered to all students who took the 1993-94 American College Testing (ACT) exam. Bateman and Hossler (1996) utilized data from the Indiana College Placement and Assessment Center (ICPAC) that were developed to encourage ninth-graders to consider
education beyond high school. The participants, who included approximately 5000 ninth-grade high school students and their parents, were mailed a questionnaire that included a student survey and a parent survey in January, 1997. McDonough and Antonio (1996) formulated a model of college-choice by drawing from the 1994 Freshman Survey Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). This survey was administered to approximately 300,000 first-time, full-time freshman enrolled in colleges and universities across the US. The researchers collected data from this study to examine how students choose colleges and how the college choices differed among racial groups.

**Research Design**

The design used to conduct this research was a qualitative case study. To be more specific, a multiple-case study design was employed. When using multiple-case studies, each case must be selected so that it either predicts similar results or predicts contrasting results but for predicable reasons (Yin, 2003). The collection of qualitative data for this study emerged in three different ways. First, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire answering questions such as age, sex, religion, and so forth. Second, each participant was asked to participate in an individual interview and finally each was asked to participate in a family interview. According to Patton (2002), it is possible to find important differences in the data gathered in one type of interview versus another. Therefore in this research study, each participant was first asked to share in a group interview and later asked to partake in an individual interview. It was hoped the participants would provide even richer responses to the probing questions by participating in two interviews. In addition, participation in both interviews served as a checks and balance system for the researcher. According to Yin (2003), one of the most important foundations of case study information is the interview. Rather than structured
questioning as seen in survey research, the interviews in case study research appear as guided conversations. Although a consistent line of questioning was pursued, the actual stream of questions in a case study is more fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Utilizing a case study method allowed me to interview the participants using a combination of open-ended and focused interviewing techniques. Use of an open-ended method allowed the interview to flow naturally allowing the participant to propose his or her own insights into certain occurrence.
According to Patton (2002), gathering responses from open-ended questions allows the researcher to understand and capture the view points of the participants without predetermining their view points. This process compelled the participants to reflect upon their past experiences in making college-choice decisions. Consequently, the goal of the interviews was to focus on descriptions and recollection of what people experienced and how they experienced what they experienced. In addition, a focused interview method allowed the interview to still remain open-ended and conversational however the researcher still followed a certain set of questions to guide the interview (Yin, 2003). It was important to note that these interview questions were categorized into: predisposition, search, and choice. This allowed the questions to be developed in conjunction with the stages of most college-choice models. Although this was an open-ended interview, this helped the researcher focus on various stages of college-choice during the interview discussion. Some examples of the open-ended questions that were used in this study:

1. What role did your parents play in assisting you in your college-choice decisions?
2. How did the members of this affiliation assist in your college-choice decisions?
3. Why did you choose to attend a PWI rather than an HBCU or an HBCU rather than a PWI?
4. In retrospect, what would you have done differently?
These open-ended questions allowed the interview to take its own direction and allowed the participants to use whatever words they wanted to express what they had to say (Patton, 2002).

**Population**

The primary sample included four African American families all consisting of both mother and father and at least one or more adult children 21 years-of-age or older. The parents and their adult children were related by birth, adoption, or guardianship. The mother, father and adult children participating in this study all graduated from a PWI or an HBCU. I intentionally selected four African American families with the following criteria: family number one in which the parents and their children all graduated from a PWI; family number two in which parents and their children all graduated from an HBCU; family number three included parents that graduated from a PWI and their children graduated from an HBCU; and family number four included parents that graduated from an HBCU and their children graduated from a PWI. I purposely selected participants from a pool of volunteers recruited from the Alumni Chapters of African American Greek letter organizations located in two mid-size Midwestern cities. The organizations were selected because the majority of the members are African American and all alumni chapter members were required to have earned a minimum of a four-year college degree as a condition of membership.

**Setting**

Participants were selected from one of two Midwestern cities because of the significant African American populations in both cities. As of 2006, Midwestern City #1 had a population of 332,252 of whom 132,152 or 39% were African American; and Midwestern City #2 had a population of 785,597 of whom 195,044 or 25% were African American (U.S. Census Bureau,
2006 Population Estimates). According to Patton (2002), the physical environment of a setting can be important to what happens in that environment. Therefore I chose to conduct the study in the participants’ homes to facilitate the convenience and comfort of the participants. However, as an alternative plan, if the participants declined to have interviews conducted in their homes, I negotiated access to private rooms in local public libraries in both cities. One participant from each family was asked to host a family interview session at his or her home. All participants agreed therefore the study was conducted in the homes of the participants.

Access and Sample Selection

Selecting a small sample size and utilizing a qualitative design for this study permitted the researcher to gather a wealth of detailed data about a smaller number of people and cases (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I chose four families consisting of mother, father and their adult child or children to participate in this study; thus, minimizing the need for a large sample size. I negotiated access to the members of six African American Greek Letter Organization Alumni Chapters in two mid-sized Midwestern cities where I conducted the study between January and March, 2008. I solicited participants by distributing recruitment information to each of the participating chapters and approximately 300 members across the six organizations. The recruitment information included a letter to prospective students (Appendix B). This letter provided details of the study, criteria for participation, and contact information. Each of the participating chapters was asked to read the letter at their January 2008 monthly chapter meeting and distribute among their members. Chapter members sent an email on my behalf to prospective participants (Appendix C) via each chapter’s membership listserv. Nine different families indicated interest by contacting me by phone or email, but not all nine families met the criteria. After speaking to one representative from all nine interested families, I narrowed the list
according to those families that met the criteria. If there were more than one family that met one of the stated criteria, I randomly selected the family by placing each family name in a hat and drawing a name. After the list of family participants was established, I asked each family representative to confirm that the other family members were interested in participating. Once I received confirmation for all four families and each family member, I scheduled family and individual interviews.

**Data Collection**

A combined conversation and interview guide approach was used to conduct in-depth, one-on-one and family interviews to capture the participant’s perspective. The conversation approach allowed flexibility and spontaneity during the interview. The interview guide (Appendices E & F) provided a more systematic approach and made sure that each participant was asked the same questions (Patton, 2002). The interviews were open-ended, in-depth interviews that allowed me to capture the testimonies and personal experiences of each of the participants. In addition, the recorded, in-depth, interviews offered answers to questions in this study that no other methodology could provide (Yow, 2005).

The findings from this study were developed from two types of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) transcriptions (Patton, 2002). For this study I used in-depth interviewing with four families as my primary method of data collection; each participant was interviewed twice. In order to provide context for understanding the participant’s perspective, each participant was asked to participate in both a family and an individual interview. Participation in both interviews presented an opportunity for the participants to provide richer responses to the questions that were asked during the study. In addition, a combination of family
interviews and group interviews provided a more holistic perspective of the college-choice process for the families and alleviated possible inconsistencies.

Prior to the start of the recorded interview, all participants received two copies of the consent form (Appendix D), one for me and one to keep for their records. I thoroughly read and reviewed the consent form prior to opening the floor for questions. After all questions and concerns were addressed, I then asked each participant to sign one copy of the consent and return it to me.

In the first round of interviews, four family interviews took place at separate times and in separate locations. All members of the four families, consisting of a mother, a father and college graduated children, were interviewed together for approximately one-to-two hours. The purpose of the family interview was to allow for interactions among participants that can enhance data quality. In addition, participants tended to provide checks and balances on one another, which helped weed out false or extreme views (Krueger & Casey 2000). At the conclusion of the family interviews, each family member was asked to schedule a one-to-two hour individual interview. An individual interview was conducted in order to capture any additional thoughts and perspectives that weren’t shared during the family interview. I conducted individual and family interviews, no more than one week apart with participants in order to give them a chance to reflect on their experience.

All interviews were tape recorded and personally transcribed verbatim by the researcher. During the interviews I also took notes in case of technical failure and to also capture non-verbal cues. Immediately following each interview, I recorded field notes using notes and observation form (Appendix G) while the information was still fresh.
Participant Profiles

For this study, prior to the interview, I collected demographic information such as participant age, occupation, highest education level achieved, and family background. I sent a biographical information form (Appendix A) to each participant via email or regular mail and asked each participant to complete and return the questionnaire before meeting for the interviews. All of the participants brought the biographical information form completed and uncompleted to the family interview. Those participants who didn’t complete the form prior to the interview were able to complete it at that time. The demographic information was used to create profiles to describe the participants in the final narrative.

The following participant narratives were presented to provide a visual illustration and a character analysis of the family and individual participants in this research:

Participant Narratives

- *The Whitman family* consisted of a father, mother and one adult son. Lim, Sr., the patriarch of the family is a 56-year-old behavioral health administrator. From the first time I saw him, I thought he had the demeanor of an academic scholar. I liken him to a Cornell West or a Michael Eric Dyson. The matriarch of the family, Delores is a 55-year-old school teacher. At the beginning of the interview, she seemed a little nervous as if she were anticipating the questions I was going ask. Their only child, Lim, Jr., is a 34-year-old sales man. He is married and has two children. He resembled his father in looks and demeanor. Although very quiet, he too had the look of an academic scholar. Lim Jr. attended and graduated from a public college preparatory school. Lim Jr. is a member of Greek letter fraternity. Both parents and son graduated from the same PWI located in the Midwest.
• The Farmer family consisted of, a father, a mother, and two adult daughters. The father George is a 59-year-old salesman. His wife Marion is a 60-year-old school teacher. She seemed very jovial but also a little anxious to get started. Their oldest daughter Miriam is a 35-year-old human resource representative. She is married with two young daughters. Their youngest daughter Monique is a 30 year old salesperson, she is single with no children. Marion, Miriam and Monique are all members of the same sorority; George is also a member of a fraternity.

• The Walker family consisted of, a father, a mother, one adult daughter and one adult son. The father, Lionel, Jr., is a 56-year-old sound engineer and mother Charlotte is a 56-year-old school teacher. Their daughter Nora is a 36-year-old computer software consultant, she is single with no children. Their son Lionel III is a 32-year-old educational consultant; he is married with no children. Lionel Jr. and Lionel III are members of the same fraternity; Nora is a member of a sorority.

• The Canton family consisted of a father, a mother, and two adult daughters and two adult sons. The father Samuel is a 70 year old retired chemical engineer and the mother Elizabeth is a 66 year old college professor. Their oldest daughter Erin is a 45-year-old college professor; she is married with three children. Their eldest son Brian is a 44-year-old attorney he is married with no children. Their youngest son Melvin is a 42-year-old high school teacher and high school basketball coach, he is divorced with two children. Their youngest daughter Lisa is a 39-year-old nurse; she is married with one child. Elizabeth and Erin are members of the same sorority; Melvin is a member of a fraternity.
Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, I used a qualitative case study design to analyze the data. Utilizing a qualitative approach provided valuable insights into the college-choice process from the perspectives of the respondents of this study (Cyprian-Andrews, 2004). In addition, a qualitative case study method was the most appropriate because it made it possible to study issues in-depth and in detail which increased the depth of understanding of the cases studied but reduced broad generalization (Yin, 2003).

