ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: EDUCATIONAL PLANS BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL:
                            NARRATIVES OF BLACK MALES'
                            POSTSECONDARY DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

                            Zakiya Shani Smith Lee, Doctor of Philosophy, 2008

Dissertation directed by: Professor Marylu K. McEwen
                            Department of Counseling and Personnel Services

The enrollment gap between Black male and female undergraduates began in 1960 and has grown significantly over the years. Although a gender gap exists for all racial/ethnic groups, more attention should be paid to one subgroup of men who are in the worst situation – African American men.

The purpose of this study was to understand the influences on and processes by which Black males make decisions about pursuing a college education and searching for a college after high school graduation. Utilizing narrative inquiry methodology, data were collected through interviews, school records, and demographic questionnaires. Participants for this study were 10 12th grade and 1 11th grade Black males attending school in a Mid-Atlantic state. Data were analyzed using initial and focused coding, and the results were considered in relation to three theoretical frameworks, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) Three Phase Model of College Choice, K. Freeman's (2005) model of African Americans in predisposition, and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Participants planned to attend college for financial advancement, career development, and personal growth. Findings suggest that parental encouragement is more influential than parental expectations, as participants whose parents were involved throughout their child's schooling had the clearest college plans. Although most participants did not identify finances as influential to their college decision making, all participants made cost-conscious decisions such as applying for scholarships and financial aid and staying close to home. The effect of low grades was strong and resulted in challenging search processes but did not affect predisposition. Social capital was influential in helping participants learn about college from those knowledgeable about college. Participants also indicated that the presence of career plans, long-term goals, patience, increased motivation and information, and the influence of family may increase the number of Black males enrolled in college.

Implications address participants' late start on the college choice process and suggest a default college preparatory curriculum, more informed school personnel, and the standardization of college and career information sessions that will produce knowledgeable Black males who have postsecondary educational options that are not hindered by poor academic performance or lack of information.

EDUCATIONAL PLANS BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL:

NARRATIVES OF BLACK MALES'

POSTSECONDARY DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

by

Zakiya Shani Smith Lee

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2008

Advisory Committee:

Professor Marylu K. McEwen, Chair
Professor Vivian S. Boyd
Professor Sharon Fries-Britt
Professor Susan R. Jones
Dr. Nancy S. Shapiro

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my son

Malcolm Elliot Lee

You are amazing!

May you have the audacity to dream big and the courage and strength to work hard to

make those dreams come true. I thank God for blessing and trusting us with you and the

task of preparing you to become a remarkable Black man.

And yes, I am *finally* done with my dissertation. Let's play!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first have to thank God for providing me with the opportunity to take on such a challenge and for giving me the ability to succeed.

I've been blessed to have many wonderful friends and family on this journey with me. It has been my husband, Alvin, who has had to live with me through the ups and downs of life as a doctoral student. Thank you does not even begin to describe how much I appreciate all you have done to help make this possible. You adjusted and readjusted life plans when this took longer than anticipated. You were patient when progress was slow. You were encouraging when I was on a roll. You sacrificed so I could have extra time to get work done. You made me rest when I was on overload. You celebrated when I succeeded. I admire you for your strength, for the thought and energy you put into everything, and for what you do for our family. I love you.

I have a committee of some of the smartest, sharpest, and most thoughtful women I know. Thank you to my chair, Dr. Marylu McEwen who found kind and encouraging words even when I knew I needed to work harder. I appreciate how you cared about what was going on in my life beyond school. I am grateful for the support you've given me from my first days at Maryland until now. Thank you for everything you did to help me produce such sound research. Dr. Vivian Boyd, I'm so glad to have had you as part of this process. Your thoughtfulness and the consideration you give to all you do amazes me. Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt, thank you for being a great mentor and teacher. You've touched a lot of lives at Maryland. I am glad to be one of those lives. Dr. Susan Jones, we were meant to work together! First Ohio State and now this! You've taught me so much; thanks for helping make my graduate experiences meaningful. Dr. Nancy Shapiro, thank

you for broadening my professional horizons. I learned so much from the time I spent with you and the fabulous staff at USM. I value the expertise and knowledge you contributed to my research. This process was much more manageable because I knew I had a committee of scholars who wanted me to succeed and who would make sure my work was of the highest quality.

Thanks and love to the Hatcher family, especially my auntie, Uncle Johnny, and cousins Teri and Tony. I'm forever grateful to my godmother, Vivian Smith, and the rest of the Smith family. Godmommy, you've always been a role model for me. Thanks for showing me what it looks like to be a "Phenomenal Woman." Additional thanks to my family at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church who never failed to ask how school was going. Some of you have been asking me that since I was 5 years old! Thanks for the years of prayers and concern.

I'm not sure what I would do without my girls! I am forever thankful for the love and pep talks from LaShanta, LaStell, Patrice, and Royden. Whether we are in the same state or hundreds of miles away, I know I can count on you all, the friends who have been with me the longest! Special thanks to Joy who, in addition to being one of my closest friends, was a fabulous ad hoc committee member. I was glad to have you there as the one person who knew, from experience, the challenges of conducting research and writing a dissertation. Thanks for believing in me. You're the best!

Thank you to my line sisters (Spring 1996) from the Theta Nu Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. From our time at Maryland until this very day, I've appreciated every bit of support and encouragement. Your accomplishments, strength,

iv

words, and love constantly inspire me – thank you Robin, Samantha, Tyffanni, Nakia, Monique, and Kerri.

The other special ladies who have walked this road with me are the women in my cohort, the Ph.Divas – Zaneeta Daver, Dawn Johnson, Mollie Monahan-Kreishman, and Wendy Wilson. I couldn't imagine going through this with anyone other than you all. I love our diva dinners and how we grew to share our lives with each other. I look forward to celebrating all the wonderful things life has in store for each of you. I'm glad to have had this time with such considerate and strong women.

Thanks also to the family and friends I've gained and become reconnected to (Go Terps!) through my husband. You all are the best for always checking in on me!

Many more people have crossed my path and have contributed to my life in many ways. Thank you to all of the CSP faculty and students, Dr. Laura Perna, Dr. Sue Briggs, Sonya Keiner-Flynn, everyone from Ohio State, especially Tricia Hackleman and Jamel Donner, and the Theta Nu, Iota Gamma Omega, Alpha Sigma Omega, and Theta chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Sorority, Inc.

In addition to all of this support, I had two exceptional women encouraging me from above. I always feel the presence of my mother, Mary Ellen Hatcher Smith. The 26 years we were here together were such a blessing. You gave everything to make sure I had the best education and the greatest opportunities. You had high hopes for me when you gave me Swahili names that mean intelligent and marvelous. I hope I've made you proud. I can also hear the cheers of my mother-in-law, Carolyn Lee, who was with us when I started this process. Thank you for the support you always showed and for raising such a magnificent son. We miss you both.

Last but not least, thank you to the staff and students of King High School. I wish many blessings on the students who have come through and will come through your halls.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that higher education is a major avenue to increased success and opportunity (Fitzgerald & Delaney, 2002). There are positive correlations between educational level and income, life satisfaction, workplace satisfaction, and employment stability (Baum & Payea, 2004; Hearn & Bunton, 2001; Institute for Higher Education Policy [IHEP], 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In the past, significant numbers of good-paying jobs were available to persons with only a high school diploma. Such jobs allowed families to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Those jobs, however, are becoming more rare (Carnevale, 2006). The majority of the country's fastest growing jobs require an associate's or bachelor's degree (United States Department of Labor, 2006). Access to college and to those degrees, however, is not open for all. College enrollment rates vary greatly by gender and race. Subsequently, the benefits of a college education are realized by select groups of people.

In 1978, women became the majority of undergraduate students enrolled in institutions of higher education. At that time, women were 50.8% of the undergraduate enrollment, and they have remained the majority ever since (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005). Although the number of enrolled men and women has increased over the years, the enrollment rate of men has not increased fast enough to narrow this gender gap (King, 2006). As of Fall 2004, approximately 8.4 million women and 6.3 million men were enrolled as undergraduates in degree-granting institutions of higher education; women comprised 57.1% of the total undergraduate enrollment (NCES). These patterns have compelled some writers and experts to declare an

educational gender crisis for boys (Conlin, 2003; Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Mortenson, 2003; Roderick, 2003). Critics, however, do not support the idea of a general gender crisis. Although the gender gap exists for all racial/ethnic groups (i.e., Black, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic, and White) (King, 2006; KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provansnik, 2007), critics posit that less attention should be paid to the overall gender gap and that more should be paid to one subgroup of men who are in the worst situation – African American men (Davis, 2003; Harvey & Anderson, 2005; King, 2000; Kleinfeld, 1998; Rivers & Barnett, 2006a).

The enrollment gap between Black men and Black women began in 1960 when there were just 5,000 more women than men enrolled in college (Billingsley, 1992). Women have maintained the majority ever since. Presently, the gender gap is larger for Blacks than it is for the other major racial/ethnic groups. In 2004, women made up a greater percentage of Black undergraduates (64%) than they did among all other racial groups (American Indian – 61%, Hispanic – 59%, White – 56%, and Asian American – 54%) (KewalRamani et al., 2007). From 1991 through 2001, the number of Black men enrolled in institutions of higher education increased by 28.6%. However, the number of enrolled Black women increased by 42.1%. Despite strong gains made by Black men, a significant gender gap remains. As of Fall 2001, approximately 635,000 Black men and 1.1 million Black women were enrolled in colleges and universities. The participation rate for Black men has not increased fast enough for their enrollment to catch up with that of Black women (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). Understanding the reasons this gap exists is a critical step in the path to help close the gender gap for African Americans. This

study explored how Black males in high school made the decision to pursue a postsecondary education and how they proceeded through the college choice process.

College choice is the process by which students determine if they will pursue a postsecondary education after high school graduation (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). One of the most popular models of college choice is the Hossler and Gallagher three-phase model. Hossler and Gallagher characterized college choice as a developmental process, not a singular decision. Their model proposed that the interaction of precollege, personal, and college level organizational factors yields a person's decision to pursue higher education or to opt for other postsecondary options (Hossler & Gallagher). The phases of the model are predisposition, search, and choice. The phases describe the initial determination of postsecondary plans, the collection of information about colleges for those who plan to pursue further education, and the evaluation of one's options and selection of schools to which to apply and enroll (Hossler & Gallagher). This study explored the predisposition and search phases only.

Several variables that contribute to the postsecondary decision-making process have been identified. Factors that influence predisposition include, but are not limited to, academic ability (Perna, 2005), parental education and encouragement (Bateman & Hossler, 1996), educational and career aspirations (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989), peers (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999), availability of information (McDonough, 1997), and anticipated costs and benefits (K. Freeman, 1999b). Although research examining the degree to which particular factors affect college choice for Black students has produced inconsistent findings, experts agree that parental influence is the most significant predictor of Black student predisposition (Bateman & Hossler; Bouse &

Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1997, 2005; Hossler, Braxton, et al; M.J. Smith, 2001; Wilson & Allen, 1987).

Secondly, academic variables such as grade point average (GPA) and level of rigor in the high school curriculum are also extremely important in determining the educational aspirations of Black students (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). A rigorous high school academic program is more important for the predisposition of Black students than any other pre-college academic measure (Venezia et al.). Unfortunately, Black students are less likely to attend high schools that offer rigorous academic programs and are less likely to be placed in those courses when they are offered at their school (Perna, 2005). Literature also describes the extent to which socioeconomic status (SES) (Kao & Tienda, 1998), social and cultural capital (McDonough, 1997), significant others (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989), finances (Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, & Suh, 2005), resources (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999), and psychological factors (K. Freeman, 2005) influence the predisposition of Black students.

Students generally enter the search phase in the 10th grade and continue through the 11th grade (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). By the 11th grade, students become more active searchers and pay more attention to potential majors, admissions potential, financial aid, institutional characteristics, and advice from others as they create a list of potential colleges and universities (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). Less is known about the search phase, as it has not received as much attention as predisposition or choice (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989). Researchers have determined, however, that SES

(McDonough, 1997), academic status (College Partnership, 2004), parents (M.J. Smith, 2001), and the availability of resources (Matthay, 1989) influence the search phase.

For example, students from high and low SES families engage differently in the search phase. Students from high SES families often contemplate attending institutions without regard to tuition or distance from home – factors that low SES students tend to consider (McDonough, 1997). Black students are more likely to be from low SES families (Perna, 2000; Valadez, 1998). Thus, finances play a major role in Black students' decisions (K. Freeman, 2005), and they often select schools based on the availability of financial aid (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1996).

McDonough (1997) conducted a comprehensive study of the college choice process. Her ethnography of female high school seniors addressed how social class, school characteristics, peers, and family influence college choice. She based the study on the propositions that the students' college choice decisions would be affected by cultural capital and habitus; Bourdieu (as cited in McDonough) defined habitus as a shared set of perceptions held by members of the same class that influence their aspirations and expectations. McDonough interviewed three college-bound students from each of four California high schools. The high schools' guidance systems ranged from weak to strong. The schools' overall SES ranged from low to high. McDonough also interviewed the participants' parents, best friend, and guidance counselor. All participants were White, girls, and average academic performers. This extensive study yielded many significant findings. Namely, social class affects the habitus of a school that, in turn, affects the manner in which students of fairly equal academic standing plan for college.

McDonough's (1997) study was influential because it addressed family and school issues that jointly affect the ways students make decisions about college. The qualitative methodology that was used allowed for participants' perspectives and descriptions of their college choice processes to be heard. McDonough, however, did not examine the postsecondary decision-making processes of males or students of color.

K. Freeman (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2005) is one of the major producers of information on college choice for Black students. K. Freeman (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2005) has drawn many conclusions about Black postsecondary decision making based on group interviews of Black students. The 70 focus group participants were Black females and males in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, and represented urban, suburban, magnet, and private high schools in five major cities in the United States. In these interviews, students described financial, psychological, and social barriers to higher education participation. Major findings include that Black students' predisposition to college is hindered by the fear that they will not have enough money to attend college, and that, upon college graduation, their income will not be proportionate to their educational level. K. Freeman (2005) also found that psychological factors, such as a loss of hope or intimidation, stifle predisposition and that cultural and school influences also affect college predisposition.

K. Freeman's (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2005) work has provided great insight into predisposition for Black students. Her participants included both females and males, but she did not meaningfully identify distinctions or similarities in participants' experiences based on gender. Additionally, K. Freeman (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2005) collected data via focus groups that have advantages, but do not facilitate a deeper understanding of individual experiences and perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the influences on and processes by which Black males make decisions about pursuing and searching for a college education after high school graduation. This study expands college choice research conducted by McDonough (1997) by focusing on students of a different race and gender. The participants of this study were 11 Black males from one high school; thus, the degree to which habitus was a factor was diminished and was not explored as McDonough did. This study also extended research done by K. Freeman (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2005) by interviewing Black males individually and focusing on more than one stage of the college choice process.

I used the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993) to address the following research questions:

1. How do Black males who are upper-level high school students describe the influences on and processes by which they decide to pursue a postsecondary education?

2. How do Black males who are upper-level high school students who plan to pursue a postsecondary education describe their search for colleges?

Definition of Terms

The use of racial terms throughout this study deserves a brief explanation. When referring to this study's participants, I use the terms Black and African American interchangeably to describe people who are of African decent and currently living in the U.S. When I refer to other visible racial/ethnic groups, I use the terms Asian American,

Latino/Latina, Native American, White, and multiracial. When referencing writings in the literature, however, I employed the terminology authors used in their work. For example, I referred to Latinos as Hispanic and Native Americans as American Indians when highlighting findings from the NCES, since those are the terms used by that organization.

Theoretical Frameworks

Three theoretical frameworks guided this study – Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase model of college choice, K. Freeman's (2005) model of African American students in predisposition, and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). First, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice provides a foundation for understanding the processes by which students determine if they will attend college after high school. The three phases of this model are predisposition, search, and choice. Hossler and Gallagher contend that students first determine if they will continue their formal education after completing high school (predisposition), then, if deciding yes, begin gathering information about colleges (search), and finally, assess their choices, apply, and eventually enroll in an institution (choice). This model was an appropriate framework because it acknowledges the influence of individual factors on the process, and identifies college choice as a process and not a single event. The current study examined the predisposition and search phases.

K. Freeman's (2005) model of African American students in the predisposition phase also guided this study. K. Freeman (2005) identified knowers, seekers, and dreamers as the roles Black students take on during predisposition. Knowers have always acknowledged that they will attend college and are most likely to obtain a postsecondary education. Seekers, over time, begin to view themselves as college students and, by

elementary or middle school, have usually identified higher education aspirations. Dreamers are much less likely to believe that college is an option for them and begin considering college attendance late in high school or not at all. K. Freeman's (2005) classification is an effective theoretical framework because it was normed on Black high school students. This is one of few frameworks that has been developed from research done exclusively with Black students. K. Freeman's (2005) work offers a model that provides guidance in attempting to understand Black students' college choice decisions. K. Freeman (2005) acknowledged that students' experiences, background, and opportunities would guide the extent to which they desire and, ultimately, engage in higher education and that, based on those experiences, background, and opportunities, any one of the three types of students could choose to attend college or not to attend college.

Finally, I utilize critical race theory (CRT) as a lens through which to discuss the study's findings. CRT is a movement dedicated to studying, understanding, and altering situations in society as they are connected to the relationships among race, power, and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory exists across disciplines, but in education, the critical race movement is used to understand school related inequities among students (Delgado & Stefancic). Examining findings from a critical race perspective is appropriate for this study because race and inequality are at the core of this research on the postsecondary decision-making processes of Black males. Indeed, one of the realities that yielded this research was the relatively low numbers of Black males enrolled in colleges and universities across the U.S. Although the issue of race was not at the foundation of every interview question, race, power, and inequality are present in the

participants' college decision-making processes. This is brought forth as I use CRT to discuss the findings of this study in Chapter VI.

Research Design

This study used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993), a qualitative methodology. The research questions that guided this study demonstrated the need for inductive exploration, discovery, and understanding that are foci of qualitative research. Qualitative inquiry encouraged the exploration of the multiple realities of how Black males experience postsecondary decision making and allowed for the participants' realities to be shared and understood holistically (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Narrative inquiry, the study of how people experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), is a means by which the participant narrates his or her personal experiences in the form of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Utilizing narrative inquiry yielded stories that reveal the influences on and processes by which participants made the decision to pursue a postsecondary education. Stories often serve as effective means by which information about a person's life can be accessed and by which readers are shown the narrator's reality (Lieblich et al., 1998). Narrative inquiry focuses on the growth and transformation in a participant's story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and on the content and structure of one's story (Riessman; Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Ten 12th grade and one 11th grade Black males were participants for this study. All participants were students at the same high school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Eleventh and 12th-grade students were ideal because it is likely that they are making a decision about their postsecondary life and that they have started actively

organizing and pursuing those plans (K. Freeman, 2005; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, and school records. I employed several validation measures to ensure that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were preserved throughout the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations are elements of the research that intentionally narrow the scope of the study (Creswell, 2003; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). This study had several delimitations. In this study I examined only postsecondary decision making from the students' perspectives. Although participants often acknowledged the effects school personnel, family members, or school practices have had on their decision-making processes, I did not specifically explore those aspects of the process. I also did not examine the choice phase of college choice. Therefore, I did not see participants through the end of the college choice process. Also, the study is narrowed by the criteria that were used to select participants. The participants were intentionally a specific race and gender, attended a specific high school, were in one of two grades, and had earned at least a "C" grade point average. This research had the potential to comprise many aspects of college choice, which is a broad field of study. Therefore, I purposely limited these factors in order to create a study that was manageable and that could be conducted soundly.

Significance

Despite these delimitations, this study and the findings of this study have many strengths and the potential to make significant contributions. This study is of great practical significance. It has been established that individuals benefit from educational attainment, which is positively correlated with income (Baum & Payea, 2004),

11

employment consistency (IHEP, 1998), workplace satisfaction (Hearn & Bunton, 2001), and overall life satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Society also benefits from the increased educational attainment of its citizens, which contributes to increased tax revenues (Carnevale & Fry, 2002), volunteerism, and voting (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999), and which decreases the proportion of families in poverty who are dependent on public funds for social programs (Carnevale & Fry). As the racial composition of the country continues to include more people of color (Carnevale & Fry), the strength and viability of the country's workforce and its future depends on the successful education of people of color (Carnevale & Fry). Thus, for national and individual prosperity, it is important to understand how Black males decide to attend college.

The particular group of interest, Black males, is "probably the most highly stigmatized and stereotyped group in America" (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003, p. 609). Stereotypes of Black males as super athletes who are uneducated, criminal and unable to make positive contributions to society provide a foundation of this group's negative image (Swanson et al.). At the other end of the spectrum, there are many successful and high-achieving Black males whose stories of competence, resilience, and achievement tend to go unnoticed (Ford, Grantham, & Bailey, 1999; Swanson et al.). There are also many males who fall between these two ends of the continuum. This research has the potential to enhance experts' understanding of factors that contribute to the decisions and decision-making processes of Black males as they are on the verge of graduating from high school, entering the real world, and becoming adults.

This study may also help inform policies and practices that are intended to increase the number of students of color who enroll in college as well as those designed

to improve the extent to which those students are prepared for college. Across the country, school systems have joined with systems of higher education to establish Pre-K-16 initiatives that generate policies and practices that are dedicated to creating alignment between primary, secondary, and higher education and to making students' transitions between those levels seamless and successful (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Also, foundations, organizations, and community-oriented groups (e.g., The Education Trust and The National College Access Network) have dedicated themselves to improving student success and access to college. Organizations such as The Schott Foundation for Public Education have directed their mission of improved education and higher degree attainment specifically to Black males. Ultimately, all of these organizations strive to increase the percentage of underrepresented students who enroll in and are successful in higher education. Understanding more about how Black males make their postsecondary plans can better inform that work.

College admissions counselors and middle and high school guidance counselors could also benefit from the information revealed from this study. On a daily basis, school counselors work to direct students to various academic tracks and to institutions of higher education to obtain a postsecondary education. College admissions counselors work diligently to invite potential students to explore and attend their college or university. Considering that Black males comprise approximately 36% of Black undergraduate students (KewalRamani et al., 2007), college admissions counselors and school counselors could benefit from understanding how Black male predisposition forms and how they engage in the search process in order to more appropriately guide students. Specifically, this may include understanding when Black males make the decision to

pursue a higher education, what influences those decisions, how students believe they are or are not prepared for college, and what they are searching for in a potential college or university.

This study also has theoretical significance. Although research on the college choice processes of Black students does exist, additional information is still needed. First, this study explored the search phase of the college choice process. The search phase has started to receive more attention, but overall has not been researched as much as the predisposition and choice phases (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989). The findings of this study that are related to the search phase can contribute to filling that void. Also, K. Freeman (2005) and MacGowan (2002) have identified distinctions between the experiences of Black and White students such that they have proposed college choice models or frameworks specifically for Blacks. The current study can further address the extent to which frequently used models apply to Black students and previous findings are consistent with or contrary to these participants' experiences.

Although access to college is important for all students, educators and researchers understand that race, gender, and class are significant mediating variables that contribute to one's experiences in the United States (American Association of University Women, 1992; Davis, 2003; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003; Holzman, 2006; Honora, 2003; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Therefore, most researchers recognize the need for specific research on college choice as related to Black males (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; C.E. Freeman, 2004; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989; Joyner-Fleming, 1995; K. Freeman, 1997; Murphy, 2004; Pitre, 2002). Hossler, Schmit, et al. (1999) acknowledged that their longitudinal study of 5,000 students did not reveal significant information about the

factors that influence the educational aspirations of Black males. This study begins to fill that void in the literature and can contribute to the knowledge educators have about the factors that influence the college choice plans of Black males.

Finally, this study is theoretically significant because I explore the college choice of Black males from a qualitative perspective. Although there are several qualitative studies on college choice (K. Freeman, 2005; Horvat, 1996; MacGowan, 2002; McDonough, 1997; Murphy, 2004; Palmer, 2003; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Wilson, 1997), the majority of the information available on this topic has emerged from quantitative research (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Hamrick & Stage, 1998, 2004; Hauser & Anderson, 1991; Hearn, 1984; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Joyner-Fleming, 1995; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Kim, 2004; Matthay, 1989; Perna, 2000; Pitre, 2002; Smith-Maddox, 2000; St. John, 1991). This qualitative exploration into college choice has the potential to reveal a more complete picture and more descriptive information regarding how Black males decide to attend college than are ascertained via quantitative approaches.

Since occupational success, life satisfaction, and the likelihood of securing full-time employment are correlated with college attendance (Baum & Payea, 2004; Hearn & Bunton, 2001; IHEP, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it is essential that educators, researchers, and policy makers better understand the processes by which students make postsecondary plans. I argue that it is especially important to understand the postsecondary decision-making processes of Black males who, despite public policies designed to promote equal opportunity, continue to struggle for educational and occupational equity in the United States.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature reviews reveal the findings, conclusions, and theories of previous studies or texts and identify the connections between those works and the proposed study (Creswell, 2003; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). In qualitative research, literature reviews can be used at the end of a study as a means of comparing the study's findings with those of prior research or earlier in a study to set the foundation for the upcoming study (Creswell, 1998). This literature review fulfills both roles. In the current chapter I set the groundwork for this study by exploring the current literature and identifying gaps and omissions in the literature regarding Black males and the college choice process. In Chapter VI, I use the literature as a basis of comparison between this study's findings and the findings of other research.

This research utilized the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry to explore how Black males describe the influences on and processes by which they decide to pursue a postsecondary education. The study also sought to understand the influences on and means by which those who plan to obtain a higher education search for a college or university. I used literature to frame the problem and to demonstrate the importance of conducting this investigation. I present themes from the current literature that informed this study's research questions. The following literature helped me to understand what was studied, who must be studied, and how to best conduct the study (Creswell, 1998).

This chapter also includes discussions of three theoretical frameworks that guide this study, the value of education to individuals and to society, the gender crises in education, the pre-college status of Black males, and college choice and the factors that

are associated with the predisposition and search phases. Finally, I summarize the literature review and highlight the limitations of and omissions in the literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

Three theoretical frameworks guided this study. First, the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-phase model of college choice operates from a combined economic and social perspective (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). This model is the basis for much of the current college choice literature (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Pitre, 2002; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Stage & Hossler, 1989). Hossler and Gallagher reviewed college choice literature and used that literature to establish the foundation of the three-phase model that has been referenced so often since its creation. The model, based on work by Jackson and Litten (as cited in Hossler & Gallagher), describes that the interaction of personal, precollege, and college level organizational factors results in a student's decision to pursue higher education and continue through the three-phase model or to select a non-college postsecondary option. The model's focus on individual factors, the identification of college choice as a developmental process, and the acknowledgment of nonattendance as an option made it a useful theoretical framework for this study.

During the first phase of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model, predisposition, students tentatively determine whether or not they will continue their formal education beyond high school. Factors such as parental education and encouragement (Bateman & Hossler, 1996), academic ability (Perna, 2005), peer influence (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999), finances (K. Freeman, 1999; St. John, 1991), and educational and career aspirations (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989) influence predisposition. During search, the

17

second phase, students who have decided to pursue higher education engage in gathering information about colleges and universities and develop a choice set of institutions from which they will seek information and ultimately choose institutions to which they will apply (Hossler & Gallagher). Knowledge about colleges (Hossler, Schmit, et al.), college costs (Bouse & Hossler, 1991), and application procedures (Joyner-Fleming, 1995; Matthay, 1989) contribute greatly to how thoroughly a student can search for colleges. The third and final phase, choice, entails evaluating one's choice set and reducing that choice set to institutions to which to apply and eventually enroll. Financial aid (Hossler & Gallagher; St. John, 1991), tuition (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000), and geography and academic reputation (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1996) influence the final choices students make about college. The predisposition and search phases were examined in this study and are explored in more detail later in this chapter.

K. Freeman's (2005) model of African American students during predisposition was the second theoretical framework for this study. K. Freeman (2005) identified three types of students and labeled them knowers, seekers, and dreamers. Knowers are students who have always recognized that they would attend college. Such students consider college a given and the natural path after high school graduation. They usually come from families who have set the expectation that the student will undoubtedly attend college. Of the three types of students, knowers most often choose to attend college. Seekers are students who, over time, develop the belief that college attendance is possible. These students identify elementary school as the point at which they realized that they could make postsecondary education an option. Seekers are less likely to attend college than knowers, but are more likely to attend than the third group of students.

Dreamers do not generally believe that college is an option. Students in this category do, however, dream about what they consider to be the remote possibility that they would attend college. Dreamers begin considering postsecondary plans between 7th and 12th grades. It is possible for dreamers to attend college, but the chances are limited because they begin assessing the possibilities much later than knowers and seekers.

K. Freeman's (2005) model is an effective theoretical framework because it was developed from an exclusively Black sample of high school students. This model provides a framework, explicitly for Black students, which helps describe the timing associated with the initiation of college aspirations of Black students. K. Freeman (2005) recognized that students' background and opportunities direct the extent to which they seek and engage in higher education. The model demonstrates that, based on those experiences, background, and opportunities, any of the three types of students could choose to attend college or not to attend college. This model is consistent with studies that report that the large majority of Black high school students have high educational aspirations although lower numbers of students actually enroll in college (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1999; Valadez, 1998). Based on the aforementioned descriptions, each type of student may cite postsecondary aspirations. Indeed, even dreamers are capable of realizing that college attendance is beneficial and might claim high aspirations. However, they are still least likely to enroll in college. Subsequently, a gap exists between Black educational aspirations and enrollment levels. It was important to examine how the experiences of participants in this study fit K. Freeman's (2005) model.

A third theoretical perspective used to inform the findings of this study is critical race theory (CRT). CRT focuses on revealing (Ladson-Billings, 1999), examining, and altering the existence of race, racism, and power in daily life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For over 30 years, CRT has been a means by which subtler forms of racism have been examined and challenged. Found in law, political science, ethnic studies, and education, critical race theory consists of tenets that are directed to the goal of identifying racism as it occurs in everyday life and to the goal of transforming its effect on society (Delgado & Stefancic).

One major principle of CRT is that racism is a common and ordinary aspect of society and a daily truth for most people of color in the United States. Racism is so ordinary and ingrained into society that it is complicated to address and cure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Laws have been enacted to guarantee equal treatment for citizens regardless of race. Such laws address more blatant and overt forms of racism. There are, however, more subtle forms of racism that are not addressed as well because the common and ordinary nature of racism in society makes them more difficult to detect and combat (Delgado & Stefancic). Another theme of critical race theory, interest convergence, notes that both elite and working-class White people benefit from racism. As long as racism exists, Whites, regardless of their class, maintain advantages over people of color, thus Whites have little motivation to eliminate racism. Additional tenets of CRT define race as a socially constructed, not genetically factual, phenomenon that society manipulates when favorable, and people have complex overlapping identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, political affiliation) that often yield conflicting loyalties (Delgado & Stefancic).

It is appropriate and important to discuss the findings of this study using a critical race lens because race and inequality are at the foundation of this research. In education, the critical race movement is used to understand school related inequities and issues such as testing, tracking, and discipline (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The gender gap among Black undergraduates constitutes a significant inequity that should be examined using this framework in order to help expose the various reasons disproportionately fewer Black males pursue a higher education.

The Value of Education

Education has been the traditional means by which Black families become successful and discover their place in life (Billingsley, 1992). Blacks understood the power and value of education before they had access to educational institutions. African Americans pursued education in order to gain freedom and to make a way for other Black citizens. Even as slaves in a time during which it was illegal to learn how to read and write, some slaves became educated through creative means of their own and through their interactions with a small population of Whites who ignored the law and taught slaves to read and write. Subsequently, slaves began educating each other, and the benefits of education became further engrained in the African American population (Brazzell, 1996).

At the start of the Civil War, approximately 30 people of African lineage had bachelor's degrees from U.S. colleges (Brazzell, 1996). This figure is reasonable considering there were only 500 free Blacks from which to draw students, few of the nation's colleges admitted Blacks continuously, Lincoln and Wilberforce were the only colleges specifically for Blacks, and there was not a surplus of White degree holders at

that time either (Brazzell). Historians estimate that in the late 1860s, 5% of the 400,000

recently freed slaves were able to read and write (Billingsley, 1992). These educated

African Americans, in addition to philanthropic White groups and individuals, were the

precursor to the post-Civil War movement toward encouraging and strengthening the

desire for and access to education for Blacks through the formalization of education

(Billingsley; Brazzell).

With the passing of the first and second Morrill Land Grant Acts in 1862 and

1890, movements by White religious and philanthropic persons and groups, and the

urging and work of many in the Black community, hundreds of institutions for Blacks

were created in the South to "train selected young men and women to 'go out to teach

and lead their people,' and to build a viable industrial system on the strength of self-

sufficiency, intelligent labor and solid moral character" (Hampton University, Hampton's

Heritage, n.d). These institutions, later called Historically Black Colleges and

Universities (HBCUs), often began as elementary or secondary schools that eventually

offered a college curriculum (Thelin, 2003). By 1895, more than 1,000 Blacks had

graduated from HBCUs (Brazzell, 1996). Since that era, each generation of Blacks in the

United States has been more educated than the previous generation. In the 21st century,

Blacks continue to place high value on education and to depend on the power of

education to yield many advantages (Billingsley, 1992).

College attendance and graduation benefit individuals and society in several

important ways. Most Americans will not dispute that persons who obtain higher

education are more likely to garner certain advantages over those who do not pursue

education beyond high school (Fitzgerald & Delaney, 2002). For women and men of all

races, there is a positive association between educational attainment and earnings (Baum & Payea, 2004). Earnings differences increase incrementally with each higher degree (Baum & Payea). Persons who acquire some college but no degree and those who receive associate's degrees earn 16% and 22%, respectively, more than those who only obtain high school diplomas. In 2003, full-time workers with bachelor's degrees earned 62 % more than full-time workers with high school diplomas (Baum & Payea).

Current figures show that, upon the conclusion of an average-length working career, a bachelor's degree recipient will earn approximately $1 million more than a high school diploma recipient (Carnevale, 2006). The rate of returns to investment (i.e., the cost-benefit ratio of a college education considering college tuition and fees and foregone earnings) for bachelor's degrees is significant for men and women of any race, but remains higher for Black graduates than for White graduates (Hearn & Bunton, 2001; Lee, 2003). It should be noted, however, that all earnings differences may not be directly attributable to educational attainment since educational level is also correlated with personal characteristics and parents' socioeconomic status (SES). Nevertheless, research suggests that the above differences are not overstated, and it is irrefutable that education is financial beneficial for people of all races (Baum & Payea, 2004), but even more so for Blacks (Hearn & Bunton).

Possibly more significant than potential earnings is the fact that an increasing number of jobs require a college degree than in years past. The reasonable-paying jobs that are available to those with high school diplomas have become more rare (Haycock & Huang, 2001). There are fewer "blue-collar jobs that let workers with modest skills earn middle-class wages" (Carnevale, 2006, p. 90). Jobs that are held by people who drop out

of or complete only high school are usually insufficient means to support a family and

infrequently offer opportunities for advancement (Carnevale). Moreover, mathematical

and reading skill requirements for many jobs are increasing. The required skill level often

exceeds that which would have been obtained in high school, and employers are

becoming less willing to offer remedial training (Haycock & Huang). Such jobs are likely

to be out of reach for a high school graduate who did not attend college. Job opportunities

for college-educated persons, however, are growing. Seventy percent of new jobs

projected through 2010 will require at least some postsecondary education (Haycock &

Huang). More than half of the 20 fastest growing jobs in the United States require an

associate's or bachelor's degree (United States Department of Labor, 2006). Steadily, a

college degree is becoming one of the few paths to economic success.

Individuals with bachelor's degrees are more likely to be employed with greater

consistency (Institute for Higher Education Policy [IHEP], 1998) and more likely to be

satisfied with their working conditions (Hearn & Bunton, 2001) than those without a

bachelor's degree. College graduates are also more likely to be employed full-time

(Bowen & Bok, 1998) and more likely to be pleased with their benefits (IHEP).

Additionally, increased educational attainment positively affects non-monetary aspects of

one's life including life satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), health and life

expectancy, quality of life for children, savings and investment potential (IHEP), and

civic participation in the form of volunteerism and voting (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999;

Baum & Payea).

Although the individual benefits are significant, the larger society also profits by

having educated citizens. If the college attainment rate for White students and students of

color was equalized, more than $230 billion would be added to the nation's wealth, providing approximately $80 billion in tax revenues (Carnevale & Fry, 2002). Additionally, educational attainment is negatively correlated to the proportion of families in poverty. In fact, the share of Black families living in poverty would decrease from 33% to 24% if their educational attainment were comparable to that of Whites (Carnevale & Fry). Therefore, in addition to contributing to tax revenues, college degree recipients are less likely to depend on the public's budget through the use of social programs (Baum & Payea, 2004). Neither society nor individuals have a chance to recognize the benefits of a higher education if students do not attend college. Considering the value many African Americans place on education (Billingsley) and the advantages that are associated with obtaining a higher education (Baum & Payea, 2004; Fitzgerald & Delaney, 2002; Hearn & Bunton, 2001), it is important to understand what motivates some students to college and other students toward alternative postsecondary options.

Gender Crises in Education

Experts (Kleinfeld, 1998) have identified an educational crisis based on gender several times during the 20th century. From the early 1900s through the 1970s, critics (Kleinfeld) proclaimed that schools, particularly elementary schools, shortchanged boys. There were claims that the predominantly female teacher population and so-called feminine schools were incapable of meeting boys' learning needs (Kleinfeld; Rivers & Barnett, 2006b). In the 1970s, educators and activists became vocal about discrimination toward girls in schools. The creation of the Girls Project, the women's movement, and federal legislation (e.g., Title IX and the Gender and Equity Act) established more "girl-friendly" (Conlin, 2003, p. 4) classrooms and significant penalties for discrimination

against girls. More recently, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) fueled national dialogue with their report entitled *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (1992), which suggested that girls received less attention from teachers, were subjected to classroom activities and teaching styles that favored boys, and emerged from schools with lower confidence, self-esteem, and math and science skills.

Shortly thereafter, researchers began highlighting shortcomings in the AAUW report and proposed that the report's assertions were a myth. Kleinfeld (1998) announced that research on gender differences in class participation, school participation, self-confidence, and school success was often inconclusive with some favoring boys, some favoring girls, and others showing no significant gender differences. She and other authors revisited the notion of an educational crisis among boys that is still part of national conversations today (Conlin, 2003; Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Mortenson, 2003; Roderick, 2003). Research asserts that male underachievement may be due to too few male teachers, too many medicated students, uninvolved parents, poor nutrition, oppressive classroom environments, teaching styles that are incompatible with boys' learning styles, genetics, low expectations from teachers, and the perception that being smart is uncool (Conlin). Other opinions, however, refute the accuracy and truthfulness of the crisis of underachieving boys. Critics believe that the so-called educational crisis of boys is manufactured, oversold, and inaccurately portrayed (Rivers & Barnett, 2006b).

Rivers and Barnett (2006a) claim that, when within group differences are examined, it is clear that the educational crisis is not among all boys. Most experts and authors will agree: the boys who are suffering and struggling the most are Black, Latino, Native American, low-income, and from the inner-city or rural communities (Davis,

2003; Harvey & Anderson, 2004; King, 2006; Kleinfeld, 1998; Rivers & Barnett).

However, regardless of the shift in focus to male achievement, the achievement of many

girls within these demographics should be of significant concern also (King, 2000; Rivers

& Barnett). Such a situation illustrates the necessity of understanding the status of Blacks

in Pre-K-12 education and considering how that may connect to their participation in

postsecondary education.

Pre-K-12 Education of Black Students

Unmistakably, there has been significant progress in the pre-kindergarten (Pre-K)

through 12th grade and higher education of Black students in the United States over the

past several decades (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). Levels of educational achievement, high

school completion, and college attendance have all increased, and the achievement gap

between Blacks and Whites has decreased (Hoffman & Llagas). Despite these

achievements, the following statistics demonstrate that the educational status and

academic achievement of Black students still requires improvement. Racial disparities

remain, there are gaps between the achievement of Black students and the average

student, and there are significant gaps between the achievement of Black females and

Black males (Holzman, 2006). This review of Black academic achievement is necessary

because it is likely that the Pre-K-12 gender gap in Black achievement contributes to the

gender discrepancy in college enrollment.

The information in this section may paint a dismal picture for Black students. My

intent is to offer background information and to establish the need for the further

examination of Black students' experiences. I do not intend to contribute to the

phenomenon of addressing the status of Blacks and the education of Black students from

a deficit perspective. A significant portion of the information in this section is based on statistics. It is important to know how Black students fare in regards to the following educational outcomes, but numbers do not tell the whole story. Most of what is known about the college choice process, including pre-college factors, has been learned from quantitative studies. Since personal stories and answers to "how" questions are not usually addressed by statistics, much of the quantitatively generated material in this section does not offer a complete view of Black students. In the current study I sought to understand and to reveal more of the whole picture. Subsequently, I framed the findings of this study by using stories by and responses from participants in addition to information obtained from their school records and demographic questionnaire to provide a more comprehensive view of their postsecondary decision-making processes and influences on those decisions.

Variables Affecting Educational Outcomes

Research proposes that the educational experiences of students, regardless of demographic differences, are affected by several variables (Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2000). It appears, however, that Black students encounter negative experiences more often than White students (Crosby, 1999; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003) and, in many cases, that Black males encounter negative experiences more often than Black girls (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Davis, 2003). The list of variables could be quite extensive. For the purposes of this literature review, however, the variables that will be explored are school climate, teacher quality, tracking, parental expectations, and acting White.

School climate. School climate is often measured by characteristics such as school and classroom management, physical space, safety, and satisfaction (Esposito, 1999). In a

study with a population that was 98% Black and Latino, Esposito found a positive correlation between student achievement and school climate before and after controlling for family resources and SES. Unfortunately, measurable numbers of Black students attend public schools that are often dilapidated, overcrowded, unsafe, and low on resources (Crosby, 1999; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003; Kozol, 1991; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Subsequently, they are more likely to be in a school with a negative climate than their White peers. This reality can begin to set the stage for low academic achievement (Kozol).

Climate is also manifested in the relationships students have with their teachers. Research on the relationship between Black students and their teachers is inconsistent. The "Life After High School" survey found that 74% of Black students had a teacher who took an interest in them (Johnson, Duffett, & Ott, 2005). In other research, however, Black high school students described their teachers as inaccessible and unsupportive (Honora, 2003). They also reported being talked down to by teachers, not being supported or challenged, and being discouraged from taking college-preparatory classes. These Black students perceived that teachers had low expectations of them because of their race, class, and culture (Howard, 2003).

Teachers have also been accused of alienating African American students, particularly boys, by seating Black males close to them for the purpose of control, paying less personal attention to Black males, calling on them less, and giving them less specific instruction and less time to respond to questions (Duncan, 1999). Similarly, when compared to their White classmates, Black students receive more criticism and negative behavioral and academic feedback from teachers (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer,

2003). It is difficult to identify causation, but repeated negative encounters with teachers and the perception that teachers do not care contributes to the disengagement and distrust of Black students (Kozol, 1991). Such relationships are contrary to fostering a student's academic achievement that could yield more interest in and better preparation for the pursuit of higher education.

School climate and educational success are also affected by retention (i.e., being held back in a grade), suspension, and expulsion rates. Students are usually retained because they have not demonstrated the academic or social skills necessary to progress to the next grade (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). Females between 5 and 12 years old are less likely to be retained than their male counterparts (C.E. Freeman, 2004). In 2004, 16% of Blacks between 16 and 19 years old had been retained at least one time. This rate was lower than in previous years but was higher than the national average of 10% (Rooney, Hussar, & Planty, 2006). Students who are retained are more likely to drop out of school than those who are not retained (C.E. Freeman, 2004). These circumstances do not usually foster high levels of achievement or progress toward higher education.

Additionally, 35% of Black students in junior high and high school (i.e., grades 7 through 12) have been suspended or expelled at least one time during their school career (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). These facts are even more strongly true for Black males (Holzman, 2006). Although Black males comprise close to 9% of the nation's public school enrollments, they represent 22% of expulsions and 23% of suspensions (R.A. Smith, 2005a). These rates are 2-3 times higher than the suspension/expulsion rates of other groups (R.A. Smith, 2005b). Obviously, a student must be in school to learn. Those who are out due to suspensions or expulsions are less likely to be learning. Since Black

males encounter this fate more often than Black females or Whites, they are at a distinct educational disadvantage that often negatively affects their academic skills, excitement about learning, and overall desire to continue their education.

Teacher quality. The quality or experience level of teachers also affects students' educational experiences (Mayer et al., 2000). Students learn more and underachievers can show improvement when taught by experienced teachers (Haycock & Huang, 2001; Mayer et al.). The trend seems to be, however, that high poverty schools (which are more often populated by more Black than White children) and high minority schools (which have student populations that are comprised of more than half students of color) have significantly more inexperienced teachers than schools with lower poverty and lower student of color enrollment rates (Haycock & Huang; Lippman, et al., 1996), Also, within public schools, students tracked in low-ability groups and high-ability groups tend to be assigned less experienced and more experienced teachers, respectively (Kershaw, 1992). Such patterns of inexperienced teachers do not serve to enhance the achievement of academically challenged Black students or to facilitate the achievement of those who are high achievers.

Tracking. Tracking or ability grouping is also pertinent to this discussion of academic achievement, because "different tracts affect opportunities" (Kershaw, 1992, p. 162). With respect to their proportion in the public school student population, a high percentage of Black students are enrolled in special education and lower level courses, and a low percentage are considered gifted (Ford, Grantham, & Bailey, 1999; Harry & Anderson, 1999; Kozol, 1991). Such tracking is correlated to the achievement gap, as tracking significantly affects a student's mobility and options (Kershaw).

Black students are placed in special education programs approximately one and a half times the expected rate based on their proportion of the student body (Harry & Anderson, 1999). This pattern is most extreme for African American boys who are in special education programs twice as often as Black females and who receive labels such as learning disabled, mentally retarded, and emotionally disabled at rates that are significantly higher than their White counterparts (R.A. Smith, 2005a). Similarly, significant percentages of Black students are also tracked into lower level courses and are less likely to be enrolled in advanced placement and honors courses (Noguera, 2003). This precedent is often set as early as the 4th or 5th grade when students are grouped according to their mathematics and reading ability levels (Oakes, 2004). Ultimately, these lower level courses are overwhelmingly Black (Kozol, 1991). In high school, tracking can be seen in the surplus of Black students enrolled in general or vocational tracks as opposed to college preparatory tracks (Venezia et al., 2003).

Once students are placed in lower level courses, they are often stuck there (Davis, 2003; Kershaw, 1992). Middle school courses such as English and math almost always set the path for what courses students take in high school and, subsequently, the level of academic preparation one has or does not have for college (Oakes, 2004). Students labeled as special education are usually placed in separate, restrictive, and lower-level educational settings (Harry & Anderson, 1999). Subsequently, students' access to the stronger teachers (who are often placed with high achievers) is limited and their progress to higher levels is often halted (Davis). Ultimately, inequalities and achievement gaps are initiated or expand.