After the interviews were conducted, each of the audio-taped interviews both individual and family was transcribed. The analysis for this research began with a case analysis that described each person and each family interviewed. Each participant and each family was considered a separate unit of analysis and was assigned separate codes and separate files.

Because this was a qualitative case study, the first step in the analysis was to gather all the case data including all interview transcripts, biographical information, and all field notes. According to Yin (2003), the process of keeping notes helps to recognize and categorize emerging themes and patterns. I first began to analyze the data by reading through all the field notes and making comments in the margins. I then created case records that were used to organize the case data into a primary resource package. This was designed to condense, classify and organize the raw data from this study (Patton, 2002). After completing the case record, I conducted a content analysis by identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data. I utilized the axial coding system to identify related codes using a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning. This analysis helped to determine what was significant in the data. I actively sought a coding pattern by cross-referencing the family and individual interview transcripts and field notes (Patton, 2002). This process helped to organize
the data and determine what were significant, identified similarities and differences and identified common themes. For example if one or more participants discussed being influenced by going on the Black college tour, this information was placed in the same category. Other information that was linked to this same category was other activities that influenced participant’s decision to attend an HBCU. Each category had its own color coding system. Since the interviews were audio-taped and field notes conducted, explicit statements about the participants experience was captured and noted. The information was examined, the researcher identified and noted similar experiences and used this information to describe the influences of African Americans on college-choice.

Reflexivity

I made several provisions to increase trustworthiness and to minimize common threats to validity. First, I selected six African American Greek Alumni Chapters from mid-sized Midwestern cities. Although I am a member of an African American Greek letter organization, I am currently not a member of any of the selected chapters. Second, I asked that the interviews take place in the participant’s homes to allow for greater comfort and ease. Third, when needed, I openly discussed the possible influence that my own life experiences may have had on my perceptions and thinking. In addition, I revealed to each participant that my perceptions of higher education and previous experiences may bring certain biases to this study. Although every effort was make to ensure objectivity, these biases may have shaped the way I view and understand the data I collected and the way I interpreted my experiences (Creswell, 2003).
Ethical Concerns

Due to the nature of the research questions and participant anonymity, there was minimal threat to the well-being of the participants in the study as a result of their involvement. In addition, it was important to note that each participant’s anonymity was protected by assigning each participant a pseudonym that was used in place of his or her actual name in the written study. All identifiable information will be kept in separately locked cabinets where only I will have access. I will dispose of all tape cassettes, erase digital recordings, and shred any other identifiable information three years after the completion of this study. It was also my intention to capture as much as possible the actual thoughts and perspectives of the participants and include some excerpts in the completed study.
CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to summarize and present the thoughts and perspectives of African American families and their college-choice decisions. The primary research question for this study was, “What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American families?” and the following sub-questions were presented to further explore the parental influences on the college-choice decisions of their children:

- How do African American parents influence the overall college-choice decisions of their children?
- How do African American parents who attended a PWI or HBCU influence the type of college or university their children chose to attend?

This chapter, divided into two sections, began with participant characteristics that presented descriptive information obtained primarily from the participant biographical data forms (Appendix A) given to each participant to complete prior to the interviews, interview notes and interview transcripts. In addition participants described their experiences surrounding their college-choice decisions and how those experiences, influences and non-influences, expressed by the participants, were directly linked with their choice to attend a PWI or an HBCU. Findings, as identified by the participants during the individual and family interviews, of factors that most influenced the college-choice decisions of the parents and their adult children were also described. This information provided a richer framework of the families’ background, experiences and college-choice influences and how those influences shaped their ultimate college-choice decision.
During the data analysis, as previously described, themes began to emerge from the shared factors identified by the participants. Therefore the final section of this chapter presented three major themes and two sub-themes that emerged during the analysis.

**Participant Characteristics**

The descriptive data were obtained primarily from individual and family interviews, interview notes (Appendix G), and the biographical information forms from the four African American families. Prior to conducting the interviews, each participant was asked to complete a biographical information form (Appendix A), which assisted me in creating the *Model of Families* (figure 7), *Demographic Characteristics of Family Participants Using Pseudonyms* (Table 1) and the *Family Education Background Information* (Table 2).

In the four families there were seventeen participants who were interviewed for this research study. These four families consisted of parents; both mother and father and nine adult children; three adult sons and six adult daughters. The average age of the parents was 59.3 years-of-age and the average age of the adult children was 34.2 years-of-age. Six of the adult children were married and seven of the adult children had children of their own. All participants either graduated from a PWI or an HBCU; nine from a PWI and eight from an HBCU. Four of the parents and five of the children went on to earn a Master’s degree or higher (Table 2).

Either one of the parents or one or more adult children was a member of an African American Greek letter organization located in one of two Midwestern cities. All of the parents resided in one of two Midwestern cities while four of the nine adult children lived in one of two Midwestern cities; the other five adult children lived in various cities across the United States.
The family and individual interviews were each approximately 60 minutes in length and consisted of multiple interview questions (Appendix E and F) that focused on three primary areas that were: predisposition, search and college-choice.

The next section provided family profiles that included a brief synopsis on the influence each person received on their college-choice decisions. The profiles were described in the order in which the family interview took place and included a brief snapshot of the family interview setting.

*Family Profiles*

- Lim Sr., Delores and Lim Jr., *Whitman* all graduated from the same PWI located in Midwestern city #1. The family interview was conducted sitting around the dining room table in the home of Lim Jr. The individual interviews took place on the same day at the same location immediately following the family interview. When the family interview first began, the entire family seemed a little nervous and intense. Everyone greeted me in a polite manner but each seemed to be deep in thought as though they were trying to anticipate the questions that were going to be asked. During the interview, both Lim Sr., and Delores expressed not receiving any influence on college-choice by their parents. Lim Jr., discussed being encouraged by his parents but it wasn’t a requirement in their household. Lim Jr. attended a public college preparatory high school. He also went on Black college tours and visits.

- George, Marion, Miriam and Monique *Farmer* all graduated from HBCUs in the South. The family interview took place at the dining room table of Miriam’s home, the oldest daughter in this family. The individual interviews took place on the same day at the same location immediately following the family interview. George was battling a cold during
this interview and seemed very subdued but ready to get started. He also looked at his watch a couple of times seemingly anxious to get started before finally saying that he had another appointment in another two hours. Because of a prior commitment, his individual interview was rescheduled for the following week at the same location. While attending high school in Alabama, George never had the influence of his parents. According to him, he was considered one of the smartest in school and he had a teacher that recognized his talents in electronics and encouraged him to further his education by going to college. Marion, wife and mother, seemed very jovial but also a little anxious to get started. Out of all the participating parents in this study, she was one of two parent participants that expressed that her college-choice decisions were greatly influenced by her parents. Their oldest daughter Miriam was very upbeat and also seemed ready to get started on the interview. Monique the youngest daughter seemed a bit more serious and distracted prior to the start of the interview. During the interview both daughters expressed that their parents played a huge role in their entire college-choice decision. Monique also noted that not only did her parents have a big influence on her college-choice decisions; her older sister Miriam also had an impact on her decisions. Both Miriam and Monique described the idea of college as being an automatic expectation while growing up in the household with their parents. While going through the search phase, Miriam and Monique only entertained the idea of attending an HBCU. However, Monique did apply to a local PWI in her hometown only as a back-up in case she wasn’t accepted into any of the HBCUs to which she applied. Both Miriam and Monique grew up being involved in programs such as Jack and Jill, sorority debutantes, and Black college tours which exposed them to various aspects of African American culture and etiquette. Both parents
attended the same HBCU in the South and both daughters attended two different HBCUs in the South.

- Lionel Jr., and Charlotte Walker both attended the same PWI located in Midwestern city #1. Their adult children, Nora and Lionel Walker III., both attended the same HBCU in the South. This family interview took place at the family home over the Fourth of July holiday. This was easiest access to the entire family since both adult children lived out of town. The individual interviews took place on the same day at the same location immediately following the family interviews. Everyone seemed really laid back and tired, probably from the cookout that took place at the home earlier that day. The house still smelled like barbeque ribs and chicken. After the family interview began, they all seemed to slowly get reenergized and became more perky and talkative. During the family interview, Lionel and Charlotte both expressed not having direct college-influences by their own parents. Charlotte did receive some encouragement from her grandfather. Both Lionel and Charlotte stated that they encouraged their children to attend an HBCU. Charlotte also stated that knowing what she knows now, she would have attended an HBCU. Both Nora and Lionel III described going to college as being an automatic expectation in their household and that their parents played a large role in their decision to attend an HBCU. Both children graduated from a public college preparatory high school.

- Samuel and Elizabeth Canton both attended the same HBCU in the South. This family interview took place over the Thanksgiving Holiday. This was the best time and the only time that all the adult children would be home at the same time. Initially I felt like I was crashing in on their holiday time but I quickly felt at ease after the interview began.
The individual interviews took place on the same day at the same location immediately following the family interview. During the family interview Samuel expressed that neither of his parents graduated from high school. He also mentioned that he did not receive any type of influence from his parents to attend college or any influence on the type of college to attend. Elizabeth’s mother, now deceased, earned a bachelor’s degree in education from an HBCU. While growing up, her parents instilled the idea of college at an early age and placed it as an expectation in their household. In addition, her parents also expected her to attend an HBCU. Both Samuel and Elizabeth admitted to being very stern on their children when it came to education and doing well in school. Being the youngest, Lisa felt pressured to attend college because all three of her siblings went on to college directly out of high school. All four children described the choice to attend college as an expectation in their household while growing up. In addition, Samuel and Elizabeth Canton took great strides in making sure their children were exposed to various extra-curricular activities such as Jack and Jill, sorority and fraternity debutantes and cotillions. The children were also very involved in sports, arts and cultural programs. All of the children attended private school from elementary to high school. Both parents attended and graduated from HBCUs in the South and all four adult children attended and graduated from a PWI in the Midwest and Northeast.
Figure 7. Model of Families

The Whitman Family

Parents
PWI

Children
PWI

The Farmer Family

HBCU

The Walker Family

PWI

The Canton Family

HBCU

PWI
Table 1.

**Demographic Characteristics of Family Participants Using Pseudonyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Status in Family</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Type of College or University Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whitman</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim, Sr.</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delores</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim, Jr.</td>
<td>Adult son</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farmer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>Adult daughter</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>Adult daughter</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walker</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel, Jr.</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Adult daughter</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel, III.</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canton</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Father</td>
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<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>40</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Adult son</td>
<td>37</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melvin</td>
<td>Adult son</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Adult daughter</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
## Family Education Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Participants’ Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Participants Parents’ Highest Level of Education Attained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whitman</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim, Sr.</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delores</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim, Jr.</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farmer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walker</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel, Jr.</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel, III.</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canton</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
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<td>Brian</td>
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**Themes**
In this study, the participants shared similar factors that influenced their college-choice decisions (Table 3). More specifically, these factors led to their decision to ultimately choose to attend a PWI or an HBCU.

Overall, the themes that emerged in this study during the data analysis described the family and individual perspectives that contributed to the participants’ college-choice decisions. *Family Influence* or the lack thereof is a theme that played a role in most of the participants’ story. This theme was investigated first because it provided a foundation for illustrating the overall family perspectives on education. The second theme was *Outside Influences*, such as teachers, school counselors and location, who had a direct impact on the participant’s college-choice decisions. Many of the parent participants in the study were influenced by someone other than their own parents. In addition, some of the adult children participants expressed being influenced by their peers. The third theme that emerged focused on how the *Personal Aspirations and Motivations* and ultimately shaped the participants college-choice decisions. The two sub-themes that were included in this study, *Class and Socio-Economic Status* and *Self-concept and Perceptions* did not emerge as major themes but provided some level of influence for some of the participants.

*Family Influences*

The most significant finding that repeatedly emerged throughout the interviews was the influence or level of influence on college-choice decisions by the participants’ family. This section demonstrated how parents influenced those college-choices and the mode in which these influences took place. In addition, the influence of extended family such as grandparents, cousins, aunts and the like was discussed.
Most of the families had similar experiences as it pertained to who influenced or didn’t influence their college-choice decisions. Overall, with the exception of a few, most of the parent participants did not receive any influence on college-choice decisions by their own parents or any other family members. In-turn, all nine of the participating adult children expressed being influenced by their parents or other family members to attend college.

When asked about conversations had with parents or other family members about college, many of the parent participant responses were similar. Those parent participants that did not receive parental or other familial influences all expressed that their parents seemed to focus more on them graduating from high school and being able to just support themselves. Samuel Canton recalled having a conversation with his father,

> My father would say to me, ‘boy you betta make good marks so you don’t end up with no education like me…my father was a very intelligent man but he never really learned how to read well…I think he only completed up through the 4th grade.

In addition, the participants that received the support expressed having had conversations with parents and other family members as far back as they could remember. Elizabeth Canton stated,

> My parents talked about college with me on a regular basis…there are pictures of me as a very young girl wearing North Carolina A&T t-shirts and sweatshirts [laughing]…there are even pictures of me wearing sorority paraphernalia long before I ever joined a sorority [laughing].

George Farmer noted that his parents didn’t finish high school and that they did not discuss college-going. He earned a full scholarship to Alabama A&M, which is where he chose to attend; his parents didn’t know where Alabama A&M was located. Similarly, Samuel Canton also expressed that it wasn’t expected for him to attend college.
I grew up on a farm and especially being the oldest of eight children I was expected to take over the family farm. Neither of my parents was educated. We didn’t talk about college in our household. Although I did make the decision to attend college only because I received a scholarship, my parents were supportive and gave me a little money when they could.

Upon graduating from college, Samuel got a job moved out of state. He discussed the resentment from some of his siblings for leaving the family farm and not returning after college to work the farm. Some of his younger siblings did not go to college and felt obligated to stay behind and help the family. He doesn’t regret his decision; he only regrets not helping some of his siblings achieve the college dream like he did. In addition, Lim Whitman Sr. noted that his father attempted a degree in journalism but did not complete it. He also expressed that they weren’t encouraged or pushed to go to college. It was most important to his family that he and his siblings finish high school and be able to take care of themselves. Lionel Walker Jr. had a similar story but was very vague and hesitant to discuss the details of his story. He merely mentioned not receiving any influence of any kind from his family. There was no input from his family on whether or not he should attend college or what type of college to attend; PWI or HBCU. Charlotte Walker wasn’t discouraged from attending college from her parents but her parents were very clear in that she stay and attend a local college in the city in which they lived. Charlotte did express receiving positive reinforcement from her grandfather to go further by pursuing higher education.

It was important to note that six out of eight parents in this study indicated that their own parents had little to no influence on their college-choice decisions; however there were two
exceptions among the parents in this study. Marion Farmer stated that her parents did place college as an expectation in their household.

   It was an automatic expectation for me…my father mainly, he had the idea that my child is going to do better than me and that is what I was reared with since he only finished 9th grade he was gone make sure that I went to finish high school and went to college….”

Similarly, Elizabeth Canton received pressure from both parents about going to college but primarily her mother was the most adamant. Elizabeth stated,

   My mother had a Bachelor’s degree from North Carolina A&T but my father did not have a degree. But they both emphasized college attendance and basically made college an expectation in our household. My mother especially encouraged me to attend a Black college. She used to take us to homecomings and sorority events so that we could get a feel for what the atmosphere might be like for us if we went to a Black college. I would say my mother had the biggest influence on my decision to attend a Black college. I honestly didn’t feel I had a choice of whether or not to attend a White college or a Black college. On the flip side, I encouraged my children to consider a Black college but I did not push or prod. I let them make their own decisions. I honestly didn’t care where they went just as long as they went to college.

   Furthermore, eight out nine adult children in this study expressed that going to college was an automatic expectation placed upon them by their parents while growing up in their household. In addition, the influence the participants received by their families went further than just typical encouragement to go to college. For some the influence had a direct impact on their decision to attend a PWI or HBCU. Miriam and Monique Farmer both stated that their parents had a huge impact on their college-choice decisions.
It was never a question of if I go to college but where I go to college. But it started at an early age and I think it’s because my parents exposed us to different things that occurred at college whether it be fraternity or sorority activities…

Miriam and Monique’s parents, George and Marion Farmer, both attended HBCUs and went beyond just encouraging them to attend college, they exposed them to HBCUs and experiences that would guide them in the direction of an HBCU. Miriam discussed the moment her parents tried to bribe her in to attending Alabama A&M.

I think mom and dad were friends with the president of the college at the time…they offered me a car, my own apartment everything if I would just attend Alabama A&M…I said heck no they would have everybody watching me…I don’t even think I applied to that school [laughing].

Parent participants, Samuel and Elizabeth Canton both attended HBCUs; in fact, they met and were engaged at North Carolina A&T. All four of their children attended private White high schools and public and private PWIs. Brian Canton noted that his parents exposed them to HBCUs by taking them to homecomings and events but he never felt pressured to attend an HBCU. He chose to attend a PWI because of the major he chose and he earned a full ride scholarship. He had some friends that attended HBCUs and expressed that he sometimes wished he attended an HBCU because of the close connections many of his friends still have with their friends from college. Melvin Canton discussed being the least academically inclined in his family. He secretly told himself that he was not going to be the only one in his family to not graduate from college. Erin Canton stated,
I don’t remember ever not talking about college in our household. I knew as early as elementary school that I was going to college. My parents talked about their days at North Carolina A&T but they never pressured us to go there or any other HBCU.

Both Nora and Lionel Walker III were highly influenced by their parents to attend HBCUs. Both Lionel Walker Jr. and Charlotte Walker attended PWIs in the Midwest and felt they missed out on an experience. They both expressed wanting their children to have an HBCU experience.

Other participants in the study discussed being heavily influenced by other family members such as a sister or brother. Lionel Walker III noted that his older sister Nora Walker went to Kentucky State and it had a big influence on his college-choice decision. Before deciding to attend, he had many opportunities to visit the campus and attend homecomings and other events. Nora expressed in addition to having the influence of both parents, she was also influenced by other family members such grandparents, aunts, cousins. Similarly, Lisa Canton stated,

Being the youngest of four, I had the influences of my older siblings. Before attending college myself, I visited my brothers and sister at their schools. I had the chance to stay all night in the dorms, attend events and help them move back in after being home from break.

In addition, Lim Whitman Sr. discussed wanting to follow in the footsteps of his older brother. Although Lim Sr. expressed not having the influence of his parents to attend college; he and all of four of his siblings did graduate from college. His older brother had a big influence on his decision to attend college and his final college-choice. Lim Sr. noted that he indeed was not a first-generation college student. His older brother and three younger siblings have all earned degrees in various fields. He expressed that his older brother, now a clinical psychologist with a
PhD in education was the biggest influence in college-choice decision. While in high school he participated in a program called Project for Youth; a bridge program from high school to college. His older brother and his brother’s friends were all counselors in this program and that’s how he got involved and that’s how he became interested in going to college. He even chose to follow in his brothers footsteps by attending and graduating from the same PWI as his brother.

**Class and Socio-Economic Status**

The parent participants in this study with the exception of Elizabeth Canton all came from lower socio-economic homes. Elizabeth Canton was the only non-first generation parent participant and grew up in a middle class home. All of the adult children came from middle to upper class socio-economic homes. Socio-economic status plays an important role in one’s ability to go to college (Walpole, 2003). Although class and socio-economic status did not emerge as a major theme in this study, its influence was underlining but apparent. Meaning, most of the participants didn’t directly discuss being a part of a particular social class however some participants did discuss the influence of participating in social organizations such as Jack and Jill or African American Greek letter organizations which have historically been linked to the social upper class. One participant discussed being a part of the Upward Bound program which was developed for lower income high school students.

Interestingly, the adult children that discussed being a part of Jack and Jill and participating in the Greek letter debutantes and cotillions all attended HBCUs. Miriam stated, Being apart of Jack and Jill did have some influence on my decision to attend a Black college. Most of the members in the chapter that we belonged to when I was a kid attended HBCUs like your Hampton University and Spelman College.
Participating parent, Charlotte Walker, earned a scholarship from being a part of the Upward Bound program and chose to attend the local PWI.

All of the participating parents with the exception of Elizabeth Canton mentioned that limited finances influenced their decision to attend either their local public PWI or a lower cost PWI or HBCU. Elizabeth stated, “My parents were not rich by any means but they did save a little money for me and my sister to go to college and so when it was time for me to go, my parents did not have as much of a financial strain.”

Lim Jr. was the only adult child that mentioned low cost as one of the reasons he chose to attend his college-choice. His father, Lim Sr., worked for the college in which he chose to attend and therefore his tuition was free. Because Lim Jr. chose to attend the local PWI which his father worked for he was able to have his own car and move in to his own apartment near the college. However, all four of the Canton children received some type of academic or athletic scholarship to their college-choice. Both Samuel and Elizabeth mentioned that they were grateful that their children all received scholarships but that they had the means and would have been willing to pay for their children’s college tuition. It’s important to note that all four of the Canton children attended secondary private schools their entire lives. Two of the four Canton children attended Brown University, an Ivy League institution in the Northeast.