Harry and Anderson (1999), Kozol (1991), and Ladson-Billings (1994) believe that the prevalence of Black students receiving special education and lower ability group assignments, suspensions, and expulsions is often attributable to low expectations from teachers, unfair assessments, and hypersensitive, culturally insensitive, or racist teachers or administrators and not always from a true need to be in such situations. Researchers have found that Black males, in particular, are more vulnerable to teacher ratings of inappropriate conduct and behavior problems (Harry & Anderson; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). Researchers propose that many Black students would be more successful in school if they encountered responsive and supportive teachers (Howard, 2003; Murrell, 1999), fair (unstandardized) assessments (Harry & Anderson), culturally relevant curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1994), high quality teachers who place high expectations on their students (Mayer, et al., 2000), single-sex classrooms or schools (Ascher, 1992; Riordan, 1990, 1994), and African American teachers, especially male teachers for Black male students (Chmelynski, 2006; Kunjufu, 2005; Lewis, 2006). A more positive status regarding these variables would increase the likelihood of academic success and higher educational attainment for Black students (Davis, 2003; Esposito, 1999; Harry & Anderson).

Parental expectations. Parents' expectations about their child's highest level of educational attainment are positively correlated with the child's current (Wasonga, Christman, & Kilmer, 2003) and future academic achievement (Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Bezruczko, & Hagemann, 1996). Halle, Kurtz-Coates, and Mahoney (1997) found that for Black students, the correlation between parents' expectations for their child's educational attainment and academic achievement is stronger than the correlation

between parental behavior (i.e., the number of times parents spoke with their child about academic oriented topics) and academic achievement. Black students who perceived high levels of familial support were more likely to attend class, pay attention in class, and do homework (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). Wasonga et al. also found that resilience, or a child's ability to succeed in spite of having multiple risk factors, was positively correlated with high expectations from home.

In a study that included Black parents and their Black children, Halle et al. (1997) found that parents generally have positive perceptions and expectations of their child's academic ability. Halle et al. also found that optimistic feelings of parents towards their child's ability and opportunity for future success remained despite the low achievement levels of the majority of the students in the study. M.J. Smith (2001) and Bateman and Hossler (1996) have also found that Black parents have high educational expectations for their children. Ultimately, familial support and expectations are critical because they have been found to regulate a child's emotional and behavioral engagement in school over and above the child's neighborhood and family economic circumstances and the child's gender (Connell et al., 1994). Such an influence can help make or break a child's academic success.

Acting White. Several researchers surmise that another factor that contributes to the disengagement and underachievement of Black students is their perception that being educationally successful is akin to "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 177). Acting White entails rejecting ways of being that are associated with Whites. Blacks experience this opposition because of racial tensions and inequalities that exist between them and Whites (Fordham & Ogbu; Horvat & Lewis, 2003). The refusal to act White

can be seen in speech, work, leisure activities, and education (Ogbu, 2004). Thus, the

theory suggests that Black students often purposely do poorly in school to avoid the

damaging accusation of acting White (Pluviose, 2006; Tyson, 2005).

Educators and researchers debate the extent to which this phenomenon is truly

tied to the academic disengagement of Black students. Although some researchers do find

merit in the acting White theory (Cook & Ludwig, 1998; Ogbu, 2004), others believe that

acting White does not negatively affect the majority of Black students (Pluviose, 2006;

Rhymes, 2004; Tyson, 2005). Researchers believe that the concept has been over

simplified and the supporting evidence is not compelling (Cook & Ludwig; Ferguson,

1998), and that accusing Black students of not caring about education is demeaning and

allows for the dismissal of more significant issues that contribute to lower Black

academic achievement (Rhymes). Similar theses equate high educational achievement

with femininity and the rejection of academic achievement by boys who do not want to

be considered feminine (Davis, 2003). Although the debate continues, the notion of

acting White appears frequently in the literature and deserves note.

School climate, teacher quality and interactions, tracking, and various personal

variables all affect students' educational experiences (Mayer et al., 2000). Research has

shown that interactions with these variables are more often counterproductive for Black

students than for White students (Crosby, 1999; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003), and that

Black males often encounter destructive school climates more often than Black females

(Connell, et al., 1994; Davis, 2003). Additionally, experts predict that the prevalence of

negative stereotypes about Black males (i.e., that they are disrespectful, violent,

unintelligent, and menacing) fosters differences in the treatment, performance, and

educational outcomes of Black males (Davis). Such differences may be the precursors to the gender differences in the pursuit of higher education.

Early Childhood Academic Achievement

Many students' educational careers and their feelings about school are established before primary school (Zill, Collins, West, & Hausken, 1995). Early childhood education gives children a strong foundation on which to build future learning and is "a key indicator of access to educational opportunities" (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003, p. 21). There is a positive correlation between children's early education and their preparation for kindergarten and subsequent education (Mashburn, 2004; Zill et al.). Research has also shown that preschool education contributes positively to cognitive development, social outcomes, and school success (Barnett, 1990, 1995). In 1999, 60% of Black children were enrolled in preprimary (or Pre-K) educational centers. Additionally, at 5 years old, 99% of Black students were enrolled in preprimary and kindergarten education. The Black student enrollment rate in these early educational programs was higher than that of White and Hispanic children (Hoffman & Llagas).

Informal literacy activities are also beneficial for young children. The percentage of parents who read to their Black three- to five-year-old children increased from 58% in 1991 to 71% in 1999 (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). Three- to five-year-old girls were more likely than boys to have been read to by others two or three times in a week. Despite this gender difference, boys and girls enrolled in kindergarten at the same rate and scored similarly on kindergarten and 1st grade general knowledge, reading, and math assessments (C.E. Freeman, 2004). Research indicates that engaging in such literacy activities positively influences a child's future success in school (NCES, 1998).

The degree to which students receive these benefits, however, depends on the quality of the preschool (Mashburn, 2004) and the frequency of literacy activities at home (NCES, 1998). Although Black students are more likely than Whites to be enrolled in preschool, Blacks may be more likely to encounter lower quality care (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Nevertheless, early childhood programs and home literacy activities do contribute to school readiness and have the potential to narrow the racial achievement gap (Magnuson & Waldfogel). Thus, early childhood academic achievement must be taken into account when considering the preparation of students for future education.

Primary and Secondary School Academic Achievement

Primary school (grades one through eight) and secondary school (high school or grades nine through twelve) are the periods during which students begin to prepare for their long-term goals. Although not obvious to younger children, students' K-12 experiences significantly shape their future success. It is important to assess the primary and secondary academic achievements of students, since that achievement contributes to understanding their preparation for certain postsecondary plans. Students' academic achievement and various other aspects of the educational experience shape their ability to and desire to complete and go beyond high school. Those who achieve less and have difficulty in school are more likely to be disinterested in higher education (Battin-Pearson, et al., 2000; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Johnson, et al., 2005). Students who are well prepared in earlier grades have a greater chance to be successful in high school and, therefore, are more likely to anticipate attending and to actually attend postsecondary education (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989).

Swanson, Cunningham, and Spencer (2003) reported that, in the first grade, Black males significantly outperformed Black females in math reasoning. Some research has indicated that the decline in Black male achievement usually begins in the 2nd grade and is well established by the 4th grade (Hilliard, 1991; Spencer, 1986). In 2004, 9- and 13-year-old Black students' performance in reading and math improved over the scores they had achieved in any previous year since 1971 (Rooney et al., 2006). Overall, 4th, 8th, and 12th-grade girls have scored higher than boys on reading assessments since the early 1990s (C.E. Freeman, 2004; Holzman, 2006). The performance of all 17-year-old Black students in reading and math during this same time was higher than in the 1970s. Nevertheless, Black students still performed below the national average in reading and mathematics (Rooney et al.). This is especially important since success in mathematics is positively correlated to one's predisposition to college (Smith-Maddox, 2000) and to the potential for academic success in college (Adelman, 2006).

Course-taking patterns are also indicative of one's academic potential and success. Rigorous courses can improve standardized test scores (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003) and the probability of predisposition to college (Perna, 2000; Venezia et al., 2003). The NCES reported that Black students took advanced math and science classes less often than White students and advanced English classes at similar rates as other students (Hoffman & Llagas). Advanced placement and gifted and talented placement for Black students is half that as would be expected based on their enrollment levels (Holzman, 2006). In general, Black males are less likely to be enrolled in honors and advanced placement courses than their female counterparts (Holzman; Noguera, 2003). In 1998, 30% of Black high school students took advanced math courses, 57% took middle-level

academic math courses, 8% took low-level academic math courses, and 1% took no academic math classes. This pattern shows progress for Black students. However, considering the strong correlation between advanced course-taking and college predisposition, improvements are still needed (Hoffman & Llagas).

Overall, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores from 1999 indicate that the percentage of Black 17-year-olds who have reached levels of achievement that would prepare them for success in college or the workforce is relatively low when compared to national averages (Haycock & Huang, 2001). For example, Black 17-year-olds read and comprehend specialized and complex information at a rate that is lower than the national average (Haycock & Huang). The combination of the lower than average reading scores, the lower than average math scores (Haycock & Huang), and the lower than average writing scores (Education Trust, 1999) suggest that many Black students are unprepared or underprepared for college or the workforce (Haycock & Huang). However, in spite of lower test scores and less rigorous course-taking patterns, many students are still interested in college. Of the approximately 75% of 1992 high school graduates who enrolled in college, only 50% had completed a college preparatory curriculum (Haycock & Huang). This demonstrates that many students are not well equipped to enter higher education although they may have the desire. Some in this predicament do not enroll in college, but those who choose to enroll may end up in remediation or encountering academic difficulty.

Postsecondary Expectations

Students' educational expectations are positively correlated with their matriculation at an institution of higher education. Those who anticipate attending college

are more likely to prepare for that goal and to actually attend (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989). Most students understand the value of obtaining a higher education (Rooney et al., 2006). In 2003-2004, 69% of high school seniors expected to earn at least a bachelor's degree, and an additional 18% expected to attain some postsecondary education, but less than a bachelor's degree. Therefore, 87% of high school seniors expected to pursue postsecondary education, and 5% planned to stop their education after obtaining a high school diploma (Rooney et al.).

The educational expectations of Black high school seniors are similar to those of the average senior. There are, however, gender differences. In 2003-2004, approximately 63% of Black male high school seniors and 72% of Black female high school seniors expected to earn a bachelor's degree or higher (Rooney et al., 2006). Although the rates for boys and girls are higher than they were 20 years ago, the trend of significantly more Black girls than boys having high educational expectations remains. Unfortunately, the high educational plans of Black students do not yield high enrollment rates (K. Freeman, 2005). It is disconcerting that college matriculation rates do not reflect the large proportion of students who say they expect to attend college (Adelman, 2006). The current study seeks to understand how academically eligible high school students decide to pursue or to not pursue a postsecondary education.

Dropouts and Completers

Most students in the United States, however, do complete high school or obtain a GED (Laird, Lew, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006). The completion rate for Black students has made small gains since the mid-1980s (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). In 2003, 87% of all students and 85% of Black students between 18- and 24-years-old had a high school

diploma or general equivalency degree (Laird et al.). More recently, during the 10-year period between 1990-1992 and 2000-2002, the high school completion rate for Black males had shown a small decrease. This pattern is consistent with the completion rate for all males. At the same time, the completion rate for Black females has increased, and Black females have maintained their lead over Black males (Harvey & Anderson).

Despite the prominence of high educational aspirations and the knowledge that a high school diploma is a necessity, some students drop out of high school before earning a diploma. Boys of all races drop out of high school at higher rates than girls (C.E. Freeman, 2004). In 2004, the status dropout rate (percentage of persons who had not earned a high school diploma or equivalency degree or were not enrolled in high school) for 16- to 24-year-old Blacks was approximately 12% (Rooney et al., 2006). This rate was lower than the 21% dropout rate of 1972 (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003) but was still higher than the national average of 10% (Rooney et al.).

A portion of dropouts ultimately obtains an equivalent high school credential (General Educational Development certificate or GED). Since the 1990s, there has been a significant increase in the number of persons who obtain GEDs. Subsequently, high school completion statistics should be interpreted with caution (Haycock & Huang, 2001). Many high school completion measures, including those used by Laird et al. (2006) and Harvey and Anderson (2005) referenced in the previous paragraph, mask the degree to which measurable numbers of students do not actually graduate from high school (Haycock & Huang). For example, the 2002 status completion rate was 86.6%. After accounting for the 1.8 million 18- to 24-year-olds who held GEDs, approximately 79% of the completers actually obtained a high school diploma.

The Schott Foundation for Public Education considers these facts and defines graduation or completion rates as the percentage of students enrolled in the 9th grade who graduate with their cohort at the end of the 12th grade (Holzman, 2006). Using this definition, the picture is less encouraging for Black males. Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics, 45% of Black males and 70% of White males graduated in four years with their cohort. Subsequently, the dropout rate (i.e., four-year graduation rate not including GED recipients) for Black males was 55%. These rates are significantly lower than those of Black females (Holzman).

These distinctions are important because students with GEDs do not fare as well as those with high school diplomas in terms of pursuing and completing postsecondary education or income (Miller, 2006). High school completion is a major element of the K-12 experience that can block students from pursuing higher education. Although most students acknowledge the benefits of college attendance and most do finish high school, those who do not complete high school significantly diminish their opportunities for successful futures.

As is evident in this review of previous research, at various points throughout the Pre-K-12 experience, students begin to make decisions about what they will do after high school and engage in the college choice process. Consciously and subconsciously, their decisions are influenced by their primary and secondary educational experiences, personal factors, and school-related variables. The college choice process, which is the backbone of this study, is similarly influenced by multiple variables.

College Choice

College choice is the developmental process by which students determine if they will pursue a college education or other non-college options after high school graduation (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The Hossler and Gallagher three-phase model of college choice has been described as one of the theoretical frameworks of this study. The predisposition and search phases are being examined in this study and will be explored in more detail below.

Predisposition

Predisposition is the developmental phase of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model during which students decide if they will continue their formal education beyond high school. Most students formalize their educational aspirations, or motivation toward education (Kao & Tienda, 1998), during the predisposition phase, which generally occurs between the 8th and 10th grades (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). Predisposition is positively correlated to college attendance. Sixty-seven percent of students who identified having a predisposition to college in the 8th or 9th grade enrolled in college within one year of their high school graduation (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). Predisposition, however, is often tentative. Students who, as freshmen, indicated that they did not want to attend college usually had higher postsecondary aspirations by their junior year in high school (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989).

Student predisposition is related to many variables. It is important to understand these factors, as they help establish the likelihood of particular postsecondary decisions. Aspects of race and gender are included within the discussion of each variable when that information is available. Overall, researchers have found correlations between race and

predisposition and gender and predisposition to be inconsistent, indirect, and/or insignificant (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Paulsen, 1990). Specifically, researchers have had more difficulty explaining and predicting the variables that affect the predisposition of Black males than they have had with Black or White females and White males (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999).

After examining longitudinal data from approximately 5,000 students, Hossler, Schmit, et al. (1999) recommended that qualitative studies be conducted to reveal more about the "experiences and social factors that influence the educational aspirations of African American boy students" (p. 29). Moreover, other authors acknowledge the need for additional research on college choice for both Black females and males (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; K. Freeman, 1997; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989; Joyner-Fleming, 1995; Pitre, 2002). The current research begins to fill the void that exists in the literature for African American males. The variables explored in this literature review are educational aspirations, parents, academic status, social and cultural capital, socioeconomic status, significant others, counselors and resources, and psychological factors.

Educational aspirations. Educational aspiration has been defined as an "idealistic value orientation toward education" (Morgan, 1996, p. 308) or one's motivation toward education (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Aspirations are one facet of the predisposition phase. Individuals with high educational aspirations are more likely to be predisposed to higher education than those with lower aspirations (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989). The educational aspirations of U.S. high school students are higher now than at any other time in the past (Venezia et al., 2003). This has been found to be specifically true for African American students (Morgan).

Fifty-five percent of African American 8th grade boys and girls expect to attend college after high school (Smith-Maddox, 2000). A study of 12th grade Black males revealed that 83% of them planned to attend college (Joyner-Fleming, 1995). Researchers have found that Black students have educational aspirations that are comparable to or higher than Whites (Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, & Suh, 2005; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Venezia et al., 2003). Paulsen (1990), however, found the opposite to be true. There are similar inconsistent findings about the intersection of gender and race with educational aspirations. Morgan (1996) found that in the 10th grade, Black males and females had higher educational expectations than White students. Contrarily, Bateman and Hossler (1996) found that Black females aspired to higher education more frequently than White females and Black and White males and that Black males aspired to higher education less frequently than all groups. Yet, Gardner (1992) found no significant gender differences in the educational aspirations of Black high school students.

Authors do agree, however, that the majority of Black students aspire to attend college, but that there is a significant gap between their aspirations and enrollment (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Valadez, 1998). Hossler, Braxton, et al. (1989) proposed that educational aspirations are dependent upon academic achievement and socioeconomic status. The fact that Black students are more likely to be of a lower SES (Valadez) and to have lower academic achievement (Education Trust, 2003; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003; Perna, 2000) may account for the discrepancy between Black students' educational aspirations and enrollment. Kao and Tienda's (1998) findings support that theory. Kao and Tienda posit that although Black

students have educational aspirations that are as high as students of other races, the negative correlation between family SES and the stability of educational aspirations causes Black students' aspirations to be particularly vulnerable. St. John (1991) also determined that aspirations positively influence predisposition, but that aspirations are not significant enough to overcome poor academic preparation. This study may help explain how some Black students who aspire to college never realize that goal.

Parents. Parental encouragement (the frequency of discussions between children and parents about the parents' expectations), parental support (engagement in activities such as saving money for the child's education, accompanying the child to campus visits, and other college preparation activities), and parental expectations significantly and positively influence students' educational aspirations (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Hearn, 1984; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Stage & Hossler, 1989).

The same positive influence exists for Black students. There is a strong positive correlation between parental encouragement and expectations and the predisposition of Black students (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1997; Smith-Maddox, 2000). Parental expectations are the best predictor of Black male college predisposition and the second best predictor of Black female college predisposition. Black females are more strongly influenced by conversations about college with parents than are Black males (Bouse & Hossler). However, the influence of conversations with parents for Black males should not be disregarded. Joyner-Fleming's (1995) research revealed that Black male high school seniors whose families did not talk to them about them about college or did not help them make educational plans had a high incidence of not planning to attend college.

Parental education is another positive predictor of college predisposition (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Manski & Wise, 1983; Stage & Hossler, 1989). This correlation may exist because college-educated parents are likely to have instilled their value for education in their children, and because college-educated parents are more familiar with the college application process and are better equipped to prepare their child for those processes than parents without a college education (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). Contrary to predisposition for White children, the predisposition of Black children is more strongly linked to the educational attainment of their mother than their father (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; K. Freeman, 1997; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989; Wilson & Allen, 1987). College educated parents also provide a higher family income which is positively correlated to predisposition to college (Choy, 2002). However, parental education, independently, is more influential than family income. Having one college-educated parent can influence predisposition more than family income (Hamrick & Stage, 2004).

The strength of parental influence is also observed in Black first-generation college students. First-generation college students are generally less academically prepared, receive less support from their families during the college preparation process, and, by the 8th grade, note lower educational expectations than their peers with college-educated parents (Choy, 2001). Although Black parents are more likely not to have gone to college and are more likely to be uninformed about college choice (Perna, 2000; M.J. Smith, 2001), they can and do still encourage college attendance and success. Black first-generation students note having parents who push them to excel beyond what the parents had achieved. Parents without college degrees encourage their children by conveying the

importance of higher education (K. Freeman, 2005; M.J. Smith, 2001) and by providing moral and emotional support (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). This encouragement significantly and positively influences the chances of first-generation Black students pursuing higher education (K. Freeman, 2005).

Finally, Smith and Fleming (2006) explored the extent to which Black parents similarly or differently influence their Black sons and daughters toward particular postsecondary goals. In a qualitative examination of 11 Black parents of Black males and females in low SES schools, Smith and Fleming revealed that parents guide their female and male children's decisions about postsecondary options very differently. Daughters are usually steered toward four-year college attendance and are told that it is the best and most logical path to success. Sons, however, are given more latitude and are told that four-year college attendance is just one of the options they have for life after high school. Smith and Fleming surmised that these differences are connected to the parents' desire for their daughters to be independent and self-sufficient and their sons to do anything productive as long as they evade the illegal activities that were prevalent in their home communities. Subsequently, the predisposition of Black males and females is differently and directly influenced by their parents' expectations. Such variance in encouragement may help shed light on how and why fewer Black males are enrolling in colleges and universities. These studies demonstrate that parents can facilitate or impede a student's progress toward and desire for higher education. It is important to understand the manner in which parents can influence decision making as the stories of this study's participants begin to emerge.

Academic status. Academic achievement is positively correlated with predisposition to college (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Manski & Wise, 1983). As students' grade point averages rise, the chances that students plan to go to college rise (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). This has also been observed in Black students (Hamrick & Stage, 2004). Grade point average is the second strongest correlate that is positively associated with the educational aspirations of Black males (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991). It is likely that this positive association exists because students who earn better grades may be given more encouragement from teachers, parents, and peers (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, et al.; McDonough, 1997) and may be more involved in high school activities (Bouse & Hossler; Hamrick & Stage). Therefore, academic achievement may be positively correlated to predisposition through parental encouragement and student involvement.

Several studies describe the positive correlation between the rigor of one's high school curriculum and college attendance (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Perna, 2000, 2005; St. John, 1991). Students who take college preparatory classes or who are in an accelerated academic track are often more confident about their college admission potential, held to higher expectations, and are given more precise direction regarding college preparation than their peers who are in less rigorous academic tracks (Venezia et al., 2003). A rigorous high school academic program serves as a stronger positive influence for Black students than any other pre-college academic measure (Venezia et al.). Unfortunately, studies have shown that Black students are more likely to attend high schools that have fewer rigorous courses than their White peers and that they are less likely to be placed in those courses if their high school offers them (Perna, 2005).

49

Specifically, Black males tend to be tracked into lower level courses and are less likely to be enrolled in advanced placement and honors courses than their female counterparts (Holzman; Noguera, 2003).

Social and cultural capital. Social capital is the presence of social relations or networks used to promote advancement or upward mobility and include social norms and values (Coleman, 1988; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Morrow, 1999; Perna, 2000). Social capital yields cultural capital, which is received from one's parents and is defined by the possession of factors that are often associated with one's class status – language, social insight, and cultural knowledge (Perna & Titus, 2005). Although all families have social and cultural capital, high SES families have the most socially influential and valued types of capital and low SES families have the most unvalued and least influential forms of capital (McDonough, 1997). Those who possess the most advantageous forms are "using, manipulating, and investing it for socially valued and difficult-to-secure purposes and resources" (McDonough, p. 9). In education, that translates to the students with the more influential social and cultural capital being more predisposed to college, attending more academically rigorous schools and/or enrolling in more academically challenging courses, and having access to more and better resources to assist them in the college selection process (McDonough; Perna & Titus).

The amount of social capital that is present at one's school can overcome an individual student's lack of capital (Perna & Titus, 2005). In the college choice process, social and cultural capital are as influential as academic ability for African American students (Perna, 2000). African Americans, however, possess less of the desirable forms

of capital and are more likely to attend schools that possess less influential forms of capital (Perna & Titus).

Socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status, when comprised of parental education, income, and occupation, positively and directly influences predisposition (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Morgan, 1996). The strength of that association, however, has been debated because it may be indirectly correlated through two other significant variables – parental expectations and grade point average (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989). Although SES is often believed to be a very strong indicator of educational outcomes, some researchers have identified parental encouragement and support (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Stage & Hossler, 1989) and academic achievement (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Hossler, Schmit, et al.; Manski & Wise, 1983; Perna, 2005) as more influential to predisposition than socioeconomic status. Also, even though family income is an element of SES, family income, independently, is not a good predictor of college predisposition (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Stage & Hossler). Family income is positively correlated to predisposition because of its effect on parental expectations (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Stage & Hossler). Also, having one college-educated parent is more significant to predisposition than family income (Hamrick & Stage, 2004).

Related to SES is the issue of finances. Black students' predisposition is particularly influenced by the extent to which a college education would be a valuable investment (K. Freeman, 2005). When determining their predisposition to college, students consider the costs of a college education, the possibility of a job ceiling that would deter them from obtaining a job that has a salary that is commensurate with their

51

education upon college graduation, and potential future earnings (K. Freeman, 1999,

2005; Joyner-Fleming, 1995). In Joyner-Fleming's study, Black males acknowledged

questioning the value of attending a college or university because they knew unemployed

or underemployed college graduates (Joyner-Fleming). Their desire to participate in

higher education was negatively influenced by that knowledge. Generally, students are

more inclined to be predisposed to college if they believe educational advancement

would lead them to opportunities that would allow them to escape or enhance their

current financial situation (Allen et al., 2005).

  Significant others. Sibling college attendance and peer educational aspirations are

also positively correlated with student predisposition (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989;

Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). High school students who are part of a college-going peer

group tend to aspire to college (McDonough, 1997; Tierney & Colyar, 2005). Black

students acknowledge an intense motivation to attend college in order to be a role model

for younger family members. Black students also speak to the importance of extended

family members (i.e., grandparents) who encourage them to attend college in order to be

successful and go beyond the circumstances to which they were bound because they did

not obtain a higher education (K. Freeman, 1999, 2005; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Kelpe

Kern (2000) found that approximately 75% of a majority Black sample stated that college

attendance was encouraged in their families. In her ethnography of White girls,

McDonough acknowledged the influence of significant others on the postsecondary

decision-making process when she interviewed the best friends, parents, and counselors

of the study's participants. These studies illustrate that significant others can have a major

influence on student predisposition and should be considered part of the process.

Although this study will not interview significant others, it is important to understand this connection, as it may be part of the stories participants share.

Counselors and resources. Hossler, Schmit, et al. (1999) suggested that after the 10th grade and former reliance on parents for college-going assistance, students use teachers, counselors, and other external sources to obtain information about the college choice process. Students in the Hossler, Schmit, et al. study found that their best resources for information about admission requirements, career opportunities, and financial aid were guidance counselors or other interested persons. Such relationships increase the likelihood that students will have aspirations toward higher education and, ultimately, enroll in college (McDonough, 2005). External forces are even more important in the college choice process if students are not encouraged from home or if parents or guardians are unable to assist their child with the college decision-making process (K. Freeman, 2005). Evidence suggests that significant interaction between counselors and students may be able to mediate cultural and social differences and barriers that Black students often encounter (K. Freeman, 2005; McDonough). Predisposition can be limited by the absence of resources and counselors or enhanced by their presence (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). Blacks, however, are more likely to attend schools with poor resources and counseling (Hossler, Schmit, et al.) and have less access to knowledge and information about obtaining a college education and fulfilling their educational aspirations (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Perna, 2000).

Psychological factors. K. Freeman (1997) described how psychological factors contribute to the predisposition of Black students. First, many students never see college as an option. Black students from low SES families are less likely to be surrounded by

family and neighbors who attended college and may be in schools that do not encourage them to excel to that goal. Therefore, they may never believe college is an option (K. Freeman, 1997). Secondly, Black students describe a loss of hope that stems from not seeing the benefits of college due to encountering unsuccessful Black college graduates. Finally, the college environment often intimidates Black students. This may come from thoughts of being outnumbered by White students or from other more direct experiences that make Black students feel uncomfortable (K. Freeman, 1997). K. Freeman (1997) also found that many students reported being predisposed to college by self-motivation and by what they did not want to become. This motivation often stemmed from observing friends or family who seemed to be unable to achieve particular goals because they were not enrolled in college or did not have a college degree.

Search

Upon the conclusion of the predisposition phase, students who plan to attend college move from predisposition to search, the second phase of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-phase model. During the search phase, students who have decided to continue their formal education beyond high school begin gathering information about colleges and universities as they prepare to develop a choice set of institutions. This choice set includes schools from which a student will seek further information and possibly apply (Hossler & Gallagher).

A college-bound student's search for colleges generally begins in the 10th grade and continues through the 11th grade (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). In Hossler, Schmit, et al.'s longitudinal study, by the 11th grade, approximately half of the students who were undecided about their postsecondary goals in the 9th and 10th grades had decided to

54

pursue higher education. And overall, the majority of the students who had decided to attend postsecondary education were in the search stage in the 10th or 11th grade.

Students engage in both active and passive searching. Most 10th-grade students are passively engaged in the search phase (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). They may pay attention to information about postsecondary education, but they do not generally request or seek out information. Eleventh-grade students, however, search for colleges more actively. Overall, students who were girls, had higher grade point averages, and were from families with higher incomes and educational levels were the most active searchers in the 11th grade (Hossler, Schmit, et al.).

The differences in search between the 10th and 11th grades can be illustrated by the lack of consistency in students' choice sets between those two years (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). Seventy-three percent of 11th-grade students did not list the same top three schools they listed as sophomores. As active searchers, 11th-grade students considered majors, admission potential, financial aid, institutional facts and characteristics, and advice from teachers, counselors, and college materials. Also, by the 11th grade, students became more interested in college costs and financial aid when as 10th-grade students, those topics were only of interest to parents. With that new information, by the 11th grade, students explored more institutions, gave their selections more thought, and the schools in their choice sets changed (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). Although the sample from which these findings emerged included Black students, Hossler, Schmit, et al. did not provide findings specific to Black males.

Although the search phase has not received as much attention as predisposition and choice (Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989), research has been conducted to determine

what factors influence how students search for a college or university. Following is an exploration of the effects of select variables on the search phase. This information, when available, includes specifics as they pertain to Black students and males. The variables explored are finances, socioeconomic status, academic factors, parents, and resources.

Finances. One variable that weighs greatly on the search phase is college cost and finances. McDonough et al. (1996) found that economic factors were predictors of the type of institution Black students explored and, subsequently, attended. Black students chose specific types of institutions if they were athletic recruits and received scholarship money, wanted to live near home to avoid room and board costs, were offered financial aid, or believed that graduates got good jobs upon graduation (McDonough et al.).

Often, inaccurate financial aid and college cost information influence students to exclude colleges during the search phase. Early in high school, students and parents generally know very little about financial aid and college costs. An understanding of financial aid and college costs is crucial when engaging in the search phase (Bouse & Hossler, 1991). Bouse and Hossler stated:

> Cost is one of the major criteria students use to eliminate institutions. Parents'
> knowledge about costs and aid appear to be more important in shaping the
> attitudes of students about costs and financial aid. Inaccurate parental information
> is likely to lead to poor decision making on the part of students. (p. 15)

Socioeconomic status. In general, students from high SES families are more knowledgeable about conducting college searches and are more likely to search a wider range of institutional types (McDonough, 1997) and a larger number of colleges (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). Hossler, Braxton, et al. (1989) acknowledged that there is a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and the selectivity of and cost of potential colleges. McDonough's ethnography of girls choosing colleges demonstrated that SES

56

contributes to the search phase because students from low-income families searched for colleges based on their ability to continue working while in college. However, girls from high SES families considered attending colleges without regard to tuition cost or distance from home – two factors that girls from low SES families considered when creating their choice set.

Academic factors. Measures of academic achievement such as standardized test scores and grade point average also contribute to a student's search phase. As students' SAT scores decrease, the geographical range and quality of the schools they consider become more limited (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Likewise, high ability students usually perform more advanced college searches (Hossler & Gallagher). Students also take into account the majors or academic programs a school offers when they consider potential institutions (College Partnership, 2004). McDonough et al. (1996) found that the academic reputation of an institution is one of the most important factors that Black students consider when deciding on colleges.

Parents. Parental involvement is also critical during the search phase. Many parents, however, are uninformed about this process and feel that they do not have access to information to assist their children with the college choice process. M.J. Smith (2001) examined college choice from the perspectives of Black parents of students who attended inner-city high schools in Los Angeles. These parents wanted to help their children search for colleges and universities. They were plagued, however, by being uninformed and feeling helpless.

M.J. Smith (2001) found that these parents were unaware of the importance of campus visits or college guides, had no means to gather information, and lacked leave

from work (due to the increased likelihood of having a job without leave and that paid an hourly wage), which would allow for more opportunities to participate in college choice activities with their child. M.J. Smith (2001) reported that low SES parents were unclear about considerations that should be made when looking for a college, had a nonspecific understanding of college access, life, and outcomes, and were frustrated because they were unable to provide their children with information. These feelings often led parents to disengage from the choice process. The parents, however, still supported their children, but the lack of parental engagement left students as the major collectors of college choice information (M.J. Smith, 2001). Perna (2000) confirmed that Black parents are more likely than White parents to be uninformed about the college choice process and less likely to have access to information that would help their children. The effectiveness with which Black students can conduct this process without their parents' assistance and with other odds against them is what makes understanding the college choice process for Black students so vital.

Resources. When evaluating their college search processes, college freshmen stated that the following resources were helpful (in descending order of importance): college visits, college catalogs, parents and family, high school counselors, friends who went to that college, and college admissions representatives (Matthay, 1989). Students and parents who had access to or were familiar with information about colleges (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999), college costs (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; McDonough, 2005), and application procedures (Joyner-Fleming, 1995; Matthay) conducted more efficient searches. Matthay also assessed students' satisfaction with the assistance they received during the search process. First-generation college students were generally less satisfied

with the assistance they received. Black students, in terms of their enrollment in postsecondary institutions, comprise a disproportionate number of the first-generation student population (Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998). Therefore, it is likely that Black students would face the challenge of receiving less satisfactory guidance as they search for postsecondary education options.

Although parents still played a role in the search phase of their child's college choice process, students more often turned to external sources of information for guidance (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999). External sources of information include peers, counselors, teachers, and college information sources. Students begin utilizing these external sources during the 11th grade and do so more prominently in the 12th grade (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). Understanding this information on the search phase is important, as this sets the foundation for this study's exploration of that phase for Black students.

Summary

This literature review establishes the basis for this study on the postsecondary decision-making processes of Black males in high school. This chapter included a presentation of the theoretical frameworks that guided this study, a discussion of the value of education, a review of Pre-K-12 education of Black students, and an analysis of variables that contribute to the predisposition and search phases of the college choice process. The literature reveals that Black students have made significant educational progress over the years, but that various social and school based circumstances hinder further advancement and contribute to the discrepancy in college enrollment for Black men and women (Harry & Anderson, 1999; Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003; Rooney et al., 2006). Once engaged in the college choice process, Black

students are most influenced by parental factors (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Smith-Maddox, 2000) and academic variables (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Venezia et al., 2003). Researchers have identified gender differences in the ways Black parents encourage their children's postsecondary plans (Smith & Fleming, 2006), in how Black children engage with their parents regarding college (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999), and in the academic achievement of Black students (Hoffman & Llagas). Additionally, many of the pre-college barriers that students encounter are present more frequently for Black males than for Black females (Connell et al., 1994; Davis, 2003). These gender differences may contribute to the gender gap in higher education.

Although these findings are clear, there are voids in the literature. Researchers have identified specific variables that influence the college choice processes of Blacks students, but the overall process (i.e., the formation of predisposition and the development of search plans) for Black students is not well understood (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; K. Freeman, 1997; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989; Kao & Tienda, 1998), and researchers continue to call for more attention to understanding the processes for students of color (Kao & Tienda; Pitre, 2002). The inconsistency that exists between findings on race and gender as factors that influence predisposition (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Kao & Tienda; Paulsen, 1990) also calls for additional research that will begin unraveling the variations in findings.

Further, researchers rarely explore college choice decisions qualitatively (K. Freeman, 2005; Horvat, 1996; MacGowan, 2002; McDonough, 1997; Murphy, 2004; Palmer, 2003; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Wilson, 1997). Much of what is known about the postsecondary decision-making processes of Black students is known via quantitative

studies or statistical analyses (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Hamrick & Stage, 1998, 2004; Hauser & Anderson, 1991; Hearn, 1984; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Joyner-Fleming, 1995; Kim, 2004; Matthay, 1989; Perna, 2000; Pitre, 2002; Smith-Maddox, 2000; St. John, 1991) that do not reveal a more comprehensive story behind the findings. Qualitative studies are better suited to hear the voices of the participants and to attend to the context in which decisions are made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Overall, this review of the literature demonstrates that only limited research specific to the intersection of race and gender has been conducted. Particularly, this literature review has revealed that a limited number of qualitative college choice studies include Black males as participants (Duncan, 2002; K. Freeman, 1997; Roderick, 2003). Research has examined the issue from the point of view of parents (Smith & Fleming, 2006), White females (McDonough, 1997), Black females (Horvat, 1996; Murphy, 2004), and a mixed race group of females (Wilson, 1997). However, most of the college choice literature that includes Black males is quantitative (Joyner-Fleming, 1995; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Perry, 2004) or conceptual (Bailey, 2003; Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2003). K. Freeman (1997) is one of the few authors to have conducted a qualitative study that devoted attention to understanding the similarities and differences in postsecondary decisions for Black males and females. The participants shared thoughts about how outside forces (i.e., society, schools, significant others) similarly or differently encourage them to pursue higher education. The study did not focus, however, on similarities or differences in how Black males and females personally make postsecondary plans and are influenced or not to pursue a higher education.

Considering these gaps in the literature, this research employed narrative inquiry to reveal the processes Black males use to make college choice decisions and to explore the influences on those decisions. This research included the voices of Black males who plan to attend college and attempts to address the void that is left by inconsistent or non-existent findings on college choice as influenced by race and gender. Chapter III, Research Methodology, follows and describes the research design that was used to explore these aspects of college choice for Black males.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research study I used narrative inquiry methodology to understand how Black males describe the influences on and processes by which they decided to pursue a postsecondary education. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black males who are upper-level high school students describe the influences on and processes by which they decide to pursue a postsecondary education?

2. How do Black males who are upper-level high school students who plan to pursue a postsecondary education describe their search for colleges?

Chapter III begins with a description of the epistemology and methodology that are the foundation of this study. This chapter then delves into descriptions of the research site, sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures are described. The chapter concludes with a description of the methods that were used to validate the findings of this study.

Methodology

Epistemology

This study is based in a constructivist epistemology. An epistemology helps provide "context or a broad map for the research process" (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 451) that describes the nature of knowledge (Crotty, 1998) and the researcher's assumptions about knowledge (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Identifying an epistemology is critical because it situates the study by influencing the researcher (Jones et al.) as well as the way research is conducted and reported (Crotty). A clearly defined

epistemology helps guarantee the quality (described as goodness by Arminio & Hultgren, 2002) and credibility of the study's findings (Crotty, 1998)

The constructivist epistemology assumes that knowledge is constructed as humans interact with and in the world (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Crotty, 1998). This epistemology presumes that reality is multiple and complex, that the researcher's values underlie the research, and that the researcher's and participant's relationship is interactive (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Based on this epistemology, the participant is the knower. Accordingly, I proceeded through data collection and data analysis considering the participants to be the best informants when it comes to describing what and who influenced their college decision-making process and how they went about searching for a college or university.

I listened to participants' stories and, in line with the goal of the constructivist epistemology, used the participants' voices to understand college decision making from a first-hand perspective (Jones et al., 2006). My goal was to analyze, interpret, and reconstruct (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) the participants' individual truths in order to address the research questions that guided this study. To that end, I created narratives to give a holistic view of processes, which took place over the span of many years and which may have seemed disjointed. The foundation of the narrative inquiry methodology that was used is well aligned with constructivist epistemology.

Narrative Inquiry

In this study I used narrative inquiry to examine and draw conclusions based on the multiple realities of how Black males made decisions about pursuing and searching for a college education after high school graduation. Narrative inquiry, the study of how

64

people experience the world, is a means by which personal experiences are shared by a narrator, the participant, in the form of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Clandinin and Connelly (1998) based their understanding of narratives and narrative inquiry on the works of John Dewey who believed that people are both individual and social beings. Moreover, Dewey (as cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 1998) posited that people experience internal and existential conditions simultaneously. Understanding the whole is necessary in order to make meaning of a situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Based on these beliefs, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that in narrative inquiry, experiences must be examined three-dimensionally – through interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place).

Narrative inquiry entails examining stories to understand how the narrator makes sense of his or her life and society (Riessman, 1993). Stories allow readers entrée into the narrator's inner world, reality, identity, and personality and are one of the clearest means by which information about a person's life can be accessed (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Narrative inquiry was particularly appropriate for this study because the methodology has been useful at illustrating and representing the lives and experiences of groups in society who have experienced discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as race, religion, and gender (Lieblich, et al.). In this research, narrative inquiry allows Black males to express their voices that have been muted for so long. The use of narrative inquiry helped to examine the participants' decision-making processes from a holistic and contextual perspective, include first-hand insight into participants' college choice experiences, and yield an understanding of those experiences based on the

meaning participants have made for themselves. The clearest understanding of someone's experiences comes from an insider's perspective (Merriam, 1998), and the use of stories through narrative inquiry allows participants' experiences and perspectives on their college decision-making processes to come forth in this research.

When analyzing and relaying narratives, researchers are interested in the growth and transformation that occurs in a participant's story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and in the content and structure of one's story (Riessman; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). As the researcher, I created a representation of the participants' stories through the collection and recounting of that story in the form of a written narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman). Participants' stories were the basis of the results and yielded information that was deep and contextual. College choice studies in general, and specifically with Black students, must expand to include a thorough understanding of how postsecondary decisions are made in addition to understanding the factors that influence that process (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

Sampling

Research Site

Criterion sampling is a purposeful sampling technique by which cases meeting specific predetermined conditions are selected to be part of a sample (Patton, 1990). I used criterion sampling to select a high school that would have students who met the criteria to serve as participants for this research. King High School (a pseudonym) was selected as the site for this research because the demographics and achievement records of Black males at the school (as described below) led me to predict that I would be able to obtain enough students who would meet the criteria for this study.

66

King High School (KHS), a public high school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, was the site for this study. The following information about KHS was obtained in September 2006 from the school system's public records that are maintained on the Internet. These statistics were used to determine if King was an appropriate fit for this study. To protect the school's confidentiality, the exact reference is not provided.

The 2006-2007 enrollment at King included more than 1,300 Black students who accounted for 52% of the total enrollment of approximately 2,500 students. Black males comprised over 25% of the student population. There were over 500 students in the 11th grade and more than 400 students in the 12th grade. KHS's rate of students receiving free and reduced lunch was 47%, which was classified as high. The free and reduced lunch rate is often used as a proxy for the school's socioeconomic status (NCES, 2006), as that service is given to students whose families have annual incomes that are equal to or lower than the poverty level (currently, $37,000 or less for a family of four) (United States Department of Agriculture, 2006).

KHS's 2005-2006 graduation rate for Black students was 84%. The graduation rate for Black males was 82% and was slightly higher than in the past two years and higher than the current graduation rate for all boys, which was 73%. The graduation rate for Black males, however, was lower than that of Black females. The state in which KHS is located computes the dropout rate by dividing the number of students who leave school and are not known to enroll in another school or state-approved program during the same school year by the total school population not including students who reenter during the same school year. During the 2005-2006 school year, African American males in 9th through 12th grades dropped out at a rate of 7%. This dropout rate was slightly higher

than that of African American females. The dropout rate for Black males was also higher than it had been in the past nine years, but lower than the overall dropout rate of 10% for males of all races.

The Department of Education of the state in which King High School is located collects post-graduation plans from high school seniors within a month of their anticipated graduation. The following findings are based on the more than 400 students in the King High School class of 2005. Data indicated that 42% of students planned to attend a four-year college, 21% planned to attend a two-year college, 4% planned to attend a specialized school or get specialized training, and 22% planned to attend a two or four-year college while working a full-time or part-time job. Therefore, over 85% of the class of 2005 anticipated obtaining some level of postsecondary education. That trend had been seen for several years. Finally, 8% of seniors planned to work or join the military, and approximately 3% did not respond or had plans that differed from the above options. Sixty-five percent of the nearly 400 seniors who graduated in 2005 completed course requirements that qualified them for admission to schools within the state's system of four-year public colleges and universities. An additional 8% completed an approved career/technology program as well as the state's system of higher education requirements. These data were not disaggregated by gender. These trends further confirmed that the population at King would yield students who were qualified for this research.

Criteria for Participation

Purposeful sampling was used to select information-rich cases, participants with stories that were relevant to this research (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). Participants for this study were selected using criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling technique. To

participate, students had to be a male who identified as African American or Black. They

must not have repeated their present grade, had to have at least a "C" (2.0 on a 4.0 scale)

grade point average (GPA), and should have lived the vast majority of their lives in the

United States. They did not have to be in a particular academic track. Students who did

not fit these criteria were not considered for the study.

Males from various academic tracks were eligible for the study because hearing

and exploring the stories of students from multiple academic tracks encouraged the

development of a well-rounded picture of the variety of ways these students make

decisions about their postsecondary plans. Males who had a "C" average or higher were

ideal because although they may not have been eligible for admission to highly selective

institutions, based on grades, they were eligible to attend many four-year colleges and

universities and most two-year institutions. Subsequently, their GPA was not technically

a barrier to admission into a significant number of institutions of higher education.

Participants

Eleven students – 10 boys from the 12th grade and 1 boy from the 11th grade –

were the participants. Patton (1990) suggested that, in qualitative research, there are no

set rules regarding sample size and that the size of the sample should be guided by the

ability to provide rich information. Therefore, I planned to select additional participants if

saturation (i.e., the point at which no new data or no additional meaningful data are

collected and the researcher notices similarities in information provided by participants as

related to the topic) was not met with the initial participants (Jones et al., 2006; Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). Ultimately, I determined that saturation was met with these 11

participants. Eleventh and twelfth-grade students were ideal for this research because it

was likely that they were making decisions about their postsecondary plans (K. Freeman, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). These grade levels were also ideal because by the last half of high school, students are more likely to maintain their postsecondary aspirations through graduation as opposed to aspirations that are formed earlier, which usually prove to be unstable (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Additionally, if participants, by the 11th grade, planned to attend college, they may at least be passively involved in the search process (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999).

The participants include one male in the 11th grade and ten males in the 12th grade. Although participants will individually be introduced in Chapter IV, the following data (obtained after data collection was completed and the seniors had graduated) are of the class of 2007, the class to which the seniors in the study belonged. These data are a useful way to introduce the participants and to elaborate on the research site, the environment in which the participants learned. King High School's 2006-2007 graduation rate for all Black students was approximately 80%. Although this rate was the lowest rate for Black students since 2002 (the date for which the first information is listed on the website), the graduation rate for all Black students is higher than that of students of all races, 78%. The graduation rate for Black males, however, was 76%, the lowest rate for that group in the previous five years for which statistics are listed, higher than that of males of all races, 70%, but lower than that of Black females, 88%.