*Outside Influences*

While conducting this research, other influences began to permeate as the second largest theme in this study. It seemed that not only did family play a large role on the influence of college-choice decisions, others such as peers, guidance counselors, extracurricular organizations and the like also had some influence on the parents and the adult children in this study. In addition, the issue of segregation and perceptions seemed to have a clear influence
among some of the parents. All of the participating children noted that their parents made certain
that they were involved in various activities and organizations that also aided in their college-
choices. It was important to note that all nine of the adult children in this study went on the
Black College Tour when they were in high school; an example of parents exposing their
children to the idea of attending an HBCU. All of the participants had some type of religious
affiliation while growing up and attended church on a regular basis. However, when asked about
the influence of church or any religious affiliation, not one participant discussed having had any
influence on their college-choice decisions by any church members or groups. Some did mention
that after being accepted into college, they did receive recognition and encouragement from the
church in the form of an announcement in church and a small monetary donation.

Overall, most of the families expressed having had some type of outside influence on
their college-choice decisions with mixed responses. Some of the participating parents expressed
being influenced by a teacher or by issues such as segregation. Some of the adult children
expressed being influenced by a guidance counselor, basketball coach, peers, and participation in
activities. Both parents and students seemed to be influenced by the location of the college or
university.

Parents Lim and Delores Whitman, Sr. and Lionel and Charlotte, Jr. Walker all attended
PWIs in the north. Each of them had different influences and different perspectives on their
college-choice decision. Neither Lionel nor Charlotte Walker, Jr. received any influence or
exposure to an HBCU however they both encouraged their own children to attend an HBCU.
Charlotte noted that she did indeed encourage her children to attend an HBCU because HBCUs
will provide a family and nurturing environment for students to become all they can be for the
community. Charlotte also stated, that “Given what I know now, I would have attended an
HBCU myself. I think it would have changed my whole world view.” Lionel also indicated that he told his children to go to an HBCU because it would give them a great foundation.

Parents, George and Marion Farmer and Samuel and Elizabeth Canton all attended HBCUs in the South. All indicated that because of segregation, they didn’t have much choice on whether to attend an HBCU or a PWI. George Farmer noted that there weren’t very many choices and the choices coming out of high school weren’t well known because of segregation and because of segregation they couldn’t go to the University of Alabama and so therefore they had to go to the HBCUs which was Alabama State or Tuskegee or Alabama A&M. In addition, George credits his high school electronics instructor for being the biggest influence on his choice to attend Alabama A&M. George stated,

My only interest in going to college came from my high school electronics teacher…he went to Alabama A&M University so he was most interested in getting me to Alabama A&M so my inspiration and expectation same from my high school teacher and not my parents…

Although Marion’s parents had expectation for her to attend college, she chose to attend Alabama A&M. She narrowed her search to include only HBCUs then she narrowed her search even more based upon the cost and the distance. Marion Farmer stated,

Ok, basically that was the only choice we were faced with…nobody in my high school ever thought about going to Auburn University which is 12 miles from home, all of my teachers everybody had either gone to the HBCUs in Alabama, Alabama State, Tuskegee, A&M…

Some participants credit participation in activities as having some influence on their college-choice, Miriam Farmer stated,
Yeah I had guidance counselors and again I had peers whose parents went to college so I kinda had positive peer pressure and I was also involved in other organizations like Jack and Jill where it was also understood that those kids were going to college…the debutante ball it was expected you know but my parents put me in things and I also surrounded myself with other kids that had like ideas…

In addition to his parents, Melvin Canton credits his high school basketball coach as having the biggest influence on his final college-choice decision. He noted that his aptitude for sports had a huge impact on his college-choice. His coach recognized his athleticism and worked really hard to help him find the right school and an athletic scholarship.

Some of the participants were influenced to not only attend college but to attend an HBCU or PWI because of discussions had with their peers. When asked about conversations with peers regarding college, some participants replied that they did indeed talk about college with their peers. Monique Farmer mentioned that she and her friends talked about differences in HBCUs and PWIs. They talked about if they wanted to go away or stay in state for school. Although Monique went away to Tennessee State University, most of her friends stayed in state and attended PWIs. Similarly, Nora Walker expressed that her friends also played a large role in her decision to attend an HBCU. Some participants indeed were influenced by their guidance counselors. Erin Canton noted that she and her brothers and sisters all attended the same small private high school and their guidance counselors didn’t talk to them about HBCUs during their college search. Although their parents were instrumental in getting them exposed to Black colleges and talking to them about PWIs and HBCUS, she chose her my PWI because it had a great program in anthropology and she earned a several scholarships that she just couldn’t refuse. She also stated that her guidance counselor was great at helping her find a school that had
the program that she wanted. She also had a few friends from my high school that attended the
same PWI and thinks that was what really sealed the deal on her final decision.

Although Marion credits her parents as being the biggest influence, she also talks about the
influence of her peers.

My best girlfriend did, she went to Tuskegee she, um, dropped out at the end of her
junior year but at the time we all went together then I had another…there was three of us that
ran together and my other friend went to A&M where I went…she graduated a year
ahead of me and then my other friend went to Tuskegee stayed three years so we were like
basically three girls from our church that was in college

In addition, Miriam Farmer stated,

All my friends went to college like all of them went and they all stayed and they all
graduated so I don’t know if that’s strange or not but they all went to HBCUS…most of
them went to HBCUs like your Spellman and your Hampton and FAMU and then the
ones that did not go went to White schools because they got basketball scholarships…so
all of my girlfriends went to HBCUs or if they didn’t go there they went to a White
school for scholarship purposes

For many of the participants there were outside influences such as peers and guidance
counselors that played a major role on their final college-choice decisions. Both Lim Whitman
Sr. and Delores Whitman discussed hearing about other colleges and universities such as Xavier
University of Louisiana or colleges in Georgia but it never occurred to them that they could
attend those schools. They both stated, “We had no reference point, no idea where these schools
were or how we would get there if we did attend.”

Marion Farmer stated,
Tuskegee was 35 miles from home and that was kind of my parents first choice until we looked at the price…and also, um, I felt part of going away of college was going to be independence for me and I felt if I went 35 miles from home my dad and mom would be there every weekend or I would be expected to come home every weekend so I went to the Northernest part of Alabama which was Huntsville.

In contrast, Charlotte Walker noted wanting to go away to college and discussed visiting the University of Chicago and University of Ontario but chose to stay and attend the University of Cincinnati because her parents wanted her to stay in the city.

Lisa Canton stated,

I don’t think any of my family including my parents had any influence on my decision to attend IUPUI. Actually, my mother was trying to get me to go away to college but I was such a homebody, I didn’t want to go to college too far away from home. I knew I wanted to go into the nursing field and IUPUI had a great nursing program, so I decided to stay home. Although I did apply and was accepted to other colleges including a few Black colleges this worked out better.

Miriam Farmer discussed having a boyfriend in her hometown at the time and she didn’t want to go too far and she wanted to go to an HBCU and so she visited many HBCUS and really liked the campus of her 1st choice and that’s how she made her final decision. Nora Walker mentioned that her final choice was definitely the best choice for her but in retrospect she may have went some place like Florida A&M University for the warm weather.

Both Erin and Brian Canton attended Brown University in the Northeast for similar but different reasons for making their final chose. Erin stated, “I unlike my younger sister wanted to move as far away from home as possible. It wasn’t that I had a bad home life, I was eighteen had
a typical tumultuous relationship with my parents especially my mother and I wanted to be
independent and on my own.” Brian Canton noted having a good relationship with his parents
but wanted to experience independent living without the watchful eyes of his parents.

*Personal Aspirations and Motivations*

The final theme that emerged during this research was the participants own personal
goals, aspirations and motivations.

Overall, the families all aspired and were motivated to attend college for various reasons.
For some of the parent participants and all of the participating adult children college was an
expectation. However, there is a varying degree of difference in the support that was received
between those participants that received support from their parents or family and those that did
not. For those that did not receive that expectation and support from their parents or family;
college attendance was more of an after thought. The dream of obtaining a college education
could not have been achieved without the participants own personal aspirations and motivations.

Some of the participants, primarily the parent participants, discussed their experiences in
working in jobs such as factories or farming prior to going to college or while in college. The
labor required for the job was a major motivation to either pursue or continue higher education.
Delores Whitman stated, “I worked at Keeblers in a factory packing cookies, I knew I didn’t
want to do this for the rest of my life so I went to college.” Similarly, Lim Whitman Sr. talked
about working in several different jobs prior to going to college. Lim Sr., stated, “I worked for
the P&G tech center which is where they tested products on animals and I was the one that put
the dead animals in the incinerator. I also delivered Pringles to the scientists.” Samuel Canton
grew up in a large family on a farm. He noted that he wasn’t expected to go to college; he was
expected to continue with the family farm. He hated being on that farm cleaning up behind the
animals and working long hot days. He knew there was more to life then farming in North Carolina and he made it his goal to go as far as he could go to obtain a different life for himself.

A few participants expressed not being the best students academically. Melvin Canton noted that he always struggled academically. He excelled at sports but never did well academically and while growing up that was always a major strain between him and his parents. His parents and siblings all did well academically but he was the only one that always had a hard time. While in junior high school, he was finally tested and diagnosed with having a learning disability. Although he did begin to improve after receiving assistance in his classes for his disability, he graduated from high school with a C average. His athletic scholarship got him in the door but it was his own personal goal of earning a college degree that motivated him to remain in college even after being severally injured and no longer being able to play basketball. Delores Whitman talked about her motivation after being in her beginning college courses. She stated, “…there were other students from really good local high schools at the time and I thought to myself they are dumb, if they can do it so can I [laughing].”

Miriam Farmer also talks about having mediocre grades while in high school but she was motivated by her personal goals to pursue college. Miriam stated, I had positive peer pressure like my friends were trying to decide if they were going to places like Washington University and Spelman which you needed a 3.5 to get in. Well, I’m like dag, my 2.8 is not getting it. I ain’t getting very far with a 2.8 [laughing]… But she was motivated and found an HBCU to accept her and her 2.8 grade point average.

Although Lim Whitman Jr. was not a first generation college student, college was not an automatic expectation and it was not pushed upon him. He grew up knowing it was an option therefore it was necessary for him to develop his own personal goals and aspirations in order to
go forward and take advantage of the opportunity before him. His final college-choice decision was motivated by his peers and by finances. Lim Jr., stated, “I went to a college preparatory high school and everybody was talking about college so I said I better start thinking about college [laughing]. He applied and was accepted to other colleges and universities outside of the city both PWIs and HBCUs but his father worked for the university at the time and therefore his tuition was free. Brian Canton expressed that he and his older sister Erin have always had a friendly academic competition between them. He stated,

I always excelled academically and always worked hard to be better than Erin in school. My parents did have a big impact on many of my college-choice decisions, my constant motivation to do as well as or better than my sister helped propel my decisions. I wanted to prove to myself that I was really smart. I have to admit that Erin was always a step ahead of me academically. You know that is hard for me to admit [laughing].

Self-Concept and Perceptions

The following section examined the thoughts and perceptions of the participants as it pertained to self-concept and perceptions about college going. The self-concept developed by the participants and the attitudes and perceptions that the participants developed about college going became apparent while conducting this study. In addition it also became evident that when surrounded by people with positive perceptions of life and people that emphasized positive self-concept, the participants were able to go further in life. The adult participants that were influenced by their parents, teachers, and older siblings all expressed receiving positive reinforcement from these influential individuals. This positive reinforcement of ideals and attitudes played a major role in shaping the behaviors and helped the parent participants develop a positive self-concept of themselves. For example, George Farmer talked about being one of the
smarter kids in his school and how his electronics teacher recognized his academic ability and consistently reminded him of his intelligence and his ability to do well in college. In addition, Marion Farmer talked about being in an African American high school and how the teachers and guidance counselors reinforced their ability to do well academically and rallied around those in their school that they knew had the aptitude to do well in college and made sure they filled out college applications. Most of the parent participants with exception of Marion Farmer and Elizabeth Canton expressed that although their parents did not instill the automatic influence for them to attend college; their parents did reinforce positive support after the decision to attend college was made. For example, Lim Sr. discussed that although his father did not influence his decision to attend college; his father was positive and supportive to him after he made the final decision to attend college. Similarly, Samuel discussed that although his family did not want him to leave the farm, his mother and father were both supportive after he made the decision to attend college and were actually most encouraging during at time when felt like dropping out of college.

Most of the adult children discussed the role that their parents played in developing their high self-esteem which allowed them to develop a positive self-concept that included positive reinforcement to do well educationally. In addition, it also became apparent that the parent participants worked hard to not only inspire their children but to also instill pride of just being African American.

One of the adult children, Erin Canton recalls her parents sitting them all down when she was in high school and talking to them about what it takes to be the best in life.

Dad said to us, ‘you are Black children, no matter how much money you have, no matter what kind of house we live in, you will always have to work 200% harder than white kids
in your class or the white folks at your job. You will have to study twice as hard in school and work twice as hard in your jobs’. I will never forget that conversation; it has always been the driving force for me to do well academically and now in my job.

Samuel Canton [laughs], “That is absolutely true, I still stand by that to this day. My pride in being Black and doing my best because I am Black is what has forced me to work so hard all of my life.”

Lisa Canton recalls,

My parents have always been very positive and encouraging and I really think that is why all four of us have done so well in life not only academically but also personally. They have always taught us to be proud of our heritage and to be proud of who we are.

When the participants were asked about whether race played a role in their college-choice influences some of the participating parents answered yes. Samuel Canton stated,

I never considered going to a White college; I went to an all Black high school, I grew up in an all Black neighborhood and I grew up loving North Carolina A&T; Black was all that knew; it was my comfort zone.

George and Marion Farmer and Samuel Canton also discussed growing up in the South and how segregation played a role in their decision to attend an HBCU. Being African American they felt they were limited in their college-choices. The adult children in this study did not express that race played a major role in their college-choice decision other than having the option to attend an HBCU. They all could have easily attended a local or non-local PWI. Those that chose to attend an HBCU did express that one of the reasons for this choice was because they wanted to have the experience of going to school in a safe and comfortable environment and liked the idea of having predominately Black classmates. Some of the adult children that chose to attend a PWI did
discuss the option of attending an HBCU and the comfort of being around predominately Black students on a daily basis. However, Brian Canton expressed,

I liked the idea of an HBCU but to be honest at the time I didn’t think it was a realistic reflection of society. I know that sounds snobbish [laughing] but knowing what I know now, I know it wasn’t a realistic reflection of society but who said that college life had to reflect society. Now that I am a little more mature, I have a better understanding.

The perceptions that many of the participants shared helped shape their attitudes and ultimately their aspirations on college going and their final college-choice decision. The next section examined the influence of the participants’ aspirations and motivations.

*Additional Data*

Although, this chapter primarily focused on the themes that emerged throughout the study, it is important to mention other discussions that took place during this study but did not stand out as primary themes.

When asked when they first began thinking about college, with the exception of parents Marion Farmer and Elizabeth Canton, all the other parents didn’t really being thinking about college until high school. Delores Whitman expressed that she began thinking about college in the 11th grade. However, all nine of the adult children began thinking about college as early as elementary school and some recalled even younger. Brian Canton recalls, “I don’t remember not thinking about college: college was part of my vocabulary in preschool [laughing]…no but seriously it was a way of life in our family and I’m so glad it was.

When asked if the participants visited any other colleges during their search process, parent Charlotte Walker discussed going on an Upward Bound College Tour and visited five or more colleges including the University of Chicago and the University of Ontario. Delores
Whitman mentioned visiting Central State University but all the other parents in this study only visited the college they attended. In contrast, all nine of the adult children went on the Black college tour. It was during this tour that each of these participants was able to visit five or more HBCUs during a one week period. Lisa Canton recalls going on the Black college tour, I had a ball when I went on the Black college tour, I knew I needed to stay home after seeing what I saw [laughing]. I probably would have flunked out during the first semester from too much partying [laughing]. Monique Farmer stated, “I grew up visiting Alabama A&M since that’s where my parents attended so when I went on the Black college tour, I was already hooked and knew I wanted to attend an HBCU.

When asked what they would do differently in their college-choice decisions, the participants had a wide variety of answers. Lionel Walker Jr. and Charlotte Walker both said that knowing what they know now they would have attended an HBCU. Marion, Miriam and Monique Farmer all expressed that they wouldn’t have changed anything. They were all very satisfied with their education and their decision to attend an HBCU. George Farmer also agreed that wouldn’t have changed a thing, “My choice still would have been going to an HBCU”. The entire Canton family expressed that they had no regrets and wouldn’t have changed a thing about their college-choice decision. Nora and Lionel Walker III stated Kentucky State University was the best option for them ant they wouldn’t have changed a thing.

During the individual interviews, I asked each participant what message he or she would like to convey to their children, nieces, nephews or to future generations as a whole about college. Many of the participants expresses that college attendance is a must. Adult children, Lionel Walker, III and Melvin Canton both expressed that the future generation should take high school more serious because it will have an impact on their future. Lim Whitman Jr., the father
of two young daughters stated that he would encourage college and expose them to opportunities but not force it on his children. Marion Farmer and Delores Whitman are both school teachers in inner city public school districts. Marion, stated,

…it’s just art do get through to them and I think it’s because they are just hearing it from the teachers they are not hearing it form family and relatives and friends so there’s not enough people coming through with it and maybe that was the big issue with us is that I know with me we had a group of people that was just saying you can do it.

Similarly, Delores Whitman stated,

Looking where they are coming from when your mama, grandparents nobody went to school and nobody’s talking about it or your friends aren’t talking about it, how do you convince them that this is the right way to go…nobody else in their immediate surroundings is talking about college.

George Farmer, grandfather of two little girls, expressed that he would tell his granddaughters to go and finish somewhere. We really don’t care, but we as a family will promise you the first BS degree…I don’t care where it is if it’s an HBCU or PWI but just finish. Marion Farmer agreed and stated, I would instill in them that it is absolutely necessary that there is no choice that they would grow up knowing that there is no choice…the only choice is which school you going to and that we will be supportive if it’s a school within our financial means [laughing].

Summary

The individual interviews of the seventeen participants and the family interviews of the four families resulted in data regarding a mixture of influences on their college-choice decisions. As previously described the use of individual interviews and family interviews served as checks and balance system for the researcher and clarified answers to questions asked during the first
interview. In addition, use of both interviews helped the participants provide their own account of just how they reached their final choice decision without the influence of the other family members. It was during both the individual and family interviews that the participants identified common factors that influenced their college-choice decisions. Many of the same questions were asked during both the individual and group interviews; however it was during the individual interviews that the answers seemed a little more heartfelt and sincere. The use of interviews, individual and family; helped capture the authentic thoughts and perspectives of the participants. The inclusion of the participant’s stories as told by the participants gave voice to this study.

After analyzing all the factors that influenced the college-choice decisions as described by the participants during the individual and group interviews, three major themes emerged as being the most influential: Family Influences, Outside Influences, and Personal Aspirations and Motivations. In addition, two sub-themes emerged while analyzing the data: Class and Socio-Economic Status and Self-Concept and Perceptions.

The findings from this research indicate that among the Family Influences most of the participating parents were not directly influenced by parents or any other family members. Only two of the parents expressed being influenced by their own parents. In addition, the adult children were most influenced by their own parents not only to attend college but in their choice to attend a PWI or an HBCU. Class and Socio-Economic Status emerged as being an underlining sub-theme in this study. It was apparent that low socio-economic status of most of the participating parents while growing up influenced their decision to attend a college or university with lower tuition or in which they received a scholarship. Only one adult child discussed attending their college-choice because of cost. Among the Outside Influences the participating parents were most influenced by the location of their college or university of choice. In addition,
the adult children expressed being influenced by peers. The study revealed that the *Personal Aspiration and Motivations* of the participating parents encouraged them to pursue higher education in pursuit of a better life. The adult children aspired and were motivated to prove themselves academically. In addition, Self-Concept and Perceptions a sub-theme revealed the participants own self-concept and the perceptions they developed about college going.

In Chapter five I will provide an overview of the study, discuss the implications for policy and practice, and outline the delimitations and limitations of the study, discuss implications for future research and recommendations and conclusions.
Table 3

Summary of participant college-choice process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>College-choice influences&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitman Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim Sr.</td>
<td>Only considered local PWI</td>
<td>Older brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delores</td>
<td>Visited one HBCU and local PWI</td>
<td>Personal aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim Jr.</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs and PWIs</td>
<td>Parents, uncle, peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Only considered an HBCU</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>Only considered an HBCU</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs</td>
<td>Parents, peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs</td>
<td>Parents, older sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel Jr.</td>
<td>Only considered local PWI</td>
<td>Parents, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Visited 3 or more PWIs</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs</td>
<td>Parents, peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel III</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs</td>
<td>Parents, older sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canton Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Visited one HBCU</td>
<td>Personal aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Visited one HBCU</td>
<td>Parents,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs and PWIs</td>
<td>Parents, older cousins, and aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs and PWIs</td>
<td>High school coach, older siblings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melvin</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs and PWIs</td>
<td>parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Visited 5 or more HBCUs and PWIs</td>
<td>Parents, older siblings, peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> The influences are listed by order of most influential as expressed by the participant.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was designed to identify factors that influenced the college-choice decisions of African-American families. Previous studies on college-choice investigated the factors that influenced the college-choice decisions of all students (Chapman, 1981; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Jackson, 1982, Litten, 1982; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Tweedell, 1987;). There were some studies that focused on the college-choice decisions of African Americans (Cyprian-Andrews, 2004; Freeman, 1997; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Horvat, 1996; Jones, 2002; McCurdy, 2003; McDonough, 1997; Thallemer, 1998; Thompson, 2005) however few studies examined the college-choice influences of African American families (Acker-Ball, 2007; DeLarge, 2003; Freeman, 2005).