During the same school year, African American males in the 9th – 12th grades dropped out at a rate of 4.5%, lower than the previous two years and lower than the dropout rate for males of all races, 5%. The dropout rate for Black males, however, was higher than the 2% dropout rate for Black females. Finally, the post graduation decisions

for the class of 2007 also shed light on the study's participants. Of over 400 documented postsecondary decisions, approximately 60% of students indicated that they planned to be full-time students at a two or four-year institution of higher education. Approximately 25% planned to attend college part time while working. Similar to previous years, approximately 85% of graduates planned to obtain some postsecondary education. Of the remaining students, 10% planned to work, join the military, or attend a specialized school or receive specialized training; 5% did not report their decision.

Recruitment of Participants

Access to King High School was facilitated by professional connections I had with personnel who worked at the school. I sent a formal letter of introduction to the principal to arrange a meeting (Appendix A). During the meeting, I provided the principal with a summary of the background, purpose, significance, and procedures of this study and explained why King High School was the ideal site (Appendix B). After receiving tentative approval from the school's principal, I completed the school system's research approval process. Ultimately, the principal of King High School, the school district in which KHS resides, and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board approved this research.

One of King's guidance counselors, Ms. Hale (a pseudonym), assisted me with the logistics of recruiting and scheduling participants. She will be referred to frequently in this and subsequent chapters. Ms. Hale worked with me to distribute a recruitment packet containing a cover letter (Appendix C), a consent form for parents (Appendix D), a consent form for students 18 years of age and older (Appendix E), and an interest form (Appendix F) to 212 Black males, each Black male in the 11th and 12th grades.

Recruitment packets were distributed to the young men through English class, the one class in which every 11th and 12th grade student is enrolled. The students' and parents' signed consent forms gave me access to the students' school records. The interest form allowed me to begin identifying potential participants based on grade level, postsecondary plans, and amount of time living in the United States. Students returned their signed consent form and interest form to Ms. Hale.

Fourteen students returned consent forms signed by a parent or guardian or by the participant if he was 18 years of age or older. The students also returned their personal interest forms at this time. I gathered and analyzed the interest forms and reviewed the school records of those who submitted signed consent forms. After examining the paperwork to find students who met the study's criteria, I identified seven potential participants – one 11th-grade student and six 12th-grade students. The remaining seven recruitment packets were from students who were removed from further consideration for participation in the study. The seven recruitment packets that were disregarded came from the following young men: one who was eligible but did not respond to several notices and calls for an initial meeting, one who was eligible but changed his mind about his desire to participate, one who was academically eligible but did not meet the study's race requirement, and four who did not meet the study's grade point average requirement.

I met with each of the seven potential participants to introduce myself and verify his continued interest in participating. During that meeting, I thanked the young man for his initial interest, restated the purpose of the study, reviewed the consent form that had been signed, had participants 17 years old or younger sign the assent form (Appendix G), reiterated the study's requirements and incentive, and identified a date and time for the

student's first interview. One of the seven young men decided that he did not want to participate and was dismissed after being thanked for his time and initial consideration. Upon the conclusion of the meeting, the remaining six potential participants, one from the 11th grade and five from the 12th grade, were given a formal invitation to participate (Appendix H) that was also a reminder of all of the details we had reviewed during that meeting. I also visited the school to deliver reminders of the interview dates for these six participants.

Initially, this research was designed to explore the decision-making processes of Black males who were and were not college bound. I wanted to know how Black males with a "C" grade point average and above made decisions about whether they would or would not pursue a postsecondary education. Ultimately, none of the qualified potential participants identified himself as non-college-bound. Ms. Hale personally sought out qualified non-college-bound students, but her efforts were unsuccessful.

Subsequently, in an attempt to have a broad range of college-bound students, I asked for Ms. Hale's assistance with identifying students with a 3.0 GPA or higher. She identified four 12th-grade students who agreed to meet with me. During the meeting, I thanked each of the young men for meeting with me, described the purpose of the study, reviewed the consent forms that needed to be signed, identified the study's requirements and incentive, and asked them to participate. All of these students agreed to participate; I assigned an interview time and place, and the participants returned their signed consent forms or signed their assent form during their first interview. The final participant was recruited when he and I were inadvertently in Ms. Hale's office at the same time. After hearing about the study, this young man in the 12th grade agreed to participate. He

returned his consent form during his first interview. These additions led to the final count

of 11 participants. I also delivered reminder notices to King for these final five

participants.

<center>*Data Collection*</center>

Data for this study were collected via semi-structured one-on-one interviews,

demographic questionnaires, and school records. Each method is described in detail

below.

Interviews

Participants engaged in two semi-structured interviews. Multiple interviews were

necessary in order to help establish a good rapport, comfort, and trust between the

participants and me (Seidman, 2006; Warren, 2002). Two interviews also allowed me to

gain a strong understanding of the phenomenon that was being studied and to follow-up

on concepts that were generated during the first interview (Charmaz, 2002). Semi-

structured interviews contain a mixture of more and less structured questions. Highly

structured or essential questions were used to obtain specific information (Berg, 1995).

The interview was also guided by less-structured questions whose wording and order

sometimes changed due to unexpected circumstances (Jones, 2002) or particular

responses (Berg; Merriam, 1998).

I designed the protocol questions based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) belief

that in narrative inquiry, experiences should be studied through three dimensions –

interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation

(place). The three-dimensional view facilitates the emergence of more comprehensive

stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000). I also asked open-ended questions in order to

<center>74</center>

encourage participants to give in-depth responses in the form of stories (Stage &

Manning, 2003). Predetermined and spontaneous probes were used to elicit more

information based on a participant's answer to a lead question (Berg, 1995; Merriam,

1998). I returned to the predetermined questions when the interview needed to be

refocused. Semi-structured interviews were ideal because of the flexibility it allowed

during the interview. I was able to rearrange interview questions and interject probes

based on a participant's responses and experiences (Merriam). Such flexibility allowed

me to be specific and purposeful in the questions that I asked each participant.

Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes during the school day. Interviews

were held in Ms. Hale's office within King High School. That location was selected

because it was easily accessible to the participants and allowed for maximum privacy. All

interviews were audio-recorded. I took limited notes during the interviews. Primarily, I

took notes on my thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the participant, the participants'

nonverbal cues, and other information that could not be ascertained via audiotape. These

observer comments were helpful when recalling specifics from the interviews. Secondly,

these notes were available to assist me in the event of an equipment failure (Creswell,

2003). At the end of a day of interviews, I wrote in a reflexive journal (described later in

this chapter) to record my reactions to the interviews.

I began each first interview by welcoming and thanking participant for their

participation. I took a few minutes to engage in casual conversation (i.e., what class they

left, how much longer before their school day was over) before beginning with study

logistics. I then reminded students of measures that would be taken to maintain their

confidentiality. I explained that their identity as well as the identity of their high school

and others mentioned during their interviews would be masked in all reports and presentations. Participants were told that only I would hear their recorded interviews and have access to the transcripts, and that school personnel would only receive a description of overall findings from which all identifying information would be deleted. Additionally, all participants completed the demographic questionnaire (Appendix I) at the beginning of the first interview.

I created an interview protocol (Appendix J) that guided each participant's first interview. In addition to asking participants the questions as they appeared on the interview protocol, I also asked probing questions when necessary. Initial interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. At the end of the first interview, participants selected a pseudonym by which they wanted to be referred in written and oral representations of this research in order to help maintain the participants' confidentiality. Finally, I gave the participants the time, date, and location for their second interview.

Generally, second interviews were conducted one week after the initial interview and lasted, on average, 25 minutes. The first half of each participant's second interview was dedicated to asking any questions that were not addressed during the first interview and to seeking clarification on issues that arose as I transcribed recordings, analyzed the transcripts from the first interview, and reviewed school records. During this time I also asked participants if any data or information regarding their postsecondary plans or the planning process had changed since the first interview. The last half of the second interview served as a member check. I orally presented each student with tentative conclusions I made about his postsecondary decision-making process based on the first interview. Participants were asked to evaluate the accuracy of my statements and were

given the opportunity to correct or add to my comments. Participants were given an incentive, a $25 gift card, at the end of the second interview.

I conducted a pilot interview in order to receive feedback on the content, flow, clarity, and organization of interview questions (Jones, 2002; Stage & Manning, 2003). Testing the questions prior to the actual interviews highlighted confusing and unnecessary items (Merriam). The pilot interview was conducted with a teenager who met the criteria for this study (Jones) but did not attend KHS and had no connection to the study. The interview was with a 16-year-old African American male in the 11th grade who planned to attend college. I solicited feedback on my interviewing style to ensure that I was an effective, nonjudgmental, and respectful interviewer (Merriam, 1998) and that I understood "unanticipated twists and turns" (Seidman, 2006, p. 39) that often emerge during an interview. This young man also completed the demographic questionnaire so I could receive feedback regarding which items were clear and which items needed clarification.

The pilot interview helped me prepare for participants who gave brief responses to questions that were asked. Subsequently, I added probing questions to the interview protocol in order to give participants guidance as they told the stories associated with their college decision-making processes. Based on the pilot interview, questions were added, some were deleted, and the wording and sequence of the interview questions and my interview style were altered for greater effectiveness.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix H) was administered to participants at the beginning of their first interview. It included information such as gender, age, race,

who raises the student, parental education level(s), parental occupation(s), approximate family income, and grade point average. I used the information from the questionnaire to give context and background to participants' lives in order to establish a more holistic and comprehensive picture of their experiences and stories.

School Records

After receiving signed consent forms from potential participants, I met with Ms. Hale to request information from the student's records. Initially, school records were used to narrow down the number of students who were invited to participate in the study. These data were also useful for confirming information participants provided on the demographic questionnaire or during an interview and for obtaining new information that could add substance and context to participants' stories. I requested the following information: academic performance indicator (i.e., numerical or letter grade point average), progression to high school completion, academic track, previous high, junior high, and elementary schools attended, date of birth, and attendance record. I requested students' free and reduced lunch status to use as a poverty indicator. This request was denied because those data are deemed highly sensitive, and their release was prohibited. I reviewed a participant's school records before his first interview. When data were missing from the school records (e.g., missing names of elementary, middle, and high schools attended), I asked the participant for clarification during one of his interviews. I also reviewed data from the participants' school records during data analysis and as I created narratives and drew conclusions.

Data analysis is the process by which conclusions are drawn from the data. This is how meaning is given to data that have been gathered from interviews and documents (Creswell, 1998). There is no one particular method by which narratives should be analyzed (Lieblich et al., 1998; Merriam, 1998). The analysis of narrative data can focus on the structure or content of one's story or on holistic or categorical aspects of a story (Lieblich et al.). Analysis can also be based on the essence of a particular discipline such as how one's story is connected to society (sociology) or how stories differ across cultures (anthropology). Data can also be simultaneously analyzed from multiple perspectives (Lieblich et al.). Although several possibilities exist for the analysis of narrative data, I chose to use the well-established constant comparative method that was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The constant comparative method was established in order to develop grounded theories. The method, however, is also well suited for other qualitative methodologies because it is based on inductive reasoning and concept building (Merriam).

Data analysis began during data collection since "the final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process" (Merriam, 1998, p. 162). Glaser and Strauss (1967) agreed, stating that the analysis of data should begin at the end of each interview.

Transcriptions

I personally transcribed each interview in order to become more familiar with the experiences of each participant. This also allowed me to incorporate notes taken during the interviews and to begin recognizing insights that could possibly become part of the

data analysis and conclusions. I transcribed most interviews within three days, but always

prior to the second interview since my reconstructions of the participants' stories were

needed for the member check that occurred during the second interview. Transcribing the

interviews fairly quickly also increased the chances that I was able to recall details about

the interview that needed to be considered during data analysis. I made notes of themes,

patterns, and initial thoughts in the margins of the transcriptions. The notes were

beneficial during coding and later stages of data analysis and contributed to a

participant's second interview by highlighting aspects of that participant's story that

needed to be further developed. I repeated this process with each interview.

Coding

Coding is the process of defining what the data mean (Charmaz, 2006) and is the

means by which aspects of the data are assigned shorthand designations that allow for

easy retrieval of data (Merriam, 1998). It includes chunking and making meaning of data

(Rossman & Rallis, 1998), and is the critical step that leads the researcher to the

conceptualization of data (Charmaz). Codes must be grounded in the data and are based

on the research topic (Charmaz). The data for this study were analyzed through initial and

focused coding that was conducted for the transcripts of each of the 11 participants.

Initial coding. Initial coding took place first, during and immediately after an

interview was transcribed. This first step entails exploring the theoretical possibilities of

the data (Charmaz, 2006). During this first coding process, I wrote memos and details for

each line of the transcripts in order to identify the key ideas that were present within the

data. This step led to the establishment of conceptual categories or concepts (Charmaz),

but focused the major ideas within smaller units, the lines of the transcripts. During initial

coding, I stuck closely to the data and made inquires as described by Charmaz (p. 47):

1. What is this data a study of?

2. What does the data suggest?

3. From whose point of view?

4. What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate?

I conducted line-by-line initial coding to identify conceptually similar incidents,

actions, and ideas. I labeled the data with action-oriented codes as a way to stay true to

what is happening in participants' stories and avoided establishing topics or categories

during this level of coding (Charmaz, 2006). Initial codes tended to be basic processes

such as "thoughts influencing predisposition," "parents influencing predisposition,"

outside influences on predisposition," "considering location," "considering academic

reputation," and "considering level of comfort." These codes were provisional because I

reworded them to better fit the data after I compared data across the various data sources

and made adjustments as necessary (Charmaz). Line-by-line coding made it easy to

identify concerns about, influences on, and processes by which predisposition and search

were carried out by the participants.

Focused coding. The final stage of coding for this study was focused coding.

Focused coding uses initial codes to explain, sort, and synthesize larger segments of data

(Charmaz, 2006). During focused coding, I made decisions about "which initial codes

make the most analytic sense to categorize [my] data incisively and completely"

(Charmaz, 2006, p. 58). Focused codes are more theoretical, abstract, and analytical than

initial codes and subsume initial codes and represent recurring themes and cut across

81

interviews (Charmaz, 2002). To create focused codes, I sorted and constantly compared initial codes that were similar and different and then grouped these items into categories and subcategories based on similar attributes and properties.

Ultimately, focused coding yielded analytic categories that describe the data. I assigned a name to each category, and I continually compared data and asked questions of the data in order to create increasingly specific categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The names of categories and subcategories emerged from the participants' words as found in the transcripts. The titles that arose from the participants' words, or "in vivo codes" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 115), were well grounded in the data since they came from the participants themselves. I also created titles for the categories based on the concepts that emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin). This process yielded 15 categories and 7 subcategories.

I further analyzed the 15 categories and 7 subcategories in order to establish the themes and subthemes. I sorted the categories and identified relationships among categories and determined similarities and differences among various categories and subcategories. For example, five categories pertaining to participants' views on the decisions of other Black males were combined and restructured into one theme with three subthemes. Similar analyses were conducted on other categories and subcategories and yielded the 12 themes and 9 subthemes that are presented in Chapter V.

For example, a category entitled "resources and support" included a wealth of information students shared in response to questions such as "how do you know about applying to college," "who helped you with this process," "how did you learn that information," and "what has your cousin (or other college educated family member) told

you about applying for, preparing for, and attending college?" After several examinations of "resources and support," I recognized the common thread of participants obtaining information from and being supported by various individuals. Participants learned about the college choice process and heard stories about others' college experiences that further informed the participants' decision-making processes.

I further noted that school personnel, family members, and friends were the ones providing this insight. Recognizing the presence of parents in other portions of the participants' stories, I established a theme dedicated specifically to the role parents played during search. The parent theme included findings from "resources and support" and from other categories. Based on what participants learned from the remaining individuals and the commonalities between them, I created a theme called "Influential Insight Gained from Persons Knowledgeable about College." School counselors, school administrators, and college friends and family assisted in such unique ways that I created three subthemes to describe the role each played for the participants. Finally, additional details from "resources and support" contributed to other themes, including "Parents Providing Information and Hands-on Assistance During Search" and the "Limited Use of Electronic and Print Publications" subtheme within the "Searching for College via Multiple Resources" theme. I followed a similar process of examining and reexamining categories and identifying appropriate themes to embrace the categories.

During both levels of coding, I maintained memos or written notes of analysis that chronicled my thoughts, questions, interpretations, and progress (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Memos kept me grounded in the data, provided me with "analytical distance from materials" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 218), and assisted me in moving from working with raw

data to concepts and then categories. Coding allowed me to discover explanations and an understanding of the concepts and experiences shared by the participants.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers use goodness and trustworthiness as the means by which the credibility of their study is established (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Goodness consists of having a clear and well-defined epistemology, a methodology that is guided by the aforementioned epistemology, methods or data collection procedures that are aligned with the methodology, a researcher who is aware of her relationship with participants and the phenomenon being studied, an interpretive process that is guided by the methodology and that leads to new insights, and recommendations that are given in order to improve the lives of others (Jones et al., 2006). I have defined the epistemology, methods, and methodology of this study in order to lay a strong foundation for conducting research that was trustworthy, credible, and sound.

The four elements of trustworthiness are the following: credibility – the establishment of confidence in the truth of the findings, transferability – the extent to which findings are applicable in different contexts or with different participants, dependability – the degree to which the inquiry could be replicated, and confirmability – assurance that findings are based on the participants' stories and not on researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba). Creswell (1998) described eight verification procedures by which trustworthiness is determined. Creswell recommended engaging in at least two of the procedures to maintain high quality work and to obtain trustworthiness. Following are explanations of the techniques that I employed to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility can be established through triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data are triangulated if the data collection methods by which they are produced or the sources from which they emerge yield consistent information (Lincoln & Guba). Data were produced by different methods (i.e., interviewing and analyses of questionnaires and school records) and from different sources (i.e., two interviews, demographic questionnaire, and school records) and were compared for consistency. I synthesized the information and identified similarities and differences. During the second interviews, I asked participants for their insights into any discrepancies or inconsistencies that were found from the various sources. Changes and confirmations that were made during this triangulation I incorporated into the data analysis, findings, and conclusions.

Credibility was also established through peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is the process of exploring various aspects of the study with a colleague. Peer debriefing is most effective when the debriefer is truly a peer and is knowledgeable about the content area and methodology being employed (Lincoln & Guba). My peer debriefer was an African America woman with an advanced degree and experience with Black youth in urban communities. My peer debriefer played devil's advocate and challenged the meanings and interpretations of data and potential biases I may have held (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). She was familiar with the college-going patterns of urban Black males, but not college choice in particular. My peer debriefer and I spoke after the first round of interviews, after initial coding, and again after focused coding. Conversations with my peer debriefer extended my thinking because her perspectives were often different from mine, and I began examining how grounded my interpretations were in the data. She

85

acted as a sounding board for potential concepts, categories, findings and interpretations, and encouraged me to think more deeply about the inquiry process and elements of it that I had not explored (Lincoln & Guba).

Finally, credibility was addressed by conducting member checks. The member check is a process by which "analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Lincoln and Guba described member checks as the most important method by which credibility is established. Member checks are ideal because they allow the researcher to begin summarizing interview data, correct factual mistakes, hear the participants' views on the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations, and receive additional information from participants (Lincoln & Guba). Member checks were conducted with the participants during their second interview. I orally presented the participants with themes, statement summaries, and interpretations that I developed based on their first interview, demographic questionnaire, and school records and requested feedback on that information. I made notes of participants' comments regarding their agreement or disagreement with the statement summaries, interpretations, and reconstructions of their experiences that I created for them. After the first drafts of narratives were completed, I sent the draft to each participant via email to conduct a second member check. In addition to the draft of the narrative, I included a bulleted summary of the conclusions drawn about the participant. I asked for the participant's reaction to the narrative or narrative highlights. Two participants responded. The feedback from these processes is incorporated into the analyses that are presented in Chapter V.

Transferability

Researchers must provide a "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316) to establish the transferability of data from one context to another. I presented concrete descriptions and details about the participants (Creswell, 1998) and the research design to provide thick descriptions that would help increase one's understanding of the topic being explored. Presenting a rich description provides readers enough information to allow them to make conclusions about the significance and meaning of the content that is presented (Patton, 2002) and the potential for it to be transferred to other settings (Creswell).

Dependability and Confirmability

While conducting this study, I maintained an audit trail, a comprehensive account of the research process that demonstrates the correlation between the methodology, the findings, and the conclusion (Bailey, 2007). The audit trail includes interview data, memos and other notes, codes, categories, and my reflexive journal that held my thoughts and comments on the research process.

Confirmability and dependability were simultaneously achieved through the use of an inquiry auditor who examined the inquiry process and product and confirmed that the product and process are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My inquiry auditor had approximately 10 years of experience in K-12 schools as a teacher and as an administrator. She was familiar with the college-going patterns of Black males in her school district, one of the largest in the U.S., but not particular college choice literature. My inquiry auditor examined the protocol questions and research questions and read transcripts, narratives, themes, and findings, noting that they were supported by the data.

My inquiry auditor was able to complete this process for only 5 of the 11 sets of transcripts and narratives.

Finally, I kept a reflexive journal of my thoughts about research decisions that were made and methods that were used during the research process. I wrote in the journal at the end of a day of interviews and as I analyzed data and established conclusions. The journal allowed me to reflect about myself as the "instrument of the research" (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 84) as it included my personal reactions to the data and potential biases. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that engaging in reflexive journaling addressed all four components of trustworthiness.

Role of the Researcher

In the qualitative tradition, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Subsequently, it is imperative that researchers are aware of how their background and experiences could affect the research and final product (Jones, 2002; Merriam).

My academic training is in elementary education, psychology, and higher education and student affairs. The majority of my professional experience has been in higher education administration and student affairs at large four-year public universities and at the administrative office of a system of higher education institutions. Additionally, I taught second grade in a Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade school in a predominantly Black urban area and 6th grade in a middle school located in a racially mixed suburb on the East Coast.

The foundation of my interest in the postsecondary decision-making processes of Blacks is my personal college choice story. According to K. Freeman (2005), I was a

knower. I recall talking about attending college as early as the 3rd grade. The two most

influential people in my life, my mother and godmother, had master's degrees and high

expectations for my educational attainment. I estimate that 95% of the students from my

urban Catholic high school went on to some level of postsecondary education; 100% of

my closest peers attended and graduated from college. My peers and I visited and

completed summer academic enrichment programs at colleges and universities, met with

our high school counselor frequently, discussed college with each other and our parents

regularly, completed college applications together, and applied for many scholarships. I

was in a very college-focused environment.

I applied to and was accepted by seven colleges and universities. My top two

choices for college were Historically Black Institutions (HBI); I received virtually no

financial aid from either of those schools. When I received a letter announcing a full

scholarship to the University of Maryland, I was content because I knew my mother did

not have the money to pay for my postsecondary education, and I was able to avoid loans.

I was, however, devastated that I would not be attending an HBI. Ultimately, finances

dictated my college choice decisions.

My understanding of Pre-K-12 and higher education policies and practices as they

relate to college going has been immensely strengthened by my experience with Pre-K-16

programming. This work has allowed me to understand how organizational predicaments

such as the misalignment of Pre-K-12 and higher education curricula and the absence of

college admissions guidance counseling in many public high schools can affect students'

postsecondary decisions. My experience as a public school teacher also informed this

research. I taught academically talented Black students in the 2nd grade. For more than

95% of the students, college was not a part of their mindset. When asked what they would do after high school, almost all students answered that they would get a job. In the students' experiences, pursuing a job was what everyone did after high school. This mentality was contrary to what I believed when I was in grade school. I was disheartened by their expectations, especially considering the talent level of the children. I have also worked with academically talented middle and high school students who do not see themselves as admissible to college and other students who aspire to college, but are unsure of how to achieve that goal. Even at the high school level, those who did express an interest in college were uninformed about admissions and financial aid applications, different types of colleges, and how they should prepare for college.

My personal story and my experiences in public school systems and in higher education administration have encouraged the formation of this study. These opportunities have allowed me to gain first-hand knowledge of how personal situations and organizational policies, agendas, and decisions can facilitate and hinder a student's college decision-making process. Over the years I have come to believe that college is beneficial and can add value to most people's lives. I recognize, however, that college is not the best decision for everyone. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that Pre-K-12 schools should academically prepare all students to attend and succeed in college and that all students should have access to information and resources that will prepare them to make decisions about applying to, financing, and selecting a college or university. These experiences and my philosophy on education brought bias and strength to this research. Being aware of these potential biases helped me stay honest during data collection and

analysis. These experiences offered a strong foundation on which I built this research. They gave me a more comprehensive understanding of the college choice process.

I also came to this study as a Black woman exploring an issue from the perspectives of Black teen-aged males. My status as a Black woman meant that I was the same race as the participants. It is possible that this commonality helped establish a level of comfort and a good rapport between the participants and me. Being of the same race eliminated the history of racism and issues of power and privilege that may have existed between interracial participant and researcher pairings (Seidman, 2006). However, regarding gender, it is possible that my status as an outsider to the male participants was affected by sexism (Seidman).

These aspects of identity should be acknowledged because they could contribute to the dynamics of the conversation during an interview (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Power issues such as race, gender, and age are prevalent in society and often find their way into interviewing relationships. Subsequently, researchers should understand the extent to which these dynamics may be manifested during interviews (Rossman & Rallis).

I am an outsider in terms of age for all participants. I anticipate that although the participants knew that I was not their peer, they knew that I was not old enough to be their parent or guardian. I expect that this allowed me to be taken seriously without the presence of restrictions that participants may have felt toward someone who reminded them of their parents or guardians. Furthermore, I have experience working with high school students and training in interpersonal communication that prepared me to relate to the participants without being patronizing. Finally, I interviewed the participants more

than once which allowed me the opportunity to gain their trust and help them overcome

any misgivings they had based on the aforementioned demographic differences or

similarities (Seidman, 2006; Warren, 2002).

I collected data with this information in mind. Acknowledging these facts adds to

the trustworthiness of the study. Although I allowed my experiences to strengthen my

role as a researcher, I maintained enough distance to effectively ask questions and listen

(Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). I was an empathic researcher who established rapport and

was nonjudgmental, respectful, and sensitive to the participants, setting, data, and

aforementioned personal biases (Merriam). Rossman and Rallis (1998) recommended

that interviewers be skilled interpersonal communicators and sensitive to cultural cues. I

have had graduate courses and training in cultural sensitivity, and have conducted

individual interviews for graduate courses and as a member of a research team. These

experiences contributed to my ability to be a sensitive and effective communicator. Also,

I maintained a reflexive journal to help me accomplish these goals. The journal included

notes regarding decisions made about the methodology, but also included my personal

feelings and thoughts as they pertained to the research process, my personal reactions to

the data, and potential biases. This helped me be more cognizant of my feelings and how

they may have affected data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting ethical research was of the utmost importance throughout this study.

In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, I ensured that all information they

shared with me and all paperwork associated with the study remained confidential.

Participants signed a consent form that described the measures taken to maintain their

confidentiality. I also verbally reviewed this information with participants and reiterated the option they had to opt out of the study at any time. Finally, each interview was held in Ms. Hale's office, which allowed for private closed-door sessions. During these sessions, I treated all participants with respect, created a comfortable environment, and remained non-judgmental in order to facilitate participants' sharing of their college decision-making processes. No ethical dilemmas arose as this research was being conducted.

Summary

I utilized a narrative inquiry methodology to explore the research questions that guided this study. Narrative inquiry enabled me to hear participants tell stories of the journeys they were taking toward a college education. Data were collected via interviews, demographic questionnaires, and school records. Although no one specific data analysis procedure accompanies narrative inquiry, I used initial and focused coding and established categories and subcategories by analyzing data within and across sources. I employed several techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. These processes guided me through the retelling and interpretation of the participants' stories in order to create their individual narratives that are presented in Chapter IV and the thematic connections across narratives that are presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to tell the stories of 11 Black high school males who were engaged in college selection and decision-making processes. Each individual narrative focuses principally on the content of the participants' descriptions of their college choice processes and barriers and concerns they have faced. Table I provides a brief demographic introduction of each participant. Within the table and within this chapter, participants are organized by one of the theoretical frameworks that guided this research, K. Freeman's (2005) classifications of African American students during predisposition. K. Freeman's (2005) description of knowers, seekers, and dreamers is a useful organizational tool to identify participants according to the time during which they became predisposed to college. Considering this research's focus on the predisposition stage of the college choice process and that K. Freeman's work was normed on Black students, the model is an effective tool by which to organize the participants' narratives. Finally, the use of this model allows for an additional basis for comparison, theme formation, and discussion in Chapters V and VI.

The narratives are not interview summaries; rather, they are compilations of stories the participants told regarding their college decision-making processes from predisposition to where they were in the college choice process during the interviews. The narratives also include commentaries on the people and events that shaped the college decision-making process for each young man and the Black male participants' insights about fewer Black males being enrolled in college than Black females.

Each participant's first interview was guided by the same protocol of questions. Second interviews were not guided by a protocol, but by questions that I developed to follow up on the conversation and stories that were shared during the first interview. Depending on the participant's experiences, the interviews differed in the amount of focus that was placed on particular issues and the extent to which a participant may have responded to particular questions. The issues that were highlighted during a participant's interviews are those that are brought forth most prominently in the following narratives. The stories, however, tend to be told in a chronological manner. An introduction is given for each participant. Each introduction is based on the information participants shared during their interviews and data gathered from school records and the demographic questionnaire. Each narrative explores the participant's predisposition and subsequent college search process and concludes with what is known about how each participant's plans were carried out. Within the descriptions of participants' search processes, references are made to a college or university's selectivity. These classifications are from *U.S. News and World Reports'* 2009 ranking of the nation's best colleges that identifies institutions as most selective, more selective, selective, less selective, and least selective based on the admissions test scores of incoming students.

In this chapter I offer narratives for each of the participants. The narratives are presented in order based on one of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, K. Freeman's (2005) model of African American students in the predisposition phase of the college search process. Knowers, participants who said, "The decision to go to college was so natural that it was like breathing" (K. Freeman, 2005, p. 25), are featured first. Seekers are presented next. Seekers are participants who, between grades 1 and 5, had

Table 1

Participant Introduction

K. Freeman's Classification	Name	Description
Knowers	John	18 years old; 4.06 senior-year GPA; 3.77 cumulative GPA; college-educated parents; career goal: sports agent, college athletic director, professional sports executive; applied to and accepted at five universities; accepted admission to first-choice college, a private HBCU with selective admissions standards
	Brian	17 years old; 4.1 senior-year GPA; 3.58 cumulative GPA; college-educated parents; career goal: pilot in armed services; applied to and accepted at two service academies with more selective admissions standards; accepted admission to one
	Timothy	17 years old; 3.37 senior-year GPA; 3.41 cumulative GPA; college-educated mother; career goal: entrepreneur; applied to and accepted at three universities; deciding between top two choices, both private HBCUs with selective admissions standards
Seekers	Mark	17 years old; 2.3 senior-year GPA; 1.39 cumulative GPA; mother attended but did not complete college; career goal: work with computers; applied to two community colleges and one four-year institution with less selective admissions standards; awaiting admission decisions
	Tony	17 years old; 2.3 senior-year GPA; 2.2 cumulative GPA; father attended but did not complete college; career goal: graphic designer; wanted to attend art school, but applied elsewhere due to parental pressure; awaiting admission decisions from pubic 4-year institution with selective admissions standards
	Brandon	16 years old; 2.0 junior-year GPA; 1.7 cumulative GPA; parents did not attend college; 1st generation US-born; career goal: lawyer or therapist; would not apply until next school year; would like to attend one of four institutions with more and most selective admissions standards

Table I (continued)

Participant Introduction

K. Freeman's Classification	Name	Description
Dreamers	Darryl	18 years old; 3.4 senior-year GPA; 3.2 cumulative GPA; college-educated parents; 1st generation US-born; career goal: graphic artist; applied to and accepted at three institutions, two with more and most selective admissions standards; accepted admission at top-choice, art school
	Dwight	18 years old; 2.2 senior-year GPA; 1.8 cumulative GPA; mother attended but did not complete college; career goal: work with computers; applied to five universities, all HBCUs with less and least selective admissions standards; accepted by three, rejected by one, awaiting other decisions to make final choice
	Sean	17 years old; 3.3 senior-year and cumulative GPA; guardians did not attend college; career goal: entrepreneur; applied to first-choice institution, an HBCU with selective admissions standards; awaiting admission decision, but preparing to apply to two other HBCUs with less selective admissions standards
	William	18 years old; 2.6 senior-year GPA; 2.16 cumulative GPA; parents did not attend college; born in Africa; career goal: sports writer; applied to three universities, HBCUs with less selective, least selective, and selective admissions standards; awaiting admission decisions
	Dion	17 years old; 2.3 senior-year GPA; 1.97 cumulative GPA; parents did not attend college; career goal: doctor or engineer; applied to three universities, two HBCUs with less selective admissions standards and one PWI with more selective admissions standards; did not complete the study

come to view themselves as potential college students. Finally, the narratives of participants who are dreamers are shared. Dreamers are less likely to consider college as a viable option and usually do not begin thinking about college attendance until seventh grade or later. The following narratives include quotations from the participants' interviews. In many cases, I eliminated placeholders such as, "um," "like," "you know," and "um," when they diminished the ability to understand the meaning of participants' words.

<p style="text-align:center">Knowers</p>

John: Proud but not Tooting His Own Horn

John, a proud, confident, yet cheerful and respectful student, was an 18-year-old senior who was identified as a possible participant for the study by Ms. Hale, a counselor at King High School. John believed that the study covered "an interesting topic," and he offered thoughtful responses and stories regarding his postsecondary plans. John lived with his mother, father, and 21-year-old sister who was a junior at a local four-year university and lived on campus during the school year. John grew up in the county in which King is located. He attended public schools within the same district as King and had been at King since his freshman year. While still in middle school, John decided to take Japanese in high school. He filed for and was granted special permission from the school system to attend King High School, which was not his neighborhood high school, to take Japanese. Even as a middle school student, John thought about challenging himself by taking unique courses. He recalled, "What made me want to take Japanese is

<p style="text-align:center">98</p>

that it's different. Everyone wants to learn Spanish. I said maybe I want to venture out

and try something different, so I tried Japanese and have been in it ever since."

John continued to accept and complete challenges throughout his high school

years. Since the 9th grade, John took the honors version of all classes that were available.

He took advanced placement (AP) English in the 11th grade and was currently in

advanced placement English and biology. Moreover, he had earned As in AP Biology

even though it was his hardest class. He took it because "I just thought it would be

something good to take." However, he didn't think the course was relevant to his interests

and thought "I'm not gon do anything in my life with this knowing the organic molecules

and this animal or organism or something like that." After pondering the situation and

listening to his father who said, "so when you go to college when you have to take a

course that might not help you you're not going to do good in it," John decided, "I just

need to work my hardest." John had also earned an A and a B in Japanese 4 and had done

just as well in all other courses too. His grade point average for the first two quarters of

his senior year was a 4.06.

John was active at school as the captain of a varsity sports team. He was proud

that he had been on the varsity team since his sophomore year. With a smile, he recalled

his parents' warning that "if my GPA isn't a 3.5 then I'm gon have to take a break from

sports." His hard work and intelligence paid off; he never had to quit playing sports for

academic reasons. In addition to his athletic pursuits, John was an officer in the National

Honor Society and a peer mediator at King. John was also active in multiple capacities at

his church, and stayed close to lessons his family taught him. He recalled, "That's mainly

what my family brought me up on, to participate in church, stay active in church." His

parents and grandparents were the most influential people in his life because they had

given him a good foundation and knowledge that had helped him be successful. He

concluded:

> I got knowledge from both my parents and then knowledge from another
> generation before my parents, my grandparents, and just grasped all the
> information from them and just come up with my own conclusions about different
> things.

> John placed a high value on education. He believed:

> If you truly want to be successful, if you really have high standards for yourself,
> that you need an education, that you need a higher education in your life to get to
> certain places in life. I think education is important 'cause there's so much stuff
> out there you need to know for life. Like you can't get through life being
> dumbfounded 'cause people take advantage of you if you're not knowledgeable.
> So, in order to stay ahead of the game and not let people take advantage of you,
> you need to know many different things in vast areas.

John thought he'd received a good education since kindergarten and had done extremely

well in high school, but was "ready to go to the next level."

"High school education is definitely not enough, definitely not enough." John's

parents set the wheels in motion for his plans to attend college. He knew that they

absolutely expected that he would go to college. He received that message from his

parents as early as elementary school. His parents were clear:

> I was going to college, going to college regardless and you just gon have to like it.
> With my expectations, I know I need to go to college, it's just that my parents had
> already told me I was going to college regardless of what I wanted.

By the 7th or 8th grade, however, he began to internalize the fact that "I am going to

college. I understand." John's parents had the same high educational expectations for

John's sister who was studying microbiology at a local four-year university that is

nationally recognized for its academic programs. John's mother graduated with a

bachelor's degree from and currently worked at his sister's university, and his father

earned a bachelor's degree from and played sports for a different local four-year institution. John acknowledged that the expectations and his career goals were too high for him not to continue his education. In fact, John had plans that would take him beyond a bachelor's degree. He had applied to and had been offered admission to a private Historically Black College (HBC) with selective admissions standards. He planned to major in business administration and then go to law school.

In addition to the strong family influence, John was inclined to go to college because it would allow him access to the workforce and opportunities to gain more knowledge. He proudly described his plan:

> I want to be a millionaire. And my parents always tell me…if you shoot for the moon you'll land among the stars. So even if I'm not a millionaire, I'll be comfortable and will be able to provide for my family and everything.

He laughed when saying, "with the things that I want in life, I definitely need a education to receive it, umm, legally, to receive the benefits legally." He also looked forward to college because he anticipated getting to know different ethnic groups, races, and cultures by moving to a new region of the country. He believed:

> It's about networking, getting to know different people 'cause when you go to college…you get to know many different ethnic groups, different races and even if you go to a HBC. Like [first choice college] is a HBC, but [with nearby predominantly White institutions] you're still going to be around different races and everything and then you get to learn many things about different cultures that you didn't know already.

John had thought a lot about his future and, around the 10th grade, began dreaming about being a sports agent, executive of a professional sports team, or a college athletic director. These potential careers and his educational expectations helped guide his college search process.

"I made my decision off of education." John began actively searching for colleges

at the beginning of his junior year when schools began recruiting him for athletics.

Although he knew he was going to college, he had only truly considered attending the

university at which his mother worked and his sister attended. When he started being

recruited by six institutions, he used those schools as the starting point of his search for a

college at which he could play sports and obtain a reputable education since he "wanted

to play sports, but it's about academics too." Ultimately, his list of potential schools

included seven schools – six that were recruiting him and his sister's university, which

was also his mother's alma mater.

As a high school junior, John's dream was to play sports at an NCAA Division I

university. He said:

> I always knew I was going to go to college 'cause I've always had good grades,
> but sports is something that's always on my heart. I love sports with a passion. So
> making my decision to go to school, it was kind of hard 'cause I want to play
> Division I athletics.

However, an injury convinced him that "I'm gon play in college, but I know that might

be the end of the road there." Since he knew it was not likely that he would play

professional sports, he decided to do "what's going to help me in the future, so I made

my decision off of education, well my parents told me to make my decision off education

too." Subsequently, he opted to focus on schools that were the best academic fit as

opposed to the ones with the strongest athletic programs.

Much of what John knew about applying to college he learned when he watched

his older sister go through the process in 2004. Although he was initially drawn to most

of the schools because of their sports programs, John took time to explore "who had the

best business school, what's their ranking in the business school?" Ultimately, he applied

to five colleges and universities – a private HBCU with selective admissions, two public PWIs, one with selective admissions and one with more selective admissions, and two private PWIs, one with more selective admissions and one with most selective admissions. With a cumulative GPA of over 3.5 and an SAT score of 1700, he was proud to share that he had been accepted at each of those institutions.

John visited seven colleges and universities – each of the schools to which he applied and two more to which he did not apply. John thought it was important to move away from home for college. He shared:

> I want to go away, not to say to find myself but if I'm here, if I'm close to home I know I can fall back on my parents. But there, that's like a 9-hour drive. You really can't fall back on your parents like that. You have to grow up and be a man, be an adult. So that's why I really want to go.

His parents wanted him to stay close to home, but did not object to his excitement about his first choice institution. John also wanted to be in a fairly urban area. Subsequently, after visiting two PWIs with more and most selective admissions that were "in the middle of nowhere…with just trees and a small little town," he did not apply to those schools. In addition to location, John was concerned about which colleges:

> Had the best business school. Then there was the ratio between students and teachers. Then of course, there was sports. Then it was like the atmosphere, like is it a party school? 'Cause I do want to have fun in college. College supposed to be the best years of your life. That's what most people say, it's the best years of your life. I thought about all those things.

John's popular and likable demeanor was immediately apparent when a school official stopped him in the hallway to give him a hug and to say congratulations for being accepted into his first-choice school. Receiving that kind of recognition from school officials meant a lot to John. He had been given a great deal of support with this process from both school officials and his family. John's counselors, including Ms. Hale, were

extremely helpful with completing forms for him and offering advice. With a smile, he

recalled:

> Well, my counselors they're real good. With every application that I put in front of them they really got on it, they were like quick. I don't know what to say but they were like serious. They really cared; they seemed to care for me. Like I want you to go be successful in college so that kind of motivated them to like I need to get all this stuff for them [students].

John had a close connection with one particular administrator who had graduated

from the college to which John was headed. This administrator had written a strong letter

of recommendation for John, and they had many conversations about the campus,

professors, and overall atmosphere at John's future college. John visited the

administrator's office almost every day and was excited to hear the administrator say, "it

would be a great experience for me to go down there…he said that the work is hard, but

he said it's going to pay off in the long run." John's parents were extremely influential in

his decisions. They planted the seed for John to attend college and maintained an active

role in his education. John and his parents spoke frequently about college and the pros

and cons of attending different universities. His mother and father also shared their

college experiences, discussed funding options, reviewed his applications, and went on

campus visits with John.

Although John was excited about attending an Historically Black Institution

(HBI), his list of potential schools did not originally include HBIs. John's future college,

the only HBI on his list of potential schools, began recruiting him later than the other

institutions. He recalled his parents and counselors asking if he planned to apply to an

HBI. His father warned him that although an HBI would give him a different perspective

on the world, HBIs are not representative of the world's power structure which is not

predominantly Black. John recalled his father telling him, "It's different from the world because you have African Americans running the program. He says that's really not the way of the world. He says, not everywhere in the world the Black person will be running everything." Despite his father's concern, John was still excited about attending an HBI. John had become invested in how he will be inspired by and hopefully inspiring to Black males since "you really don't see that many African American males doing something positive with their lives."

"You don't really want to pay for undergraduate." John completed the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), but was not offered any funding since his family's income was too high, between $100,000 and $150,000. However, John had already been awarded academic and athletic scholarships that would completely fund four years of John's undergraduate education at his first-choice institution as long as he maintained a particular GPA and played on the sports team. Prior to receiving these scholarships, John received advice on college finances and debt. John shared, "My parents said you don't really want to pay for undergraduate. You're going to have to pay for graduate school, maybe you so you don't want to come out of undergraduate in debt." He received more advice from his administrator at King who said "he just got finished paying off his undergraduate loans a few years ago. He said it took him 10 years to pay off his loans." John concluded:

> My parents really showed me that money talks. Not money talks like don't make the decision by money, but at the same time you think about the long run and what's gon happen when you graduate from school. So you just have to kind of put everything together to see what really works for you.

This conversation seemed especially pertinent for John and his family as his parents had saved only a little money for college since his mother's employment at a

university afforded John the opportunity to receive tuition remission at any one of 10 undergraduate degree-granting institutions within that system of higher education institutions. If he had not received the scholarships to his first-choice school, John imagined that he might have been at one of the system schools. Two of the five schools to which John applied were in this particular system, so attending one of them was not inconceivable. He believed, however, that if he had objected to going to any of the schools where he could have received tuition remission, his mother and father would have allowed him to attend the school of his choice even if it meant taking out loans. He said:

> If I was really like I really don't want to go there, I really want to go somewhere else, my parents would have most likely been behind me saying this is what you want to do. This is the next four to six years of your life. You have to like it; you have to enjoy it.

"They try to become something overnight and don't realize that it's a process."

The majority of John's friends planned to go to college. He also knew quite a few seniors who had decided to bypass college to go straight into the workforce. Although he had already made his mind up about his future and was not affected by others' postsecondary plans, "it feels better to know that my friends want to go to college too." John and his college-bound friends enjoyed talking about their college plans and how "life is getting real" as they prepared to leave the safety of high school for the more adult college life. His college-bound friends, especially two young men who were likely to attend the same HBI as John, have kept him excited about this new phase in his life.

Although most of his close friends planned to attend college, John knew that more Black females attended college than Black males. He observed that males, more often than females, "care about what people think" and are driven by a desire to quickly obtain

glamorous possessions. John believed that many Black men feel pressure to "try to become something overnight" even to the extent of dropping out of high school because they have and take opportunities to earn money quickly through illegal means. He knew young Black men who were often "home by themselves and they have to come up with things on their own…what they see out on the street, that's what they take in because the parent is working 9-5 and overtime with another job." He acknowledged, "I'm fortunate to have both my parents and grandparents too...telling me different things and instilling in me different qualities and that, yeah, I am going to college and stuff like that." John also believed that Black males, more than females, shy away from getting good grades in school. He said, "What I see around the school, people think if you get good grades, you can't be cool." With a sly smirk he noted, "Not trying to toot my own horn, but I have a 3.8 GPA, and I'm the captain of the team, and I'm popular."

Ultimately, John believed that families were the most critical factor in attempting to get more Black males to attend college. He recommended that families motivate and encourage their children "and just talk to them about college and what do you really want to do with your life, what process do you think it's going to take. What steps do you need to take to get there in life?" He saw a difference in the postsecondary plans of young men who were able to think about their long-term existence and patiently work toward a stable future and the postsecondary plans of those who "see all the glamour on TV and are like I have to get that right now. They try to become something overnight and don't realize that it's a process to receiving these different things." With his family's guidance, John had engaged in a long-term planning process, as he had a vision of the types of jobs he would

like to hold and had considered the extent to which he would be able to have and provide

for his family in the same way his parents do for him and his sister. He reflected:

> I've watched my parents. I like the family feeling. It's just being together and all
> that stuff. And I see my parents and how they act with us and with one another
> and I'm like o.k. I want that in my life too.

Successful plans. John received a certificate of merit as he graduated from King

High School in June 2007. He'd earned a 3.77 cumulative grade point average for his

entire high school career. John planned to continue working at his part-time job at an

office supply store for the remainder of the summer until it was time to leave for college.

John did not reply to my emails requesting an update on his postsecondary plans. Ms.

Hale, however, was fairly certain that John was headed to the prestigious HBI about

which he was so excited.

Brian: Military Bound

Brian was an intelligent, well-spoken, and fairly serious 17-year-old senior who

was recruited to the study by Ms. Hale. He agreed to participate and calmly shared how

he came to make postsecondary decisions. Brian grew up in the metropolitan area in

which King High School resides. He was an only child who was raised by his mother and

visited his father on weekends. Despite not being in the same household as his father,

Brian counted his father and mother as significant influences in his life. He said, "My

dad, well he was in the military. I think that was one thing that drew me to the military.

And my mom always encouraged me to do good in school and not make stupid

decisions." He attended several public elementary schools and one Catholic elementary

school because he moved frequently. He went to a public middle school that feeds into

King High School. Brian thought the education he had received from elementary through

high school was "adequate…could have been better…definitely could have been worse." He started at King in the 9th grade, was the captain of a sports team and active on a second sports team, and was in a military-affiliated organization. He was also involved in various activities at his church.

Brian took his education and classes seriously, as he felt it was "the stepping stone for whatever you want to do later in your life. 'Cause whatever you want to do you need education in order to do it." He was very intentional and strategic about the decisions he made regarding his education. As a senior, Brian had a full schedule of classes that included four AP courses. He opted not to take advantage of early dismissal which many seniors utilize once they have taken the courses that are required for graduation. He said:

> There is really no point in getting a half schedule unless you are going to work or whatever. And since I stopped working in senior year due to practices, I was like I might as well be here since I'm going to have to come back after school anyway.

Brian went above and beyond the minimum requirements and took several rigorous courses because "I was always told that colleges actually like when you actually don't just slack your senior year." The average of Brian's first and second quarter grade point averages was 4.1. He had earned all As and two Bs in the first two quarters.

"It just became second nature that after you graduate you are going to college." Brian's mother and father both earned bachelor's degrees and always expected that Brian would go to college and relayed that message to him early in life. He said:

> Well, they both [parents] always knew I was going to go to college. That's why they always tried to incorporate in me to keep my grades up and stuff like that. So, they both encouraged me to go to college – whichever one I chose.

He also had many aunts and uncles who went to college and "let me know every time I started slipping that I was going to get knocked out." To Brian it became "second nature that after you graduate you are going to college." Encouraged by his father's service in the army, Brian participated in a military affiliated organization from the 9th through 12th grades and was certain that he wanted to attend one of the United States military academies (also referred to as service academies). Brian's father tried to "encourage me to go to a regular college and just get a scholarship rather than applying to a service academy." Brian, however, remained intrigued by and interested in service in the military.

Brian viewed college as the way to success and a secure future. He considered the military academy a good choice for him because:

> If I go to the service academy, then it's free. So, that's four years of free college and then I'm guaranteed a job when I get out. Plus, even if I don't choose to stay in the military, that's like a top-notch education that can set me up for other jobs. Plus, you get military discounts when you go to buy a house and stuff like that.

College in general and attendance at a military academy specifically "just opens a lot of doors" and was something to which Brian sincerely aspired.

"I realized you get more opportunities…so I decided to try to get in." Before settling on the military, Brian considered studying engineering at civilian universities including two private PWIs with most selective admissions and two public PWIs with more selective admissions. He knew, however, that tuition would have been a considerable barrier. He recalled, "I was thinking about regular colleges like Penn State and some other ones. But then I thought about enlisting because I know without scholarships I wouldn't have been able to afford them." Subsequently, he considered joining the military which rewards service with funding for college. He contemplated

110

enlisting in the service "but then I realized you get like more opportunities as an officer. Plus, I've been drawn to flying and you have to be an officer to fly. So I decided to try to get into an academy." He considered this path most beneficial because he could obtain training for a career in addition to a highly regarded college education.

After making those decisions, Brian began exploring service academies during the 10th grade. At the end of his junior year, he attended a summer program at one of the military academies and subsequently completed applications to that and an additional military academy. Brian managed the process of obtaining three nominations (only one is required), passing medical evaluations, and passing the SAT with a 1320 to complete the application process for these service academies with more selective admissions standards. Brian was admitted to both academies and accepted admission at the academy where he went to the summer program. This was also the branch of the service affiliated with his military-related student organization. He was excited about enrolling to earn a bachelor of science in computer engineering. He explained, "There it's broken down into computer science. And then, you get a major in whatever you want and after that you specialize in a certain area. I'm going to specialize in aviation." Brian also planned to earn a master's degree in engineering.

Since Brian applied to only two colleges and those were fairly unique and specialized, he did a lot of research and exploration on his own. He did, however, receive assistance with the application process from his mother and by attending informational sessions and admissions seminars hosted by the service academies. Brian also credits his counselors who gave him college tips and information on different schools, but he did most of the search process on his own. He said:

I know my guidance counselors, they talked to me a lot. Like I don't think all the schools have as good of guidance counselors as we do. They will like sit there and work with you. They all gave me different college tips and stuff and information on different schools, but most of it, since I already knew what schools I wanted to go to, most of it has been on my own.

Finances – a moot point. As previously mentioned, when Brian considered traditional colleges, he was particularly concerned about the costs. He didn't know how much money his parents saved for his college education, but they began researching scholarships before Brian decided his first choice schools were U.S. military academies. The decision to enter a service academy made finances a moot point because the institutions do not charge tuition. He explained:

If I go to the [military academy] then it's free so that's four years of free college and then I'm guaranteed a job when I get out. Well, all service academies are free. They actually pay you while you are there so you have money to eat and stuff like that.

"Some Black males aren't so sure about what they want to do." Although some of Brian's friends planned to go to work after graduation, the majority was headed to either a traditional four-year college or a U.S. service academy. Brian was certain of his postsecondary plans. When asked if he had been affected by his friends' plans, he said, "Not really, but it would be tight [exciting] if we all went to the same school." Despite his friends' ambitions, Brian was not surprised that fewer Black males plan to attend college than Black females. He reflected:

Some Black males like aren't so sure about what they want to do. And it's not that they don't have plans or dreams or whatever, just they don't always focus around school. Like, it might be a stereotype, but most Black like Black athletes or whatever like most people instead of thinking I want to go to college, we think I want to play in the NBA. And then if we have to go to school we like don't graduate because like after our first or third year we decide we can go into the draft and start making money right then without getting the degree or whatever. And I think Black females are actually more focused on getting degrees because they are thinking about what can come after rather than just the current.

112

He also noticed that many Black males wanted money and success sooner rather than later and didn't consider the long-term instability that was inherent in some of their postsecondary plans. He believed that he was different from those Black males because he weighed the pros and cons of various plans and his decisions. He shared his thought process, "I guess I just think logically." He continued:

> 'Cause, I mean, I know I'm not the best basketball player or football player or anything like that. I mean, even though I was the captain, I can get a scholarship for my sport, but I don't think about like making that a career. 'Cause I know like the military is a lot more stable career than an athlete. 'Cause you can have one injury as an athlete and your whole career is over. But even if you get injured in the military, you still got benefits and you can also get relocated to a desk job and stuff like that. So the military just has more of a backup plan.

Knowing that Black males are often stigmatized by negative stereotypes, Brian said:

> It basically makes me work harder to prove to people that think I won't make it just because I'm Black. It makes me work harder to prove them wrong so they can see that I'm just as qualified as other people.

The next steps. Brian graduated from King High School with a 3.58 cumulative GPA, honors, and a certificate of merit in June 2007. He was in the top 1% of the class of 2007. Brian started school at a U.S. military academy less than one month after graduation. He did not respond to my email inquiries regarding final details of his postsecondary plans. However, due to the consistent and thorough manner in which he progressed through King, the excitement he showed about attending the service academy, and because he had already accepted admission prior to our interviews, Ms. Hale was fairly certain that Brian's postsecondary plans had unfolded smoothly.

Timothy: All About Business

Timothy displayed his calm and self-assured manner from the very beginning with direct eye contact and a strong presence. He was a 17-year-old student who was

identified as a possible research participant by Ms. Hale. After I described the study to him, Timothy eagerly signed up and was at each of his interviews on time and prepared to share his experiences and plans. Timothy was an only child who was being raised by his mother. He acknowledged his mother and maternal grandparents as the most influential people in his life. He said:

> My mother, I mean, 'cause she just raised me. She did everything for me and she taught me how to live a good life, like how to be respectful and all that. And my grandfather, like he just taught me how to be a good young man, how to respect people, he just taught me everything. And my grandmother, she just, she keep me grounded.

He was born and raised in and around the city in which King was located. Timothy attended a Catholic elementary school from kindergarten through the 4th grade. His mother took him out of Catholic schools because of the high tuition and sent Timothy to the public elementary and middle schools that fed into King High School.

Timothy played on a King High School sports team and was active in a business-related student organization that "teaches how the world is for the business aspect, for the business and financial aspect of the world." This student organization opened the doors to an internship that helped prepare Timothy for a career in business. During the 11th grade, he competed in and won a district wide competition to earn an internship at a federal government agency. During the 12th grade, he obtained another federal internship that he sought out and applied for independently. Both internships helped him "prepare for the business world…people taught me what to expect when I really get out in the world – like how to be professional, my attire, how to dress." His grade point average for the first two quarters of his senior year was 3.37. Besides the required senior English class and pre-calculus (which was not a graduation requirement), Timothy had four business-

related electives that he selected in order to prepare him for the business major he planned to pursue in college. He had consistently earned As and Bs in math and business courses. Timothy was a bright and hard-working student who had taken one AP course in the 11th grade and honors courses in English, math, science, and social studies throughout his high school years.

"My family members put college as a main priority." Timothy recalled being in elementary school when he first knew he would go to college. His mother, who earned a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, and other close family members "made sure that I knew that I needed to go to college." It had been an expectation in his home since he was in grade school, and for as long as he could remember, "I knew I was going to college." Timothy planned to major in Business Management in order to prepare himself to be an entrepreneur like his uncles and grandfather. Even though his uncles and grandfather did not graduate from college, he believed that college was the best way to prepare him to successfully accomplish his goals. He stated, "I want to be an entrepreneur. I really don't know what kind of business I'm going to start up." He imagined that he would "first get a job after going to college. Save up or something and then start my own business." Timothy also had educational expectations that went beyond an undergraduate degree to a Masters of Business Administration. If he decided to attend one particular college, he would enter that college's five-year program and graduate with an MBA. At other schools, he planned to return for an MBA after graduating with his undergraduate degree.

Timothy was clear about the importance of a good education. He said:

> I think you need money to live a good life and I think you need education in order to get that most of the time. Not to say that money is what makes you happy, but you need money to live a good life.

He hesitantly answered "yes," however, when asked if he had received a good education. He explained, "I feel that I'm smart but I think that, it's like other factors that made me feel smart, not just because of the education I receive. 'Cause, I mean the education is good, but it's just, it's just like average." He agreed, when I asked for clarification, that he thought his academic success had more to do with the effort he put into learning and achieving than the education that was given to him.

In addition to financial motivation for attending college, Timothy looked forward to going to college for personal reasons. For him, going to college was one of the first steps toward gaining independence and establishing new friendships and connections. He felt that going away to college or living on campus would help him:

> Become more independent of people that you're dependent on right now. And also you gain many friendships and you're able to network so you could have connections like when you need something or if you try to start a business or something if you have networks. You could meet a lot of good people to help you out and you could also help them out.

"That's all I'd hear about." During his junior year, Timothy took the SAT and began actively searching for colleges. Timothy was certain that he only wanted to attend an HBI. He was very familiar with two particular HBIs because "I was growing up, I'd go to the football games and that's all I'd hear about was just [those schools]. And I know they are both prestigious schools for HBCs that they're really prestigious so that really just made me want to go to one of the two." Additionally, his mother earned a bachelor's degree from one of the two schools and persuaded Timothy to explore attending that university. He then began exploring both universities beyond what he saw on the football

field. Timothy applied to these two universities, both private institutions with selective

admissions standards, and made them his first two choices. He applied to a third HBI, a

public university with less selective admissions standards, as a last resort school. An

above average student with a 3.41 cumulative GPA and an SAT score of 1500, Timothy

was accepted to all three colleges.

Timothy had been on the campus of one of his first choice schools, his mother's

alma mater, many times for football games, but not as a prospective student for tours or

informational sessions. He had, however, visited his other top choice for both athletic

events and as a potential student for a tour and admission information. When selecting

potential colleges, Timothy was most interested (in order of decreasing importance) in

the school's historically Black status, prestige, location, and size. He wanted to attend a

predominantly Black school because "I guess I just wanted to be with other African

Americans, majority African Americans, that's trying to be positive and do something

constructive with their lives and learn and with just other people of the same race."

Prestige was important because:

> When I'm looking for a job I think like companies they'll look at what school you
> went to to see other people that came from your school to see just the prestige to
> see if they think you're going to live up to that standard.

Location was also important for Timothy who wanted to live away from home in

order to become more independent. Although he could have commuted from his home to

two of the three colleges to which he applied, Timothy planned to live on campus

regardless of the school he finally selected. His mother also encouraged his desire to live

on campus. Finally, Timothy wanted to attend "a smaller school so there can be less

people in the class and the teacher could teach you more to each individual if it's less in the class."

Timothy casually dismissed the likelihood of attending the third choice on his list. He said:

> I already knew I didn't want to go to [names third choice school], but I just happened to be somewhere and they were accepting people on the spot. So I just did the interview and I got accepted, but I already knew I wasn't going to go there.

He was still somewhat torn, however, about which one of his first two choices to attend. He needed to make a decision within two weeks after our interview. Timothy was inclined to accept the offer for admission at the school that was the farthest from home because "it's away so it's going to help me mature and become more independent." He was not ready, however, to make a firm decision about his choice until closer to the final deadline.

Timothy's mother had been very hands-on in his college selection process. She talked to him about his plans and options, shared her college experiences, worked with him to complete the FAFSA, relayed the importance of living on campus, and helped him identify and apply for scholarships and brainstorm and organize for scholarship essays. Timothy had also received assistance from Ms. Hale and another counselor. He said the counselors "helped me write scholarships, given me letters of recommendation, and like they provide the scholarships and different things that you can apply for to get money to go to school." He often randomly visited Ms. Hale's office to share updates of his application and admission status. I knew this to be true since I had seen him in Ms. Hale's office several times before he was recruited for this study.

"It [cost] didn't matter to me." When he started considering colleges, Timothy selected his top choice schools regardless of cost. He applied to the schools that he thought would be a good fit for him and planned to live on campus even if he selected the university that was less than 10 miles away from his home and easily accessible by public transportation. In this way, he established that cost "didn't matter to me." Even though he made that statement, he was still conscious of the financial responsibility that comes with a higher education. Timothy knew his mother saved money for his postsecondary education, but he stated, "I need the scholarships to go to college." Subsequently, he sought out multiple financing options. With his mother's help, Timothy completed the FAFSA and was awarded four-year grants in the amount of $7,500 per year to each of his first two choice schools. He'd also received a merit-based scholarship from his third choice college. Believing that scholarships were the preferred way to pay for college, Timothy applied for over a dozen scholarships including two nationally recognized scholarships for students of color that fund a student for four years of undergraduate education. Not receiving scholarships, however, would not alter his school choices or college plans. Finally, he preferred not to take out loans, but he would if necessary. Timothy noted that "money to pay for tuition and stuff" could make college attendance more difficult, but he did not consider money to be a barrier for him.

"They [females] care more about their school work than males of any race." Timothy and his friends often shared their postsecondary plans and discussed their futures. Timothy's friends had a variety of post-graduation plans. He said, "Some of them going to college, 4-year college, some of them going to community college, some are thinking about going…just working or going to the little trade schools." Overall, most

119

were going on to some level of postsecondary education. Although he had friends who did not intend to continue their education, college attendance was so ingrained in him that "I haven't let anybody else, like my friends' decisions or anything, influence what I'm going to do."

Timothy was aware enough of the postsecondary plans of King High School seniors that he was not surprised to hear that more Black females plan to attend college than Black males. He observed that "you always hear about females, even females in general of any race, being more, like they care more about their school work than males of any race." Timothy proposed that a lack of encouragement and information are two main reasons Black males were less inclined to attend college. He stated, "I think maybe 'cause they don't have anyone, they really don't know nothing about it. People didn't give them information about it." He also believed that a desire for fast money contributed to fewer Black males in college. He said, "They want things, like materialistic things, so they want to get a job to work to get money to get that, so they not worried about college." He believed he was able to reject those pressures because "I had like family members just constantly in my head with it since I was little. I think that's the reason why."

Timothy also believed that many Black males were not headed for college because they were unclear about what kinds of careers they want to pursue. He contended that Black males would be more likely to attend college if they knew "what they like doing and then just try to find careers that revolve around that and just look for information to do that." Timothy also felt that Black males may be more inclined to go to college if they knew the benefits of college and the drawbacks to nonattendance. He said:

I think they could bring in Black men to give them information about what college can do for them. And maybe like they could find Black men that was like the kids that's in the school right now and who thought the same way they do right now but went to college and became successful or whatever and come back to tell them how they were and just stuff like that.

Although he believed that both an individual's motivation and high school counselors and teachers were critical to increasing the number of Black males attending college, he considered family to be the most significant force of all. He said, "I think it's the family because you're nurtured from a baby so. I think your family has to put it in you 'cause from since you're little you don't know nothing about it, so somebody has to teach you about it." Timothy has been influenced by the reality that many Black males are not headed for college. He concluded:

It has influenced me to go to college because maybe like other races don't think that Black males are as good as them or smart. But, I know I am, so I'll go to college and prove them wrong and I can help future generations of Black males decide to go to college.

Leaving King. Timothy received a certificate of merit as he graduated from King High School in June 2007. His high school cumulative grade point average was 3.41. Timothy was one of the two participants who responded to my email inquiry to receive an update on their postsecondary plans. When he responded he was approximately one week away from moving to college. He had accepted admission into the five-year MBA program at the out-of-state HBI that was one of his top choices.

Seekers

Mark: Overcoming a Slow Start

Mark, a mild mannered and mellow student, was a 17-year-old senior who was in the initial wave of students expressing interest in the study. Mark was an only child who

lived with his mother and father. He identified his parents and grandmother as the most influential people in his life. He said, "My dad, he taught me sports. My mom, she taught me manners. My grandmother, she just told me to treat everybody the way you want to be treated." Mark was born and raised in the county in which King is located and had always attended public schools within the same district as King. He played on a varsity sports team at King and on a basketball team at a community center. Although he was not involved in any other extracurricular activities in school, he was involved in a cotillion for a community center. He described the cotillion as "something different" that teaches "you different things like manners and different dances."

Mark's senior year grade point average was 2.3 after the first two quarters. He had an abbreviated schedule that allowed him to leave school after two periods of a four period day. He was enrolled in a mandatory English class and physical education, forensic science, history, and environmental relations electives. Mark viewed education as critical to one's success. He said:

> I think education real important, especially now. I want a good job. Everybody want to make a lot of money. Like my dad, he only got a high school diploma but he got a good job. Back then it was easier, but now it's a lot harder with just a high school diploma.

Mark had received messages about the need to acquire a higher education from his father and teachers.

Unfortunately, Mark thought his kindergarten through 8th grade education put him at a disadvantage. When asked if he had received a good education, he stated, "Here at King, I did. But, in middle school, somewhat. But, in elementary, not at all." He went on to elaborate:

Elementary school, like the one I went to, was known for being real bad and really we didn't learn anything. When I left elementary school, I wasn't ready for junior high at all. I was struggling in classes when I got there, and in 7th, I got together.

Mark identified his low academic achievement as the one barrier to his going to college and to doing well in college. When discussing potential barriers to college, he said:

Probably my grades and probably like going back to elementary school like I ain't get the basic stuff that elementary schools give to you. The one [school] I went to they ain't really teach you, they ain't really try to push you that much. I mean, I don't know what happened.

"If you want a nice car and a nice house…" Mark recalled that he knew he wanted to go to college when he was still in elementary school. He stated, "I wanted to go to college back in elementary school. And that's when they [parents] started telling me [about needing to attend college]." His first memories of knowing about college helped secure his college-bound vision for himself. He said, "My cousin went to college…I forgot the name of it, but it's in [named city]. I just always wanted to go to college." In middle school, he began thinking more about college attendance when "everybody [family and friends] was telling me like, if you want a nice car and a nice house when you get older, you got to go to college."

In addition to wanting to attend college in order to obtain nice material possessions, Mark looked at college as a way to get experiences that would help steer his career. He said:

You can get like an internship at places like if you want to see if you want to work there to see if that's really what you want to do. That's why I want to go to college like, to really see if I really want to work on computers, so I'll just go for an internship.

Mark also considered becoming a detective. He was taking a forensic science elective to help inform that decision, but said that the class was "pretty difficult." His first choice career, however, was to work with computers.

Mark's plans to attend college had been influenced by his grandmother and father who never attended college and encouraged him to do so. Also greatly affecting Mark, however, was his mother who "went to college, but she wished she would have gone for longer. She went, but she wanted to go back again. She wasn't thinking about it back then. But she said now, she wished she would have went longer." Additionally, Mark had a cousin who was helpful in exposing him to college and directing his thoughts and plans regarding college. He said his cousin "showed me the books and she was like she was gon help me and said how hard it is to get through college. She was like it's not easy and you gon have to study long nights."

"I don't think they gon accept me." In the 11th grade, Mark began actively searching for colleges and universities. His parents were extremely supportive of their son's plans. When Mark needed assistance with applying to colleges, filling out applications, and understanding financial aid, however, he went to "my counselor and my cousin(s) that went to college…they helped me out a lot." Mark said he applied to a lot of schools, but could only recall the names of three – a private, predominantly White, four-year college with less selective admissions standards, the community college in his county, and a community college in an adjacent county. The four-year institution was his first choice because it was located where he had "family that I don't really see and I want to spend time with them." Mark was doubtful, however, that the four-year institution would accept him. He said, "I don't think they gon accept me because of my grades. I

124

started out slow. So, I'm like I'll probably gon have to end up going to [names community college]." Mark imagined that he would transfer to his state's flagship university and said that he would be happy there although it was not a school he'd initially considered.

Mark did not express a preference for many specific institutional characteristics such as size and location. He only hoped that the college he attended had "a nice atmosphere, like just really a nice atmosphere. As long as you have a good education." He defined a "nice atmosphere" as "nice teachers and students." Mark did not identify any other institutional characteristics that mattered to him. As of our interviews, Mark had not visited any of the colleges in which he was interested. He said he "hadn't had time to really because of sports" but that it is likely that he will "now that I got my car."

Finances. Mark was aware that many people do not have the money to go to college. He did not, however, express concern about paying for college. Mark was unaware of tuition costs at the community college and did not acknowledge factoring finances into his college decision-making process. He said that his parents had saved money for him to go to college and that they would "do it [pay]…'cause I was planning on going to the community college and then transferring. Then I'm playing athletics, so hopefully that would help out also. Not a full scholarship, but at least pay for some of it."

"I ain't want to end up like them doing nothing." Mark referred several times to his best friend who was also college-bound. In fact, Mark and his friend "want to go to the same college, so we won't feel like lost. We said we think it would be better if we went to college at the same time. It would be easier on both of us." They both applied to the community college and spoke often about their postsecondary lives and plans. Mark's

best friend is also the one to whom Mark would turn when having academic problems. Mark said, "He's pretty smart so he could help me out. We went to the same elementary school, but he was like in the Talented and Gifted program." Mark had more friends, however, who were not headed to college. He said, "My friends came from the same elementary school, so most of them ended up dropping out. They ended up dropping out or getting kicked out of high school. Only a few of my friends still go here." These friends influenced Mark because "I ain't want to end up like them doing nothing. I wanted to do something with my life."

Mark was not surprised to hear that more Black females than males attend college. In fact, he was striving to attend college because "I know people say there's not that many Black males going to college so I want to prove them wrong and be successful." From what he saw of Black males:

> Most of them just give up. Like, if they ain't got the money, then what's the point. So like they already had bad grades and they don't know like you can go to community college and then transfer. So, they just give up, like what's the point.

Mark believed he was different from those Black males because he had "somebody telling me about all those things and different options." Just like his family encouraged him to pursue a higher education, he thought families were the most important resource in trying to get more Black males to college. He said, "I think family is the biggest influence. They can tell you like, you can be something when you get older. You ain't got to depend on nobody. You can be somebody when you get older. You can go to school, get your degree, and get a good job."

"By the skin of his teeth." Mark graduated from King High School in June 2007. His cumulative grade point average was 1.39, lowered greatly by his low grade point

averages from the first two years of high school. According to Ms. Hale, Mark received a "jeopardy letter" during the second semester of his senior year because of the need to earn certain grades in order to graduate from King. Mark did meet the requirements, but graduated "by the skin of his teeth" according to Ms. Hale. Mark did not make a final report of his postsecondary plans to King officials. Additionally, he did not respond to my emails requesting an update on his postsecondary plans. Therefore, it is unclear if Mark achieved his goal of attending college or not. Even with a 1.39 grade point average, however, it is likely that Mark would have been accepted by the local community college, which was his contingency plan.

Tony: Certain Goal, Uncertain Path

Tony was a carefree and casual 17-year-old senior who volunteered for the study during the first round of recruitment. He had attended public schools since kindergarten and had been at King since his freshman year. Tony was involved in church activities and drama and art-related clubs at King. He lived in his great grandmother's house with his three siblings, uncle, grandmother, and great grandmother. He noted that his mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandmother, and great grandmother all raised him although neither his mother nor father lived permanently in the house with him. Nevertheless, his mother was extremely hands-on as he made postsecondary plans, and he identified his father as one of the most influential people in his life.

> Although he did not have daily contact with his father, Tony's dad cautioned him:
>
> To pay attention in school. 'Cause he used to tell me stories about how he messed up because he thought that he was grown and stuff because he had a job and all that. 'Cause, he went to [a county high school] and he was good on the football team and everything and took them to the state championship when he was there. Then, he thought he was all high and mighty and they sent him out to Nebraska. He said there was nothing out there so he was like I'm going to leave and drop

out. He always told me that he let a good opportunity get away 'cause he always tells me that he could have been in the NFL or something but that he messed up 'cause his mind wasn't on schoolwork. So he always pushing me towards that.

At the time of the interviews, Tony had a senior year average of 2.3 out of 4.0 for the first and second quarters. As a senior, Tony was taking AP computer graphics, German 4, Algebra 2, and computer applications and web design. AP computer graphics was the only advanced level course he had taken in high school. Tony believed that education was important, but he was not happy with being forced to take certain courses. He said:

> My views on education is that it's necessary, but some of the stuff that's being taught I don't think that I'll personally have to use it. Like some of the math. 'Cause math always frustrated me ever since I was younger. 'Cause I always thought that no one was going to come up to ask me for like five-tenths of a dollar or something like that. So I always thought that that part of math wasn't necessary.

It seemed that his biggest problem was with math and not all non-art related courses. Tony was receiving tutoring for algebra 2 and had grades of D and E (failing) for the first and second quarters. However, he enjoyed and earned Bs and Cs in German 4, computer applications, and English.

Confusing postsecondary plans. Tony planned on studying art in college and becoming a graphic designer. In the 11th grade, Tony decided that he was going to attend a local art school to earn a bachelor's degree in graphic design or animation. He had loved art since elementary school and laughed as he recalled "me and my friends in 3rd grade, we used to draw little comics in class and when the week was over we'd show them to our parents and stuff." Subsequently, he was sure of his future career, saying "I been stuck to that idea for the longest time," but his postsecondary plans were in flux. On

the participant recruitment forms, Tony indicated that he did not plan to attend college. When we met, however, his answer was not that clear cut. During our first conversation, he called his postsecondary plans "confusing."

Tony's mother had recently made plans to send him to live with an uncle across the country. His mother was initially supportive of Tony's plans to attend art school, and he was unsure of why he was being sent away. He shared:

> My mother, she is sending me out west to live with my uncle. She want me to go to school out there for a year, but she hasn't told me why. All I know is that she was like, you going if you want to go or not.

By the second interview, his older sister explained that he was being sent because of "independence and stuff and how they won't always be there to help me do stuff and that's what they said. That's all she told me. So I got to learn to do things for myself." Tony felt comfortable continuing his participation in the study since he could address how he became interested in obtaining a postsecondary education and the plans he had prior to hearing of his mother's plans for him. Additionally, he also started a revised search process to enroll in postsecondary education in what was to be his new home state.

"It started when I was younger." Tony initially had thoughts about attending college based on expectations from his family. He said, "It started when I was younger; they [mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and aunt] would tell me that I was going to college and stuff like that." They supported his love of art and encouraged him to follow that path to college. He reminisced happily about his aunt's support of his artistic interest and ability. He recalled, "Back in middle school, she [his aunt] signed me up for this animation class. It was fun. I wanted to do it again, but I never got to." His family's

educational expectations and his understanding that he could pursue art in college

initially predisposed Tony to college.

Beyond that foundation, Tony was motivated to attend college because of his

older sister's current enrollment in college and because of finances. His 19-year-old sister

was a sophomore at an out-of-state university. Tony described his sister as an extremely

hard worker who was involved in and successful at many things. She had set an example

that encouraged Tony to do well and to pursue further education. Speaking of his sister,

Tony said:

> She was the one in the family that did everything. And she never wanted to stop.
> Me, I'm laid back. I didn't want to really, the stuff that I wanted to do, it wasn't as
> much as she did. So, she motivates me because sometimes I get jealous and
> irritated 'cause she doing all this stuff and I'm just sitting around watching TV.

She also helped Tony with specific college preparation tasks such as applying to schools

and researching information about institutions and degrees.

Tony was also inclined to pursue a college education because he'd read about the

differences in income for people with and without college degrees. He thought college

was advantageous because:

> You get paid more in the real world. I been knowing about that for the longest
> time. 'Cause I seen like papers comparing high school diploma paychecks to
> masters and bachelors degree paychecks. If I'm going to, like, have a family, I
> couldn't support my family with just a high school diploma. I'd need a doctorate
> or something like that.

Tony was a carefree young man who admitted that he did not like to do a lot of work and

who was not at all excited about the amount of work that he knew would be required in

college. When asked if there were any disadvantages to going to college, he said, "For me

I guess…just more work. But that's the only one I can think of." Nevertheless, he

planned to take on those responsibilities because he knew it was a necessary step to be

able to take care of himself and a family in the future. Although this foundation had been laid for Tony to pursue and attend college, he did not have specific plans on how to achieve those goals until the 11th grade when he learned about a few specific colleges.

"I just wanted to stick with one school." Tony began looking into particular colleges and universities after his art teacher told him about a local four-year art school to which many King High School alumni had gone. He recalled, "First I heard about [names a four-year university]. Then that next day, my teacher told me about the art school. Then I looked that up and was like, yeah, I like that school. It was close, and I was like yeah." In addition to the location, Tony was attracted to the school's sole focus on art and its small campus. When discussing his friend's desire to attend a large four-year PWI with more selective admissions standards, he said, "I been there and been looking around but, that's too many people. That's why I chose a small school like the art school. That could overwhelm me. I seen some of the freshmen go crazy!"

After researching the art school online, Tony began focusing on the art school, did not apply to the other institution, and no longer sought information about any other college. He said:

> I'm stubborn, so I just wanted to stick with one school and make it easier on everybody else [mother, aunt, grandmother]. 'Cause I know that some of them applications aren't cheap. So, I was trying to make it easier for them. Then they kept pushing me like you gotta fill out…what if you don't get into that school."

Tony, however, did not take their advice.

In preparation to apply to colleges, Tony took the SAT at the beginning of his senior year. He did not do well, but did not recall specific scores. Since taking the test the first time, he had enrolled in an SAT prep class at King and through the Educational

Talent Search program. Tony registered for a second attempt at the SAT, but did not take the test because he forgot the date. He was not sure if or when he would take it again.

Tony's family, particularly his mother, aunt, and grandmother, was supportive of his plans to attend the art school. He described both pushing and encouraging that his family does to get him motivated. Tony admitted:

> It's a little of both. If I get into my mode [low motivation], they will push me and other times they will support me. Like with the art school, my mother, she went up there with me to the school when I had an interview with all of my art I did this year and last year.

Before deciding he would go live with his uncle, Tony's mother also accompanied him to the art school for informational interviews, tours, and open houses, and advised him about the SAT. Tony's father did not have a say in Tony's move west. His father did, however, give Tony two special books:

> Some motivational book. It gets you to read some inspiring little statements each day. And, he bought me like this book so I can practice my art. It shows like the steps to draw like cars and animals and stuff. I been using that.

King contributed to Tony's college selection process in a number of ways. He learned about the art school and the second school he briefly considered through his art teacher and a university admissions representative who visited King. Ms. Hale also played a direct role in helping Tony. Referring to Ms. Hale, he said:

> She helped me when I had to fill out something called an applicant form, or something like that. But, she will give me information on a school. She told me a little bit more about the art school than my teacher did. Giving me requirements.

Since Tony's postsecondary plans had been rearranged when his mother announced that he was being sent to live with his uncle, he began considering attending college in the state to which he was moving. He recalled, "My uncle told me that there is a good computer graphics program there at the university. So I was like, yeah. I didn't

have a real problem with it." Tony's older sister assisted him with applying to the new institution via the Internet. Although Tony was becoming settled with the idea of moving, he still longed to attend the art school. The art school was absolutely his first-choice institution – where he sincerely wanted to attend. He said, "That's like the only school...like they [family] told me I should apply to more than one school and I was like, no, I want to go to this school." Subsequently, he was sure that when he returned home in one year, he would "fill out the application for the art school."

"Them applications aren't cheap." Tony planned to use financial aid and scholarships to pay for school. He and his family had completed the FAFSA, but he had not yet applied for any scholarships. His family had not saved money for his education although he anticipated that they would help him pay. Tony had no potential scholarships but had received the results of his FAFSA application saying, "they sent home the results of how much you would need to pay and how much they would cover and stuff" although he did not remember specifics. Nevertheless, he did not express any concerns about financing college. He did, however, express concern about the application fees and stating that one reason he only applied to one school was because "I know that some of them applications aren't cheap." This further convinced him not to research or apply to other colleges or universities even though his mother, aunt, and grandmother did not share his concern about the application fees and wanted him to apply to more than one school. When asked whether application fee costs or his dedication to attending the art school drove his desire to not pursue any other schools, Tony said it was both.

"They don't want more stress." A few of Tony's peers from King High School planned to attend the art school, and several were planning to attend a well-regarded four-

year university close to their home. Although Tony was excited about the prospect of going to school with people he knew, he based his decision to apply to the art school on his own research and career goals. Although most of Tony's friends planned to attend college, he was aware of many seniors at King who "talk about how they don't want to go to college. Those are just people I know. They aren't really friends, just associates. They talk about how they'd rather stay home." Most of those young people were Black men who felt that "high school has put enough stress on them and they don't want more stress directly after high school." Subsequently, Tony was not surprised that fewer Black males plan to attend college than Black females.

Tony took seriously the opportunity he had to prove people wrong who assumed that Blacks could not achieve great things. He wanted to attend and do well in college because:

> Back in the day White people didn't think that we were smart or that we'd be able to do well in the schools. So, I think that we can prove them wrong if we go to school and finish and live a good life after we're finished instead of going to jail every week or something like that.

He said he was different from the Black males who had no postsecondary plans because he had the:

> Potential to let the world know about how good my art is and stuff like that. But, I just can't do that staying at home. I gotta go out and talk to people and show them my work so that the world can be like, that guy can draw or that guy got a good cartoon or something like that.

Tony believed that the family was most important in trying to get more Black males into college. He said that families "could encourage them more. 'Cause some parents aren't very enthusiastic with their kids and their grades." He predicted that with familial encouragement and involvement with their children's school work, more Black

males might be inclined to attend college. He also believed that Black males needed to take responsibility. He said they needed to "push themselves a little more instead of going along with everybody else. Instead of going along with everybody else that's not going, they should do what they choose to do."

Staying home. Tony successfully graduated from King High School in June 2007. He earned a cumulative grade point average of 2.21 and was presented with a certificate of merit during the graduation ceremony. Tony informed Ms. Hale that he was no longer going to move in with his uncle. She did not, however, know what led to that change in his plans. He was staying at home and was applying to four-year institutions in his home state. Ms. Hale did not know, however, if the art school was one of those schools. Four months after our interviews, I emailed Tony to get an update on his college plans, but he did not respond.

Brandon: Seizing Opportunities not Given to His Parents

Brandon was the only qualified junior who volunteered to participate in the study. He signed up to participate in the study after it was announced by his English teacher. Brandon was a 16-year-old young man who was polite, mild-mannered, and helpful. I emailed him during the study to ask for his help recruiting other 11th-grade students. He responded promptly to my emails (which was not the case when I solicited help from other participants) and brought two friends he thought would be good for the study. Unfortunately, those friends did not meet the criteria for the study, but I was impressed and grateful that he tried to help.

Brandon lived with his mother, father, and two brothers, one in the 8th grade and one in the 12th grade. He was born and raised in the major city and outlying suburbs that

surround King High School. Although he identified himself as Black on all documentation for this research project and although he was born in the U.S., Brandon felt connected to the Caribbean island on which his parents were born. He stated, "I consider myself [names nationality] since my parents are from [names country]." In discussing how his parents influenced him, he shared that their nationality affected how he identified himself and thought of his place in the world. Brandon described being inspired by his parents' struggle because "growing up they didn't have the things I have and them working to give me the things that they didn't have so I could pursue a career that I like."

Brandon had attended public schools since kindergarten and had been at King since the 9ᵗʰ grade. He described himself as making good grades. His transcript, however, described a student who struggled with several classes. At the time we met, Brandon's junior year grade point average was 2.06. In the first two marking periods, he failed his foreign language class. During the first marking period he earned a D (which is a passing grade) in algebra 2 and an elective class that was connected to his career goals. By the second marking period, he improved the aforementioned Ds to Cs and earned Bs and Cs in his other courses. Brandon had not taken any AP or honors classes.

Brandon believed that education was "real important to survive in this world because everything is based on your prior education." Overall, he thought he had received a good education at King. However, he felt most prepared and informed by the classes that were preparing him for his goal of becoming a psychologist or lawyer. He said, "Psychology helps me because it's preparing me for when I go to college to study psychology and practical law is helping me to study law." He used electives to help him

make a better decision about which path he might want to take in the future. Even though Brandon did not feel as connected to his other courses, he felt they were useful because they challenged him.

"It's necessary if I want to strive for my goals." Brandon's parents had been encouraging him to go to college since he was in elementary school. He recalled:

> Since I was smaller I used to do good in school and got good grades in math and English and science and stuff like that, I always used to get grades. So since then they always expected me to go to college. But, at that point I wasn't really thinking about it. But, they encouraged me and I started taking the mind frame to go to college.

He believed that his success in school and the fact that his parents did not attend college made his parents expect that he could and should go to college after high school. When he first started receiving those messages, however, he said, "I wasn't really thinking about it." By the time he got to middle school, Brandon began to understand the importance of college and internalize that he would go to college. Brandon knew that college was "necessary for me if I want to strive for my goals [of becoming a lawyer or a psychologist]." Besides needing college to pursue his particular career goals, Brandon believed that having a college education would provide an advantage over competitors who did not have a college degree. He said, "If I go to college and someone else has just a high school diploma, those going for the same job, I would think they would hire me because I have college and have learned more."

Brandon had a brother who was one year older and months away from graduating from King and attending a community college. Although his brother did provide some support with thinking about and preparing for the college application process, Brandon was most encouraged by his cousin who had attended and graduated from a nationally

137

renowned four-year research university. This cousin gave him "a whole lot of information and a lot of hope. To see her get a full scholarship and she's telling me that I can do it too, that influenced me a lot." Even with his brother's pending attendance at a community college, knowing that he will be the first person in his household to attend a four-year university encouraged Brandon. He also took pride in knowing that his younger brother would benefit if he achieved his goals of attending college. Referring to his brother in the 8th grade, Brandon said, "Well, he looks up to me for everything. So, if I am able to go to college, get a good education, and come out and be somebody, I think that would push him to do the same thing."

Brandon's ideas about going to college became clearer in his mind once he started considering possible careers. In middle school, Brandon began thinking about becoming a lawyer. His college-educated uncle who worked in a law firm began sharing his knowledge and experience with Brandon. This encouraged Brandon's thoughts about becoming a lawyer and going to "work with him during the summer" to get legal experience. Additionally, Brandon took a practical law elective at the encouragement of a teacher at King. That experience and teacher further encouraged Brandon to continue his education when the teacher told him "to go to college because I am so good in it that I could do something with it." Brandon's interest in psychology, his other potential profession, developed in the 10th grade and was facilitated by a teacher who talked about the profession. That interaction influenced Brandon to take psychology as an elective and to plan to take AP psychology as a senior.

"An environment who is pushing you…toward your goals." Brandon had not yet started to actively engage in the college search process. He did, however, have a list of

schools he would consider attending. Brandon was interested in four large public

research-intensive schools with strong and visible sports programs. Three of these PWIs

have more selective admissions standards and one has most selective admissions

standards. When asked why he would consider those specific schools, he said, "First of

all, they have good sports teams. And, the type of course they have, I would want to take

those courses." He also considered other characteristics about the schools. An in-state

institution appealed to him "because I live close and it would be cheaper." Another

school appealed to him because "I have family down there and they live close to it, so

that would be easy." He began considering one of the other schools when he thought he

might pursue a technical major. He said, "I wanted to go there because I was interested in

technical stuff and I thought that would be a good school."

Generally, when selecting a college or university, Brandon planned to consider

the location and environment of the school and if the school had his projected majors. He

did not mind going away from home. Only one of the schools in which he expressed

interest was close to his home. The other universities were all more than an eight-hour

drive from his home. He did, however, prefer to not be in an:

> Urban environment like where I am now because there's a lot of things that could
> pull you away from doing what you want to do. 'Cause, I look around me and I
> see people staying out of school and skipping school and stuff like that because of
> the people who are around them. So I want to go to an environment who is
> pushing you to stay toward your goals.

Brandon's primary sources of information were his cousin who had graduated

from one of the universities he considered attending and an uncle who worked for a law

firm and encouraged Brandon's interest in becoming a lawyer. His cousin gave him

insight into college courses and what to expect. His uncle "tells me about good schools

that deal in law" and helped him understand the process of becoming a lawyer. Brandon knew "you have to take four years of college and then go to law school." Beyond majoring in psychology, he was not clear on the path to becoming a therapist, but listened intently as I described possible educational paths to becoming a therapist. Brandon had not, however, started considering specifics regarding the college selection process. When asked what he knew about the application process, he said, "It's kind of hard because you might apply to a school and not be accepted and you can only pick a certain amount of schools." He also stated that he had not received any information from King regarding the upcoming college decision-making process. Nevertheless, he planned to go to his high school counselor when he began to actively search for and apply to colleges.

Brandon had not begun to thoroughly consider how he would pay for college. Although he considered one barrier or disadvantage of going to college to be finances, he did not personally have concerns about the cost of a school. He had heard from teachers who said they are "still paying off their college debt" and determined that money "really doesn't matter" and that he would still pursue his college dreams. Brandon believed that one of his aunts was saving money for his college education, but he had also received messages from his parents that he should be ready to contribute financially to his education. More than one time his parents told him that he should "get a job so I can pay some." Subsequently, he planned to "get a job on the side while I'm still going to school" and to apply for financial aid and scholarships. Brandon had a limited amount of information about college cost and assumed that one of the schools he was considering cost several thousands of dollars less than it actually does. Brandon, however, had decided that he would go to college despite the cost.

"They just want to get a break from school." The majority of Brandon's peers were not planning to go to college immediately after high school graduation. Many of them said "that they'd like to wait or not to go to college at all because of the cost or time it takes up." Brandon predicted that his friends who planned to postpone college attendance were doing so "because either they don't have enough money already or they just want to get a break from school." Other friends, however, seemed more inclined to pass up college. He highlighted one friend from King who had a job and said:

> If she didn't go to college she could step up and get paid a lot of money and she could become manager. If she goes to college, she would stay in the position she is in now until after college.

That friend and several other peers found it more important to make money sooner than later.

Brandon was an aware young man and was not surprised to hear that more Black females than Black males go to college. He said, "All around me I see more Black females going to college than men. Around me, the men always think about the money first to get the advantage." He thought that families and schools could do more to help increase the number of Black males planning to attend college. Brandon said that families should "get them [Black males] at a young age to start thinking about school and reading. Then, it will be known to them, so they'll probably grow up to like it." He thought high schools needed to talk about the prospect of college in more positive terms. Brandon said:

> Don't make it like it would be hard for them to get in. 'Cause now, how people here talk about it makes it like you're not going to be able to go through college because of the way you're doing in high school.

Finally, he thought that individual Black males might be more encouraged to attend college if they:

Select subjects that they like, not just select subjects because they are easy. For me, I like subjects that will challenge me. So, if I like it, I will pursue a career in it. Some people just pick easy subjects just to get through high school.

Brandon believed that his Caribbean ancestry contributed to how he differed from most Black males he knew. Brandon said he was different from many Black males because "to have family that's not from this country, they know that I have the opportunities that they didn't have. So, they push me to take the opportunities that they didn't have." Moreover, Brandon was motivated to attend college and succeed in college because of his race and ancestry. He passionately said:

You don't really see people from [names two Caribbean islands] actually like up in their education. I want to be one of those persons who actually are like that. Like my cousin, she's from [names country] too and she got the scholarship and finished college.

As a junior, Brandon was not scheduled to graduate until one year after the other participants. His cumulative grade point average for his first two years of high school was 1.71. Brandon did not reply to my emails requesting an update on his postsecondary plans.

Dreamers

Darryl: Love What You Do

Darryl was a serious, thoughtful, and sincere 18-year-old budding graphic artist who loved drawing and music. He politely agreed to participate in the study when Ms. Hale identified him to me as a potential participant. Darryl and his 13-year-old brother were being raised by their mother and father who were both born on a Caribbean island. His father, an architect, and his mother, a data processor, both had bachelor's degrees and engaged in additional studies at specialized schools, but Darryl was not sure if they had

earned graduate degrees. His mother and father were inspirations to him because "my father works really hard to take care of everything, and my mother has a lot of responsibilities, so she's taught me about that." Darryl was born and raised in the county in which King High School is located and went to public elementary and middle schools which feed into King. Fostering his love of music, he has been in the choir and band throughout most of high school.

Darryl was an intelligent young man who was intentional about his academic progress at King. He believed it was important to get a good education "because if you want to get what you really want, you need to know how to get there." He believed that "the teachers here have done a pretty good job at helping me get to where I want to go." Subsequently, he challenged himself and did his part to learn as much as possible. The large majority of Darryl's high school classes had been at the honors or advanced placement levels. His grade point average for the first two quarters of senior year was 3.4. The As and Bs he had earned in rigorous courses such as trigonometry, Japanese 4, three advanced placement classes, and computer graphics demonstrated his love of learning, as he had gone well beyond the minimum graduation requirements. He described his courses as "easy because I know what's expected and I know how to take care of it and how to adapt to whatever is thrown at me. The classes are pretty interesting, so I like them a lot."