A study was conducted that brought to light the influence of family and school on African American college-choice (Freeman, 2005). Prior to this study, most of the research on African Americans and college-choice focused primarily on the types of colleges this group most often chose to attend but sparingly examined the influence of families.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides a summary of the research study. The second presents a summary of findings based on the research questions that guided the study. The third section outlines the delimitations and limitations the study presented and the final section discuss implications for policy and practice, research and future studies and provided a final conclusion to the study.
Overview

This study used qualitative methods to conduct case studies and explore the stories of African American families and college-choice. These methods included audio recorded interviews and data analysis of each family and individual story.

Chapter I provided an overview of the problem, established the purpose and significance of the study, and outlined the theoretical framework that guided the study.

Chapter II was the literature review, which included a historical and current day synopsis of African Americans and college-choice, an overview of college-choice models that have been used to shape most college-choice research, and previous studies that have been conducted on college-choice of all students.

Chapter III outlined the methodology, provided a rationale for a qualitative case study, described other possible methods that could have been used and other methods that have been used in other studies. This chapter also described the setting, population and data collection procedures. The reflexivity and ethical concerns were also included to ensure trustworthiness and eliminate any bias.

Chapter IV consisted primarily of insights collected from the participant interviews. This chapter attempted to understand what influenced the college-choice decisions of African American families. The researcher conducted a data analysis and examined the participant responses to the interview questions. This analysis was used to develop themes that emerged; the themes were also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter V presents a summary of findings based on the research questions. It also describes the limitations of the study, implications for future research and study conclusions.
The primary focus of this study was the influence of family on college-choice. It is also what guided the research questions. The primary research question of this study is: What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American families? The following are two additional sub questions:

1. How do African American parents influence the overall college-choice decisions of their children?

2. How do African American parents who attended a predominately White (PWI) or historically Black (HBCU) college or university influence the type of college or university their children chose to attend?

Summary of findings

Family Overview

The Whitman Family were all graduates of the same PWI in Midwestern city #1. Neither Lim II nor Delores received influence to attend college from their parents. Lim II expressed being highly influenced by his older brother who received all of his degrees including his PhD from the same PWI. Delores was inspired by personal motivation and aspiration to attend college; she quickly realized that obtaining a college degree was as a way of having a better career choice and a better life. Lim III, their only child, credits his parents for encouraging him to attend college but it wasn’t set up as an automatic expectation in their household. He credits his uncle as being the first person that he knew to earn a PhD and watching his peers apply for college and discussing college encouraged him to begin that process as well.

The Farmer Family, both parents and their adult children were graduates of HBCUS in the South. George and Marion had both similar but different experiences in their college-choice process. Segregation played a role in assisting George and Marion in eliminating colleges they could not attend however George had the assistance of his teacher in making his final college-choice decisions and Marion had the assistance of parents. In addition, George and Marion
involved their children in activities and groups such as the Black College Tour and Jack and Jill in order to expose them to HBCU experiences. The parents often took their children to their alma mater for visits especially during homecoming. Miriam and Monique both credit their parents for having large influences in their college-choice to attend an HBCU. They both expressed having received automatic expectation in their household; college attendance was not an option.

The Walker Family, parents were graduates of a PWI and both children were graduates of an HBCU. The findings revealed that neither Lionel Jr. nor Charlotte were influenced to attend college by their parents. However Charlotte did express receiving encouragement from her grandfather. In addition, because of their own college experiences, both parents highly encouraged their children to not only go on to college but to also attend an HBCU. Both Nora and Lionel III attended the same HBCU in the South.

The Canton Family, parents were graduates of an HBCU and all four of the adult children were graduates of PWIs. The findings from their individual and family interviews revealed that each of the parents had different experiences and were influenced to attend college in different ways. Samuel Canton did not receive any influence to attend college; his choice to attend college was primarily influenced by personal aspirations and motivation. Elizabeth Canton was influenced from the time she was a child by her parents to not only attend college but to attend an HBCU. All four children expressed being influenced to attend college by their parents. However each of the children had additional influences. For example, Melvin Canton discussed being largely influenced by his basketball coach on where to go to college. Erin Canton, the oldest of the four children discussed being influenced by an aunt and older cousins. Erin also discussed being highly influenced by her guidance counselor which is consistent with findings from McDonough (1997) that found that guidance counselors have a direct impact on students,
and more importantly, the counselor is vital in creating the school’s expectations and formal college planning. Brian Canton expressed being influenced by his older sister Erin to attend his PWI of choice. Lisa Canton, the youngest of the four Canton children discussed being influenced by parents and her three older siblings. In addition, Lisa was also influenced by the location of the college, she felt more comfortable staying closer to home. All of the adult children had a different experience in making their college-choice decisions then their parents’ had. Although Samuel had positive support from her family, Samuel and Elizabeth made concerted efforts to make sure their children made sound college-choice decisions.

*Family Comparisons*

Most of the participating parents did not receive support from their own parents in making their final college-choice decisions. In addition most of the parent participants had different support and different experiences during their college-choice process. For example, Marion Farmer and Elizabeth Canton were the only parents in this study that had the support to attend college from their own parents however, the support received was different. Marion was a first generation college student and the support she received from her parents was not hands on. Elizabeth was not first generation, her mother had earned a bachelors degree and was more than willing to assist Elizabeth in filling out her college application and helping her understand what college would be like for her. Lim Sr. had the help and support from his older brother in which none of the other parent participants mentioned having any support from older siblings. George Farmer had the help of his electronics teacher in not only discussing which college to attend but also filling out his college application. Lionel Sr. and Charlotte Walker expressed not receiving any help during their college-choice process.
Although each of the adult children received automatic support from their parents, one can’t assume the level of support would be the same for all of the participants. However, in this study, each of the adult children had similar experiences in that their parents involved them in activities that encouraged college going, assisted them in completing college applications and took them on college visits.

The following is a summary of findings based on the research questions that guided this study.

1. What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American families?

None of the adult children were first-generation college students and were more likely to attend college than someone who was first-generation. Therefore findings revealed that parents were the primary factor that influenced their children to attend college in this study. However, out of the nine adult children, four expressed that their parents influenced their decision to attend an HBCU. One adult child participant expressed that because their parent worked for the local college it was more cost effective to attend that institution. The other four children expressed that their parents did not influence their decision to attend a PWI or HBCU. In addition, the findings revealed that the adult children were other family members. All four of the younger Canton children discussed being influenced by their older siblings to go to college. They all had an opportunity to visit an older sibling at college and those visits helped to inspire them to continue their education. Although Erin Canton, the oldest of the four Canton children, did not have an older sibling to inspire her, she did have the influence of an Aunt and an older cousin. She had the opportunity to visit both while they were in college and spend time on their campuses.

The findings also revealed that there was a combination of factors that influenced the college-choice decisions of the participating parents in this study. It was quite clear in this study
that due to the lack of education among the parents of the parent participants; the parent participants saw the need to be successful and do better in life than their own parents. Therefore, personal aspirations and motivations seemed to be the primary factor that influenced the college-choice decisions for the parent participants in this study. In addition, some of the parent participants were also influenced by a teacher, an older sibling, or a grandparent. For example, Lim Whitman Sr. talked about looking up to his older brother and how much of an influence his brother had on not only his decision to attend college but also his decision to the PWI that he chose. In addition, George Farmer talked about how his electronics teacher encouraged him because he saw his potential but also highly influenced his decision to attend the HBCU that he chose to attend.

2. How do African American parents influence the overall college-choice decisions of their children?

All of the parent participants in this study involved their children in activities and programs, such as Jack and Jill, the Black college tour and sorority and fraternity debutantes and cotillions. All of the adult children expressed that their participation in these groups and organizations had some impact on their decision to attend college. Those that chose to attend an HBCU expressed that these experiences did aid in their decision to attend an HBCU. The exposure to activities and events coupled with constant reinforcement from the parents appeared to provide the adult children with the vital level of motivation to pursue a college degree. In this study, none of the adult children were first-generation; therefore their chances of attending college were much higher than someone that wasn’t first generation. The findings revealed that the primary influence for the adult children was simply continued discussions about the importance of college going from the time they were small children. None of the adult children expressed
feeling pressured to attend an HBCU or PWI, but definitely they were pressured by their parents to go to college.

Again, the findings revealed that many of the parent participants did not have the influence of their own parents in making college-choice decisions. In addition because of the lack of education and support received during their upbringing many of the parent participants saw the need to be successful and do better in life than their own parents. Personal aspirations and motivations were keys to the success of the parent participants in this study. It is important to note that none of the parent participants expressed ever getting negative feedback from their parents or other family about making the decision to attend college.

3. How do African American parents who attended a predominately White (PWI) or historically Black (HBCU) college or university influence the type of college or university their children chose to attend?

The findings revealed that the parents who attended an HBCU took their children to the annual homecomings at their alma mater in order to expose their children to an HBCU atmosphere. All of the adult children discussed going on the Black college tours while they were in high school. However, two of the parents in this study that attended a PWI made concerted efforts to make sure their children had a different college experience by steering their children in the direction of an HBCU. However, those adult children who chose to attend an HBCU may not have made that college-choice decision if they hadn’t had the reinforcement and exposure from their parents. Interestingly, only four of the adult children who attended an HBCU were highly influenced by their parents to choose an HBCU. Sisters, Miriam and Monique Farmer both attended an HBCU and both of their parents attended an HBCU. Siblings, Nora and Lionel Walker III both attended an HBCU but both of their parents attended a PWI. Lim Whitman Jr. who attended a PWI and
Siblings, Erin, Brian, Melvin and Lisa Canton all attended a PWI, none were highly influenced by their parents to attend a PWI.

In the next section, the researcher explored the findings outlined into themes that emerged during the data analysis. Future researchers of African American families and college-choice could use the information outlined below as a springboard in examining the college-choice influences of African American families and expand upon the knowledge gained from this study. In addition, college administrators and school guidance counselors can use this information as a guide in helping students make sound choices in their college-choice decisions.