He strategically chose these courses and went beyond the minimum requirements because they related to his career interest and "I knew there was stuff I needed to do." Darryl rejected the trend seen in many high school seniors who take the minimum courses as a senior. In fact, he was not even aware of the minimum graduation

requirements. Darryl took classes that would make him well-rounded and prepare him for

the future. He described:

> Well, I knew I wanted to be a graphic artist and so I knew that multimedia would
> fit in there, so I took TV production. I took computer graphics. And, I want to do
> international…so, I want to be able to speak Japanese fluently, so I took Japanese
> 4. Government helps to understand, like, what's going on and how everything
> operates. And trig is a pretty rigorous class and it just helps you all around.

> *"I thought that I could learn more and I could do more if I went to college."*

Darryl viewed a college education as helping him become well rounded and

knowledgeable about many things and preparing him for various future endeavors and

goals. He thought college would be a great experience "because you get to meet all sorts

of different people. You get to learn different ideas, you get to adapt, you get to change,

you get to become somebody completely new." Darryl knew he wanted to go to college

since his freshman year. By the 10th grade, he knew he wanted to study art. When

deciding between going to college for art and going for music, he thought:

> What I enjoyed about art was that, unlike music, it wasn't limited by, like when I
> play music or when I sing in the choir, I'm limited by my natural vocal range.
> With art I can learn a technique and then use it however I want to. So that's what I
> liked about art.

Both Darryl and his parents had high expectations for his education and his life. Darryl

made up his mind about going to college before his parents first verbalized that

expectation. He was clear, however, that encouragement came from within himself and

from his parents. He reflected, "They knew that I could go pretty far with what I could

do. And I wanted myself to go that far as well."

In addition to wanting to learn more and become well rounded, Darryl saw

college as the most certain and efficient path to "get a good job and I want to be able to

support myself. So, I just want to see what was out there and that would get me there the

quickest." He did not want to venture out on his own and attempt to pursue an art career without formal training. He predicted, "If I just tried to go out there, it wouldn't be enough to get by. I thought that I could learn more and I could do more if I went to college."

"I pieced it together." Darryl began searching for colleges in the 10th grade when he became familiar with a local art school through his courses in the Art Department at King and through the local media. Additionally, representatives from the art school had done presentations at King, and the are school was a popular postsecondary institution for many King graduates. He said, "The art school had a lot of TV ads. Because I'm in the Art Department, I got, through the multiple programs I got to see what they offered. So, first as an artist, I got to see what they had to offer. And then, as a multimedia artist, I got to see what they had to offer and I was impressed with that. So that's why I chose them."

Subsequently, Darryl did more research on the school and ultimately made it his first choice college. He considered schools based on "the amount of focus it put on the program… the amount of hands-on time I'd have." Darryl also wanted to receive a top-notch education and preferred to stay close to home. He said, "I wanted to go somewhere where it would be easy to get home. So, the fact that the art school is right on the [public transportation] route...that helps." Although the art school appealed to him the most because he would be able to almost exclusively focus on art, he also applied to a private PWI with most selective admissions standards and a public PWI with more selective admissions standards. Darryl, with a 3.2 cumulative GPA and an SAT score of 1620, was accepted into each of the three institutions to which he applied.

Darryl "pieced it [the application process] together" by researching the process and specific schools. He also relied on "assistance from family, friends, and guidance counselors to help put some of the pieces that were missing together." Darryl's counselors were "pretty helpful" and his parents "helped me with applications. They've come down with me to the school to fill out my applications and forms. So, they've been helpful." Most of Darryl's close friends planned to attend a certificate and associate degree-granting technology school, the art school, or a traditional four-year institution after high school graduation. Darryl commented about himself and his friends:

> We all had the idea of going to a school that was really good. So, we knew [names a local four-year university] was really good because it's right around the corner and we've known about it for years. And we've had this idea to just go for what we wanted. So, if that was what we wanted, then we would just apply there.

This mutual challenge and support became a very significant part of the process for Darryl.

"I'm planning to apply for more scholarships." Darryl put time and energy into working to secure financing for college. He had received a $1,000 scholarship from his first-choice college. He was grateful, but said, "I'm planning to apply for more scholarships" and he was "working with my financial aid counselor at the college to see what's going on with that." Although he was optimistic about scholarships and believed that his parents had saved some money for his education, he was completing the FAFSA with assistance from an official at the art school. Darryl had already decided, however, that he was going to college even if he had to take out loans to cover the art school's four-year cost of tuition and fees. He had a goal to reach and he decided, "Cost didn't matter. I knew that if I wanted to do what I wanted to do, I didn't, I don't care about the price. I had to go for it." He knew that the cost would be approximately $80,000 if he

lived on campus and was more than happy to live at home to bring the four-year cost down to $60,000.

"They don't know what they want to go for." Darryl estimated that the majority of the Black males in the senior class planned to attend college. Nevertheless, he recognized that fewer Black males attended college than Black females. He attributed the difference in the pursuit of college between Black males and Black females to less motivation and a lack of direction in the males. He described:

> Just because of like the environment I've grown up in. I've seen stuff and so…like, I'll walk outside my house and I might go out to get something to eat and I'll just see a group of kids hanging on the street corner.

He continued, "I think it's motivation because it might be like how to raise maybe motivation. Like they don't know what they want to go for, so they just do whatever they feel like." He believed that more Black males would pursue college if they were clear on possible career goals. Darryl's motivation and eagerness for school came from the fact that he had found his passion. He excitedly explained, "I love what I do. I love music. I love art. So, the more I do it I just enjoy it. So, I guess that's what's pushing me to get to the art school."

Darryl also contended that families were the most important factor in getting more Black males to college "because those are the people who are closest around you." Although he couldn't describe specific strategies for families to use to encourage their children, he said, "I can think of just being supportive of what they want to do." Race did not play into the decisions Darryl made about his postsecondary life. He thought, "I just thought that everyone would go to college and just go to college. It [race] doesn't matter." He thought that everyone should go to college because "it's just very important

to go to college and try to pick up as much skill as you can so that when you graduate from college you'll be ready for what's out there."

On to art school. Darryl earned a 3.2 cumulative GPA and a certificate of merit when he graduated from King High School in June 2007. Ultimately, he plans to earn a master's degree and wants to specialize in game art and design. He described his plans for weaving his love of music with art. He said, "So I'll be creating video games. I'll be doing the artwork. Hopefully since I'll be the one who's designing them, I'll have influence over the music which I'll bring my background as a musician into it." Approximately four months after our last interview, I emailed Darryl to obtain an update on his postsecondary plans. He was one of the two participants who responded to my inquiry. At that time, he had enrolled in the art school and was beginning classes the following week. He had received a $1,000 scholarship and was funding the rest of his education with loans. As planned, he was commuting to school to save money.

Dwight: A Dreamer with Significant Resources and Assistance

Dwight was one of the first students to volunteer to participate in the study after his English teacher encouraged students' participation. He was an 18-year-old senior who planned to attend college after graduating from King in June 2007. He had lived in the metropolitan area around King since he was born. Although he had a relationship with his father's daughter, his half sister, Dwight was his mother's only child and was being raised by her. Dwight acknowledged his mother as the most influential person in his life. He said, "If I'm having problems of whatever, I can like go to her and she like can get me through it. She can like give me advice on what to do and what not to do in critical situations."

Dwight received his elementary education at multiple schools. He said, "I went to many elementary schools. I'd stay at one for about one or two years and then I'd transfer to another one, so basically in and out." He wavered on the reason for having attended so many schools. He said, "I don't know…I guess it was because of the learning environment." Subsequently, he said it was also because he moved a lot as a child. Dwight attended a public middle school that is part of King High School's feeder system and had been at King since the 9th grade. Dwight was on a varsity sports team at King, but did not participate in any other organizations in or out of school. He had a 2.2 grade point average for the first two quarters of his senior year. His senior schedule was light enough that it allowed for early dismissal from school. Dwight was taking English, a foreign language, science, and algebra 2. He viewed education as important and planned to pursue a postsecondary education because "it's good to get an education because if you get an education you can succeed in life and go places and experience things. If you don't you're basically missing out on everything that you could be experiencing."

When asked if he had received a good education, Dwight stated, "Well, yeah, I guess…until I came here." He continued, "When I heard about high school it was supposed to be challenging but so far it hasn't. It's been smooth." Throughout high school, Dwight had earned Cs in standard level classes. He had not taken college preparatory, honors, or advanced placement courses because "I thought that was like way over my head, so I didn't want to take that chance." He explained that he needed classes to "make you think more logically and not standing up for 90 minutes and just talking." Dwight wanted his classes to be more challenging than the ones he was taking, but less rigorous than advanced-level classes.

"She's been really pushing, pushing me to go." Dwight had planned to go to

college since he was in the 9th grade. Dwight's mother was influential in his educational

plans. Since he had been in high school, "she's been really pushing, pushing me to go.

She's like, I want you to go to college and all this other stuff. So I've been mentally

preparing myself for that until I get to that stage next year." His mother put the idea of

college attendance in his mind before he began thinking about it for himself. He began to

understand the importance of such an achievement when he realized that "nobody in my

family has, they've [his mother, aunt, uncle, and stepfather] taken college courses, but

they've never been to college and graduated. So, I want to be the first person in my

family to actually go do all four years and graduate." Dwight was still somewhat unsure

of his potential major. He said:

> My major, I'm still a little hazy on right now because I really don't know what I
> want to do. But I think that I might try to pursue a major in computers, like
> graphic design or something like that.

Despite the uncertainty, he was sure he wanted to go to college in order to "receive a

higher level of education."

Identifying and applying to "good schools." Dwight gained knowledge and

information about searching for a college or university from a number of resources. He

explained, "Me and my mother talked to Ms. Hale. Then, I went to this man who helps

students get into college. He works at the HEAP, and that's how I got all my information

through." The Higher Education Access Program (HEAP) is a pseudonym for a local

organization that assists high school students during their college selection process.

Dwight began gathering information via these resources when he was in the 11th grade.

Dwight's mother was very hands-on and influential in this process. She met with Dwight

and Ms. Hale and was also responsible for connecting Dwight to the HEAP

representative. Dwight described:

> My mother's friend they went to him [the HEAP representative] when her son
> was going to college. He went to Grambling State, and he helped him get
> through…they did everything, like the college waivers, all the applications, and
> he just filled them out and they did the rest.

With the help of these professionals and his mother, Dwight applied to more than five

four-year institutions. He could only recall the names of five, but said there were more.

He applied to four public and one private HBCUs, all of which had less and least

selective admissions standards. By the time we met, he had been accepted to three

institutions and rejected by one who said his SAT score of 990 was too low.

When considering schools, Dwight was most concerned with size, racial

composition, academic reputation, and location. Each of the schools was an HBI, schools

at which he thought he would "be in an area where I am comfortable and that people

accept me for who I am. And not one of the schools that give you a hard time and stuff

like that." Regarding reputation, Dwight relied on the HEAP representative who

identified the schools to which he applied as "good schools." Finally, when it came to

location, Dwight said:

> [I] wanted to go away. My mother said it would be best to stay here. She was like
> what if I need or what if I'm in trouble or something and I need to come up to the
> school or whatever, And, if I want to come home on the weekends. So I was like
> maybe I will stay in that area instead of going far.

Subsequently, three of his five schools were within a one to three hour drive of home.

Dwight identified his top choice as one of the schools that was about three hours away.

Initially, he preferred a school that was a nine-hour drive from home. He changed his first

choice based on his mother's concerns regarding location. Dwight said, "She wants me to

stay up here to go to [names university] for like a year and if I don't like it I can transfer

down there. But, Imma just wait to see how it plays out."

Although Dwight knew what he wanted in a college, he did not personally do

research to select his choice set. He said:

> The man from HEAP told me and my mother those were really good schools, so
> we just applied to them and sent out the information and stuff. From what he told
> me I didn't have to do any research. He was like they are really good schools.
> They give you hands-on one-on-one learning and tutoring if you need to. That's
> good enough for me. And, they have smaller classrooms.

If Dwight did not have the help of the HEAP representative, he said he would have asked

"people that I know to give me information on what college I should try to apply

for…people that's already in college or that's been through it already. I would have just

gone to them for help."

Dwight's first choice was one of the schools that had already offered him

admission. Of the three that accepted him, he felt that his first choice was the best

combination of location and reputation. He was in the process of dismissing from

consideration one of the schools to which he applied because of the impression among his

mother's friends that the college was poorly organized and run. He said, "My mother she

talked to somebody and the person she talked to said not to go there 'cause it's not a good

school. It's like a ghetto school or whatever." Dwight had plans to visit his first choice

college with his mother within two weeks of our interview. This would have been his first

visit to a college or university as a prospective student.

Dwight's mother's assistance came in a variety of ways. In addition to meeting

with Dwight, Ms. Hale, and the HEAP staff, "she's helped me by like sitting down and

reading the little brochures that colleges send so we can just look at it and see, get a feel

152

for what I might get to experience." Aside from direct meetings with Ms. Hale, assistance

from King had been limited. Dwight did receive some insight into college searching from

college admission representatives' visits to King. His teachers, however, had played a

less significant role. He noted:

> We didn't really talk about it that much. Except for my science teacher, she talked
> about it a little bit. Like, maybe once in a blue moon she would be like I want
> y'all to go to college. But she didn't really go into details.

Dwight also talked to his friends who were already in college about the process and what

to expect once getting to college. He said:

> Basically they say study more and party less. Yeah, they giving me like information like
>
> when you get to college you gon deal with all the peer pressure and you gon experience
>
> things like you never experienced it before. 'Cause it's like nobody's watching you so
>
> you just free to do whatever.

"My mother is going to pay." Dwight recognized that financing a college

education is a barrier to many people's desire to attend. He, however, did not consider

money a barrier for himself. Tuition and fees for Dwight's first year in college were

already accounted for. He said, "My mother is going to pay for like the first year and then

after that Imma try to get financial aid for the rest." Since it was not of concern until his

second year in school, Dwight had not thought through the specifics of the financial aid

application process. Although he did not seem overly concerned about finances, Dwight

did pay attention to the tuition at his prospective schools. He thought the tuition and room

and board at his top choices were reasonable. He said, " the three [main] schools…all of

their prices and room and board were real reasonable. They weren't very expensive like

some of the others. So that played a big part." He estimated that tuition at this top choice

school was $2,600 per semester. The university's website, however, listed one semester of tuition at $5,400.

"I have like a little idea...so that's a start." Dwight's friends at King had plans both to attend and not attend college. He said, "Half of them do want to go to college and the other half, they just like, after high school they just like don't want to go to school no more. They finished with it all. So, that's their decision." Among his friends "there are people I do know, they want to go, but none of them have applied yet." Although he believed there were many students who were most concerned about graduating and getting a job and who did not plan to go to college, he knew many people who wanted to go to college but simply did not have a plan. He said, "I think they don't know what they really want to do [a career to pursue]. So they don't know if they want to go [to college] or not. They still thinking about it." Although he was not 100% sure of his major or career aspirations, he said he was different from other seniors because:

> I have like a little idea of what I want to do. Some of them don't have no idea. I have like the slightest idea of what I want to do, and that's computer graphics. I'm good with computers, so that's a start.

> Despite his acknowledgment of his peers' plans, Dwight was surprised to hear

that fewer Black males plan to attend college than Black females. He believed, however, that families and schools could do more to increase the number of Black males attending college. He recommended:

> Encourage them. Like, show them support and not stray away from that and, umm, and downgrade them saying you not gon be nothing you not gon to amount to nothing. Tell them they gon be successful and that they gon do good and they will basically follow that and believe it and they will do their best at what they can so they can go to college and succeed.

Ultimately, he felt that the onus to do well and succeed was on the individual. He said:

They're gon have to get themselves to that point because nobody is gon like hold their hand the whole way giving them help and stuff. They're not gon have someone like guide them. When they get to college they gon have to do everything on their own. They not gon have nobody holding their hand the whole way telling them what to do and what not to do.

Change of plans. Dwight graduated from King High School in June 2007. He'd earned a 1.81 cumulative grade point average for his entire high school career. Dwight did not reply to my emails requesting an update on his postsecondary plans. Ms. Hale, however, was fairly certain that Dwight was headed to the community college in his county. She did not know what happened to his plans for attendance at one of the four-year colleges to which he was accepted.

Sean: Focused with Clear Educational and Career Goals

Sean was a relaxed and personable 17-year-old senior who signed up for the study after the announcement was made by his English teacher. He was engaged in the study and gave thoughtful and revealing responses regarding his postsecondary plans. His engagement in the study and overall curiosity were evident when he was the only participant to ask for more details regarding the study and why it was being conducted. Sean was a popular young man who was greeted by many students as he walked through the school and sat in the guidance counselor's, Ms. Hale's, office. Sean was raised in the metropolitan area in which King is located. His great aunt had raised him since he was one week old and was dropped off by his mother. He and his mother have since reunited; at the time of the study she lived at Sean's grandmother's house with Sean, his 15-year-old sister, great aunt, and grandmother.

Sean was absolutely clear, however, that his great aunt (whom he referred to as his aunt) raised him and was the most influential person in his life. His aunt taught him

155

"almost everything I know," namely, the importance of determination, perseverance, and achieving more than she did. He relayed:

> She always wanted me to push forward more. She always pushes me and motivated me to do better. 'Cause, she went to high school, but she never went to college and she wants me to excel more than her and don't want me to get stuck in one thing…she wants me to be very broad in everything I do. My grandmother also, that's my aunt's sister, so they tag team me on that.

Sean also gained inspiration from the father he had never met. He had gained a strong sense of how to be responsible for his actions because he understood the effect one's irresponsibility could have on many people. He described:

> I don't know how he carries himself, but from what he's given me from what he's shown me, is I guess that he wasn't ready to have a child. I'm not trying to say he's any less of a man, but I guess he wasn't ready for what he partook in. He's showed me everything not to do and how I should go about everything as far as fatherhood and growing up.

Sean spent kindergarten through the 8th grades at a PreK-12th grade Christian school. He expressed that he received a strong educational foundation there because the low student-teacher ratio gave teachers more time to work one-on-one with students. He said:

> I got a good education [names school]. [Names school] was a small school so you kind of got more of the actual teachers. Teachers would know your name even if they weren't your teacher. They took time to break things down and it really helped…teachers could actually hit on points for each and every student thoroughly. I'd probably say [names school] was better, but King is good too.

Once in 8th grade, Sean decided he wanted to go to public school "for something new…I wanted to see how the public school experience was." He also recalled, "Being in private school kind of like set off everything and I didn't know how to interact with other schools really." He was equally concerned that his aunt and grandmother had become burdened by tuition payments for him and his sister at the Christian school. He stated:

The little paying to go to private school, that kept adding up, adding up, adding up. So I was even trying to make it easier on my aunt and them, my aunt and my grandmother. But just seeing how they always had to somehow scrape together and always were behind in school payments.

Subsequently, he suggested, "Rather than my sister go, she was younger than me, so I said she could stay in school and I could go to public school." He saw this as a win-win in which his family only had to be concerned with tuition for one person, his sister could stay in Christian school, and he could experience a different environment. He experienced the change he expected. Sean said, "Coming here [to King] opened up a whole new world when I got to see how things were done, operating by different schedules, it was somewhat fascinating, to be honest with you."

Sean was a strong student throughout his years in school. His Honors English course in the 11th grade was the only honors or advanced class he had taken during high school. His grade point averages (GPA) for the first two quarters of senior year were 3.5 and 3.25. His class schedule was relatively light, as Sean had classes for two or three periods (depending on the day) of a four period school day. Sean's course load would have been lighter if he had not listened to his counselor who challenged him to take math although it was not required. Sean stated:

I mean, I already had my math credits, and I really didn't want to take no math. They was like it look good on your college thing, you need to know as much math as you can you trying to be into business…it's gon be numbers…so I was like, I might as well do it. But, it does make sense though.

Subsequently, he was taking math as a senior. Sean's abbreviated school schedule gave him time to work 35-40 hours per week at a sports-related retail store. He did not believe that his job interfered with his academics. He said:

I always put my schoolwork before my job. That's not nothing I want to do. I don't want that as a career. I'm just trying to go to [names first-choice college] and better myself and get further than where I'm at now.

Sean regarded education as extremely important. He stated:

Education to me is really important. I mean a lot of people say that, but for real, if you don't have an education, you won't be able to do anything in life. You need to get your high school diploma.

Moreover, school officials and his family imparted upon him, "You can't really get anything without a high school diploma." Subsequently, he thought that most people need to go beyond high school to a college education. He believed "even if you feel like college isn't your thing – you still try it. You can't knock it until you try it." He also knew that "if you want to get into something that's really going to be your profession worth an income, you need to go to college."

Although some of those messages had been given to Sean directly, he learned a lot of lessons by being observant and aware of his surroundings and the lives of his family members. He reflected:

Not everybody in my family graduated from high school. You can see that it's kind of harder for them to go out and get things rather than somebody who got their diploma. Just from like seeing that example, I mean, not saying you not gon be nothing, but it's harder to become what you want to be without a high school diploma. From seeing it and then hearing it over and over again and then tying the two together that kind of made it like it showed that it's the truth. That if you don't have a high school diploma, I mean not saying you won't be anything, it's always a possibility, but it's gon be a harder, harder attempt to try to make something happen for you better 'cause that's [a diploma] what they gon look at, look for.

His aunt, grandmother, and school counselors relayed this message to him for years, but seeing it manifested in the lives of his family members made Sean truly appreciate the value of a higher education.

"The push." As soon as Sean entered high school, his aunt and grandmother began "banging it in my head that I needed to go to college." Once they realized that Sean had ambitions to attend one particular prominent HBI, his aunt and grandmother continued encouraging, supporting, and pushing him to do well in school and to achieve that goal. He laughed as he recalled:

> When they found out what college I wanted to go to, that's when they started really like pushing. It wasn't no turning back now. They made their point that they wanted me to go to college. Not because they was forcing me to do it, I wanted to do it. But it seemed like they wasn't gon let me renege on it. I had to go along with it.

Before "the push" started coming from his family, however, Sean knew he wanted to go to college. A college was located across the street from the Christian school Sean attended for nine years. He stated:

> Back in middle school, when I went to the Christian school, I always said I would go to there 'til the 12th grade and then go to the college across the street. So I always wanted to go to college.

At that point, his desire to attend college was more based on intrigue and curiosity, wanting to "see what it was about." Once he left the Christian school for King, he remembers his interest in college:

> Grew more and more as I got in high school. Seeing how as high school was talking about you need to go to college, this that and the third. It was kind of good being in an environment that pushed forward on something I wanted to know more about 'cause that's what kind of made me more enthusiastic about wanting to go to college and pursuing a career.

Although his desire to go to "the college across the street" died, that postsecondary institution initiated Sean's fist thoughts about college.

Sean looked forward to going to college to experience freedom and a greater level of learning and growing. He also felt, "making more money would be a good benefit also." He extended his thoughts:

> I mean a lot of people may go to college to make more money and to be in a better position in life, but I just sometimes want to learn more about stuff. Like I said, I like being challenged and going to college and having to learn more and read more and study more and pick up all that other information, I find that more interesting. Not to say I'm gon like just going to college for learning, I want to make money too but it's like more so like without picking up any of that stuff you might learn in college you wouldn't be able to get none of the money or anything or a good position in life.

He felt that after the learning and growth took place, the "money will fall into place."

Neither Sean's aunt, grandmother, nor mother went to college. The only person in his family to have gone to college was an uncle who encouraged Sean's college dreams and offered Sean advice. His uncle's advice was:

> Not to go wild down there. It's gon be like a real opening up to the real world for you 'cause you gon be on your own. So he was like just learn, be sure you do your best, don't be foolish, make wise decisions, and just try to stay focused. Don't get distracted. He just like basically, be on task 'cause it's gon be hard. And he was like they don't want to see me come back talking about I don't want to go back to college because it's too hard. So he was like you just make sure you do what you need to do to get done.

Although he may have already been inclined to attend college, Sean benefited from the encouraging messages of many of his high school teachers and administrators. He recalled teachers telling him:

> Don't let up now just 'cause you got honor roll. Go forward and keep pushing forward, try to get higher than you got now. They said people look at that; people take that into consideration. So, don't like stop and feel like you good where you are 'cause you aren't. You should always want to be better and strive to be better than what you are now.

He also discussed teachers who "stayed on my case and really did help me get to where I need to be at and helped to push me to get to be better than I was, than what I am."

HBIs only, thank you. Sean began engaging in the search process and making

decisions about college when he was in the 10th grade. When identifying colleges, he was

most concerned about the availability of strong business programs to help him achieve

his goal of becoming an entrepreneur. He said a school should "help you do what you

what you want to major in. Think about like what your career is and what you plan on

doing. Do they have the classes or anything corresponds to what your major is?"

Secondly, he wanted to attend an HBI because he wanted to attend a college in which he

would feel comfortable with his peers and professors. He thought that was more likely to

happen for him at an HBI. Regarding HBIs, Sean said:

> I just feel like I could probably have a…not saying that going to a non-HBCU
> school wouldn't be more corresponding to what it is I'm trying to learn, but I
> always felt like learning from a Black teacher appeals more and kind of like helps
> you understand everything more.

Through a 10th grade class project, Sean became familiar with a private HBI with

selective admissions standards. He enthusiastically recalled, "I came across [names first-

choice college] and I read about being an entrepreneur and that kind of tied in to what I

wanted to do. That's when I kind of fell in love with going and that's when I wanted to be

with them." Additionally, Sean used the Internet to conduct research on that college and

also talked to a King High School administrator who was an alumnus of his first-choice

college. Sean was so impressed and excited by the school's academic offerings and

reputation and the positive experiences the administrator relayed to him that he made that

school his first-choice institution.

Sean had also identified two other HBIs with which he was impressed and would

be happy to attend. At the time of the interviews for this study, he had applied to the first-

choice institution and was in the process of applying to the other HBIs, both of which

were public institutions with less selective admissions standards. If Sean was admitted to his first-choice institution, he planned to enroll in a combined degree program between that HBI and a public PWI in the same city. Upon completion of the joint program, he will have earned a master's degree in business. Although he was unsure of what came after a master's degree, he said, "I'm open to pick up anything else along the way. I don't want to stop once I get one degree, I want to keep on going forward."

Sean had not visited any of the universities to which he applied or planned to apply. He and a friend from King were flying to his first-choice college during his spring break with the school administrator who was an alumnus of that institution and who had become the young men's mentor. Sean said the administrator "was real interested in me after he found out I wanted to go. He pushing and trying to get me in as best as he can. He wrote me a recommendation and called up there too." This administrator also connected Sean and his friend with local recruiters from the college and had involved them in several university-sponsored events for prospective students. Sean described:

> I'd walk into places with him and since he's all recognized 'cause he went there and graduated and all, he'd introduce me to people I needed to know. I met the president already, I met some of the admissions staff, I met some alumni, and I met a whole bunch of people. I went to dinner with him, I went to breakfast with them for Martin Luther King's birthday and met a whole bunch of people up there. So yeah, he is helping me out a lot.

These activities were extremely beneficial because admission to the college is highly competitive. Sean was grateful for the connections his high school administrator made for him and knew that the administrator was "doing all he can. I really appreciate that too." Sean hoped this would all pay off in admission to the college.

Sean learned about the college application process by independently inquiring and researching, but he also had the assistance of his high school administrator and teacher.

162

He recalled how his teacher was "really pushing me to go to college" and the administrator helped him navigate the college application process. They talked him through completing forms and getting an idea of what to expect once in college regarding the academic demands and the need for social responsibility. Moreover, even though Sean's aunt and grandmother did not attend college, they were instrumental in his decisions about college. He stated, "They help encourage me and talk about it. But they also been helping me…how to fill out essays, money for application fees, and all that other stuff. They've been helping me with both, but more so on the support side."

"I have something to throw in." Sean had been concerned about tuition costs since 10th grade when he began actively searching for colleges. He was certain, however, that he wanted to attend college and didn't let financial concerns sway his decision to pursue college. He figured that "the tuition and all the books and room and board, it's gon be high, but I mean I'm just gon try to find as many scholarships and get as much money as I can and just pay that off." He believed, however, that the cost of college and the fact that "people are putting their hard earned money and their time and faith in me" made it that much more imperative that he succeed. With a family income of $20,000-$39,999, Sean hoped to get enough scholarship money to fund his education. He had applied for multiple scholarships, including athletic scholarships, and had completed the FAFSA in order to be eligible for loans and grants. His aunt and grandmother had saved money for his college education, and he was sure that they would contribute significantly if necessary. Sean had also saved some of the money he'd earned at his part-time job because "I still don't take that [family's financial contribution] for granted. I always do

try to make sure I have something [money] to throw in just so it won't be so hard on them. Plus, find out all them other scholarships."

"A lot of people are still stuck on what they are going to do." Sean estimated that 40% of his classmates planned to go to college in the fall after graduation. He believed that that group of students wanted to go directly to college "not just to get it over with but to also go so they won't become lazy and lose that drive they had when they were in school." The majority of Sean's close friends planned to attend a community college. There were many students, however, who were "still stuck on what they are going to do. They don't know what college they are going to or what they're going to do." Ultimately, he believed that most seniors were tired enough of school that they wanted to go immediately to work. He reflected, "Everybody is just ready to get out of high school. They've been through 13 years of school. Why would they want to go to school for another four or five years? So, they just leave it alone." Although he noted that some of these students had discussed enrolling in college after taking a year off, many did not express any plans for postsecondary education.

Sean was aware that fewer Black males go to college than Black females. He noticed how "a lot of Black males, once they get out of high school, they think they did something. Like they got their diploma, so they have everything that they need." Careful to not degrade his peers, Sean separated himself from them noting:

> I'm not trying to be looked upon the same as everybody else, like every other
> Black male. People see Black males and think all they do is start trouble. I am
> trying to be one of the ones that tries to show that they about something, that
> they're trying to make something of themselves rather than just staying at home.

He believed that most people don't expect Black males to go to college and that such messages can destroy a person's spirit and have them question why they should bother

pursuing such goals. He said, "Being thrown in that category can kind of mess with you mentally though. You can tell it has a lot of people say…so why bother? They already categorize you, you can't really change their mind." Sean, however, took the low expectations as a challenge because "somebody saying that you not gon to be nothing, that makes me want to prove them wrong and show that you can." He reflected on more of his aunt's wisdom:

> She tells me this every time, it's harder for a Black male coming up rather than a White male. So, you need to pick up as much as you can and somehow throw it back in their face to show them that you can do anything they can do.

Graduation and beyond. At the end of the school year, Ms. Hale informed me that Sean had graduated in June 2007 with a certificate of merit and a cumulative grade point average of 3.35. Additionally, he had been accepted to the prominent HBI that was his first choice institution. He was, however, still waiting to hear about the status of scholarships to which he applied. At that time, the receipt of scholarship funds was the factor that stood between Sean and his first choice college. Four months after our interviews, I emailed Sean to get an update on his college plans, but he did not respond to my emails.

William: Drawn to College Via Athletics

William was a calm 18-year-old senior who was one of the first students to sign up to participate in the study. He considered himself a sociable young man, saying, "I'm outgoing and like to have fun. But, at the same time, I like to concentrate on my schoolwork." William and his family were born in Africa and moved to the United States when William was in the 1st grade. Since moving to the United States, they have lived in the county in which King High School is located. William played varsity sports at King

and also worked approximately 15 hours per week at a restaurant. Although playing

sports often required 20 hours of practice and game time each week, he noted that

athletics:

> Helped me a lot because it taught me a lot of things first and foremost. I'm
> saying…it kept me disciplined 'cause if you don't have a 2.0 you can't play
> sports, period. So, it kept me real focused in class…not playing around.

William's grade point average for the first two quarters of 12th grade was 2.6. He

never enrolled in any AP or honors classes during high school. William went to school

for two out of four periods each day. He opted for a reduced senior year schedule because

"I had all my hours. I had everything already done from 9th, 10th, and 11th grade year. I

just got English and one math class, but it's not that difficult." His math class, however,

did go above and beyond the math requirement for graduation. In addition to math and

English, William was taking a foreign language and physical education. He considered

himself to be a good writer and planned to go to college to combine his writing skills

with his love of sports into a career. He said:

> Yeah. I'm real good in English. I got like a B or A, so I know how to write. I want
> to do something with writing. 'Cause I'm real good at writing. I want a job, umm,
> maybe like a sports editor or something like that. I like sports, so I would love to
> do that.
> William viewed education as being extremely beneficial, saying:
>
> It can help you a lot if you came from a family that didn't have a lot. It can give
> you the opportunity to make something of your life even though maybe other
> people have it better than you. It can give you the chance to get better, make
> yourself better.

He was ready to move on to the next stage of his life and to obtain what he saw as the

benefits of college attendance. Subsequently, he planned to go to college after graduating

from high school in a few months.

"I just want to make myself better." College was the furthest thing from William's mind before high school. He recalled, "In middle school I ain't even think about college. Until, the reality hit me that I'm real close." That reality hit once in high school, particularly in the 10th grade, when his participation in athletics motivated him to consider college as a postsecondary option. He said, "To be honest, yeah. I ain't think about going to college until I started playing and getting letters from colleges and they were interested in me, so." William's parents, who did not graduate from high school, gave William great support and encouragement regarding his college plans. They did not, however, give him messages that they expected him to go to college after graduating from high school. William recalled initiating his college expectations as opposed to their being put on him by his parents. He stated, "I want to further my education first and foremost. My parents want me to go. I mean, it's not like my parents force me to go, but I want to go myself to make something better of my life."

He thanked athletics for getting him in the college mindset. If it were not for sports, he believed "I'd probably still be interested [in college] but it would probably be less interest." William had a brother who was presently enrolled in a four-year university close to their home and a sister who was enrolled in a community college. He said he learned about college and college life because he would "watch my brother all the time. He has a lot of work to do."

In addition to wanting to use education as a means to secure his future, William wanted the opportunity to be independent of his parents and to begin to learn how to live on his own. He said, "I'm not going to have anybody telling me what to do forever, so I

want to start right now so I can get a head start." He had also decided that he did not want

to be:

> One of the people that ain't go to college. I see a whole rack of people not making
> something out of themselves. Just hanging out in the streets, so, I don't want to be
> like that…I just want to make myself better.

These influences, his plans to be a sports writer, and his connections through athletics

helped guide William when he began exploring and identifying potential colleges.

"They showed a lot of interest in me." At the start of high school, William was

only familiar with "big schools like [names a state flagship institution] but I didn't know

about smaller schools and stuff." He became familiar with more colleges and universities

through his connection with athletics. Related to his experience in the 10th grade, William

said:

> [Names an HBI] showed me a lot of interest because I play sports. So, they call
> me a lot and send me emails and tell me to come to their school and visit. And,
> [names a second HBI], they also keep in touch with me, so. They offered me
> some help so, financial and stuff.

Ultimately, he applied to those two universities, a private HBCU with least selective

admissions standards and a public HBCU with less selective admissions standards.

William was already aware of one of the universities because it was the same school his

brother attends and is less than 20 miles from his home, but he had not considered it for

himself until the school began recruiting him. The second university is a two-hour drive

from his home.

William also applied to a third HBI after "my friend, he got accepted so he was

telling me to fill out an application and I went on the website and researching the school,

looking at the campus and all that stuff." This school was a private institution with

selective admissions requirements and a more highly regarded reputation than the other

two universities. He recalled "one person, when I was applying, they were like naw, don't do that because you probably won't get accepted. But I still applied." William, however, agreed that his chances for admissions at this third university were slimmer. He considered this university a "reach school," because he thought his 1160 SAT score and his grade point average would make it more difficult for him to get into this third institution.

When considering the ideal university, William preferred the setting of a smaller school where "there's not a lot of people, so teachers can attend to more people at one time or at different times." He also felt, "It's pointless to me to go to a school with 200 students with one professor." He also was looking for a school with:

> People that are honest. They not gon lie to you about how you doing just because they like you. And, just a place where I could feel like I could learn, do my best, and given the same opportunities as everybody else.

William also wanted to go to a university that "had a good number of Black people." Once he found out about the small percentage of Black students at one predominantly White university in Pennsylvania that was recruiting him, he declined further invitations to explore the school. He said, "One school wanted me to come there, but they were all the way in Pennsylvania and they ain't have a lot of Black people there. I want to go somewhere like I feel accepted, but at the same time I want to get a good education." William was conflicted about how he would factor in a university's location, stating, "I want to stay somewhere close to home, but at the same time I want to be on my own." Ultimately, he concluded that he wanted to be closer to home and realized that staying in state and commuting to school would be a better financial decision.

William had multiple opportunities to visit the campus of the local university to which he applied. He had not, however, been on the campuses of the two schools that were located out of state. Besides the three schools to which William applied, he expressed interest in other institutions too. He was scheduled to visit a predominantly White in-state university but did not do so due to conflicts with his athletics practices. He was still contemplating applying to another public in-state school that was over two hours from home. Regarding this other institution, William said, "I still might [apply] if if I don't get accepted [to the other schools], I'm probably still going to apply. 'Cause they don't have a deadline…it goes all the way up to the first day of school." William had known about this school since he began searching for colleges, but it didn't make his initial choice set. He was still interested in this school, however, because "I like the price of the school 'cause with financial aid it comes out to like $5,000 a semester. And I got a couple of friends that go there." With the school's rolling admissions process, he would wait until he received responses from his top choices before applying to this final school. William conducted a small amount of independent Internet research on the three schools to which he applied. More so than not, however, he relied on the opinions and encouragement of third parties (i.e., peers, coaches) to create his choice set of institutions.

William felt prepared for the college search process. He received support from his parents, brother, and coaches and referred to them as the most influential people in his life. He said, "My parents, my brother, my coach, my sister helped me find out [about applying to college]." His parents showed their love and support by asking "me about it a lot. Like, what school I'm applying to and like what's the application, the application fee,

and how much it costs." He continued, "They try to see how I'm going with it. But, they let me handle most of the things by myself, like application wise."

Additionally, William learned a lot about applying to college by watching his brother and sister who had already researched and selected colleges. He has also learned about what to expect in college by observing his brother. He said, "I watch my brother all the time. He has a lot of work to do. So, I know that when I get there I can't slack off. 'Cause, by watching him, I see what he's doing and the hard work he's putting in, so I got to try to follow the same examples." The lessons he received from watching his brother were even more poignant because his brother was working hard to turn around from being "out of control the first year." William decided, "I got to focus more and hopefully I won't end up like him."

Besides the role his athletic coaches played in encouraging William to attend college, he felt that King High School played a small role in preparing him for the college selection process. He acknowledged that King had "a lot of colleges, schools coming over here. So, they give you a chance to talk to, umm, office people from universities and find out how much it's going to cost, the requirements to get in the school." Subsequently, he learned some information from those sessions, but most of the assistance he received throughout the application and decision-making processes was from his family and coaches.

"If there weren't financial barriers…we would have a whole lot of people in college." Although other criteria were important, William considered cost to be the most important decision when trying to select a potential college. He was not sure if his parents had saved money for him to go to college stating, "Naw, I don't know. I'm probably

going to use financial aid and loans." Subsequently, his parents assisted him with completing the FAFSA to finance his education. According to William, the main barrier to college attendance for him and many others was when "you don't have the money to pay." He applied for scholarships, but had not received any. The schools that were recruiting him for sports did not offer financial assistance, presumably because he had not been admitted yet. He noted, however, that coaches from the schools said, "If I get accepted they'll help me do whatever it takes so I can go there."

Even though William seemed certain that he would have to borrow money for college, he said "I don't want to put myself in debt after school and not be able to pay for the loan." William felt the burden of finances and also realized that others with college aspirations felt financial pressure. He said:

> I know some people want to apply to college, but the price is too much. So, they be like I can't afford it, my parents can't afford it, or whatever. So, usually they forget about it. So, if there wasn't no money barriers or financial barriers, I think we would have a lot, a whole rack, a whole lot of people in college now.

If William were accepted at each of the schools to which he applied, he was almost certain that he would attend the local university because it "would be smarter for me so I wouldn't have to spend money on housing since I live in state. It would save that money." He was more than ready to take on loans, get a job, and/or go to school in state if those sacrifices made it more possible for him to attend college and not graduate with a massive amount of debt.

"Anybody could go to college…some people just not focused." William's friends were a positive influence on his postsecondary plans. The majority of his friends planned to go to college, and a couple of his friends applied to the same colleges as he did. He said, "It would be cool to have friends around. But sometimes they could get you like

172

unfocused with doing your schoolwork." William encouraged a couple of friends to apply

to the schools to which he was applying. Similarly, a friend who had been accepted to

one of the schools to which William applied encouraged him to research and apply to that

university. Finally, he was still considering applying to a fourth school, an in-state

university that would require that he live away from home. He had friends there who

were encouraging William to apply.

Not all of William's friends were college-bound, however. He stated, "Most of

my friends are going to college. A couple of my friends, I don't think that they really

care. I'm trying hard as I can to convince them, but, I don't know. I'm going to see what I

can do." These friends planned to get jobs after graduating. He continued to try to

convince them to pursue college because he thought that "anybody could go to college if

they really wanted to, even if you ain't want to go to like a university you can go to a

community college and transfer to different school." William concluded, however,

"Some people just not focused."

These experiences led William to not be surprised that fewer Black males planned

to attend college than Black females. Ultimately, he said:

> Males just like getting things fast. Like, they not willing to work for and take time
> to do something. They just want to get a job that pays decent money. They don't
> want to stay to go to college and work and wait for years to get a good job. They
> just want it quick. So, that don't surprise me.

He believed that his patience allowed him to steer clear of that mindset. He said, "I take

my time to get things done and make sure I do it to the best of my ability."

William thought high schools could do more to encourage Black males to attend

college. He believed that having more colleges visit the high school and debunking the

myth that only 4.0 GPA students can go to college would be extremely helpful. He noticed:

> Most people think that since they have low grades that they still can't go to college. That's like a misunderstanding. They think to go to college you have to be a 4.0 student. And you can get into college with a 2.0, so I don't know why they refuse to apply or whatever.

He thought Black males must take responsibility for their education also. He believed that Black males needed to "stay in school and stop skipping classes 'cause that kills a lot of people." He also considered many Black males to be at a disadvantage because they often did not have career goals or postsecondary plans. He said "I think a lot of females knew what they want to do before time so they could better prepare for it, you know. Some guys, they have no idea what they want to do."

Despite the critical role of high schools and individual students, William thought families were the most critical influence for Black males and their postsecondary plans. He said, "It has to be the families. Family plays a lot in there. When you talk to your family you tend to listen more than if it's someone you don't know. So, I think it's family." He thought families could:

> Start talking about college at a young age so they stay interested. Because, it's kind of too late when you're a senior and your parents start talking to you about college. By that time it's too late 'cause you lost interest. So, starting at a young age you have to start talking about college.

Next steps. William graduated from King High School in June 2007. His cumulative grade point average was 2.16. William did not reply to my emails requesting an update on his postsecondary plans. Additionally, William did not make a final report of his postsecondary plans to King officials.

Dion: Continuing to Try Harder

I first met Dion when he was in the guidance office talking to Ms. Hale about his

classes and his application to the local community college. He was a talkative and

friendly young man who, prior to a formal introduction, greeted me as I sat in Ms. Hale's

office. Knowing that Dion planned to attend college, Ms. Hale encouraged him to

participate in the study. After I discussed the details with him, Dion agreed to participate.

This 17-year-old senior maintained his gregarious demeanor when we met for his

interview.

Dion had lived in the metropolitan area around King since he was born. He was

being raised by his mother and lived with her, an aunt, and two cousins. Dion was greatly

influenced by his mother and an uncle who both lived their lives with a determination

that made Dion want to achieve more. Dion said:

> Looking at her even though she went through all that working and everything, she
> was still able to do it – still graduated from school and go to college. She still
> trying to do better. She trying to better herself. So seeing that and seeing my uncle
> working and he doing his thing. They wanted more and my mom kept working
> and kept working. Just by looking at her and looking at him, being successful I
> know I can still see to this day that they want more. That's enough to make me
> say Dion, wake up. It's time for you to graduate, make her happy once. You done
> made her happy a few times, make her real happy, make her cry.

Dion was clearly motivated by his mother and uncle's work ethic and strived to emulate

them in many ways.

Dion considered his uncle to be a "father figure" who, along with his mother,

"know when I'm about to slip up and they catch me every time I slip up in school. That's

all about good parenting. That's how you know they care about you." Dion looked up to

his uncle who is "real smart and he know a lot of stuff" and talks to him "man-to-man"

about life. Dion recalled that after showing his uncle that he was "smart and that I'm

capable of working and doing my thing, he started respecting me as a man and I started

having privileges." Dion thought it was especially important for him to graduate from

high school and to make his family proud because he had an older brother who was not

successful. Dion felt that his 19-year-old brother's failures made it so that "all the

pressure is on me now because he was supposed to graduate, but he didn't." Dion shared,

"My brother don't live with me anymore. He got disrespectful and my mom wasn't

having it" and that his family thinks his older brother is mentally unstable. Although

these experiences have put the weight on Dion, he was at the point where he could "just

look at his [his brother's] downfalls and try to recap and do better."

Dion had attended three different elementary schools in an urban city close to

King. Additionally, he spent the 9th and 10th grades in schools in the urban district. He

made special arrangements to attend King in the 11th and 12th grades because "I wanted to

graduate from a school that people would be like he went to King. That's a good school. I

ain't want to graduate from no city school." He noticed a difference in the level of

challenge and rigor between 9th and 10th grades in the city schools and his first year at

King. Dion said:

> My grades started improving from when I was at the city high school, 'cause I
> guess this was a challenge. I started making my moms happy or whatever 'cause
> she was hearing good things from the teachers. The first time I got in here [King]
> I was in math class and got an E because I wasn't used to all the hard work. Then,
> the second quarter, I busted an A. Then the rest of the quarters it was smooth.

Upon first arriving at King, Dion played on a varsity sports team. He quit the team,

however, at the beginning of his senior year so he could begin a part-time job.

Dion's shortened class schedule allowed him to leave school early and work

approximately 20 hours per week. He earned a 2.3 grade point average in the first two

quarters of his senior year but admitted, "I be tired. By the time I get in the house I don't even be wanting to do nothing – get in the shower and go to bed." Dion failed science in the 1st marking period and had recently received a failing grade on his progress report for science. He shared, "My mom was pissed. So, I'm like, she took my cell phone. I'm like, I pay my own bill. How you gon take my cell phone? It was tough, but I was like, you know what, I kinda see what they mean. And I was thinking about stopping working, 'cause right now that work stuff is tough." In addition to his mother's pressure about school, Dion's uncle expected a lot from Dion also. Dion shared his uncle's words:

> He was like to try to go for better. Leaving out of school you want your grades to improve a lot. He said go from a C to B average to an A average. I'm like, man, I'm trying. I guess I got to try harder. I ain't trying hard enough.

Dion believed receiving a good education was of the utmost importance. He said, "The biggest thing right now for a senior here is to get out of high school. 'Cause if you don't have that, if they don't see you graduate from high school, jobs gon turn you down so bad. They gon say, He give up. That's the biggest things." Dion also believed that a good education would be the key to increased knowledge and independence. He stated, "The learning thing, that's why I'm going to college 'cause I want to learn more. I want to be something in life. Like, right now, with me working at my company, I see I don't want to work under nobody." For Dion, obtaining a higher education was the way to achieve his goals.