Overview of themes

Family Influence

Recent studies reveal that parental support positively influences student’s college decisions (Freeman, 2005; Sztam, 2003; Tweedell, 1987). This study demonstrated that, parents and siblings had the biggest influence on the college-choice decisions of the adult children. The findings concluded that African American families have promoted educational attainment at all levels. Although most of the parent participants didn’t receive the automatic support from their own parents, no parent participant received any discouragement from their own parent to attend college. The parent participants in this study constantly advocated college education for their children by not only providing emotional support but in some cases by providing financial support as well. All of the parents in this study were college graduates and therefore were well aware of the importance of obtaining a college education. To ensure that their children embraced the idea of college attendance, the parents took upon themselves to provide positive reinforcement on college going and to involve their children in college related activities. Four out of eight parent participants in this study did indeed have a direct impact on where their child
or children chose to attend college. For example, Lionel and Charlotte Walker both attended PWIs in the Midwest, both encouraged their children to attend HBCUs by sending them on the Black college tour; discussing their own experiences with attending a PWI and having positive discussions surrounding college attendance at an HBCU. Parent participants in this study also found family support from older siblings, older cousins, aunts and grandparents. Eccles and Harrold (1993) noted that parents who are better educated are more involved in school and home than parents who are less educated. Elizabeth credits her mother for supporting and encouraging her on college going. It’s important to note that a mother’s education has a significant impact on a student’s choice to attend (Hu & Hossler, 1998).

Other Influences

The influence of peers, teachers and organizational involvement was also prevalent in this study. Participants discussed being influenced by their friends and teachers and coaches. They also discussed being involved in activities and organizations that encouraged college going. For example, George Farmer discussed how his electronics teacher recognized his academic ability and made sure he went on to attend Alabama A&M which was also his teachers alma mater. In addition all of the adult children participated in the Black college tour. Miriam talked about being a part of the Jack and Jill organization and being encouraged to attend an HBCU since so many of the members were graduates of HBCUs.

Location was also another outside influence and in some cases an obstacle in the participant’s decision making process. For example, Parents Lim Sr. and Delores Whitman discussed not having a reference point for many of the colleges and universities outside of their hometown. They had no idea where some of these schools were located and if they attended they did not know how they would get there. This was a prime example of students making college-
choice decisions without all of the proper information. Often students exclude a college or university from their choice set when they should be evaluating (Jackson 1982). In addition, with tools such as the internet and programs such as the VSA, perhaps lack of information is not longer an issue in making college-choices.

*Personal Aspirations and Motivations*

The findings revealed that personal aspiration and motivation was necessary in order for college to have been possible for some of our participants. Parent participants, Lim and Deborah Whitman II discussed working menial jobs prior to college and credits that experience as a definite motivator to go forward and earn a college degree. Samuel Canton expressed his distaste for working on his family farm and credits his experience as his sole motivation for working hard on obtaining good grades in high school and going forward to pursue and earn his college degree. According to Freeman (2005) educational aspirations among African Americans have consistently been found to be higher than those of other groups. Some studies (Hearn, Griswold, Marine, & McFarland, 1995; Thomas, 1980) have indicated that although African Americans have high educational aspirations, their aspirations do not always render it into obtaining a college degree. Although Melvin Canton credits his high basketball coach as being the biggest influence on his college-choice decisions he also discussed being diagnosed with a learning disability and using personal motivation and aspiration to overcome academic challenges. He also maintained his motivation to continue his college education after an injury ended his college basketball career. In addition, Miriam credits her parents as being her biggest influences on her college-choice decisions; she admitted that seeing her peers apply to colleges and universities especially HBCUS it inspired her to want to go to an HBCU. This is consistent with
McDonough’s (1997) findings that found that students with few friends had a weak network when it came to discussing information about college going.

Sub-themes

Class and Socio-Economic Status

There is much research on the influence of class and socio-economic status on college-choice decisions (Horvat, 2001; McDonough & Others, 1997; McDonough, 1997). Family class level wasn’t discussed in this study and did not emerge as a major theme however; the influence of family participation in organizations such as Jack and Jill, Greek letter organization activities and Upward Bound suggested a certain level of social status among the families. According to Thayer (2000), family income is the greatest predictor of college enrollment even when ability is considered. In this study the families were either of middle or upper-class status; all of the participating adult children attended and graduated from college.

Self-concept and Perceptions

The way in which the participants saw themselves attributed to their own abilities to do well and go forward in life and help to develop their positive self-concept and helped to shape and mold their attitudes and perceptions about college.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Findings from this study have implications for policy and practice regarding the college-choice process of African American families. There are many common factors that are necessary to the college-choice process for all students; there are differences that exist between racial groups regarding how these decisions are made (Cyprian-Andrews, 2004; Freeman, 1997, 2005; McCurdy, 2003; McDonough, 1997).
In this study, all participants grew up having some type of religious affiliation however none received any influence nor participated in any church events that assisted with the college-choice process for students. All participants expressed that the church did not have any influence on their college-choice decision or process. The findings from this study are inconsistent with studies conducted by Cyprian-Andrews (2004) and Tweedell (1997). These studies contended that participation in church increased the probability of youth pursuing higher education. Based upon these findings, African American churches could play a larger role in encouraging and influencing their congregational members to attend college. They could invite admissions and financial aid personnel to visit and inform the young people in their congregations of the academic programs and financial aid available and be available to assist with the completion of admission and financial aid forms. They could also help sponsor local college and Black college tours. In addition, colleges and universities could produce more literature and more recruitment programs geared toward the parents and families of the potential students. Guidance counselors could coordinate college events to include parents and families meeting college and university admissions and financial aid representatives.

In order to recruit and retain African American students it is important to understand what influences their college-choice decisions. This knowledge will help colleges and universities better understand and meet the needs of that group. The next section describes the delimitations and limitations that became apparent while conducting this study.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations also known as assumptions refer to deliberate limitations that have been placed on the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). This study was delimited to studying only African American families whose members attended and graduated from a PWI or an HBCU. In
addition, identifying non-first generation African American children from two-parent homes and recruiting participants from Midwestern cities are other delimitation for this study.

The limitations for this study included the small sample size and the research design. In addition, the families who self-selected to participate in the study may have introduced bias to the sample because they were not a complete representation of African American families in the US. Only college graduated participants were interviewed for this study. Another limitation for this study is that only participants who were from the Midwest were interviewed. However, four of the eight parents were born and raised in the South. All of the children were born and raised in the Midwest.

Implications for Future Research

While conducting this research it became quite apparent that other questions needed to be explored in order to close the gaps on college-choice especially surrounding race and gender. Therefore this next section describes implications for future research that began to permeate during this study and could be investigated in the future:

1. What factors influence the college-choice decisions of African American males and African American females?

While examining the college-choice models in this study, the exploration of gender was mentioned in some of the earlier models but nothing was mentioned in the research pertaining to African Americans, gender and college-choice. Again, the exploration of gender, race and college-choice could close another gap in the research and provide additional information on college-choice influences for this group for college administrators.

2. What role does the African American church play in assisting students in the college-choice process?
The review of literature revealed that many colleges and universities were founded or affiliated with a church or religious affiliation. In addition, the literature found that participation in church or church activities increased the likelihood of college going. However in this study, all of the participants attended church but none felt that church had any significance on their college going and did not receive any influence from the church or church members. This needs to be explored further.

3. What role does extended family play in assisting African American students in the college-choice process?

Extended family such as grandparents and cousins played a role in not only influencing some of the participants in this study. Extended family sometimes takes the place of family in the African American community therefore the influence of extended needs to be explored further. Research in this area could prove to be significant and college administrators may need to develop information and materials that cater to the extended family.

4. What role do peers play in assisting African American students in the college-choice process?

The influence of peers was a significant finding in this study, especially for the adult children. Some expressed having discussions about college with their peers and how those discussions sometimes motivated them to begin making some decisions about whether to attend a PWI or HBCU or just making decisions about college in general. As the researcher, I was a first-generation college student and did not have a frame of reference when it came to college. I was fortunate to be surrounded by friends that were thinking about college, it was one of the biggest influences on my decision to attend college.
5. Is the influence of family on college-choice different for African Americans then it is for Hispanics or White students?

This study primarily focused on the influence of family on college-choice for African Americans. A comparison of these influences across ethnic groups could prove to be significant. This information could provide additional data for colleges and universities in knowing more about what influences prospective college students and their families and use this as another resource to help with attracting these students.

6. How does the participation in extracurricular activities and programs before college affect the college-choice process for African American students?

During this study, the findings revealed that participation in college related activities was significant and had a strong correlation and a big influence on the student’s college-choice decisions. For example, all of the adult children in this discussed having participated in the Black College Tour the exposure to the HBCU experience gave the participants a frame of reference during the choice phase of their college decisions.

Researcher Observations

The interviews in this study, both individual and family were told in a retrospective manner. Meaning all of the participants told their experiences from a historical perspective. The most recent bachelor’s degree earned among the participants was earned eight years ago. Interestingly, there was a conspicuous absence in the use of technology among the participants in this study. No one spoke of technology or the use of technology in aiding them in their college-choice process. The youngest parent participant graduated from college in the mid-seventies therefore the parent participants had little to no technology available during that time to aid them in the college-choice process. The youngest adult child graduated from college around eight years ago in which some technology was available during that time. I would suspect that if I
interviewed current students about their college-choice process, technology would be a major
discussion. Today, technology is such an important part of the college-choice process; colleges
and universities are able to share information with numerous prospective students almost
immediately. For example, many colleges and universities have their own official website that
provides a mass amount of information about their college or university. Students can learn
everything there is to know without ever stepping foot on a college campus. Many colleges and
universities have home page websites that are overflowing with tools and information such as a
virtual tour of the campus, an instant message link which will allow a student or parent to ask a
question and receive an immediate answer and video streamed interviews of excerpts from
current students. In addition a student can read about the college or university on that college or
universities home page or the college portrait website as powered by the VSA (2007). This will
help students to conduct a comparison analysis during the evaluation phase of the college-choice
process.

As a college administrator it is important to understand the influences on college-choice
and to understand if there are any differences in college-choice influences among various groups.
As an administrator it is also important to be aware of who influences those choices. In this
study, I found that many of the participants were influenced by someone other than their own
parents (i.e teacher, guidance counselors). In my work as an administrator, and as I work with
students on a day to day basis, I am finding that mentors and extended family are often as
equally important in the student’s lives as a parent. This knowledge is worthy of understanding
and will help college and university administrators in reaching out to prospective students.