Throughout high school, Dion had taken standard level classes. He had not taken any advanced placement or honors courses although "that's what I wanted to take this year so that when I graduated they'd give me that little strip [an honors stole or cord]." Although he described his senior year classes as easy, he was having problems with

177

science and alluded to the possibility of failing science which, according to Ms. Hale,

would have put his graduation in jeopardy. With a sigh, Dion said:

> These last few months, I just been trying to focus. I'm like, I know this teacher ain't gon fail me. I just got to show him that I'm working. I already know I'm graduating. I just got to bring up that one grade, and that's in science. But I already know I brought it up, 'cause he would have already told me if I was failing.

> When considering this potential barrier between Dion and his college plans, he

concluded:

> It's all what you want in your mind. That's what I keep saying to myself. If I want it, I got to get it. I'm going push myself even if it's tough. I know in these last few months, I know I'm gon graduate. I'm gon get out of here. I mean that's so embarrassing to come back to school one more year. And the teachers looking at you like huh?

Despite the concern he had about his science course, Dion was still excited about the life

that was ahead for him after high school graduation.

"Handle your business so you can be something in life." In junior high school,

Dion knew he wanted to attend college. At that point, however, he wanted to attend so he

could play sports. Once he got to high school, however, he considered the importance of

academics and how focusing on academics could open the door for sports. Dion

theorized:

> You can get in from sports. But the best thing I always thought about, it'd be better if you get in for academics. People will know that if you go there for academics, if you get a scholarship for academics, you smart. Then, if you try to get on the team, there would be no struggle. If you go there for academic reasons, they'll look at you and be like, he's a Black American or whatever trying to do something in his life, let's give him a scholarship.

> Dion was inclined to go to college because he believed it opened the doors to

more opportunities in life and taught you how to be a responsible adult. He said:

178

I think there's more opportunities waiting for you. It's more hands on. Basically they look at you as an adult or whatever. Say, in high school you got teachers coming after you, do this and do that. In college, they don't care. Those professors are like, either you do my work or I'm going give you an E. I mean that's serious enough for you right there…you gon go there and handle your business so you can be something in life or you want to work for somebody?

Dion had varied career interests. He said:

At first I thought about being a surgeon. 'Cause I like all that dissecting things and all that. And I learned a lot in anatomy. Plus, I like motorcycles too and I like working on them. So I was thinking that when I go to college, I'm not gon settle on one thing. I might try the doctor thing, I might try the engineer thing but own my own business doing the engineering thing. Or, I might try the sports thing again and see how that work out.

"That's close and it's a good school." Dion applied to three in-state schools. Two of the colleges were small public historically Black colleges with less selective admissions standards. Many King graduates attend these universities after graduation. The third institution was a large public PWI with more selective admission standards. If money was not an option and he was admitted to all schools, Dion would attend the large PWI because "that's close and it's a good school." Dion had dreams of attending a school not included in the three to which he did apply. He wanted to attend a prominent HBI but "I know they expect, they got high standards. I know they wasn't gon to accept me," so he did not apply.

Dion was most concerned that a college had strong academic programs. He felt inclined towards universities with "programs set up for you, for what you want to do. Say like, I told you I want to be a doctor. They got like a good medical program or a good engineering program. Things like that." Dion had visited the three campuses to which he applied. He liked that two of the schools were "not that big and not too small" and described the third school as "having classes everywhere." He determined, however, that

179

he would not reject admission to a school because of size because if "they send me a scholarship, I'd cry to death. I'd be like, woo shucks!"

In addition to the encouragement Dion received from his mother and uncle, he felt support from staff at King. He identified "the people in the career center" as those who helped him get information regarding the college application process. Those "people" were Ms. Hale and other counselors. Dion explained, however, that he liked Ms. Hale the best because she:

> Will go over your grades with you and will tell you what you need to do and by the time you do that, you be passing. And she'll be like, I told you you could do it. She the type of counselor that will push you, help you out, and give you the confidence you need.

"What's the point of wasting your money?" Dion planned on paying for college with financial aid he hoped to receive based on the FAFSA his mother completed. He also applied for scholarships, but did not give specific details. Although Dion did not describe finances as a barrier to attending college, he expressed frustration with young men and women who waste their parents' money. He rhetorically asked, "Are you going to go to college and waste your mom's or pop's money or you gon go there and handle your business so you can be something in life." Also, he conveyed confusion with why some students don't put forth their best effort. He said, "What's the point of wasting your money. See, school [high school] is free. You go to college, you mess around, they kick you smack out." Finally, he considered finances when he considered choosing a major. He said, "I think for more money, I'd probably head for the medical. For more money and more knowledge."

Dion assumed that most of his friends were thinking about going to college. He and his friends, however, did not talk much about their postsecondary plans. Dion noted,

"We said something about it" and alluded to the need to focus on his own situation because of the pressure from his mother and uncle to graduate from high school. Dion did not know, however, that there were more Black females than males in college. He "thought it would be males 'cause you know they try to say they going to trade school." It appeared that, of the students he knew, enough males had expressed interest in trade school that he was unaware of the gender disparity in college attendance.

Time to save grades, no time for further interviews. Dion's second interview was rescheduled three times. He did not show up to either of the meetings. Weeks later, I inadvertently saw Dion during a fire drill at King. He gave me a hug and apologized for not completing the study. He expressed how much time and energy he had to put into his classes to ensure that he would graduate. Substantiating Dion's reasoning, Ms. Hale told me that Dion had received a "jeopardy letter" during the time interviews were being held. This letter indicated the possibility of not graduating if certain courses were not successfully completed. Dion, however, graduated from King in June 2007 "by the skin of his teeth," according to Ms. Hale. His cumulative grade point average from all of high school was a 1.97. He had been accepted to the local community college. Ms. Hale, however, did not have information on Dion applying to four-year colleges.

<center>*Summary*</center>

In this chapter I presented findings from data collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews, demographic questionnaires, and school records. The preceding narratives have been presented to describe the processes by which the participants became interested in and began pursuing postsecondary education. Their stories include significant details about the influences on each participants' college aspirations and the

<center>181</center>

means by which they were proceeding through the college choice process. These narratives relay the essential content of the stories the participants revealed about their college choice process. In the following chapter I identify and explore themes that were reflected in the participants' stories.

CHAPTER V

THEMES OF COLLEGE DECISION MAKING

The purpose of this chapter is to present the themes that were found among the individual narratives presented in Chapter IV. I identify, describe, and examine themes that cut across the experiences of all 11 participants. These content-based themes focus on various aspects of the participants' journeys to and through the college choice process. Within each theme, findings are presented as they correspond to K. Freeman's (2005) classification of knowers, seekers, and dreamers. Utilizing this theoretical framework to organize the findings of this study is beneficial because it provides a clear point from which to begin drawing conclusions and making comparisons.

Becoming Predisposed to College -- In Phases

Each participant's predisposition story was unique, but many participants described becoming predisposed to college in two phases. First, participants established aspirations to attend college. For knowers and seekers, this occurred during childhood. In fact, knowers had aspired to college for so long that many of them could not identify a time at which they did not know they were going to college. Since this happened at such a young age for these participants, this first phase of predisposition did not include a mature understanding of what it meant to attend college. John illustrated this stage by sharing that his parents made sure he knew: "You just gon have to like it…I was going to college regardless of what I wanted." Timothy, Brian, Tony, and Mark, all of the knowers and two of the seekers, each had similar experiences. Their parents let them know that college attendance was expected and the children began to anticipate that aspect of their futures.

Phase two occurred when the young men began to understand what it meant to attend college. This typically took place during middle school. Participants started making meaning of their educational aspirations as they got older and began understanding the benefits of attending college and the consequences of not attending college. John identified 7th or 8th grade as when he entered the second phase of predisposition and began considering what kind of life he wanted to lead as an adult. It was then that John realized that "with my expectations, I know I need to go to college." This realization, however, happened years after his parents told him that he was going to college. Tony entered this phase when he became familiar with research that described that college graduates earn more money than high school graduates. Mark entered phase two after his father told him that high school diplomas are no longer sufficient to earn a good living, and that a college degree is now necessary to sustain oneself and one's family. For all of the knowers and most of the seekers, these phases were distinct. Dreamers, however, experienced these phases differently.

The dreamers did not describe two phases of predisposition. Their responses, however, suggest that due to the late establishment of college aspirations, phase one happened in such close succession to or simultaneously with phase two that the distinctions between the phases were not as obvious to the dreamers as they were to the knowers and seekers who began aspiring to college as children. The close proximity or simultaneous timing of the phases for dreamers was facilitated by the participants' maturity and their preexisting understanding or quick ability to comprehend the benefits of attending college. It is likely that prior to establishing their aspirations, they had heard about college, had a frame of reference to go with their new thoughts about attending

college, and were able to apply that to their lives. Participants spoke more clearly about the first phase of predisposition – when they first recall having college aspirations.

The High School's Role in Initiating Predisposition

Each participant's predisposition was initiated in a unique manner. Some of the participants became predisposed to college through the influences of school officials including coaches and teachers or other school-related experiences. Other participants became predisposed to college through family members; this is described further in the following theme. William, Dion, Darryl, and Sean were all dreamers who became predisposed to college via school officials and school-based occurrences. William and Dion both thanked sports for steering them toward college attendance. Dion first thought about attending college when he started playing football in middle school, and William's path began leading toward college in high school when college coaches sent him recruitment letters and he began receiving encouragement from his high school coach. Middle and high school-based athletics and coaches were critical in the predisposition of these participants.

Sean and Darryl recalled becoming predisposed to college by school-related means also. Although Darryl's parents graduated from college and had taken classes beyond their four-year degrees, Darryl began considering college in the 9th grade when he heard about it from teachers and other resources within King High School. It was then that he immediately knew he wanted to attend college. Sean first acknowledged that he wanted to go to college while in middle school. Every day he saw the college that was across the street from his school and began to believe that was where he was supposed to go after high school graduation. These two participants who were excited about their

futures benefited from connections made outside of their homes that led them to consider college.

Each of the four participants who were influenced to attend college by school-based officials and experiences, Sean, Darryl, Dion, and William, was a dreamer. Schools typically began discussing college with students in high school. Thus, those who were not influenced to attend college by their parents or family members were more likely to be dreamers because they were usually influenced to attend college by the aforementioned school officials when they got to high school. It appears, however, that dreamers and those influenced to attend college by school-based officials and experiences have a reasonable chance of achieving their college dreams if they have family support. Although dreamers are the least likely to attend college (K. Freeman, 2005), it appears that the presence of family support can increase the chances that they do make it to a college or university.

Family Influencing Predisposition to College

Seven participants became predisposed to college due to expectations set upon them by their families. Dwight, a dreamer, was in high school when his mother first stated that Dwight needed to go to college. Tony, Mark, and Brandon, seekers, were in elementary school and early middle school when their parents and family members first expressed the expectation that they would go to college. Brian, Timothy, and John had known that their families expected them to attend college for as long as they can remember. Since that time, Brian, John, and Timothy had thought of going to college as a natural step after high school graduation. They are knowers.

There are differences, however, between the young men although their parents influenced their predisposition. Even though the knowers and seekers were both inspired early in life to attend college, the knowers' plans and goals were more stable. It is likely that the college-educated parents of the knowers were better equipped to help their sons realize the goal of attending college. Since childhood these Black males' parents planned for them to go to college, and the parents instilled the importance of good grades and hard work throughout their sons' school years. These participants had some of the highest GPAs and most clearly defined postsecondary plans of the group. The knowers had more college acceptances than the seekers. The knowers were also three of the five participants who appeared to be the most excited about and invested in attending college.

On the other hand, although the seekers aspired to college from a fairly young age, they did not indicate that their parents focused on grades throughout their school years or that their parents had significant conversations with them about college or their futures. The differences are most stark when examining seekers Brandon and Mark who, despite early college aspirations, had unsettled postsecondary plans, low grade point averages that were likely to significantly limit their college options, and seemingly limited input from their families. For those whose predisposition was influenced by family, it appears that the conversations with and encouragement from parents that occurred between the establishment of college expectations and the search process were as critical as setting early college expectations.

The influence of family on predisposition also becomes clear when considering Dwight's narrative. As a dreamer, Dwight's predisposition happened in high school, making it less likely that he would attend college when compared to knowers and

seekers. However, immediately after Dwight's mother stated her expectation for Dwight's higher education, he and his mother began talking about and actively planning for his postsecondary education. At the time of the interview, Dwight had applied to and had been accepted at more than one college. Dwight's mother's guidance helped him have a successful college search process although he established predisposition late. Late predisposition and a lack of guidance may have had very different outcomes, as was seen with Dion. It is important to note, however, that Ms. Hale believed that Dwight ultimately attended a community college, not either of the four-year universities he described as his preferred institutions.

Family was also influential to the participants who became predisposed to college through school-based sources still cited their families as influential during their college-going process. After Darryl discovered college, he expressed his college aspirations to his family and Darryl's parents began supporting his plans. Similarly, Sean described his aunt and grandmother's involvement as "banging it in my head that I needed to go to college" once they knew what college he wanted to attend. Both families became truly invested in and excited about the prospect of Sean and Darryl going to college once each had set that goal for himself.

Dion and William noted their parents' support of their plans, but did not appear to be as influenced by their parents' input as Sean and Darryl. For William, this may have been due to the knowledge and guidance he received from his brother who was already in college and was, possibly, better equipped to assist William than their parents who were not born or educated in the United States. Although Dion described his mother as supportive of his college plans, Dion also told stories that led me to believe his mother

had more pressing concerns. Dion was being compared to his older brother who dropped out of high school and had caused significant problems for their family. That reality, in conjunction with Dion's poor grades, may have made his mother most concerned about Dion's ability to graduate from high school as opposed to being focused on his possible college attendance.

Although their parents did not initiate their interest in college, Darryl and Sean received invaluable encouragement and assistance from their families. This parental influence is what most significantly distinguishes Dion and William from Darryl and Sean. Despite being dreamers, the latter pair was among the participants with the most well thought out college decision-making processes, the highest excitement level about attending college, and a greater number of college acceptances. The influence of family members appears to have negated the negative effects of the late establishment of predisposition and the absence of early parental encouragement.

The early onset of predisposition to college in conjunction with academic monitoring and parental involvement and encouragement regarding future plans appears to have yielded the students with the clearest college plans. Even for participants who were dreamers, the involvement and influence of one's parents seems to have lessened the negative effects associated with the late establishment of college predispositions.

Opportunities for Financial and Job Security through Attending College

Participants decided to pursue a postsecondary education for many practical reasons – financial advancement, career development, and personal growth. Most of the young men believed that college was important because it would prepare them to be successful and productive in the future. Several of the participants, including Sean,

Darryl, Dion, Dwight, and John, expressed the need to go to college in order to obtain a job and earn money. Most of the participants had narrowed their career goals to one option and anticipated receiving training for that career when in college. Other participants were still unsure of their career goals and thought attending college, taking classes, and having internships would help them decide on a career. Although several participants, including Brandon, Tony, and Brian, sought to become experts in one field, John believed the knowledge obtained in college would cut across various disciplines and would prepare him not to be taken advantage of in the world.

Participants heard family members share messages about the need to attend college to ensure job security. Mark's father informed him that obtaining a good-paying job without a higher education was possible years ago, but that Mark needed to go beyond a high school diploma to be successful. Mark took these words to heart and saw college as the path he must take to thrive in a career and in life. Sean received the same message from his family as he observed the financial and career challenges many of his non-college going family members faced. Tony heard a similar message via the media and was aware of research to support his notion that he must attend college in order to earn a reasonable amount of money. He had read that college graduates earn more money than high school graduates and even thought that he would need a doctorate to make enough money to raise a family. Having such knowledge motivated the participants to pursue college as a way to succeed. Without this information or insight, some of the participants would have been misinformed and possibly would have made other decisions.

Timothy examined the importance of a higher education from a financial perspective. He wanted to live a good life and thought that money helped secure that good life and that education, in turn, helped secure the money. Similarly, John had dreams of becoming a millionaire. In a society where some of his peers made money illegally, college was the way John planned to make money legally. Dwight summed it up for most of the participants when he said that education allows one to "succeed in life, and go places, and experience things." William considered his personal family circumstances when acknowledging that education is helpful if one comes from a family with limited opportunities and success. This young man, born in Africa, looked at education as a way to excel above and beyond his family circumstances. Similarly, Sean observed his family and concluded that not having a good education makes life harder because it becomes more difficult to be successful and to become prosperous.

Regardless of a participant's status as a dreamer, seeker, or knower, the majority of the participants identified one of these practical reasons as the motivation for them to attend college. Although dreamers may have realized the need for financial and job security later than knowers, most of the participants had the same desire to attend college to help improve the chances they would earn significant money, get a good job, and be able to provide for themselves and their family. Sean was the only participant whose primary reason for attending college was the acquisition of knowledge for the sake of learning. He was quick to note, however, that a career and a stable income were also important.

In part, the desire to attend college for such practical reasons may relate to the participants' less than privileged backgrounds and the belief that education is one of the

most highly regarded ways to improve the status of one's life. However, students who come from high-income families also desire to attend college for similar practical reasons. Their rationale may be to sustain the lifestyle they have lived as children, but at its core, educational aspirations are still very much connected to finances. Subsequently, the participants' desire to attend college in order to obtain a secure future is understood.

Enhancing Personal Growth and Making Connections through College Attendance

Many of the participants planned to attend college to experience personal growth too. William, Sean, Timothy, and John all looked forward to gaining more independence when they went to college. William planned to live on campus even if he went to college close to home because he wanted to become more responsible. Similarly, John and Timothy thought they would rely on their parents too much if they went to college locally. Thus, they preferred to attend college away from home so they could become more mature.

Even though he planned to stay close to home, Darryl also considered college beneficial because of opportunities he would have to meet a wide variety of people. Darryl looked forward to learning new ideas from the new people he would meet. Timothy and John agreed, viewing these new connections as ways to network. Timothy already anticipated making connections that could be used when he starts a business after college graduation. John mentioned the opportunities he would have to meet people of various races. Even though he was going from a predominantly Black high school and hometown to a predominantly Black college in a city with a sizable Black population, John expected that his college's proximity to PWIs would facilitate his ability to learn about different cultures. Impressively, John was able to acknowledge the fact that

although he wanted to attend a Historically Black College (HBC), he needed to be able to work with people of all races and he wanted to learn about various cultures. It is possible that his father, who was somewhat critical of HBCs which he felt did not reflect the true power structure in the U.S., initiated this mindset.

Several participants believed that college was a natural next step in their lives, and they anticipated growing and becoming more mature while there. Additionally, many of the participants had given thought to the type of people and connections they would make at college. Both dreamers and knowers described looking forward to encounters with new people that the participants hoped would lead them to achieving growth and maturity. Although second to obtaining financial and job security as a rationale for college attendance, enhancing personal growth and making connections emerged as important for several participants.

Searching for College via Multiple Resources

The participants began and went through the search phase of the college choice process in different ways, but with similar timing. All of the participants began searching for and considering specific institutions in the 10th and 11th grades. The result of the search process was a choice set that participants created in various ways. William and John's initial choice set of colleges mainly included institutions that recruited them for sports. Brandon's list of potential universities included institutions with major athletics programs, two of which were also alma maters of his cousin and uncle who influenced his postsecondary plans. For these young men, participation in or interest in athletics helped them identify colleges they were interested in attending. This realization was even more compelling considering none of the participants was heading to college as a way to

193

pursue a professional athletic career. Nevertheless, sports helped steer them in the direction of college in general and also particular institutions.

The participants whose choice sets were influenced by sports represented each of the three K. Freeman (2005) classifications. Brandon, a seeker, seems to have benefited the most from the lure of sports because he knew little else about colleges besides the university his cousin attended. Although it was likely that Brandon's choice set would change (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999), this junior's choice set was entirely based on sports. William and John, who were also influenced by sports, had at least one non-sports influenced university in their choice sets. The connection Brandon made between the sports teams he liked to watch on television and the potential to attend those universities was significant for him. Similarly, William, a dreamer, seemed to benefit greatly from the options and structure he was given by being able to create a choice set out of the colleges that were recruiting him. Though his brother was in college and did provide assistance to him, the list of colleges recruiting William seemed to provide the structure or incentive he needed to continue along the path to college. On the contrary, I believe that John, a knower with college-educated parents, would have been successful at creating a choice set even if sports was not involved. It is quite likely that John would have received guidance from his mother and father in identifying potential colleges. Nevertheless, athletics was a significant force in the process for these three participants – one dreamer, a seeker, and a knower.

The colleges and universities Tony, Darryl, and Sean first considered were brought forth via a class project or other resource or person from King and were based on the young men's academic interests. Timothy identified potential universities based on

194

experiences given to him by his family, while the HEAP counselor developed Dwight's list of potential colleges, but based that list on characteristics Dwight thought were important. Several of the young men expanded their original choice set after obtaining new information. William included another institution based on a recommendation from a friend, and John applied to an additional college because it was a well-respected university in the state to which he could have received tuition remission. Additionally, Sean planned to apply to two additional institutions beyond his first-choice college because he realized he needed additional options and found universities that he felt were almost as academically strong as his first choice. Timothy added a "safety school" he was fairly sure he would get into because they were accepting on-site applications at a college fair.

Although many universities in a participant's choice set were recommended to the participants or included institutions to which they were being recruited, most participants were thoughtful and strategic when they added colleges to their choice set. They considered a variety of institutional characteristics and tried to determine where they would do best. Dwight was the only participant who did not conduct personal research in order to create or expand his choice set. Participants across each K. Freeman (2005) classification benefited from in-school resources when it came to creating their choice set. Knowers had the extra advantage, however, of having their families serve as a resource for creating a choice set. This was not seen with seekers or dreamers.

Searching according to location, academic reputation, and other institutional characteristics. Participants considered many factors when creating the list of colleges and universities to which they would apply. Various institutional characteristics were key

in the decision-making processes of some of the participants. Eight of 10 participants identified the location of a university as important in their decision making. Knowers, seekers, and dreamers all considered location to be an important factor. Dion, William, Tony, and Darryl wanted to attend college close to home while Dwight and Timothy preferred to attend school away from home. John and Brandon considered location important because they wanted to attend college in an urban and vibrant city. For Dwight, John, Timothy, and Brandon, location translated into where they would be most comfortable and where they would have fun while fulfilling their desire to become more independent. William also wanted to become more mature and independent, but wanted to do that close to home in order to save money. Although the importance of location meant something different for each participant, the majority of the participants considered location when making decisions during the search process.

An institution's reputation (usually referred to as a "good school" by the participants) was also extremely important to many of the participants. Six of 10 participants, almost all of the dreamers and knowers and one seeker, identified the university's reputation as one of the most important factors considered when searching for an institution. Brandon, Dion, and Dwight all looked at a university's reputation from a holistic perspective, while Darryl and John were looking for colleges that had a strong reputation in the field they planned to pursue. Sean also expressed the desire to attend a university with a good business program, but did not list it as one of his top deciding factors. Timothy was concerned about an institution's reputation, because he anticipated that companies would be impressed with a person who graduated from a prestigious institution. Several other participants were also cognizant of how they might be perceived

by future employers as a graduate of certain institutions. Similarly, many of the participants placed importance on the ranking or prestige of a college, and their desire to attend a good school was connected with their desire to have a successful career and make money in the future. Participants, regardless of their K. Freeman (2005) classification, recognized the importance of this factor.

Six participants from each of K. Freeman's (2005) categories also considered a university's size when contemplating how good a fit a college or university would be for them. Timothy, Dwight, Tony, William, and Darryl all preferred small to medium sized colleges while Brandon preferred a large university. The climate of a campus (determined by the participant's ability to feel comfortable on campus or by the presence of friendly students and professors) and the availability of one's major were also considered.

Sean, William, Timothy, and Dwight, dreamers and knowers, were the only participants who identified a university's racial composition as an important factor as they searched for the ideal college. Each of them applied solely to HBCUs, and believed that HBCUs would be the most comfortable environment in which they could learn and grow. Sean also preferred an HBCU because he had extremely positive interactions with African American teachers and wanted to duplicate those experiences in college. Sean and Timothy had applied or were applying to some of the top-ranked HBCUs in the U.S. They spoke of their intentions to make sure they attended a highly regarded predominantly Black institution. This illustrates how intentional some participants were as they created choice sets, specifically when it concerned combining a college's prestige with other factors they considered important.

The institutional characteristics most often considered by participants were location, academic reputation, size, and racial composition. Participants across all K. Freeman classifications (2005) considered these factors when creating a choice set. The focus on institutional characteristics demonstrates the degree to which most participants made thoughtful decisions.

Campus visits help confirm decisions. Campus tours and visits were also important tools for gathering information for several participants. Tony, Darryl, William, Brian, Timothy, and John all visited at least one of the colleges to which they applied. In most cases, the participants used the visits to interview, tour, and gather information to determine how good a fit the university would be for them. After visiting his top two choices, Darryl was able to identify his first and second choice colleges because his time at the schools confirmed that one was a better fit for him. Subsequently, he applied to both institutions, but he was more passionate about attending the art school because it was smaller and allowed him to focus almost entirely on art. Similarly, college visits helped John and Brian make critical decisions. Brian attended a week-long summer seminar before his senior year at his first-choice institution. That time helped him experience what it would be like to attend that service academy. Although he still applied to a second service academy, the institution he visited and felt comfortable with became his first choice.

John had the opportunity to visit each of the five universities to which he applied. His visits to two other institutions in rural areas confirmed that he wanted to be in and felt more comfortable in an urban environment. Timothy visited his top two choices but said that those visits did not sway him because he was going to apply to those institutions

anyway. Sean and Dwight had not visited any of the colleges to which they applied, but they had campus visits planned for the weeks following our interviews.

Campus visits were a useful way to help participants make decisions. All of the knowers, one seeker, and two dreamers visited campuses during their college choice process. The dreamer who did visit campuses had more stable and clear postsecondary plans. The visits helped confirm plans the participants were making for their postsecondary lives. Based on the visits, the young men were able to make informed decisions about how they anticipated the size and location of an institution would affect them. Participants found campus visits valuable, and the visits contributed to the level of comfort the participants expected to feel once on the campus in the fall.

Limited use of electronic and print publications. Participants used various forms of media to obtain information as they made decisions during their college choice process. Darryl, Tony, William, and Sean all discussed how they used the Internet to gather information about various universities. Although Sean heard of his first-choice college from one of his teachers, he used the Internet to learn more about the institution. Sean used the Internet to gather information that helped him decide to make that school his first choice. Darryl used both the Internet and magazine ads to learn about the majors at several universities that were not well known by students, and possibly staff, at King. Tony's use of the Internet helped him narrow his potential colleges from two to one. Immediately after a teacher told him about the art school, he researched the institution online and decided that he wanted to go there instead of another university he considered.

Most participants, seekers, knowers, and dreamers, used electronic and print resources to verify or increase the information known about particular institutions. Only

199

Darryl, a dreamer, expressed initially finding out about colleges via media or print resources. Most participants found out about a college from another individual and augmented their knowledge of the colleges via electronic and print resources.

Ultimately, at the time of the interviews, the participants applied to the following number of colleges and universities: Dwight and John applied to five, Timothy, Darryl, William, and Mark applied to three, Dion and Brian applied to two, and Sean and Tony applied to one institution. Brandon, the 11th grade participant, had not applied for admission to colleges although he had started considering certain postsecondary institutions. There was no pattern found between a participant's status as a knower, seeker, or dreamer and the number of colleges to which they applied.

Parents Providing Information and Hands-on Assistance During Search

Participants often spoke of the emotional support and encouragement they received from parents as they made postsecondary plans, but parents additionally served as sources of information throughout participants' college-going processes. Participants shared numerous stories of how parents helped with various aspects of the college selection process. Darryl's parents helped with his applications and went to the art school's campus with him to meet with financial aid officials. John's parents and sister discussed their college experiences with John and gave him a sense of what to expect. Additionally, John's father and mother worked with him to narrow down his list of potential schools, searched, found, and printed college information from the Internet, and visited campuses with him. Timothy's mother talked to him about her alma mater, completed the FAFSA with him, and worked with him to locate and apply for scholarships.

Similarly, Dwight and his mother read and studied college brochures together to get an idea of what Dwight might experience if he attended. Dwight's mother also visited Ms. Hale with him to discuss college and was going on a college visit with him. Dwight's mother's assistance was also critical because it led to the use of the HEAP counselor who guided Dwight through the college identification and application process. It appears that without the substantive help from HEAP, Dwight's college decision making would have been very different. The HEAP counselor identified potential colleges for Dwight, obtained applications for those institutions, and helped Dwight complete necessary forms. Dwight admitted that he did very little independent exploration and searching for colleges and that the HEAP counselor did most of the work. Dwight's mother made sure Dwight was exposed to and used resources (i.e., Ms. Hale and the HEAP counselor) in order to get the best information and to make the best decisions regarding attending college.

The extent to which parents influenced their children differed by participant. Participants who had been accepted to institutions of higher education often had parents who were most directly involved with helping their child make decisions, consider options, and find useful resources. Two of three knowers and two of five dreamers had the assistance of their parents which translated into completed applications, campus visits, college acceptances, and a level of excitement and confidence about achieving their goal. No seekers and 3 of 5 dreamers did not note direct assistance from parents. Although most of those without direct parental assistance applied to colleges, none had received acceptances and most had college choice processes that were less stable than participants who did receive parental assistance.

Influential Insight Gained from Persons Knowledgeable about College

Participants also used other people as resources and as a means of gathering information. Participants noted some of the best information or best advice as that from family and friends who were in or had already graduated from college. The range of assistance from others went from words of wisdom and specific information given about college to nonverbal messages about how hard one must work when in college.

Watching and learning from college students and recent graduates. Dwight's friends who were in college told him to be prepared for more studying and encouraged him to limit the amount of partying he does. Similarly, Sean's uncle, a college graduate, told him to have fun, but not to go wild at college. Sean's uncle recommended that Sean learn how to strike a good balance between work and fun and that he stay focused and exercise good judgment. Timothy's cousin, who graduated from Timothy's first-choice college, told Timothy to be prepared for an increase in studying, completing work, and listening to professors.

Although not given in the way of advice or specific resources, Brandon, Mark, William, and John learned lessons about applying for and attending college as they watched others in action. John and William had older siblings and Mark had an older cousin who were in or had graduated from college. These participants were aware of the amount of time and energy their older relatives spent on school work and, from those observations, knew they needed to give their full attention and effort to doing well in school. Brandon was also inspired by his cousin who was one of the few natives of his parents' Caribbean nation he knew to graduate from college. Brandon's cousin also served as an important source of information about college for him. Although she gave

him information, he seemed most inspired by her success and accomplishments that came without words.

One knower, John, spoke of learning a great deal about what to expect from college by watching his sister who was a junior in college. Although he found this to be beneficial, it is quite likely that John would have been college-bound even without this resource and that he would have been well prepared to begin college due to the influence of his college-educated parents and his early predisposition. Watching others in action seemed to have more significance for two seekers and one dreamer. Neither William, Brandon, nor Mark had parents who went to college, so they gathered a great deal of information and perspective from others who were in or had recently graduated from college. The family members they watched influenced the participants' predisposition and search processes and provided inspiration the participants may not have received elsewhere.

Participants used the actions and advice of others to help them consider how they needed to behave as they went through the college choice process and once they started their college career. These connections made the college experience more real for the participants. Participants seemed to believe college was attainable and doable because they had seen their contemporaries go through the same processes as opposed to only hearing about someone's college experience from decades ago. This was invaluable in that it may have served as a mirror for the participants.

School counselors' influential role. Mrs. Hale, other counselors, and other school officials also served as important resources for several of the participants. These school officials were instrumental throughout the college choice process of many participants.

203

Dwight and his mother visited Ms. Hale to get direction on pursuing college. Similarly, Mark found his counselor to be helpful when it came to "applying to colleges and filling out applications and financial aid and finding and seeking out information." Tony had similar experiences when his counselor helped him complete forms required by his college and provided him with information including, but not limited to, admission requirements and institution details. Timothy also received assistance from his counselor who helped him find and complete scholarships and wrote letters of recommendation. John also had positive experiences with his counselor who quickly completed admission paperwork and always spoke encouraging words that helped build his self-esteem. This led him to conclude that the counselors really cared about his future. Finally, Sean, William, and Darryl acknowledged the useful information they gained when the counselors arranged for representatives from various colleges to visit King to talk to interested students.

Knowers, seekers, and dreamers all spoke highly of the counselors' roles in their application processes. It is important to note, however, that the majority of assistance the participants received was in the 12th grade. The fact that Brandon, in the 11th grade, had not yet received college/postsecondary information from his counselor and other participants' lack of references to college assistance from counselors prior to the 12th grade indicates that these relationships generally began in senior year or once in the search stage of the college choice process. Brandon's perspectives and lack of knowledge regarding the college-going process underscores why students should be in touch with their counselors about college information earlier in high school or even prior to high school.

Doors opened by teachers and an administrator. John and Sean enjoyed a very inspiring and helpful relationship with one particular administrator who was a graduate of their first-choice institution. Once the administrator discovered that Sean and John were seriously interested in attending his alma mater, he became their mentor. The administrator wrote recommendations for John and Sean and connected them with a university recruiter assigned to their geographical area. Sean's connections with the recruiter, via his administrator, gave Sean entrée into university events with the president, admissions staff, and alumni. This interaction helped Sean confirm that he truly wanted to attend the university and helped him become more familiar to important decision-makers at a college with a competitive admissions process.

John's close relationship with this school administrator also led to John being exposed to some of the same resources and opportunities as Sean. John and Sean talked to the administrator about campus life, teachers, classes, and what to expect as a student. The relationship these young men had with the King administrator helped them be excited and more confident about their choice and decisions. These relationships and the resources and information that stemmed from the relationships helped John and Sean feel a connection to their first-choice university. Ultimately, the connection made between John, Sean, and the administrator increased John and Sean's social capital as they became familiar with admissions representatives, administrators, and alumni from the university and the school itself at a level deeper than would have been likely without the administrator. This was possibly most important for Sean, the dreamer, who had fewer college-educated and knowledgeable influences than John, the knower. They both, however, benefited greatly from this strong connection to such an influential resource

205

who showed concern for them and was able to contribute to their decision-making process and to their understanding of what to expect in college, particularly as it was connected to John and Sean's first-choice university.

Participants also discussed how teachers served as resources for making postsecondary decisions. Tony and Sean originally heard about their first-choice college from a teacher. Sean's excitement about attending this university grew as another teacher reinforced his plans by sharing what she knew about the school he was exploring. These instances of teacher reinforcement and assistance made Sean feel more certain about the choices he was making. Subsequently, Sean "started reading more and looking into it and that's when I actually did want to end up going to [names university]." Teachers were also instrumental in giving Brandon ideas about future careers. When his government teacher praised his performance in the class and recommended that he take an upper level government course, he did, and became further encouraged about being a lawyer. He also recalled listening to a teacher discuss psychology and possible careers which led him to take psychology and to hopefully take advanced placement psychology as a senior. Contrary to the aforementioned experiences, neither Timothy nor Dwight cited teachers as helpful during any portion of their college decision-making process; Darryl described teachers as moderately helpful.

Only seekers and dreamers, with the exception of one knower, discussed the positive influence of teachers. Teachers' influence was most often in expanding students' options by opening their minds to the idea of college or by helping them identify potential careers. Class and one-on-one discussions helped steer students in particular directions. Such assistance was often welcomed, as some participants benefited from the

suggestions and guidance that otherwise might not have been received. Teachers and other school officials, including counselors and administrators, have the potential to provide meaningful guidance to students, as all participants, dreamers, seekers, and knowers, found the assistance of these school officials to be invaluable.

The Wide-Ranging Influence of Peers

All of the participants knew King High School students who were and were not planning to go to college after graduating from high school. The majority of the participants estimated that most of their peers planned to go to college after graduation. Darryl was positively influenced by his friends who were heading to college. He described positive peer pressure from his friends with whom he had a goal of attending an academically reputable university. He and his friends also examined and compared academic programs at various colleges before deciding to apply to a particular school. These interactions helped guide and encourage Darryl as he made decisions about college. The positive pressure he received from his friends was another resource that helped propel this dreamer further than other dreamers may typically go. Although he did not become predisposed until he was in high school, being surrounded by friends with the same goals likely contributed to Darryl's excitement about college and successful college choice process.

On the other hand, William, Brian, Timothy, and John said they were not influenced by their friends' decisions because they had already decided to go to college. Despite making plans independent of their friends, Brian and John were comforted by knowing that many of their friends were also going to college after graduation. Participants also got ideas about potential colleges from peers. For example, although

William did not make the ultimate decision to attend college based on his friends, he was influenced to apply to a particular university because of a friend's recommendation.

Mark described a unique situation in which most of his friends were not in high school with him because they had either dropped out or had been expelled. He was influenced by their decisions because those young men had not led productive lives since leaving school, and Mark did not want to suffer the same fate. Mark had, however, one friend with whom he shared his college decision-making process. Mark and Tim decided to attend the same college in order to make their first year and their transition easier. They identified the local community college as a school they could go to together, and they applied.

Sean, Dwight, John, and Tony described their non-college bound peers as being tired of school and unable or unwilling, as John said, to "see college as something that they could put up for the next four or six years of their life." The majority of Sean's friends decided to bypass college and go to Job Corps in order to work and make what they hoped would be a significant amount of money. Most of the participants knew a sizable portion of students who were not headed for college. The consensus was that those students needed a break, wanted to earn money sooner than later, and did not want to continue their education at all or, in some cases, at that time.

Although most of the participants expressed independent decision making, peers were still an important part of the process for many. All of the knowers and select seekers and dreamers described themselves as making decisions independent of their peers. The knowers, however, were comforted by knowing that their friends planned to attend college, particularly if it was the same college as the participant. Dreamers, seekers, and

knowers all used images or knowledge of non-college bound peers' futures as incentive to maintain their goals to attend college and be successful. Many of the participants expressed their disagreement with the non-college path of some of their peers. Participants recognized those decisions as mistakes, but generally did not try to change their peers' minds. It appears that besides expending their energy on securing their own future, the participants understood the reasons (financial, tired of school, unclear career goals, etc.) many of their peers gave for not pursuing a college education. Participants were, however, strong enough to maintain their focus despite their non-college bound peers.

Such strength was particularly necessary for Mark who had seen many of his peers drop out of high school. Mark, a seeker, actually needed a peer to be there with him through the college decision-making process and, he decided, when he went college. There were several cases in which it was likely that a participant would be at college with a friend or acquaintance from King. This brought a sense of comfort to most participants. Mark, however, doubted his academic abilities and believed that the presence of his friend was critical in determining his success in college. This represented the most significant influence of a peer on the participants in this study.

High School Grades Influencing College Decision Making

Participants were recruited to the study based on their grade point average for the first two quarters of the school year. Those GPAs ranged from 2.0 (C-) to 4.1 (A+). Data collected at the conclusion of interviews revealed that Brandon, Dion, Dwight, and Mark, two seekers and two dreamers, all had cumulative (across all high school years) grade point averages of D. Cumulative grade point average is important to analyze because it is

one of the measures colleges receive when a student applies for admission and because it appears to have had an effect on various aspects of the college decision-making process for those participants.

Despite their low but passing grades, the four participants with cumulative D grade point averages seemed hopeful about college and were still engaged in the college decision-making process. Therefore, it appears that these participants' predispositions were not affected by their low grades. Participants appeared to remain optimistic about their chances to attend college because either they were unaware that low grades would negatively affect their college-going process (i.e., Brandon's hope of attending a more or most selective university while having a cumulative 1.7 grade point average) or they were aware that they would, at least, be admitted to a community college or a university whose admissions requirements were minimally selective (i.e., Mark and Dwight applying to less and least selective institutions). Participants identified attending a community college as more favorable than not going to college at all; hence, their educational aspirations still went beyond high school.

Participants reiterated their belief that any college is better than no college at all when they expressed the need for students, particularly Black males, to know that a low grade point average did not end all hope for a postsecondary education. William reflected on community colleges and four-year institutions with lower selectivity when saying, "Most people think that since they have low grades that they still can't go to college. That's like a misunderstanding. They think to go to college you have to be a 4.0 student." It is possible that some of this study's participants understood this fact and continued pursuing their college aspirations despite low grades.

Participants with higher grade point averages were more clear on the colleges and universities to which they applied and why, visited the campuses, were generally aware of the cost of attendance, seemed to have given deeper thought to the entire college choice process, and, in several cases, had already been admitted to a university. Although predisposition was not affected by lower grades, the search processes of those with D cumulative averages were affected. Those young men were faced with, or in the future would face, barriers and limitations during the search process.

For example, Mark knew his low grades were affecting his college plans and had resigned himself to the fact that he would not be admitted to his first-choice institution, a four-year university, but that he would attend a community college and then transfer to a four-year institution. Mark's unexcited mood and stories were congruent with his low cumulative grade point average. On the other hand, Brandon, also possessing a cumulative D grade point average, was one year away from applying to college and spoke of applying to universities whose freshmen classes had average GPAs significantly higher than his. However, due to limited support and information, Brandon seemed oblivious to the fact that his grades were likely to pose barriers during his college decision-making process.

Dion, a dreamer, was also likely to face many barriers. Dion had plans and shared stories that were not congruent with his 1.97 cumulative GPA. Dion expressed the desire to pursue engineering, medicine, or athletics once in college, but wavered on the names of the colleges to which he applied. It is possible that he would have been admitted to two of the three colleges he named as potential schools. However, it is highly likely that the third university would have rejected him because of his grades. During my time at King

High School, it became clear that the task at the forefront of Dion's mind was graduating from high school. During his interview he mentioned difficulties in classes, but Dion's failure to show up for the second interview and his subsequent explanation of having to dedicate more time to a class that stood between him and graduation made his academic difficulties more obvious. I believe that Dion's low grades may have contributed to his delayed predisposition, to his family's lack of guidance for him, and to his lack of clarity with regard to his college goals and plans. It is likely that Dion's hopes for himself may have been more rooted in personal longing to do well and social desirability than in reality.

Dwight, however, also had a cumulative D grade point average but had other factors that altered the presence of such low grades. It appears that the significant support Dwight received from his mother and the HEAP representative diminished the negative effects of his low grades. It is likely that the HEAP representative recommended that Dwight apply to colleges which were more likely to admit him with such grades. Despite the fact that he seemed likely to enroll in college, Dwight's search decisions were affected by his academic achievement.

Two of three seekers and two of five dreamers comprised the participants with D cumulative grade point averages. The participants with D averages who had assistance (i.e., Dwight with the HEAP representative) and an understanding of various college options (i.e., Mark realizing that community college is a good option for him with low grades) seemed more likely to achieve their goal of going to college. Knowers' cumulative grade point averages ranged from 3.41 (B) to 3.77 (B+). No knower's search process was limited due to grades. The differences among participants based on grade

212

point average were seen in their search processes and also in the extent to which they relayed a clear understanding of their college choice process and of their future goals.

Cost Concerns, but Not for All

Participants considered the financial cost of a college or university in various ways. William was the only participant who identified price as an important factor in his decision-making process. In fact, William listed cost as the factor that was most important to him as he searched for a college. Price affected William's search process because he made an in-state university his first-choice due to the lower tuition. Finances also influenced Brian's search process. When considering traditional universities, Brian was dejected about cost because he did not believe that his parents were able to afford any of the colleges he wanted to attend. This concern about cost, along with his desire to enter the military, led him to explore attending a service academy, none of which charge tuition. Other participants' concerns for cost were not stated as explicitly. In fact, no other participant, besides William, mentioned price in his list of most important institutional characteristics considered when deciding on a choice set. Upon deeper analysis, however, it appears that many of the participants considered the cost of a college in other ways.

Both Timothy and Darryl declared that cost didn't matter. Both of these young men were determined to attend the college that they thought would be best for them regardless of cost. They were prepared to take on loans and go into debt if it meant going to the university of their choice. Even with that mindset, however, Timothy and Darryl knew how much it cost to attend their first-choice university and applied for and sincerely hoped they would receive scholarships. Additionally, Darryl decided to commute to and

from college in order to eliminate room and board costs. Although Timothy and Darryl would have done whatever necessary to attend college, they made cost-conscious decisions (i.e., applying for scholarships and deciding not to live on campus) to save money. Ultimately, cost did matter; but cost concerns were manifested differently for each participant.

Similarly, John did not alter his search for a college due to cost, but he did apply for scholarships to help defray the cost of college. His story was especially interesting since his mother's employment with a university system of schools would have made him eligible to attend one of several universities without paying tuition. If John had not received scholarships to his first-choice university, he felt it was likely that his parents would have still allowed him to attend the university of his choice. Although he would have incurred loans, it appears that his parents' dedication to and focus on higher education would not have let him pass up an opportunity to attend his first-choice university.

Although Sean did not factor cost into the identification of preferred colleges, he recognized that the tuition at some institutions was high. Subsequently, Sean decided he would work that much harder to make his time in college worth the money. Additionally, he applied for scholarships and had begun saving money to contribute to his education. Cost did not dissuade Sean from searching for and applying to particular universities, but it did encourage him to give his best effort as a way to show his appreciation for being able to attend college, especially one that costs a lot of money. Sean was not aware, however, of just how much it costs to attend his first-choice college. He stated that tuition at his first-choice college was approximately $10,000 per year although it is actually

$10,000 per semester. This demonstrates Sean's overall concern about college cost, but the inaccuracy of his specific knowledge regarding the financial obligations associated with attending his preferred university.

Mark did not consider cost as he searched for potential colleges or universities. He was unable to state or estimate how much it costs to attend the institutions to which he applied. However, Mark, along with Dwight, Brandon, and Timothy, did recognize that while cost is not a barrier to their college goals, it often is a barrier for others. Specifically, Mark cited lack of money for high tuition as a reason many Blacks abandon their dreams of pursuing and attending college.

Brandon, the high school junior, was not overly concerned about cost because he had heard teachers say they were still paying off college loans. Although this seemed to make him feel comfortable with the idea of taking out loans, Brandon planned to apply for financial aid and scholarships to pay for his postsecondary education. As a junior, however, he had not given college costs more thought than that. Dion and Tony did not make or change any plans due to the cost of an institution, but they did apply for financial aid. Despite their specific views on cost and how it influenced their selection of potential colleges, each participant, except Brandon in the 11th grade and Brian who was headed to a tuition-free service academy, applied for either financial aid or scholarships to defray the cost of continuing their education. Participants did not look forward to going into debt, but many participants believed that accumulating debt was very likely and would have done so without hesitation if it was the only way they could have attended college. Although some participants did not let the thought or fear of cost affect their college search, all participants, regardless of their status as a knower, seeker, or dreamer, made

cost-conscious decisions including applying for scholarships, completing the FAFSA, applying to in-state universities, and deciding to live at home and commute to college.

Finally, it was interesting that many participants were unaware of college costs. Two factors might have been at play. First, it is likely that specific dollar amounts would not have changed a participant's desire or need for financial aid. Thus, they were less in tune with the costs associated with college attendance because they would have needed scholarships or loans to pay regardless of the amount. Secondly, only those who had been accepted to a university and William, who identified cost as his primary concern, accurately quoted the tuition for their college. Subsequently, it is possible that the primary concern of the participants who were unaware of costs was being admitted to an institution before the concern turned to how to fund their education.

Proposing Explanations for the Decisions of Non-College Bound Black Males

I asked participants to consider the status of non-college bound Black males as they prepare to graduate from high school. Nine of the 11 participants were not surprised to hear that there are fewer Black males in college than Black females. Dwight was unaware of that fact, and Dion perceived that more Black males were in college because he thought a significant number of Black males went to trade school. The vast majority of participants, however, had already observed or heard that Black males did not attend college as often as Black females.

Tony, Brandon, and Sean were observant of their surroundings and noticed that more Black females were headed for college. Sean believed that many Black males are satisfied with a high school diploma and are not as driven or encouraged to pursue college. John realized that more Black women were in college than Black men when he

216

attended a college graduation at an Historically Black College and noticed the discrepancy in the number of Black male and female graduates. He concluded that Black females were more motivated than Black males. Darryl agreed with the lack of motivation as a reason for the lower level of college attendance for Black males. Additionally, Timothy thought that females of all races cared more about their grades and schoolwork than their male counterparts; thus, he was not surprised by the gender gap in college attendance among Blacks. Timothy also believed that a lack of information was a major contributing factor to why many Black males did not go to college.

Mark was not surprised about the number of Black males in college because he alleged that many Black males abandoned dreams of going to college upon realizing that they did not have the grades to be admitted or the money to enroll. He predicted that Black males with low grades did not know community college was a good option for improving one's skills and knowledge and becoming more prepared for college-level work. Without that information, he concluded, many Black males believe they are not eligible to attend college and decide to go to work after graduating from high school. It appears that Mark knows he is not the only student at King with low grades, but he realizes that he is one of the few with low grades who is still seeking a postsecondary education. When many of his peers gave up on their postsecondary dreams because of low grades, Mark used his knowledge about community colleges to adjust his postsecondary plans. By analyzing his personal situation, Mark was able to describe and understand the circumstances that keep many Black males from pursuing a college education.

The positive effect of career plans, long-term goals, and patience on Black male college going. Several of the young men were also not surprised by the gender gap because they thought that many males desire material possessions and do not have the patience to endure four years of college before obtaining such luxuries. William, Brandon, Brian, Timothy, and John all agreed that the desire for fast money dissuades many Black males from going to college. Brian and John elaborated by explaining that many Black males engage only in short-term life planning (i.e., wanting fast money), not realizing how their decisions not to attend college may negatively affect them in the future. This ability to think and plan from a long-term perspective is a trait that Brian attributed to more females than males, hence females' higher enrollment in colleges and universities.

Brian and William both believed that their logical thinking and patience helped steer them toward college and away from the mindset of earning money fast that they said deters some Black males from college. Brian thought that his logical thinking helped him examine the long-term benefits of attending college as opposed to pursuing athletics in college as he sees many Black males do. He described the stability of a military career and the ability of that career to be maintained even in light of an injury, and compared that to a career in the National Basketball Association that could be over after one injury. Brian described the need for contingency plans and contended that the military and graduation from a service academy had better back up plans than other non-college postsecondary options that might yield faster money.

When asked how they were different from other Black males, participants gave revealing answers regarding themselves and their peers. Darryl, Dwight, and Tony all felt

that having an interest in specific disciplines and subjects helped guide them toward college as a way to begin pursuing those interests as careers. Darryl and Tony both loved art and wanted to improve their skills and share their talents with the world. They both felt they needed college to accomplish those goals. Mark and Dwight, although not entirely certain of the career they planned to pursue, had enough of an idea that they thought they were ready for college. They believed that even the most tentative of plans would help guide a student toward college where he could then take classes and engage in opportunities that would help him make a more definite career decision. Dwight felt that students without any idea of what career they wanted to pursue were less likely to pursue a postsecondary education.

Similarly, Timothy and Brandon thought that Black males should select classes or identify hobbies they like in order to identify potential careers. Brandon followed this advice and was planning to become a lawyer or a therapist. Subsequently, he knew and was ready to follow the path from high school to college and graduate school to one of those careers. Darryl observed that many Black males did not know what they want to study in college. Reflecting on his own experience, Darryl believed that doing what he loved is what motivates and excites him about continuing his education. Knowing that he has wanted to be an artist since elementary school helped make the college search process relatively smooth and efficient for Darryl.

The theme of the importance of career plans arose from participants without the guidance of a specific question. Overwhelmingly, participants believed that the absence of a career plan, definite or tentative, hinders student desire or student interest in obtaining a postsecondary education. When comparing Black females and Black males,

William revealed, "I think a lot of females knew what they want to do before time so they could better prepare for it, you know. Some guys, they have no idea what they want to do." In William's mind, as well as in the minds of the majority of other dreamers, knowers, and seekers, not having a career goal or plan made it more likely that one would not be college-bound.

Participants did not reveal how they concluded that career plans were so essential to postsecondary plans for Black males, but participants' experiences and thoughts suggest that it is related to finances. Participants recognized that college costs a significant amount of money and believed that they would receive a return on their investment upon getting a job after college graduation. Participants, and they believed their peers, were proponents of going to college when one knew what one wanted to study because such clarity would help make better use of time (minimum time in college because direction is clear; less time not making money) and money (minimum amount spent on education; faster entrance into working, money-making world) and would contribute directly to the goal of financial security.

The role of family in increasing Black male college enrollment. Seven of ten participants believed that family involvement was most critical in influencing more Black males to attend college. I find it most compelling that all of the dreamers agreed that more influence and encouragement from families would contribute to more Black males in college. This came from dreamers who did and did not receive significant influence from their families. Those participants understood the positive or negative effects their situation had on their college decision-making process. Knowers and seekers agreed with the importance of family encouragement also.

William and Brandon both believed that families should begin talking to their Black males about college early in their lives. William said, "It's kind of too late when you're a senior and your parents start talking to you about college. By that time it's too late 'cause you lost interest." Similarly, Brian thought families should instill the importance of good grades and college from early in a child's life. For Brian, the constant focus on grades made him more conscious of his achievement and yielded his early understanding that college was automatically the next step after high school graduation and of what it took to get to college. Timothy and John agreed that parents should start teaching their children about college from an early age. Timothy reasoned that since one's family nurtures children from the beginning in all other aspects of life, families could and should nurture Black males to seek and strive for college. All knowers and a dreamer agreed with the need to be exposed to college before high school as a way to increase the number of Black males in college.

John also suggested that families should ask what a child wants to do with his life and have the child describe the process it takes to get to that goal. He reasoned that, once a young man identifies his goal and the path to that goal, he would be more likely to put those plans in action. John contended, "If you don't have anyone sitting down and talking to you to put ideas in your head…then it's kind of difficult." John believed that high schools might be able to have similar discussions and should encourage deep thinking on the part of the child, but that parents have the potential to be most influential because of the closer bonds that are usually held between a child and his family as opposed to a child and school officials.

Mark, Timothy, John, and Brandon asserted that influential family members were one aspect of their lives that made them different from non-college bound Black males. Their family members did what John and Timothy described by opening up the idea of college when they were younger. John believed that constant discussions with his parents made him unique since many people were not raised in such an environment. Family involvement also came in the form of parents encouraging their child to excel beyond the parents' levels of achievement. Both directly and indirectly, Brandon received messages to work hard and take educational opportunities his parents, immigrants to the United States, did not have, as these chances would help improve the likelihood he would prosper in the U.S.

Providing information and motivation to increase college attendance. Participants' realization of why and how they are different from the Black males who are not headed to college helped them understand themselves better and also helped them identify suggestions regarding how to get more Black males focused toward college and enrolled in college. Participants described two other factors that could play a role in influencing Black male participation in postsecondary education, motivation and information. Although not identified prominently by all participants, increasing individual motivation was listed as a way to raise the number of Black males in college. Dwight identified individual motivation as the most important factor in trying to get more Black males to attend college while other participants focused on information.

William thought it would be helpful for high schools to have more college admissions officers visit the high school. He specifically noted the need for colleges to clear up the misconception that students with low grades have no college options.

Brandon also looked to high schools to encourage and inform Black males. He stated that school officials should talk about college more often and should not make Black males feel like college admission is impossible. Brandon heard school officials discuss how difficult college is and believed that such conversation discourages interest in college.

Timothy suggested that high schools bring in Black men to describe the benefits and importance of college. He thought it would be effective if high schools recruited Black men who, during their high school years, were unsure of the route they would take after high school, ultimately chose college, and became successful. John recommended that high schools have programs specifically for African American males that would help them create long-term goals and understand paths that could be taken to reach their goals. Finally, Brian's experience with good counselors made him realize the usefulness of that resource. Subsequently, he recommended that high schools have more good counselors. Interestingly, Brian did not suggest that the counselors work more with students during the college decision-making process. Brian suggested that the counselors work more to help students who struggle academically and who skip school. He recommended that high schools go beyond suspending a student to helping understand the root of and solutions for problems that may be holding a student back from his academic highest potential.

Participants who were knowers, seekers, and dreamers identified learning about college at a younger age, receiving more family influence, being more informed, and having a career goal as themes that could increase the number of Black males in college. When each classification is analyzed more closely, however, all of the knowers focused in on learning about college at an earlier age, the importance of having career goals, and

223

the need for information and resources. Every dreamer and most seekers thought the strongest influence would come from the participation of family during predisposition and search. The knowers focused in on the aspects of their college choice process that made them successful – learning about college as a child, having an idea of their career, and being informed. Most dreamers and seekers, however, focused on the aspect of their college choice process that was lacking – family involvement.

Summary

This chapter revealed themes that emerged among the narratives that were shared in Chapter IV. Although the narratives highlight the unique situation and reality of each participant's college decision-making process, these content-based themes help expand what is learned about the creation and manifestation of postsecondary plans for this group of 11 Black males.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight significant findings of this study and to discuss the findings in relation to the research questions, from the perspective of the theoretical frameworks that guided the study, and through the lens of critical race theory. Within these sections, I will draw conclusions in relation to the literature that was reviewed in Chapter II. Finally, in this chapter I consider limitations of the study, suggest implications of the results for practice and future research, and conclude by presenting the strengths of the study. Throughout this chapter, I will refer frequently to participants both by their names (pseudonyms) as well as K. Freeman's (2005) classifications of knowers, seekers, and dreamers in order to fully integrate that theoretical framework into the discussion.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the influences on and processes by which upper-level high school Black males make decisions about pursuing a college education and, subsequently, searching for a college. Two research questions guided this study: (a) How do Black males who are upper-level high school students describe the influences on and processes by which they decide to pursue a postsecondary education? (b) How do Black males who are upper-level high school students who plan to pursue a postsecondary education describe their search for colleges?

How do Black males who are upper-level high school students describe the influences on and processes by which they decide to pursue a postsecondary education?

Participants described two main phases of the process by which they decided to pursue a postsecondary education. During phase one, participants began developing aspirations to attend college. For those for whom this happened during elementary school and before, their desires to attend college were not usually well defined. Those individuals may have said, "I'm going to college after I graduate from high school," but they did not have had a clear understanding of what college entailed. Influences on participants' initial aspirations varied for the participants in this study. Seven of the 11 participants cited their parents or family as the main influence on their educational aspirations. The seven students who were influenced by their parents or families included all of the knowers, most of the seekers, and one dreamer.

The four participants who were not influenced by family members were all dreamers. Two of those dreamers were encouraged to pursue a postsecondary education through their involvement with athletics. Their desire to attend college initially centered on playing sports in college. Later, the value the participants put on athletics waned as they began to understand the primary importance of furthering their education. The other two participants began aspiring to college due to their grade school's geographical proximity to a college and information obtained at King.

Phase two of deciding to pursue a postsecondary education is the actual formalization of educational aspirations, the time during which participants begin to make sense of their college aspirations. Even though some participants had known their parents' expectations for them since they were in grade school, most did not begin to

understand the necessity of a college education until they were in middle school or later. Participants began putting meaning to their parents' expectations when, in most cases, they realized that a higher education led to a higher income which increased the likelihood that they would be able to live a successful and productive life (e.g., take care of their future family, acquire nice possessions). Ultimately, this phase was marked by an understanding of what it meant to attend college, the benefits of attendance, and consequences associated with non-attendance.

By virtue of limited time, participants who encountered phase one, initial aspirations, during high school, usually entered phase two shortly thereafter or simultaneously. Thus, the phases were most distinct for the dreamers and seekers who developed college aspirations early and began comprehending what it meant to go to college. When coming to the realization of what it meant to attend college, most of the participants, regardless of their status as a dreamer, seeker, or knower, identified and focused on practical reasons for pursuing a college education – job security, financial security, enhancing personal growth, and networking or making connections.

Parental support and engagement through both phases of predisposition was consistent among knowers, but not among seekers and dreamers. Participants with engaged parents had well-structured college choice processes and, in the case of dreamers, overcame the negative effects of establishing predisposition late and a low grade point average. This exemplifies the critical role parents and families played in the predisposition of this study's participants.

How do Black males who are upper-level high school students who plan to pursue a postsecondary education describe their search for colleges?

Nine of 10 participants began searching for potential colleges in the 10th or 11th grade, and most continued the search process into their senior year. The search processes for these participants began with the identification of several institutions from which participants would seek further information and possibly apply, a choice set (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Participants generally created or revised their choice sets through the use of out-of-school or in-school resources. Out-of-school resources included community organizations or businesses dedicated to assisting college-bound students (i.e., HEAP), family or peers, and personal knowledge. Two of three knowers and two of five dreamers noted receiving assistance from their parents for completing admission and scholarship applications, visiting campuses, and completing the FAFSA form. Neither seekers nor most dreamers received significant parental assistance. Those participants had less stable postsecondary plans than participants who had parental assistance.

Although out-of-school resources were useful, most participants relied on in-school resources to guide them through the search process. In-school resources included school officials, college admission officers, class projects, participation on a sports team, and college recruitment materials. Teachers who assigned college-related projects, talked about their college experiences, and discussed challenges associated with paying for college were described as good resources during the search process. Only dreamers and seekers identified teachers as influential on their search process. Counselors and other school officials played a bigger role than teachers during the search process for knowers,

seekers, and dreamers. Despite having college-educated parents, two of three knowers still utilized in-school resources as they proceeded through the search phase.

Participants' search processes also included campus visits. All of the knowers, one seeker, and two dreamers made campus visits and used those visits to help make informed decisions. When creating a choice set, all participants, regardless of K. Freeman's (2005) classifications, considered a college's location, size, academic reputation, and their finances. Although only two participants noted the direct influence of finances on their search process, all participants' search processes were affected by their grade point averages. Two seekers and two dreamers had D grade point averages and had to make changes to their search process due to their grades. On the other hand, the knowers had A and B grade point averages and had flexibility during the search phase. Low grades in conjunction with significant guidance helped one participant overcome the negative effects of low grades.

Discussion of Findings from Perspectives of Guiding Theoretical Frameworks and Prior Literature

Three theoretical frameworks guided this research: Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) Three-Phase Model of College Choice (predisposition and search were analyzed during this study), K. Freeman's (2005) model of African Americans in predisposition, and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) defined predisposition as a developmental phase during which students make the tentative decision to attend college after high school graduation. Researchers determined that predisposition could occur as early as the 7th grade (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001) and usually concludes by the 10th grade (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999;

229

Terenzini et al.). K. Freeman (2005) built on Hossler and Gallagher's work by identifying the ages at which three classifications of African American students began considering college attendance. K. Freeman (2005) defined knowers as those who do not recall a time when they did not consider going to college, seekers as those who began considering college in grades 1-5, and dreamers as those who began considering a higher education between 7th and 12th grades and says that students of either classification may or may not make it to college.

The Black males in this study became predisposed to college between 7th and 10th grades, which corresponds to findings by Hossler et al. (1999) and Terenzini et al. (2001). At the time of predisposition, participants began understanding and making meaning of their postsecondary plans. Initiation of participants' college education aspirations, however, is more in line with K. Freeman's (2005) classification system, which addresses students' ages and how they "begin creating the idea of higher education as an option" (p. 25).

The three knowers had always known they were going to college and were the participants who were most likely to attend; the three seekers had had college aspirations since elementary school, but encountered barriers on their way through the college choice process; the five dreamers began considering a college education in middle or high school and included participants who were likely to attend college and others who faced challenges during the decision-making process. Thus, the ages and characteristics associated with knowers, seekers, and dreamers and the likelihood that they make it to college (K. Freeman, 2005) are consistent with the ages and characteristics of most, but not all, of this study's participants.

Parents may have implanted college expectations in their child and triggered the child's educational aspirations while that child was still in grade school, but the participants did not make formal decisions or truly understand the need to go to college until late middle school. It is important to note, however, that the shift from aspirations to predisposition happened quickly with dreamers who did not establish aspirations until high school. At that point, they had less time to move through the rest of the college choice process, and it is likely that the development of college aspirations and predisposition happened simultaneously.

During this transition from aspiration to more formal decisions, participants' plans evolved from the more abstract and undefined "I'm going to college after high school" to more specific and detailed, although often still tentative, plans about their postsecondary lives. During the second phase of the process, in line with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) definition of predisposition, participants' plans became more explicit and the participants were, for instance, able to articulate reasons for attending college and what career or course of study they planned to pursue in college. At this time during predisposition, participants began to make meaning of their plans to go to college. Participants' moves from aspirations to predisposition and the influences on each of those stages affected the participants' overall college choice process.

As described in K. Freeman's (2005) model, knowers, seekers, and dreamers all have the potential to go to college. The findings of this study support that premise, as the dreamers, seekers, and knowers within this study were all college-bound. The knowers, as seen in K. Freeman's (2005) work, had the most thorough college plans. The additional time knowers had to aspire to college and the family influence they received

231

helped the knowers get an earlier and possibly clearer start on predisposition (K.

Freeman, 2005; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989). Contrary to K. Freeman's (2005) model,

the seekers in this study were among those with the most unstable college plans.

According to K. Freeman (2005), dreamers are typically those with less certain

postsecondary plans. Although the seekers became predisposed to college earlier than the

dreamers, select dreamers had more stable college choice plans than the seekers. The

dreamers with more concrete postsecondary plans had two factors, specifically, parental

involvement and higher grade point averages, that enhanced their college choice process

beyond that of the seekers.

Subsequently, K. Freeman's (2005) model was effective for organizing

participants based on the timing of their predisposition. Although the knowers in this

study possessed characteristics as described by K. Freeman (2005), there were

differences between seekers and dreamers as described by K. Freeman (2005) and those

seen in this research. The fact that K. Freeman's (2005) model is relatively new and that

it was developed based on research on both Black males and females may contribute to

the differences seen between the model and the participants in this study of Black males.

Additionally, K. Freeman's (2005) model categorizes students and notes that knowers,

seekers, and dreamers may ultimately attend college, but the model does not detail the

extent to which different variables, such as grade point average and parental

encouragement, contribute to the fulfillment of college aspirations. K. Freeman's (2005)

model acknowledges that some students who aspire to college may not make it there.

That finding, as well as the findings of this study, support existing literature which

describe a significant gap between the higher education aspirations of Black high school

students and the actual enrollment of Black undergraduates (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1999; Valadez, 1998).

The third theoretical framework that guided this study was critical race theory. Although race was not embedded in the majority of the protocol questions, the inherent presence of the issue of race within the purpose of this study compels me to discuss select findings from a critical race theory perspective. Within education, critical race theory is employed to explore and understand school-based inequalities among students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Although participants did not usually directly identify race or racism as a consideration in their decisions, the effects of race and racism were present in the participants' experiences.

When discussing the overall status of Black males in higher education and ideas for what could increase the number of Black males in colleges, many participants focused on the need for information. The participants are part of a school system and a high school that does not spend a considerable amount of time on college counseling until students are seniors. The school system and King High School address college counseling in the same way for all students with no individual focus on Black males, the demographic group who, nationally and at King, enroll in college at lower rates than many other demographic groups. The focus on college counseling in the senior year, as opposed to earlier in high school or in middle school, may affect all students. When examined at a deeper level, however, delayed college counseling has a disproportionally greater effect on Black males who differ from the norm and do not benefit from the school system's universal effort to prepare students for college (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This reality calls attention to the lives of Black males and their intersectionality, or

overlapping identities (Delgado & Stefancic), of being Black and male. If intersectionality was considered, Black males would be given individualized treatment that deals with the experiences of Black males in context (Delgado & Stefancic) considering their place in society, specifically the burden placed upon them as one of the most highly stereotyped groups in the U.S. (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003).

The ordinariness of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) was illustrated in participants' consideration of various institutional characteristics when creating a choice set of institutions. Several participants only applied to or strongly preferred to attend a predominantly Black college or university. The reasons participants gave for their preference of an HBI or their opposition to a PWI seemed related to concerns regarding race and the treatment they anticipated receiving on campus. With the existence of racism being an ordinary and daily experience for people of color (Delgado & Stefancic), participants, even before stepping on a college campus, were fearful of the treatment they might receive at a PWI.

Four participants explicitly stated that they wanted to attend an HBI because they believed they would feel more comfortable there as opposed to a PWI. William did not apply to a PWI that was recruiting him for athletics because he was concerned that Whites would perceive that he was only in college for athletics. He believed that Whites did not think that a Black male could be seriously interested in learning. Therefore, he applied to HBCUs where he believed he would be more comfortable and less stereotyped. Participants' feelings about HBCUs are supported by literature that identifies the mission and climate of HBCUs as more nurturing and welcoming to Black students than PWIs (Allen & Jewell, 2002). In addition to a history of being a safe educational environment

for Blacks, HBCUs have successfully enrolled and graduated a disproportionally high number of African Americans (Allen & Jewell). HBCUs were in the choice sets of 6 of 11 participants.

Similarly, Dion thought it would be better for a Black student to be accepted to college for his academic ability and not for his athletic prowess. Dion believed that university officials would be impressed that a Black student was academically talented since, as he implied, this was not how many Blacks are seen. William and Dion represent multiple participants who experienced stereotype threat, or the "threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype" (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 111). Many of the participants were aware of the negative light in which Black males are seen, and they were concerned that they would be treated poorly due to that image. Subsequently, they made decisions that would help them avoid the negative stereotypes that are associated with Black males, namely, applying to HBCUs, focusing on academics in addition to or instead of athletics, and setting out to prove that Black males have the ability to be successful.

Finally, issues of race and power were at the core of why more than half of the participants decided to attend college. Although not usually the participants' primary reason for pursuing a college education, several of the young men noted the desire to disprove perceptions people, most often White people, had about Black males as a reason for attending college. Several participants acknowledged that Whites did not think Blacks were as smart as Whites. Similarly, Brian, headed for a United States service academy, believed that racism still existed in the military, but he used that belief as incentive to work harder so he could prove that he deserved to be there as much as anyone else. These

young men had confidence in themselves and believed that they were, in fact, as smart as or smarter than they are given credit for. Subsequently, some participants attempted to avoid negative stereotypes about Black males by trying to prove those stereotypes as untrue. They felt compelled to prove their intelligence and abilities, especially to Whites. In essence, some of the participants were engaged in their own process of trying to transform how race and racism affect society, a hallmark of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Although participants rarely stated the existence of racism and the role it played in their lives, there were several instances in which issues of race and power were part of participants' postsecondary decision-making processes. Participants recognized the power and privilege given to Whites that was not afforded to them, and they recognized the negative image Black males had. Many participants wanted to change that perception, but they knew it would take work. Several participants believed, as one participant's guardian told him, that things would be more difficult for them due to the color of their skin and that, indeed, they would have to work harder than White males to overcome barriers and to prove that they belonged in institutions of higher education.

The Establishment of Predisposition

Parental involvement. The results of this study support previous research which identified parental encouragement and expectations as critical during predisposition (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1997; Smith-Maddox, 2000). Hossler, Schmit, et al. (1999) defined parental encouragement as the frequency of discussions between children and parents about the parents' expectations. Researchers have identified a strong positive correlation between parental encouragement, parental

expectations, and predisposition for Black students (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1997; Smith-Maddox, 2000). The findings of this study support that research. Within this study, parental encouragement also came in the form of parents asking students about the colleges they wanted to attend, meeting with the high school counselor for college counseling, helping students complete admissions applications, the FAFSA form, and scholarship applications, and going on campus visits with their child. This engagement went beyond setting high expectations and extended into discussions about the parents' personal college experiences, trips to colleges, and discussions about parents' careers. These interactions took place between participants and parents who had and had not graduated from college. Such discussions and interactions appear to have positively affected these young men's college choice process and resulted in a stronger college selection process.

Based on the participants' stories and experiences, parental encouragement had a stronger effect on one's college choice process than parental expectations. This finding contradicts previous research that describes parental expectations as the best predictor of Black male college predisposition (Bouse & Hossler, 1991). Parents who expressed high educational expectations for their child and did not remain substantively involved in their child's college-choice process often had sons with less stable college plans or plans that were likely to be hindered due to poor academic performance. The parents who set high expectations for their child and continually reinforced the importance of studying and maintaining high grades and engaged in discussions regarding postsecondary plans contributed greatly to their son having average or above average grades and reaching college. These findings support studies that show a positive correlation between parents

talking to Black males about college and the likelihood those males would attend college (Joyner-Fleming, 1995) as well as studies that reveal a positive correlation between academic ability and predisposition (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Perna, 2005; Venezia et al. 2003).

Regardless of the timing, parents who stated their college expectations to their children seemed to trigger thoughts, goals, and plans in their son's mind. Reinforcing expectations with specific guidance was critical for these participants. For several participants, this went above having parents who had graduated from college and beyond establishing college aspirations early in life, both of which remain critically important to predisposition. However, the availability of specific and individualized assistance from parents, or the ability of a parent to align their son with someone who can give such assistance, meaningfully helped lead the participants into the college choice process and over barriers that often stand in the way of college-bound Black males.

Prior research also describes parental education as having considerable influence on one's predisposition (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Manski & Wise, 1983; Stage & Hossler, 1989). The fact that all of the knowers' parents were college graduates supports the importance of parental education, as those parents instilled the value of higher education in their children early in life (Hossler, Schmit, et al.). The results of this study also support research that indicates ways in which parents who had not graduated from college were often as influential in their child's college decision making as the college-graduate parents. Non-college graduate parents in this study encouraged their child to excel beyond the parents' level of achievement (K. Freeman, 2005). Parents also stressed the importance of a higher education (K. Freeman, 2005;

M.J. Smith, 2001) and consequences of not receiving a college education, and provided emotional and moral support (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005) that helped push their sons towards college attendance.

The current study describes instances in which the usual negative effects of low parental education (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Stage & Hossler, 1989) and the late emergence of college aspirations (K. Freeman, 2005) were overcome by significant parental encouragement. The decision-making processes of several dreamers were positively influenced by parental encouragement and parental support (i.e., accompanying students on college visits, attending college-related workshops with their child, saving for college, completing college-related forms with their child). The positive effects of parental support were consistent with prior research (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Hearn, 1984; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Stage & Hossler, 1989).

Athletics. Athletics played a role in the development of college aspirations and predisposition for participants in this study, but not in the manner described by K. Freeman (2005). Participants in K. Freeman's (2005) study perceived that Black males are frequently lured to college via athletic scholarships with considerably less focus placed on academics. The participants of this study, however, were not focused on athletics to the exclusion of academics. One participant was in the process of securing academic and athletic scholarships. Although other participants were high school athletes and looked forward to playing sports in college, athletic participation was not guaranteed, was not tied to a future career, and did not dominate their decision-making processes.

Initially, two participants considered college because they were interested in playing sports in college. As time went on, the young men held on to their goals of going to college, but began focusing more on the academic and life-long benefits of college attendance as opposed to benefits that would stem from time as a college athlete. Additionally, the presence of coaches who served as encouragement through the college decision-making process was important. Subsequently, athletics participation encouraged the young men to consider college, but did not direct their decision-making process in the way that is often associated with Black males (i.e., playing college sports and leaving without a degree to play professional sports). Therefore, the role of athletics in the college choice processes of these Black males should be looked at from multiple perspectives. This study demonstrates the positive influence sports had on helping Black males aspire to a higher education.

Career and future success. Participants were influenced to pursue a postsecondary education because they believed further education was necessary in order for them to pursue certain careers and to be successful in the future. Such a rationale for obtaining a higher education is aligned with many studies describing the benefits of college (Baum & Payea, 2004; Hearn & Bunton, 2001; IHEP, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Many of the participants were able to look beyond the next few years and had an idea of what job or career they wanted to have in the future. Moreover, several participants had been told, or had read, that a high school diploma was no longer sufficient for one to be highly successful. Several took this to heart and surmised that their chances for success were higher if they attended college. Similarly, participants were motivated to attend and do well in college because they recognized that family

members with more or better education tended to struggle less. Participants were encouraged by what they did not want to become. K. Freeman (2005) identified a similar sentiment among Black students.

Participants were also encouraged by positive images and what they did want to become. One participant, whose parents graduated from college, admired the way his parents took care of and provided for his family and determined that the life they led was, in part, due to his parents' college educations and success. Many of the participants' predispositions were, in one way or another, affected by their ability to look into their futures and set long-term goals and plans. The lack of this long-term view of life and the lack of specific career goals is what the participants said greatly contributes to many Black males not planning to go to college.

Executing the Search Process

The seniors in this study recalled being fairly actively engaged in the search phase as juniors. This timing corresponds to the timeframe identified by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) who said that 10th-grade students are typically passive searchers, yet 11th-grade students are more active as they consider majors, admissions potential, institutional characteristics, financial aid, and assistance from others as they create a choice set. Most of the participants noted going into their senior year with several potential colleges and ideas about their majors. Brandon, however, offered a current view of how an 11th grade student is involved in the search phase. His initial choice set was comprised of universities he knew of due to athletics. He was aware that his preferred colleges had the majors he was considering, but he had not given deep thought to financial aid or admissions potential. It appeared that Brandon was missing some

241

important information that helps push students through the search process, factors that were helpful to other participants as they searched for potential institutions.

The importance of having information and resources during the search phase was present for each of the participants within this study. Prior research also highlights the importance of the availability of resources (Matthay, 1989), knowledge about colleges (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999), and knowledge about application procedures (Joyner-Fleming, 1995). Participants' knowledge about colleges and universities certainly directed their search process. Those who knew more about various colleges conducted more wide-reaching search processes.

The importance of information was also relayed in participants' comments that a lack of information possibly contributes to the lower numbers of Black males planning to attend college when compared to Black females. Participants believed that some Black males were unaware that college is an option and that they were not privy to information regarding admissions criteria and financing. Participants presumed that this dearth of information discouraged some Black males from pursuing a higher education. Participants' impressions about other Black males are in line with K. Freeman (1997) who found that many Black students, especially those from low SES families, are less likely to be surrounded by people who attended college and often do not view college as an option for themselves.

Although many participants' parents remained active during the search phase of their child's college decision-making process, participants began relying more often on school-based resources for guidance and information. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper

(1998) found a similar pattern, referring to counselors, teachers, peers, and college information sources as external resources.

Participants in the current study obtained information about colleges and application procedures from high school teachers, guidance counselors, and athletic coaches. High school personnel and resources at school introduced many of the students to the colleges and universities they considered. Even though it appears that direct interventions and student inquiries about college did not begin until 12th grade, participants utilized information from teachers, recruitment materials within the school, coaches, and college admissions visits to King to help initiate their search thoughts. Participants also gained information through friends and family who were in college and college admissions representatives visiting King, and college recruitment materials at King. Matthay (1989) identified many of the same resources as instrumental for those going through the search process.

Participants' use of persons knowledgeable about college and the college search process demonstrates the social capital possessed by many of the participants. Social capital, or social relations used to promote upward mobility (Coleman, 1988; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Morrow, 1999; Perna, 2000), was valuable for many of the participants to proceed through the postsecondary decision-making process. Social capital provided participants opportunities to meet officials from perspective universities, to understand how students of similar age experience and deal with the challenges of college, to be encouraged and supported by counselors to pursue a higher education, and to engage with teachers and college admissions officers about pursuing a college education. Based on these interactions, participants made decisions that were more informed than they might

have been without these meetings. The findings of this study support prior research that describes social capital as influential for African Americans (Perna, 2000) and as a means for overcoming one's lack of cultural capital, which is received from one's parents (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Campus visits were also extremely useful for participants who were able to travel. Participants who visited colleges prior to applying to them seemed to be more confident through the search process and with the thought that they would be comfortable attending a particular institution. Visiting colleges and universities helped participants better articulate and rationalize the pros and cons of attending specific institutions. Although a few participants visited colleges before applying, more visited or were planning to visit schools after applying to them, well into their senior year. Those who visited campuses prior to senior year tended to have more certain college plans.

During the search process, several institutional characteristics were at the forefront of participants' decision-making processes. Participants were most concerned with the location and academic reputation of an institution. McDonough et al. (1996) also found that academic reputation was one of the most important factors that Black students consider when deciding on colleges.

Academic Achievement

Participants' grade point averages for the first two quarters of the school year ranged from 2.0 (C-) to 4.1 (A+). Researchers have identified a positive correlation between academic achievement and educational aspirations or predisposition (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Hossler, Braxton, et al., 1989; Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; Manski & Wise, 1983; Perna, 2005; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003) and

between academic achievement and the likelihood that a student will go to college (Hossler, Schmit, et al.).

Participants with higher grade point averages had fairly stable and clear search plans. Those with higher grade point averages were also those who took more rigorous courses. In this study, as well as in previous research, rigorous course taking was positively correlated with predisposition and other aspects of one's college choice process (Perna, 2005; Venezia et al.). This is aligned with participants in this study. St. John (1991) noted that although educational aspirations may encourage predisposition, aspirations are not enough to overcome poor academic preparation. This was the reality for at least one participant with a cumulative D grade point average. Overall, participants with low grades had limitations during the search process and are likely to have difficulties in college. Although the best-case scenario would not have these young men with such low grades, the participants with low GPAs still aspired to achieve more and do better. A similar desire to attend college despite low grades was also found by Haycock and Huang (2001).

Finances

All of the participants in this study were predisposed to college despite any concerns they had about paying for college. Although several participants noted concerns about college costs, those concerns did not hinder the participants' desire to pursue a college degree. Several of the participants perceived, however, that cost was a major concern for many students, especially Black males. They spoke of Black males who never become predisposed to college because of the high costs associated with attending college. K. Freeman (1999) made the same conclusion in her study of Black students.

Many of the participants in this study became predisposed to college because they were concerned about their financial future. Those concerns were in line with Allen et al. (2005) who found that participants were more likely to become predisposed if they believed that a higher education would lead to opportunities to enhance their current financial situation. Most participants acknowledged their desire for financial and career security as reasons they wanted to attend college.

However, when it came to the effect finances had on the college choice process for these young men, some participants appeared, or stated that they were, unconcerned about the costs associated with attending college. They searched for and planned to attend the college that they thought was best for them regardless of cost. Ultimately, however, the concern about finances manifested itself in other ways. Many participants applied for scholarships, decided to stay close to home to save money, applied for financial aid, and were aware of the costs associated with attending their preferred colleges. Overall, there were multiple ways and varying degrees to which finances affected the college decision-making processes of the participants as was seen in previous studies (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; McDonough et al., 1996).

Another line of thinking that emerged from the participants was the belief that the absence of a potential major and career goals made predisposition less likely. I contend that these ideas are related to finances. Participants implied that spending time in college without a prospective major, career goal, or specific plan would waste money. Related is the research that says Black students' predisposition is influenced by the extent to which a college education would be a valuable investment (K. Freeman, 2005). Research posits that students consider the costs of a college education, the likelihood of obtaining a job

with a fair salary, and potential future earnings (K. Freeman, 1999, 2005; Joyner-Fleming, 1995) when becoming predisposed to college or other postsecondary options. It is difficult to make those estimations if students enter college without a potential career or major in mind. Subsequently, many consider college a waste of time and money if career or major plans are not in place. Repeatedly, participants in this study acknowledged the significant role career plans have in a person's predisposition.

Ultimately, the search processes for the participants within this study were more affected by finances than their predisposition was. McDonough et al. (1996) found that finances were often related to Black students' search processes because Black students considered attending universities at which they were able to obtain scholarship money or financial aid or where they believed graduates got good jobs upon graduation. These factors did contribute to the search processes for many of the participants in this study. Moreover, participants in this study considered colleges closer to home for financial reasons also. They considered staying close to home because they could save money on in-state tuition or they could save money by living at home and commuting to college. This was not the thought pattern for all students, but it is in line with other findings that emerged from McDonough et al.

Critique and Limitations of the Study

The results of this study should be considered in relation to one critique and several limitations of the research design. The degree to which a participant's story is composed of facts or fiction is a frequent critique of the narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993). There are divergent views on how researchers should consider and use participants' stories that may or may

247

not be historically accurate (Atkinson, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly; Fontanta, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Lieblich et al.; Riessman, 1993; R.C. Smith, 2002). My views are most aligned with those who contend that the actual facts or historical accuracy of a participant's story are not the most important issue (Clandinin & Connelly; Lieblich et al.; Riessman, 1993, 2002) and that qualitative researchers conduct interviews to obtain interpretations and to understand the participant's meaning making (Warren, 2002). Narratives are neither precise descriptions of reality nor complete fiction. Stories are most often based on a "core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these 'remembered facts'" (Lieblich et al., p. 8).

Accordingly, those conducting narrative research should be less concerned with "the truth" of a story and more concerned with the "truths" and with the level of trustworthiness that exists in the findings (Riessman, 1993, 2002). A participant's story is simply one instance of that story that should not be seen as the exact truth since stories can change and develop over time (Lieblich et al., 1998). The participant's understanding of past events evolves as it is influenced by successive life events and by the circumstances under which the story is told (i.e., the relationship between the speaker and listener, the goal of the interview, the participant's mood) (Lieblich et al.; Riessman, 1993). Subsequently, there are shifts in the meaning participants make of their past that is then manifested in shifts in their stories (Riessman, 2002). Nonetheless, stories construct and communicate meaning about the individual and the culture or social world in which the narrator lives (Lieblich et al.).

The purposeful sampling used in this research limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the larger population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants in this study represented 11 different experiences within one high school in one state. Moreover, neither African Americans nor African American males are a monolithic group. For example, although William met the criteria for the study because he had lived the majority of his life in the U.S., he was born in Africa and considered himself African/African American. Similarly, Darryl and Brandon felt strong connections to their parents' home countries in the Caribbean although the participants were both born in the United States. These three participants' home cultures were unique, as their lives included African and Caribbean practices, values, and traditions that presumably differed from those of homes headed by parents who were born in the United States. In addition to being culturally diverse, participants were also diverse in terms of family structure, socioeconomic status, parental educational and income level, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and ability level (Billingsley, 1992). Therefore, it would be inappropriate to generalize the findings of this study to the experiences of all African Americans males in the 11th and 12th grades although the results may be transferable to similar settings (i.e., high schools with similar demographics) or to individuals with shared characteristics (Creswell, 1998).

There is also potential bias in how participants were identified for this research and in who chose to participate in this study. Recruitment packets were given to English teachers to be distributed to each Black male in their class. This process would have resulted in a packet being given to every Black male in the 11th and 12th grades at King. Ms. Hale reminded teachers to distribute the packets to the students, but she was unable

to confirm that packets were distributed in each class. Although the majority of participants were identified through the initial recruitment process through English classes, Ms. Hale recommended four participants and one participant was asked to participate when I met him in Ms. Hale's office.

It is likely that Ms. Hale was able to recommend the four young men because they were academically successful and known to her and other administrators for their status as strong and successful students. Additionally, Ms. Hale may also have had more familiarity with students who were outgoing or involved in student organizations. Similarly, the young man who was recruited when I was in Ms. Hale's office represents the student who was comfortable talking to Ms. Hale, as opposed to other counselors, about his personal and academic issues. Students without those traits may have been less well known to Ms. Hale and, subsequently, may have been less likely to be identified as potential participants. Students who accepted the invitation to participate in the research may have been those with good relationships with the school principal and counselor who encouraged participation. Finally, upon being asked to participate in a study about their postsecondary plans, students who were less certain of their plans may have been less likely to volunteer. Therefore, the participants may not representative of all Black males who met the participation criteria.

Finally, regarding participant recruitment, the original intent of this research was to understand the decision-making processes of Black males who did and did not plan to attend college. The recruitment packets requested volunteers who did and did not plan to attend college after high school graduation, but no non-college bound volunteers came forward. This development changed the study from one comparing academically capable

Black males who did and did not plan to attend college to a study analyzing the postsecondary college decision-making processes of only college-bound participants. The inability to conduct the research to compare the two groups of Black males is a limitation.

This research was also limited by the accuracy of the school records and self-reported information on the demographic questionnaire. For example, not all participants knew their household income and the educational attainment of their parents or guardians. Similarly, many participants did not recall their SAT scores and the scores that were noted within this study were self-reported, as SAT scores were not available to me through the school. The conclusions that I drew from the questionnaire and school records depended on the accuracy and completion of the data that were provided by participants or maintained by school officials. Also, students differed in their ability to be reflective, perceptive, critical, and articulate (Creswell, 2003). This resulted in responses with varying levels of depth. These limitations should be considered when drawing conclusions from these data.

Several procedures were followed to ensure trustworthiness and goodness within this study. Member checks were completed and allowed each participant, except Dion who did not have a second interview, to verbally confirm or correct conclusions I made about their college choice processes based on the first interview we had. This first level of member checking was productive, as it revealed how aligned my interpretations were with the participants' views of their experiences. The study was limited, however, because only two participants responded to my post-interview request for them to review a draft of their narrative. This second level of member checking would have improved the trustworthiness of the findings, as it would have been another means by which the

credibility and accuracy of my interpretations would have been confirmed. Stake (1995) recommended that such processes be included as additional ways to ensure the high quality of qualitative research.

Additionally, my inquiry auditor reviewed 5 of the 11 sets of transcripts and narratives. Ideally, all transcripts and narratives would have been examined in order to confirm that the process I used and the findings I produced were supported by the data. I recognize that using the aforementioned procedures would have incorporated additional layers of verification, but time constraints prohibited further member checks and inquiry auditor reviews from being completed.

This research was also limited because of my status as an outsider to male participants because of my gender (Seidman, 2006). Although I believe the participants felt more comfortable with me because we were the same race, they may have felt some hesitancy with me because we were not the same gender. Participants may have been more forthcoming with a Black male researcher who the participants felt could relate to the experiences and challenges they and their peers faced as Black males. The study was based on the gender discrepancy in college enrollment between Black males and Black females with the latter group having more success than the former. The fact that I was a member of the group that is excelling while the participants were members of the group that, generally, is not achieving as highly may have affected the degree to which the participants felt comfortable sharing their stories.

Finally, this research was limited because neither Ms. Hale nor I received information from several participants that allowed me to be certain of further progress regarding their postsecondary plans. The interviews for this study were conducted with

approximately one and a half months left in the school year. At that time, many participants had not received college admissions decisions or had not made final decisions about their postsecondary plans. Such information would have proved useful in drawing conclusions about the search phase and other more general conclusions about the participants' college decision-making processes.

<div align="center">*Implications for Policy and Practice*</div>

Results of this study give support for policy and practical implications and interventions. Many of this study's participants started considering, preparing for, and inquiring about college too late. Although many participants were academically prepared and informed about the college selection process, many of the participants' search processes were hindered because they began planning to attend college too late. Most of the following implications address ways in which Black males can become more prepared and more well informed to pursue college dreams prior to being in high school.

Many of the participants' grade point averages, senior year schedules, and classes they had taken throughout high school suggest that they were unprepared or underprepared for being admitted to a wide range or colleges or for being successful once admitted to college. State departments of education should begin setting high standards and encouraging academic rigor for all students by instituting a default college preparatory curriculum for their students. A standard rigorous curriculum would be beneficial both for students who decide to pursue a college education and for those who decide to enter the workforce, as the skills and levels of readiness needed to be successful in college and in the workforce are comparable (ACT, 2006).

At every grade, there should be a focus on the importance of maintaining a strong grade point average and taking rigorous courses. Brian, a knower with a B+ cumulative GPA, and Mark, a seeker with a D cumulative GPA, agreed that academics often hinder the college plans of Black males. Both males, one with grades that have given him entrée into two institutions and one who had resigned himself to attending community college due to his low grade point average, believed that a focus on grades is imperative. Although no participants' predisposition was affected by their grades, participants' search processes were affected. The participants with stronger grades had more options and excitement throughout the college decision-making process.

School systems should focus significant attention on making career exploration and college education part of children's awareness from the elementary school years. Student affairs professionals in admissions offices should partner with school systems to create a college and career education program that would be administered in an age-appropriate manner to students from elementary through high school. The vast majority of knowers, seekers, and dreamers in this study believed that the lack of career plans hinders many Black males from pursuing a higher education. Having students learn about a plethora of jobs and careers may result in students being more aware of what kinds of jobs they would like to pursue when they get older. As tentative as such thoughts might be for young children, such programs would begin instilling thoughts about jobs and careers. The belief among participants that career plans would help increase the number of Black males in college was prominent and should be seriously considered.

From elementary school, children should be taught the many benefits of attending college and should become aware of how what they do in their early school years (i.e.,

maintaining good grades and developing good work habits and study skills) can positively contribute to getting into and being successful in college. Knowers, seekers, and dreamers in the study recommended that Black males be informed of postsecondary options while still in the elementary years. Based on their experiences and the advice they offered, many participants described the need for college to be introduced when one is still a young child. Additionally, the focus on college should be consistent throughout one's schooling, going beyond initiating aspirations while still in elementary school to continuing college-focused discussions and establishing and maintaining a strong academic record through high school.

Considering the focus participants put on the need to be informed, university admissions officers and middle and high school guidance officials should collaborate to create an intense and substantive college preparation series for each grade level from 6th through 12th grades. Based on the findings of this study, such a series should include exposure to various types of institutions, details on admissions requirements of various institutional types, the connections between majors and potential careers, the creation of a choice set (including narrowing down extensive lists), and presentations by Black male graduates of their high school who attend various colleges and can serve as role models for students.

Many of this study's participants believed that increasing the extent to which Black males have information about college and applying for college, as described above, would help increase the number of Black males enrolled in colleges and universities. The above suggestions should be implemented in a very systematic way (i.e., regularly scheduled classroom visits from guidance), but all educators (i.e., teachers, coaches,

administrators, paraprofessionals) within the school should be trained and provided with ways to reinforce these lessons to students, even outside of organized college and career education sessions. College-going information can certainly also be an aspect of Black male support groups that exist in some high schools.

There should also be a focus on utilizing various forms of media to obtain information about colleges and the college-going process. Participants in this study described limited use of electronic and print publications. Participants would have been better informed if they used various publications to discover information about admission requirements, costs, and majors and to learn more about the campuses they considered, especially since most participants had not been on campus visits. A focus on electronic and print publications could be incorporated in a college preparation series, select classes, and community organizations.