Conclusion
This study was a qualitative case study that explored the influences on college-choice for African American families. The researcher was able to answer the research questions presented by conducting in-depth family and individual interviews with seventeen participants and four African American families. In addition, the research examined the data of the study to reveal themes that emerged during data collection.

Findings from this study revealed that there are multiple influences on the college-choice of African American families. Participants were influenced not only to attend college but also influenced on whether or not to choose a PWI or HBCU by parents, siblings, peers, activities and personal aspiration and motivation. However, in this study, outside influences such as peers, teachers and location were the biggest influence on the parent participants; parental influence was the most prevalent for the adult children.

As a result of their college attendance, the parents in which all but one were first generation had a significant impact on their children’s decision to attend college. Moreover, the parents also made an impact on the way in which their children made their decision to attend either a PWI or HBCU. Consequently, the impact that the parents had on their children will ultimately impact the way in which the adult children will impact their own children’s college-choice decisions.

Summary

African Americans have traveled a long historical journey in pursuit of education. This journey ends with African Americans having the ability to attend any college or university of their choice. Hence it is important to understand the factors that influenced those college-choice decisions; it is equally important to understand the role that family play in this process. With systems such as the VSA (2007), which provides a portal in retrieving accurate information on
colleges and universities around the country, students and their families will be able to make sound decisions in their college-choice.

This study gave the participants an opportunity to not only reflect upon their experiences but to also give voice to their experiences and be heard. In addition, the information provided by this study will be useful for college administrators, high school counselors, the African American community and college-choice researchers. It is hoped that this study will add to the existing body of literature on African Americans and college-choice.
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Appendix A
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM
(Please Print)

Study about the Influence of Family on College-Choice Decisions

☐ Yes, I am interested in being interviewed.

Name: __________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Phone Number: (       ) _________________________________________________

Cell Number: (       ) _________________________________________________

E-mail: _______________________________________________________________

Age: ________________________________ Gender: _______________________

Race: _______________________________

Occupation: __________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

Highest level of education obtained (please circle):

High school_________ Associate’s degree_________ Bachelor’s degree_________

Master’s degree_______ Doctoral degree_________ JD__________ MD_________

Other_________

List colleges and universities you’ve attended:

1. _______________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________

4. _______________________________________________________________

5. _______________________________________________________________

6. _______________________________________________________________

Please complete and return via email or in person to the interviewer
Appendix B

LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS
Dear,

My name is Nicole Shankle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Cincinnati. I am conducting a research study on the connections between parental college-choice and the college-choice of their children by examining similarities and differences in the decision making process.

As the principal investigator of this study, I would like to meet with you face-to-face during two separate interviews. The first interview will be in a group with your family. The second interview will be a private individual interview. Both interviews will be used to discuss the college-choice influences for you and your family. The interviews will last up to 2 hours each.

I am interested in interviewing participants that meet the following criteria: (1) African American families (mother, father and children) that have all graduated from a predominately White institution (PWI) or historically Black college or university (HBCU), and (2) all participants must be 18 years of age or older.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at anytime without threat or consequences.

If you agree to participate in this study or have any questions please feel free to contact me (812) 593-2871, (317) 881-6358 or via email nshankle@ivytech.edu.

Sincerely,

Nicole Shankle
Doctoral Candidate
University of Cincinnati
Dear,

My name is Nicole Shankle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Cincinnati. I am conducting a research study on the linkages between parental college-choice and the college-choice of their children by examining similarities and differences in the decision making process.

As the principal investigator of this study, I would like to meet with you face-to-face during two separate interviews. The first interview will be in a group with your family. The second interview will be a private individual interview. Both interviews will be used to discuss the college-choice influences of you and your family. The interviews will last approximately 1-2 hours each.

I am interested in interviewing participants that meet the following criteria: (1) African American families (mother, father and children) that have all graduated from a predominately White institution (PWI) or historically Black college or university (HBCU), and (2) all participants must be 18 years of age or older.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at anytime without threat or consequences.

If you agree to participate in this study or have any questions please feel free to reply to this email nshankle@ivytech.edu or call me at (812) 593-2871, (317) 881-6358.

Sincerely,

Nicole Shankle
Doctoral Candidate
University of Cincinnati

Appendix D

University of Cincinnati

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Title of Study:
African American Families and College Choice: Case Studies of Four African American Families.

Introduction:
Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important to understand the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed during the study, the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study, the rights of each study participant, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality.

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of parents on the college-choice decisions of their children that chose to attend a Predominately White or Historically Black College or University. You will be one of approximately up to 20 participants taking part in this study. You, ______________________ agree to participate in this research study in which the investigator will ask you to discuss your personal experiences and views pertaining to African Americans and college-choice.

Duration:
Your participation in this study will last for two non-consecutive days consisting of no more than 1-2 hours per day.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured individual and family interview in which you will be asked questions about college-choice. You will be asked to discuss your thoughts and perspectives until you think you have no more to say. Each interview will last approximately 1-2 hours or as long as it takes for you to describe your thoughts and feelings in answering the questions. The interviews will be conducted at a time and location that is most convenient for you. If you have any questions about your responses you may be asked to elaborate or further describe your thoughts and feelings either during this session or at a future session. The interviews will be tape recorded for later transcription to computer.

Risks/discomforts:
Although there are no anticipated risks associated with this study, you might experience some possible discomfort during interview discussions about your background and your experiences. Should discomfort or unforeseen risks arise, you have the right to choose not to respond to that question or withdraw from the entire study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You also may discuss discomfort and risks with the investigator, Nicole Shankle at (812) 593-2871,
Benefits:
Participants might benefit from the opportunity to openly express their ideas, thoughts and opinions regarding their college choice process. Those discussions might help other African American parents and their children in examining the college choice process of their family. In addition, the findings will be used to give voice to African Americans as it pertains to college-choice and add to the literature on African Americans and college-choice.

Alternatives:
There are no other activities planned if you do not want to be interviewed.

Confidentiality:
Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of all records. The investigator’s advisor at the University of Cincinnati will be allowed to read sections of the research records related to this study. The investigator’s advisor will not have access to identifiable information such as your name, phone number, email or address. All identifiable information will remain confidential and separate from all transcripts. The data from the study may be published and presented at conferences; however, you will not be identified by name. Your identity will remain confidential unless law, such as mandatory reporting of child abuse, elder abuse, or immediate danger to self or others, requires disclosure. To further ensure confidentiality, all field notes, interview audiotapes, and interview transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet and destroyed no later then three years after the study is completed.

Offer to answer questions: If you have any other questions about this study, you may call Nicole Shankle at (812) 593-2871, (317) 881-6358 or Dr. Lanthan Camblin at (513) 556-333. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at (513) 558-5784. If you have a concern about the study you may also call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or you may write to the Institutional Review Board-Social and Behavioral Sciences, G-28 Wherry Hall, ML 0567, 3225 Eden Avenue, PO Box 670567, Cincinnati, OH 45267-0567, or you may email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or may discontinue participation at ANY TIME, without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Agreement:
I have read this consent document. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I will receive a signed and dated copy of this consent document for my reference.

________________________________________________       ___________________
Participant Signature                                                                        Date

_______________________________________________        ___________________
Appendix E

Family Interview Questions

Predisposition
1. Discuss when you first began thinking about attending college?

**High School**
2. Discuss the types of resources your junior high and/or high school provided to assist you with college decisions?

**Family**
1. Discuss the role your parents played in assisting you in your college-choice decisions?
2. What types of colleges did your parents attend?
3. Did other members of your family encourage you to attend college (cousins, cousins, godparents, other relatives)?
4. What role did other members of your family play in assisting you in your college-choice decisions?
5. Tell me about the other members of your family that did attend college?
6. What types of colleges did they attend?

**Church**
7. Do you have a religious affiliation? If so, what is your affiliation?
8. How did the members of this affiliation assist in your college-choice decisions?

**Other Organizations**
9. Were you or your parent’s members of clubs or organizations? If so, how did members of the clubs or organizations aid in your college-choice decisions?

**Peers**
10. Did you and your friends talk about going to college?
11. What types of things did you talk about?
12. What types of colleges or universities did your friends attend?
13. What role did your friends play in your college choice?

**Search**
14. Did you visit any other college campuses? If so, which ones?
15. Who went on the college visits with you?
16. Did you apply to other colleges? If so, which ones?
17. How did you learn about ______________college or university?
18. What information (materials) did you collect about the schools that you considered?
19. How did you access this information?

**Choice**
20. What was your first college-choice?
21. When did you make the decision to attend ______________?
22. How did you make the decision to attend ______________?
23. Why did you choose to attend a PWI rather than an HBCU or an HBCU rather than a PWI?
Other
24. What message would you like to convey to your children about attending college?
25. In retrospect, what would you have done differently?
26. What advice would offer to others, similar to yourself, who are looking for a college?
27. Given what you know now, do you think that you would make the same decision today?
   Why or why not?

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

Predisposition
1. When did you first begin thinking about attending college?
High School
2. What types of resources did your junior high and/or high school provide to assist you with college decisions?

Family
3. What role did your parents play in assisting you in your college-choice decisions?
4. What types of colleges did your parents attend?
5. Did other members of your family encourage you to attend college (cousins, grandparents, godparents, other relatives)?
6. What role did other members of your family play in assisting you in your college-choice decisions?
7. Tell me about the other members of your family that did attend college?
8. What types of colleges did they attend?

Church
9. Do you have a religious affiliation? If so, what is your affiliation?
10. How did the members of this affiliation assist in your college-choice decisions?

Other Organizations
11. Were you or your parent’s members of clubs or organizations? If so, how did members of the clubs or organizations aid in your college-choice decisions?

Peers
12. Did you and your friends talk about going to college?
13. What types of things did you talk about?
14. What types of colleges or universities did your friends attend?
15. What role did your friends play in your college choice?

Search
16. Did you visit any other college campuses? If so, which ones?
17. Who went on the college visits with you?
18. Did you apply to other colleges? If so, which ones?
19. How did you learn about ______________ college or university?
20. What information (materials) did you collect about the schools that you considered?
21. How did you access this information?

Choice
22. What was your first college-choice?
23. When did you make the decision to attend ______________?
24. How did you make the decision to attend ______________?
25. Why did you choose to attend a PWI rather than an HBCU or an HBCU rather than a PWI?

Other
26. What message would you like to convey to your children about attending college?
27. In retrospect, what would you have done differently?
28. What advice would offer to others, similar to yourself, who are looking for a college?
29. Given what you know now, do you think that you would make the same decision today? Why or why not?
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother, Odessa Grant, who departed this earth on December 5, 2007. Ma, I thank you for always supporting me in all of my endeavors. You passed on to me your strength, your courage and your Christian values. I wish you could have been here to see me complete this process but I know you are smiling down on me from heaven. I miss you and I will always love and cherish you.