Additionally, government and community organizations should place a similar focus on providing information regarding the college choice process. The HEAP representative significantly influenced Dwight's college-going process, and it is likely that he would have had a much less organized search process if it were not for that organization. Government and community organizations should advertise their services and provide information through various media outlets to account for people who do not have Internet access and for those who are unaware that such information and resources exist.

Finally, considering the meaningful role parents played for the participants of this study, focus should be placed on informing parents about the college choice process. While students are receiving college and career preparation information, parents and

guardians should be made aware of this information so they can provide reinforcement at home. Prior research (Hossler et al, 1999) and the results of this study identify the benefits of students having multiple sources of support and information throughout predisposition and search. The influence of parents through predisposition and search were well cited by participants. It follows that enlightening parents and having them be a major source of information would be advantageous to students.

The focus of these implications for policy and practice is helping Black male students to be more academically prepared and to provide information regarding college and the college-going process in an effort to minimize information and resource deficits and poor grades as reasons Black males are less likely to attend college.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlights the importance of continuing research on the college choice processes of Black males. Future research should consider alternative methodologies, theoretical perspectives, participant criteria, and research design elements, as well as build on the findings of this research.

Future research should explore the college decision-making processes of Black males from various methodological approaches including grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Grounded theory would produce a theory about the college choice processes of Black males and would build on or provide an alternative to existing theories. Employing grounded theory would entail conducting more interviews that would result in a theory that would include a central phenomenon, express causality, and contain conditions and context as well as strategies (Creswell, 1998). Ethnography of the college-bound Black male culture, or a person within that culture, at a high school would

provide invaluable information. Such a study would provide insight into behaviors, interactions, and decisions of that group in order to produce a detailed cultural portrait (Creswell) of the group or individual. Finally, a case study should be conducted to analyze and reveal what a school, school system, or privately sponsored college access program does to support or discourage Black males from being eligible for and considering college.

The issue of race and its influence on the social and educational experiences of Black males is inextricably connected to the study of Black males' college choice processes. I used CRT as a theoretical framework from which to discuss the study's findings. I recommend that future research build on my exploration of this issue by analyzing findings from the perspective of CRT. A more intense use of critical race theory could also manifest itself in protocol questions being more reflective of CRT and in placing more focus on the social institution (i.e., the school or school system) that can be so influential to this process. Specifically, if CRT is used to examine an educational system, findings of the research may reveal the degree to which Black males are or are not encouraged to pursue, attend, and be successful in college. Furthermore, using critical race theory during data analysis may result in changes in individuals or systems as CRT has an activist component that focuses on examining the existence of race, racism, and power in daily life and changing it for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In addition to incorporating CRT both in data analysis as well as in the conceptualization and design of a study, future research should include specific analyses of college choice as it relates to the intersection of race, gender, and class for Black males.

Additional research should also examine various student characteristics. Research could explore the college choice process of high achieving students such as John, Timothy, and Brian. Such a study would illustrate the experiences of Black males who are academically talented and add to the literature on high achieving Black students (Fries-Britt, 2002, 2004; Small, 2007) by revealing the processes by which they make decisions and the successes and challenges they face as they make those decisions.

The gap between Black student college aspirations and enrollment has been well documented (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; K. Freeman, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Valadez, 1998). Participants in the study mentioned peers who wanted to attend college, but who probably were not going to enroll. According to Ms. Hale, at least one of the participants may not have actually made it to college as planned. Subsequently, research could explore the decision-making processes of Black males who aspired to attend college but do not fulfill that goal to begin to understand what has guided their thinking and the development of their postsecondary plans and to examine the "missing pieces of the puzzle between aspiration and participation in higher education" (K. Freeman, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, additional research should compare the postsecondary decision-making processes of academically eligible Black males who do and do not plan to pursue a postsecondary education. Conducting a study that compares the decisions of young men who have similar academic talents yet make different postsecondary decisions would reveal first-hand insight into why a significant proportion of Black males are not pursuing a college education. Understanding the thought processes, experiences, environments, and influences of these young men would contribute greatly to how educators and community officials could guide the future of Black males.

Future research should include more specific questions about participants' academic courses, the rigor of those courses, and the participants' study habits. The degree to which grade point average affected the college choice processes of these participants, most notably those with D cumulative GPAs, illustrates the need for more information regarding course-taking patterns, academic rigor, and the participants' academic tracks. This could be accomplished by requesting and analyzing high school transcripts, information on the participants' academic track, and the extent to which their high school curricula have prepared them for college.

Further research could build on the findings of this study by intensely exploring the relationship between career goals and predisposition. Participants within this study believed that Black males without specific career goals are less likely to pursue a college education. The present study, however, did not reveal the basis for the relationship between predisposition and career goals. Thus, future research could examine how the lack of career goals contributes to lack of predisposition for Black males.

Additionally, I suggest that forthcoming research examine the role of resiliency (Callaway, 2008; Mauricio, 2008; Suskind, 1998) in the decision-making processes of college-bound Black males from low-performing schools and challenging environments. In particular, Brian, John, Darryl, and Timothy all attended public middle schools that were low to average performing schools, the same schools some of the other participants attended. The aforementioned four participants, however, had strong grades and were headed for college without the difficulties experienced by some of the other participants. Participants also mentioned the opportunities their environment presented for making large amounts of money illegally and other descriptions of lack of focus on academics

that turned many of their peers away from college. The participants in this study, however, established and maintained their focus on college. Examining resiliency may elucidate what allows young men to overcome challenging circumstances in order to make it to college.

Previous research has noted that peers can significantly affect one's college choice process (Hossler, Schmit, et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). With the exception of Mark, the participants of this study point to little reliance on or influence by peers during their college decision-making processes. Future research should examine more closely the role of individual peers and Black male support groups in Black males' college decision-making processes.

Finally, a longitudinal study would help address many of the questions that were left unanswered at the conclusion of this research. It would be enlightening to know the status of the participants' college applications, the decisions they made about attendance, as well as their productivity, success, and satisfaction at various intervals beyond the initial interviews. The current research sheds light on the issue of college access, but access is only part of the equation. Understanding how Black males succeed in college as well as the retention, satisfaction, and challenges of Black males in college is equally as important and brings the research full circle. When Black males gain access to colleges only to drop out prior to receiving a degree (Cuyjet, 1997), there is still much work to be done.

Strengths of the Study

One of the greatest strengths of this study was the use of multiple theoretical frameworks – Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice theory, K. Freeman's

(2005) classification of Black students' establishment of educational aspirations, and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Hossler and Gallagher's and K. Freeman's (2005) frameworks contributed to data analysis, and all three frameworks contributed to the perspectives from which findings of this study were discussed. Hossler and Gallagher's theory's focus on individual factors that contribute to one's postsecondary decisions and the identification of college choice as a developmental process were useful as this study was designed to understand the factors that contribute to the multiple steps of participants' postsecondary decision-making process. K. Freeman's (2005) classifications strengthened the study because it was the one theory that was developed from an exclusively Black sample of high school students. Subsequently, I was able to analyze data and produce findings from a perspective based on students with similar demographics to the participants in this study. Finally, while Hossler and Gallagher and K. Freeman (2005) focused on individual factors contributing to Black males' postsecondary choices, critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic) recognized the presence of societal and systemic variables that may affect one's postsecondary decision-making process. The use of this framework set the foundation for considering the extent to which these Black males' postsecondary plans are affected by forces other than themselves. Each of these theoretical frameworks contributed uniquely to this research.

The inclusion of substantive and meaningful policy and practical implications is an additional strength of this research. The implications for practice and policy address the participants' late start on the college choice process. The implications concentrate on multiple challenges that must be overcome in order for more Black males to be prepared for college, namely, a strong academic background and the accessibility of information

and resources. Implications are directed to public schools, colleges and universities, families, communities, and students in order to engage all of the persons who are involved in a student's college-going process in the effort to improve the status of Black males transitioning from high school to college. This study is strong because of its implications for policies and practice that are likely to produce knowledgeable Black males who have postsecondary educational options that are not hindered by poor academic performance or lack of information.

The use of narrative inquiry is an additional strength of this research. The use of this methodology facilitated the comfort that was felt by participants, as narrative inquiry allows for sharing and discussing to the extent that a participant is comfortable. Utilizing narrative inquiry, a story-telling based methodology, allowed participants to respond to open-ended questions and encouraged them to share freely. Participants told stories that included rich details and descriptions that facilitated my understanding of their postsecondary decision-making processes.

An additional strength is the level of comfort established between the participants and me as the researcher. Many of the participants were genuinely engaged in the study, sharing their experiences and thoughts on issues that affect them and others like them. Although participants may have shared different aspects of their postsecondary decision-making process if I were a Black male, overall, I believe that my race and, possibly, age contributed to the participants' comfort level. I began to notice that participants were comfortable and at ease during the interviews because of their relaxed demeanor and use of slang or other informal language to communicate their thoughts and feelings. I think

that it is likely that the participants in this study would not have been as open and honest with a researcher of another race.

The awareness of and connection I felt with the culture of the school were also strengths of this study. During many meetings with Ms. Hale, I became familiar with the way she interacts with students regarding their academic progress and postsecondary plans. I witnessed the types of questions and concerns that seniors, including participants from the study, brought to her and the ways she helped them resolve their issues. I also witnessed the participants interacting with other students and, in some cases, with school staff. These interactions helped me understand the climate of the school, the support given to students, and the level of comfort participants had with several adults at King, thus enhancing the way I analyzed data and composed narratives. My awareness of and connection to the culture of King provided me with greater insight.

Conclusion

Conversations with Black males regarding their college decision making has revealed how they are influenced to pursue a postsecondary education and how they search for a college. Hearing the participants' stories broadened my understanding of the college choice process, access to higher education, and the many challenges faced by these 11 Black male upperclass high school students who are a part of a specific demographic group. The participants put a face on facts and figures that sometimes are the only picture we have of a group of people. This research steered away from the deficit perspective that is often employed when researching and discussing minority groups. However, I did engage with the participants in this research to go deep enough to provide possible answers to the questions that exist regarding why there is a significant gender

gap among Blacks in higher education. The case for this study's significance and

implications of its findings have been made and can be used to further understand and

improve the status of education for Black males.

Appendix A: Introduction Letter to Principal

Wednesday, November 11, 2006

Principal
King High School

Dear Principal:

Thank you for considering my request to complete my dissertation research at King High School. This letter will explain the nature of my study, what I need from your school, and what you can expect of me as a researcher.

My study will focus on how Black males make the decision to pursue a college education or not to pursue a college education after graduating from high school. I will examine these issues by having two interviews with each of 12 students – 6 boys from the 11th grade and 6 boys from the 12th grade. All students must identify as Black or African American, should have at least a "C" grade point average, and should not have repeated their current grade.

Interviews will be scheduled for 60 minutes, held at the student's convenience, and held at the school. I will need access to the participants' school records, a private room in which to conduct interviews, and a school official who will assist with logistics. I will also need you to sign a letter to endorse this research. The endorsement letter will be for students and their parent or guardian who must provide consent for participants under 18-years-old. Human subjects approval will be obtained from the county's school system and the University of Maryland. The names of participants and the school will be changed in all written and oral reproductions of this research.

Upon the conclusion of my research, I will give you a report of the study's findings. It is my hope that you can use the findings to understand and plan services according to students' desires to pursue college or other postsecondary options. Please be assured that I will conduct professional research on a schedule that is convenient for the school and participants. I propose to start collecting data in January 2007.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my study in detail and to address any questions and concerns you have. Thank you for your time and consideration of this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Zakiya S. Lee   Marylu K. McEwen, Ph.D.
Doctoral Candidate   Faculty, Counseling and Personnel Services
College of Education   College of Education
University of Maryland   University of Maryland
zlee@umd.edu   3214 Benjamin Building
301-602-8689   College Park, MD 20742
                                       mmcewen@umd.edu
                                       301-405-2871

266

Purpose of Research – The purpose of this research is to explore how Black males describe and make meaning of the influences on and processes by which they decide to pursue or not to pursue a postsecondary education. The study also seeks to understand the influences on and processes by which those who plan to obtain a higher education search for a college or university.

Describe Procedures

Counselor to assist me with distributing a packet containing a cover letter, a

consent forms, and an interest form to each Black 11th and 12th grade male

Students will return their signed consent form and interest form to the counselor

I will gather the forms from the counselor

I will coordinate with counselor to review the school records of those who submit

signed consent forms

I will identify eight 11th grade boys and eight 12th grade boys as potential

participants; Students are ideal if they have at least a "C" GPA, have not

repeated their current grade, and have lived the vast majority of their lives in

the United States

Work with counselor to designate a time for both interviews for each potential

participant, based on students' schedules

I will send an invitation to participate to the identified students to formally request

their participation and to announce the date, time, and location of their

informational meeting

I will visit the school to deliver notes to serve as reminders of the interview dates

Conduct interview #1 with each potential participant – 60 minutes

Complete demographic questionnaire

Interview protocol for college-bound

Interview protocol for non-college-bound

Select pseudonym

Conduct interview #2 with each potential participant – 60 minutes

Conduct member check

Present with gift card

Needs

Signature on school board form

Staff assistant

Signature on cover letter & interest form

Verbal endorsement and encouragement of students to participate

2 - 60 minute interviews with 12-16 Black males; ½ 11th grade and ½ 12th grade

Access to school records

Private locations for interviews

Ideal time frame

Week 1 – meet with staff assistant; distribute packets _____

Week 2 – receive packets; review records; arrange interview 1 and 2 dates, times,

and locations _____

Week 3 – 1st interviews _____

Week 4 – 2nd interviews _____

Appendix C: Cover Letter

Friday, February 9, 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian or Student:

I am conducting research to understand how Black males in the 11th and 12th grades decide to pursue or not to pursue a college education after graduating from high school. I am inviting students from your son's high school to participate in this study.

A student's participation includes two 60-minute interviews that will be held at your son's high school and based around his schedule. Participants will also be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. I would also need access to a participant's school records in order to obtain the following information: grade point average, progression to completion of high school, academic track, PSAT and/or SAT scores, standardized high school assessment scores, previous high, junior high, and elementary schools attended, date of birth, free/reduced lunch status, and attendance record.

At the end of the second interview, participants will receive a $25 gift card as a token of my appreciation. A participant's identity, the identity of the high school, and the identity of anyone discussed in the interviews will be changed in order to maintain the participant's confidentiality and privacy when reports are written and presented from this research.

The results of this study may help educators learn more about how Black males decide to attend or not to attend college after completing high school. The research may also help officials at your son's high school and throughout the school system plan services according to students' desires to pursue college or other plans. Your son's principal and the research and evaluation offices of the school system and the University of Maryland have approved this research. I would appreciate and encourage your son's participation.

Parents/guardians, if you approve of your child's participation, please read and sign the informed parental consent form. Students 18 years of age and older, if you approve and wish to participate, please read and sign the informed consent form. All students who are interested in participating should also read and complete the interest form. The signed consent form and the completed interest form should be placed in the attached envelope and returned to Ms. Hale's offices – C325 by February 15, 2007.

Please contact me with any questions. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Zakiya S. Lee	Marylu K. McEwen, Ph.D.	Principal
Graduate Student	Faculty Advisor	King High School
College of Education	University of Maryland	
zlee@umd.edu	3214 Benjamin Building	
301-602-8689	College Park, MD 20742	
	mmcewen@umd.edu	
	301-405-2871	

Project Title	Life Beyond High School: The Postsecondary Decision-Making Processes of Black Males
Why is this research being done?	I, Zakiya S. Lee, am conducting this research project under the faculty advisement of Dr. Marylu K. McEwen in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting your child to participate in this research because he is a Black high school junior or senior. The purpose of this research is to explore how Black males make decisions about whether they are going to college or not after high school graduation.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures include two 60-minute interviews. The interviews will be held at your child's school and at your child's convenience. The interview will include questions pertaining to how and why your son has decided to attend or not to attend college, advantages and disadvantages of his decision, what and who influenced his decision, his level of preparation for college, and his views on how race may affect a person's decision to attend college or not to attend college. If your son does not plan to attend college, he will also be asked to discuss if anyone or anything could have persuaded him to go to college. If he does plan to attend college, he will be asked to describe barriers to pursuing that goal and how he is searching for colleges and universities to attend. The study also requires that your child complete a demographic questionnaire and that I have access to his school records.
What about confidentiality?	I will do my best to keep your child's personal information confidential. To help protect your child's confidentiality: (1) your child's name will not be included on any collected data; (2) your child's identity, the identity of your child's high school, and the identity of anyone your child discusses in the interviews will be changed in all written reports and oral presentations of this research. All transcripts, demographic questionnaires, and notes from the study will be stored in a locked drawer in the private residence of the student researcher. Your child's information may be shared with representatives of the high school, the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if your child or someone else is in danger or if I am required to do so by law.
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participation.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help your child personally, but the results may help the researcher and officials at your child's school understand the decisions students make and plan services according to students' desires to pursue college or not.

Project Title	Life Beyond High School: The Postsecondary Decision-Making Processes of Black Males
Do I have to be in this research? Can I stop participating at any time?	Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your child may choose not to take part at all. If your child decides to participate in this research, he may stop participating at any time.
What if I have questions?	Zakiya S. Lee, doctoral student at the University of Maryland, is conducting this research. Dr. Marylu McEwen of the University of Maryland's College of Education is her faculty advisor. You may contact either of them using the following information if you have any questions about the research study: Zakiya Lee (zlee@umd.edu or 301-602-8689) or Dr. Marylu McEwen (mmcewen@umd.edu or 301-405-2871). If there are questions regarding your child's rights as a research subject or if your child wishes to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (E-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that: you approve of your child's participation in this research project; and you authorize the school system to release information from your child's school records to Zakiya S. Lee for use in the research. You are aware that the school system will release the most current versions of the following data from your child's school records: grade point average, progression to high school completion, academic track, PSAT and/or SAT scores, standardized high school assessment scores, previous high, junior high, and elementary schools attended, date of birth, free/reduced lunch status, and attendance record.
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT (PRINT)**
	NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN (PRINT) (If participant is under 18 years old)
	SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN (If participant is under 18 years old)
	DATE

Note: Be sure to initial the upper right-hand corner of both pages.

Project Title	Life Beyond High School: The Postsecondary Decision-Making Processes of Black Males
Why is this research being done?	I, Zakiya S. Lee, am conducting this research project under the faculty advisement of Dr. Marylu K. McEwen in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research because you are a Black male who is a high school junior or senior. The purpose of this research is to explore how Black males make decisions about whether they are going to college or not after high school graduation.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures include two 60-minute interviews. The interviews will be held at your school and at your convenience. The interview will include questions pertaining to how and why you have decided to attend or not to attend college, advantages and disadvantages of your decision, what and who influenced your decision, your level of preparation for college, and your views on how race may affect a person's decision to attend college or not to attend college. If you do not plan to attend college, you will also be asked to discuss if anyone or anything could have persuaded you to go to college. If you do plan to attend college, you will be asked to describe barriers to pursuing that goal and how you are searching for colleges and universities to attend. The study also requires that you complete a demographic questionnaire and that I have access to your school records.
What about confidentiality?	I will do my best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality: (1) your name will not be included on any collected data; (2) your identity, the identity of your high school, and the identity of anyone you discuss in your interviews will be changed in all written reports and oral presentations of this research. All transcripts, demographic questionnaires, and notes from the study will be stored in a locked drawer in the private residence of the student researcher.

Your information may be shared with representatives of your high school, the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if I am required to do so by law. |
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participation.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher and officials at your school understand the decisions students make and plan services according to students' desires to pursue college or not.

Project Title	Life Beyond High School: The Postsecondary Decision-Making Processes of Black Males
Do I have to be in this research? Can I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time.
What if I have questions?	Zakiya S. Lee, doctoral student at the University of Maryland, is conducting this research. Dr. Marylu McEwen of the University of Maryland's College of Education is her faculty advisor. You may contact either of them using the following information if you have any questions about the research study: Zakiya Lee (zlee@umd.edu or 301-602-8689) or Dr. Marylu McEwen (mmcewen@umd.edu or 301-405-2871). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742;** **(E-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	Your signature indicates that: you are 18 years of age or older; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been answered; you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project; and you authorize the school system to release information from your school records to Zakiya S. Lee for use in the research. You are aware that the school system will release the most current versions of the following data from your school records: grade point average, progression to high school completion, academic track, PSAT and/or SAT scores, standardized high school assessment scores, previous high, junior high, and elementary schools attended, date of birth, free/reduced lunch status, and attendance record.
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT (PRINT)**
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT
	DATE

Note: Be sure to initial the upper right-hand corner of both pages.

Appendix F: Participation Interest Form

Dear Student:

We would like you to participate in a research study about how you are making the decision to pursue or not to pursue college after high school graduation. Your participation would entail two interviews that would take place at your school.

As thanks for your participation, you will receive a $25 American Express Gift Card upon the completion of the second interview!

Your participation is very important because your responses will contribute to educators' understanding of how Black males plan to attend or not attend college.

If you are interested and are under 18 years of age and your parent/guardian approves and signs consent form B, please answer the following questions and place this form and the signed consent form from your parent/guardian in the attached envelope. If you are interested and are 18 years of age or older, you do not require parental permission and you should answer the following questions and sign consent form C to participate. Please place this form and the signed consent form in the attached envelope.

Please return these forms to Ms. Hale's office – C325 by Thursday, February 15, 2007. Depending on the number of responses, you may be contacted to participate in this study.

1. What is your name? _____

2. What grade are you in? _____

3. In what country were you born? _____

4. How many years have you lived in the United States? _____

5. Do you plan to attend college in the Fall after high school graduation? _____

If you have any questions, please contact my faculty advisor or me.

Thank you in advance for your participation,

Zakiya S. Lee   Marylu K. McEwen, Ph.D.   King High School
Graduate Student   Faculty Advisor   Principal
College of Education   University of Maryland
zlee@umd.edu   3214 Benjamin Building
301-602-8689   College Park, MD 20742
                              mmcewen@umd.edu
                              301-405-2871

Project Title	Life Beyond High School: The Postsecondary Decision-Making Processes of Black Males
Why is this research being done?	I, Zakiya S. Lee, am conducting this research project under the faculty advisement of Dr. Marylu K. McEwen in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research because you are a Black male who is a high school junior or senior. The purpose of this research is to explore how Black males make decisions about whether they are going to college or not after high school graduation.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures include two 60-minute interviews. The interviews will be held at your school and at your convenience. The interview will include questions pertaining to how and why you have decided to attend or not to attend college, advantages and disadvantages of your decision, what and who influenced your decision, your level of preparation for college, and your views on how race may affect one's decision to attend college or not to attend college. If you do not plan to attend college, you will also be asked to discuss if anyone or anything could have persuaded you to go to college. If you do plan to attend college, you will be asked to describe barriers to pursuing that goal and how you are searching for colleges and universities to attend. The study also requires that you complete a demographic questionnaire and that I have access to your school records.
What about confidentiality?	I will do my best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality: (1) your name will not be included on any collected data; (2) your identity, the identity of your high school, and the identity of anyone you discuss in your interviews will be changed in all written reports and oral presentations of this research. All transcripts, demographic questionnaires, and notes from the study will be stored in a locked drawer in the private residence of the student researcher.

Your information may be shared with representatives of your high school, the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if I am required to do so by law. |
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participation.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher and officials at your school understand the decisions students make and plan services according to students' desires to pursue college or not.

Project Title	Life Beyond High School: The Postsecondary Decision-Making Processes of Black Males
Do I have to be in this research? Can I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time.
What if I have questions?	Zakiya S. Lee, doctoral student at the University of Maryland, is conducting this research. Dr. Marylu McEwen of the University of Maryland's College of Education is her faculty advisor. You may contact either of them using the following information if you have any questions about the research study: Zakiya Lee (zlee@umd.edu or 301-602-8689) or Dr. Marylu McEwen (mmcewen@umd.edu or 301-405-2871). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742;** **(E-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	Your signature indicates that: you have the permission of your parent/guardian since you are under 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been answered; you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project; and you authorize the school system to release the following information from your school records to the researcher: grade point average, progression to high school completion, academic track, PSAT and/or SAT scores, high school assessment scores, previous high, junior high, and elementary schools attended, date of birth, free/reduced lunch status, and attendance record.
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT (PRINT)**
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT
	DATE

Note: Be sure to initial the upper right-hand corner of both pages.

Dear Student:

I have received your signed consent form and interest form for participation in the study addressing how Black males decide to pursue or not to pursue a college education after graduating from high school. Thank you for considering involvement in this study.

You are receiving this letter because, based on your responses on the interest form and your school records, you are an ideal participant for this study. As was mentioned in the first mailing, your participation entails two interviews that will be held at your school. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and are 60 minutes long. For your participation, you will receive a $25 gift card at the end of the second interview. Your identity, the identity of your high school, and the identity of anyone you discuss in your interviews will be changed in all reports and presentations from this research.

Please meet with the researcher, Zakiya Lee, in _____ at _____ for your first interview.

Please contact me with any questions. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Zakiya S. Lee	Marylu K. McEwen, Ph.D.	King High School
Graduate Student	Faculty Advisor	Principal
College of Education	University of Maryland	
zlee@umd.edu	3214 Benjamin Building	
301-602-8689	College Park, MD 20742	
	mmcewen@umd.edu	
	301-405-2871	

Appendix I: Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire by checking or writing in the appropriate answers.

1. Gender: O Female   O Male

2. Age: _____

3. Identify the relationship to you of the people or persons who raise you (such as mother, grandfather) _____

4. Please list the following information for the people who live in your home who do not raise you:

	Relation	Age	Grade/Job
a.	_____	_____	_____
b.	_____	_____	_____
c.	_____	_____	_____
d.	_____	_____	_____
e.	_____	_____	_____

5. What is your race? _____

6. Do you identify with any other race? If so, which race(s)? _____

7. In what country were the following people born?
    a. You: _____

    b. Your mother/primary female guardian: _____

    c. Your father/primary male guardian: _____

8. What grade are you in? _____

9. What is your grade point average? _____ out of _____

10. How many hours per week do you work during the school year? _____

11. What is the highest level of education of your mother or primary female guardian?

O Elementary school only   O Bachelor's degree

O Some high school   O Some graduate school

O High school diploma   O Master's degree

O Associate's degree   O Ph.D./Professional degree

O Some college   O Unknown

12. What is the highest level of education of your father or primary male guardian?

O Elementary school only   O Bachelor's degree

O Some high school   O Some graduate school

O High school diploma   O Master's degree

O Associate's degree   O Ph.D./Professional degree

O Some college   O Unknown

13. What is your mother's/primary female guardian's profession or job?

_____

14. What is your father's/primary male guardian's profession or job?

_____

15. What is your approximate combined yearly family income:

O under $20,000   O $60,000-$79,999

O $20,000-$39,999   O $80,000-$99,999

O $40,000-$49,999   O $100,000-$149,999

O $50,000-$59,999   O $150,000 +

                                             O Unknown

Appendix J: Interview Protocol for College-Bound Students

Opening Comments: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study to help educators understand how African American males in the 11th and 12th grades decide to pursue or to not pursue a college education. Your story will contribute greatly to the knowledge educators have about this issue. I will begin with general questions about you.

1. Tell me about yourself?
    a. Probe: Who have been some of the most important/influential people in your life?
    b. Probe: How have they influenced you?

2. What are your views on education?
    a. Probe: What has happened in your life that has helped form your views on education?
    b. Probe: How has the education you've received from middle to high school met or not met your views of education?

3. What are your educational plans for the Fall after high school graduation?

4. How and why did you make that decision?
    a. Probe: How long have you had that plan?

5. Describe the advantages and/or disadvantages of your decision to attend college.
    a. Probe: What barriers will you face in pursuing college?
    b. Probe: What supports do you anticipate in pursuing college?

6. Who or what influenced your decision to attend college?
    a. Probe: How have your parents/guardians influenced your decision?
    b. Probe: What are your parents/guardians' thoughts/feelings about your decision?
    c. Probe: What are your peers' plans for college after high school graduation?
    d. Probe: How have your peers influenced your decision?
    e. Probe: Which of your siblings, family, friends, or mentors are or are not in college or have or have not completed college?
    f. Probe: How has the college attendance, or not, of your siblings, family, friends, or mentors influenced your decision?

7. What do you know about applying for and preparing for college?
    a. Probe: How and from whom did you learn about applying to and preparing for college?

Appendix J: Interview Protocol for College-Bound Students (con't)

8. Tell me about your background and preparation for college.
    a. Probe: How well prepared do you think you are for college?
    b. Probe: What aids or assistance have you received in preparing for college?
    c. Probe: How academically prepared are you for college?
    d. Probe: How socially prepared are you for college?

9. How has your race influenced your decision about college?

10. Would you be surprised to know that Black males plan to attend college less often than Black females? Why or why not?
    a. Probe: How does knowing this relate to your college plans?

11. Describe how you plan to search for information on colleges?
    a. Probe: What colleges/universities are you considering? Why those schools?
    b. Probe: What characteristics are you looking for in a college?
    c. Probe: What colleges/universities have you thought about and dismissed from further consideration?
    d. Probe: Describe why you dismissed those colleges/universities from consideration.

12. You talked about barriers to pursuing college. If those barriers didn't exist, how would trying to get a college education be different? [Only if participant noted he experienced barriers to pursuing college.]

13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me related to your decision to pursue a college education?

REFERENCES

Adelman, C. (2006). The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college. Washington: DC: U.S. Department of Education.

ACT (2006). *Ready for college and ready for work: Same or different?* Iowa City, IA: Retrieved November 27, 2008, from http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ReadinessBrief.pdf

Allen, W.R., Bonous-Hammarth, M., & Suh, S.A. (2005). *Who goes to college?: High school context, academic preparation, the college choice process, and college attendance.* The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved May 9, 2006, from http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/Downloads/ed/researchevaluation/GMS/NewF inal-WhoGoestoCollegeWalterAllen.pdf

Allen, W.R. & Jewell, J.O. (2002). A backward glance forward: Past, present, and future perspectives on historically Black colleges and universities. *The Review of Higher Education, 25*, 241-261.

American Association of University Women (1992). *The AAUW report: How schools shortchange girls.* Washington, DC: Executive summary retrieved August 5, 2006, from http://www.aauw.org/research/hssg.pdf

Arminio, J.L. & Hultgren, F.H. (2002). Breaking out from the shadow: The question of criteria in qualitative research. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*, 446-460.

Ascher, C. (1992). School programs for African-American males and females [Electronic version]. *Phi Delta Kappan, 73,* 777-782. Retrieved January 31, 2007, from Interlibrary Loan Services.

Astin, A.W., Sax, L.J., & Avalos, J. (1999). Long-term effects of volunteerism during the undergraduate years [Electronic version]. *The Review of Higher Education, 22*, 187-202.

Atkinson, R. (2002). The life story interview. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 121-140). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Bailey, C.A. (2007). *A guide to qualitative field research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Bailey, D.F. (2003, September). Preparing African-American males for postsecondary options [Electronic Journal]. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 12*(1).

Barnett, W.S. (1990). Benefits of compensatory preschool education [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Human Resources, 27*, 279-312.

Barnett, W.S. (1995, Winter). Long-term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes. *The Future of Children, 5*(3). Retrieved July 28, 2006 from http://futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol5no3ART2.pdf

Bateman, M., & Hossler, D. (1996). Exploring the development of postsecondary plans among African American and White students [Electronic version]. *College and University, 72*(1), 2-10.

Battin-Pearson, S., Newcomb, M.D., Abbott, R.D., Hill, K.G., Catalano, R.F., & Hawkins, J.D. (2000). Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five theories [Electronic version]. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*, 568-582.

Baum, S., & Payea, K. (2004). *Education pays 2004: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society.* Washington, DC: The College Board. Retrieved August 4, 2006, from http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost04/EducationPays2004.pdf

Berg, B.L. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Billingsley, A. (1992). *Climbing Jacob's ladder: The enduring legacy of African-American families.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Bouse, G.A., & Hossler, D. (1991). Studying college choice: A progress report [Electronic version]. *Journal of College Admissions, 130,* 11-15.

Bowen, W.G., & Bok, D. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Brazzell, J.C. (1996). Diversification of postsecondary institutions. In D.B. Woodard Jr. & S.R. Komives (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (3rd ed., pp. 43-63). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Morison, K.B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises. Retrieved May 13, 2006, from http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf

Broido, E.M., & Manning, K. (2002). Philosophical foundations and current theoretical perspectives in qualitative research [Electronic version]. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*, 434-445.

Cabrera, A.F., & LaNasa, S.M. (2000). Understanding the college-choice process. In A.F. Cabrera & S.M. LaNasa (Eds.), *Understanding the college choice of disadvantaged students* (pp. 5-22). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Callaway, P.B. (2008). "Don't you fall" resilient and academically successful African Americans' literacy and family involvement practices (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2008). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3315005)

Carnevale, A.P. (2006, July 17). Hitting the books still pays off. *Business Week.* Retrieved August 3, 2006, from Ebsco host.

Carnevale, A.P., & Fry, R.A. (2002). The demographic window of opportunity: College access and diversity in the new century. In D.E. Heller (Ed.), *Condition of access: Higher education for lower income students* (pp. 137-151). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Charmaz, K. (2002). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 675-694). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Chase, S.E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.,* pp. 651 679). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Chmelynski, C. (2006, January). Getting more men and Blacks into teaching. *The Education Digest.* Retrieved January 26, 2007, from Ebsco host.

Choy, S.P. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment.* (NCES 2001-126). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved June 5, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001126.pdf

Choy, S.P. (2002). *Access and persistence: Findings from 10 years of longitudinal research on students.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (1998). Personal experience methods, In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 150-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Coleman, J.S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95-120.

College Partnership (2004). *Opinion survey of college bound students and their parents: Most important factors when applying to college or university.* College Partnership. Lakewood, CO. Retrieved April 12, 2006 from http://www.collegepartnership.com/pdf/Fall%202004%20Study%20Charts%20&%20Analysis%20_1_.pdf

Conlin, M. (2003, May 26). The new gender gap. *Business Week Online.* Retrieved August 4, 2006, from http://www.businessweek.com/print/magazine/content/03_21/b3834001_mz001.htm

Connell, J.P., Spencer, M.B, Aber, J.L. (1994). Educational risk and resilience in African-American youth: Context, self, action, and outcomes in school [Electronic version]. *Child Development, 65*, 493-506.

Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14.

Cook, P.J., & Ludwig, J. (1998). The burden of "Acting White": Do Black adolescents disparage academic achievement? In C. Jencks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White test score gap* (pp. 375-400). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory method: Procedures, canons, and evaluative procedures. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*, 13-21.

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA SAGE.

Crosby, E.A. (1999, December). Urban schools: Forced to fail. *Phi Delta Kappan.* Retrieved April 3, 2004, from Academic Search Premier.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* London: SAGE.

Cuyjet, M.J. (1997). African American men on college campuses: Their needs and their perceptions. In M.J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *Helping African American men succeed in college* (New Directions for Student Services No. 80, pp. 5-16). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Davis, J.E. (2003). Early schooling and academic achievement of African American males [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 38*, 515-537.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction.* New York; New York University Press.

Duncan, G. (1999). The education of adolescent Black males: Connecting self-esteem to human dignity. In L.E. Davis (Ed.), *Working with African-American males* (pp. 173-190). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Duncan, G.A. (2002). Beyond love: A critical race ethnography of the schooling of adolescent Black males. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 35*, 131-143.

Education Trust. (1999, Fall). *Ticket to nowhere: The gap between leaving high school and entering college and high-performance jobs.* Washington, DC. Retrieved September 9, 2005, from http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/product+catalog/reports+and+publications.htm#good

Education Trust (2003). *African American achievement in America.* Washington, DC. Retrieved May 15, 2006, from http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/9AB4AC88-7301-43FF-81A3-EB94807B917F/0/AfAmer_Achievement.pdf

Esposito, C. (1999). Learning in urban blight: School climate and its effect on the school performance of urban, minority, low-income children [Electronic version]. *School Psychology Review, 28*, 365-377.

Ferguson, R.F. (1998). Teachers' perceptions and expectations and the Black-White test score gap. In C. Jencks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White test score gap* (pp. 273-317). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Fitzgerald, B.K., & Delaney, J.A. (2002). Educational opportunity in America. In D.E. Heller (Ed.), *Condition of access: Higher education for lower income students* (pp. 3-24). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Fontana, A. (2002). Postmodern trends in interviewing. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 161-175). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Ford, D.Y., Grantham, T.C., & Bailey, D.F. (1999). Identifying giftedness among African American males: Recommendations for effective recruitment and retention. In V.C. Polite, & J.E. Davis (Eds.), *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education* (pp. 51-67). New York: Teachers College Press.

Fordham, S. & Ogbu, J.U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of "Acting White" [Electronic version]. *Urban Review 18*, 176-206.

Freeman, C.E. (2004). *Trends in educational equity of girls and women: 2004* (NCES 2005-016). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 24, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005016.pdf

Freeman, K. (1997). Increasing African Americans' participation in higher education: African American high-school students' perspectives [Electronic version]. *Journal of Higher Education, 68*, 523-550.

Freeman, K. (1998). African Americans and college choice: Cultural considerations and policy implications. In K. Freeman (Ed.), *African American culture and heritage in higher education research and practice* (pp. 181-194). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Freeman, K. (1999a). The race factor in African Americans' college choice [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 34*, 4-25.

Freeman, K. (1999b). Will higher education make a difference? African American's economic expectations and college choice [Electronic version]. *College and University Journal, 75*(2), 7-12.

Freeman, K. (2005). *African Americans and college choice.* Albany: SUNY Press.

Fries-Britt, S.L. (2002, July/August). High achieving Black collegians [Electronic version]. *About Campus*, 7(3), 2-8.

Fries-Britt, S. L., (2004). The challenges and needs of high-achieving Black college students. In M.C. Brown & K. Freeman (Eds.), *Black colleges: New perspectives on policy and praxis* (pp. 161-176). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Gardner, O.S. (1992). Postsecondary education opportunities as perceived by Black high school seniors. In M. Lang & C. Ford (Eds.), *Strategies for retaining minority students in higher education* (pp. 54-63). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Grbich, C. (1999). *Qualitative research in health: An introduction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Gurian, M., & Stevens, K. (2005). *The minds of boys: Saving our sons from falling behind in school and life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gutman, L.M., & McLoyd, V.C. (2000). Parents' management of their children's education within the home, at school, and within the community: An examination of African American families living in poverty [Electronic version]. *Urban Review, 32*, 1-24.

Halle, T.G., Kurtz-Coates, B., & Mahoney, J.L. (1997). Family influences on school achievement in low-income, African-American children [Electronic version]. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*, 527-537.

Hampton University: Hampton's Heritage. (n.d.). Retrieved August 1, 2006, from http://www.hamptonu.edu/about/heritage.cfm

Hamrick, F.A., & Stage, F.K. (1998). High minority enrollment, high school-lunch rates: Predisposition to college [Electronic version]. *Review of Higher Education, 21*, 343-357.

Hamrick, F.A., & Stage, F.K. (2004). College predisposition at high-minority enrollment, low-income schools [Electronic version]. *Review of Higher Education, 27*, 151-168.

Harry, D., & Anderson, M.G. (1999). The social construction of high-incidence disabilities: The effect on African American males. In V.C. Polite, & J.E. Davis (Eds.), *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education* (pp. 34-50). New York: Teachers College Press.

Harvey, W.B., & Anderson, E.L. (2005). *Minorities in higher education: Twenty-first annual status report.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Hauser, R.M., & Anderson, D.K. (1991). Post-high school plans and aspirations of Black and White high school seniors: 1976-86 [Electronic version]. *Sociology of Education, 64*, 263-277.

Hawkins, D.A., & Clinedinst, M. (2006). *State of college admission 2006.* Alexandria, VA: National Association for College Admission Counseling. Retrieved September 23, 2006, from http://www.nacacnet.org/NR/rdonlyres/4B4C0DF4-BF0A-4B10-89F4-A3D631061305/0/06StateofCollegeAdmissionpdf.pdf

Haycock. K., & Huang, S. (2001). *Youth at the crossroads: Facing high school and beyond* (Volume 5, Issue 1). Retrieved September 9, 2005, from http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/product+catalog/reports+and+publications.htm#good

Hearn, J.C. (1984). The relative roles of academic, ascribed, and socioeconomic characteristics in college destinations [Electronic version]. *Sociology of Education, 57*, 22-30.

Hearn, J.C., & Bunton, S.A. (2001, May). *Economic and social returns of baccalaureate, graduate, and professional degrees.* Retrieved September 26, 2004, from http://education.umn.edu/PEPSC/products/Policy%20Brief%2001-01.pdf

Hilliard, A. (1991). Do we have the will to educate all children [Electronic version]? *Educational Leadership, 49*(1), 31-36.

Hoffman, K., & Llagas, C. (2003). *Status and trends in the education of Blacks* (NCES 2003-034). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved November 11, 2003, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003034.pdf

Holzman, M, (2006). *Public education and Black male students: The 2006 state report card.* Cambridge, MA: The Schott Foundation for Public Education. Retrieved July 21, 2006 from http://www.schottfoundation.org/publications/Schott_06_report_final.pdf

Honora, D. (2003). Urban African American adolescents and school identification [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 38*, 58-76.

Horvat, E.M. (1996). African American students and college choice decision making in social context (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 9640254)

Horvat, E.M., & Lewis, K.S. (2003). Reassessing the "burden of acting White": The importance of peer groups in managing academic success [Electronic version]. *Sociology of Education, 76*, 265-280.

Hossler, D., Braxton, J., & Coopersmith, G. (1989). Understanding student college choice. In J.C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, Vol. V (pp. 231-288). New York: Agathon.

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three-phase model and the implications for policymakers. *College and University, 62,* 207-221.

Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Howard, T. (2003). "A tug of war for our minds": African American high school students' perceptions of their academic identities and college aspirations [Electronic version]. *High School Journal, 87*(1), 14-17.

Hurtado, S., Inkelas, K. K., Briggs, C., & Rhee, B. S. (1997). Difference in college access and choice among racial/ethnic groups: Identifying continuing barriers [Electronic version]. *Research in Higher Education, 38,* 43-75.

Institute for Higher Education Policy (1998, March). *Reaping the benefits: Defining the public and private value of going to college.* Retrieved September 26, 2004, from http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/Reap.pdf

Johnson, J.M. (2002). In-depth interviewing. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 103-119). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Johnson, J., Duffett, A., & Ott, A. (2005). *Life after high school: Young people talk about their hopes and prospects.* New York: Public Agenda. Retrieved April 11, 2006, from http://www.publicagenda.org/research/pdfs/life_after_high_school.pdf

Jones, S.R. (2002). Rewriting the word: Methodological strategies and issues in qualitative research. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*, 461-473.

Jones, S.R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2006). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues.* New York: Routledge.

Joyner-Fleming, G. (1995). The college attendance plans of male high school students and their perceptions of the quality of education received (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1995). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 9541219)

Kao, G., & Tienda, M. (1998). Educational aspirations among minority youth [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Education, 106*, 349-384.

Kelpe Kern, C.W. (2000). College choice influences: Urban high school students respond [Electronic version]. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 24*, 487-494.

Kenny, M.E., Blustein, D.L., Chaves, A., Grossman, J.M., Gallagher, L.A. (2003). The role of perceived barriers and relational support in the educational and vocational lives of urban high school students [Electronic version]. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 50*, 142-155.

Kershaw, T. (1992). The effects of educational tracking on the social mobility of African Americans [Electronic version]. *Journal of Black Studies, 23*(1), 152-169.

KewalRamani, A., Gilbertson, L., Fox, M.A., & Provasnik, S. (2007). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities* (NCES 2007-039). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved November 9, 2008, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/index.asp

Kim, D. (2004). The effects of financial aid on students' college choice: Differences by racial groups [Electronic version]. *Research in Higher Education, 45*, 43-70.

King, J.E. (2000). *Gender equity in higher education: Are male students at a disadvantage?* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

King, J.E. (2006). *Gender equity in higher education: 2006.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Kirst, M.W., & Venezia, A. (Eds.). (2004). *From high school to college: Improving opportunities for success in postsecondary education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kleinfeld, J. (1998). *The myth that schools shortchange girls: Social science in the service of deception.* Retrieved August 5, 2006, from http://www.uaf.edu/northern/schools/myth.pdf

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools.* New York: HarperCollins.

Kunjufu, J. (2005). *Countering the conspiracy to destroy Black boys.* Chicago: African American Images.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Just what is critical race theory, and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In L. Parker, D. Deyhle, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is…race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 7-30). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Laird, J., Lew, S., DeBell, M., & Chapman, C. (2006). *Dropout rates in the United States: 2002 and 2003* (NCES 2006-062). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 28th, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006062.pdf

Lareau, A., & Horvat, E.M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships [Electronic version]. *Sociology of Education, 72*, 37-53.

Lee, J. (2003, May). *Higher education: Who benefits?* National Education Association Higher Education: Research Center Update, 9(3). Washington, DC: National Education Association, Office of Higher Education. Retrieved, August 4, 2006, from http://www2.nea.org/he/heupdate/vol9no3.pdf

Levine, A., & Nidiffer, J. (1996). *Beating the odds: How the poor get to college.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewis, C. (2006). African American male teachers in public schools: An examination of three urban school districts [Electronic version]. *Teachers College Record, 108*, 224-245.

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation.* Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 47. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

Lippman, L., Burns, S., & McArthur, E. (1996). *Urban schools: The challenge of location and poverty* (NCES 96-184). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved August 5, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/96184all.pdf

MacGowan, B. R. (2002, November). *A student-centered model of college choice: Opportunity structures for college-bound Black college students.* Alexandria, VA: The National Association for College Admission Counseling. Retrieved August 22, 2006, from http://www.nacac.com/miatpa.bradmacgowan.pdf

Magnuson, K.A., & Waldfogel, J. (2005, Spring). Early childhood care and education: Effects on ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *The Future of Children, 15*(1). Retrieved July 28, 2006 from http://futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/pg_169_magnuson.pdf

Manski, C. F., & Wise, D. A. (1983). *College choice in America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Mashburn, A.J. (2004). Preschool quality and cognitive development of preschoolers in Georgia (Doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University, 2004). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3170738)

Matthay, E. R. (1989, May). A critical study of the college selection process [Electronic version]. *The School Counselor, 36,* 359-370.

Mauricio, D. (2008). Pathways to success: Developing resiliency in urban students (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2008). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3307684)

Mayer, D.P., Mullens, J.E., & Moore, M.T. (2000). *Monitoring school quality: An indicators report* (NCES 2001-030). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved August 5, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001030.pdf

McDonough, P.M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure Opportunity.* Albany: SUNY Press.

McDonough, P.M. (2005). Counseling matters: Knowledge, assistance, and organizational commitment in college preparation. In W.G. Tierney, Z.B. Corwin, & J.E. Colyar (Eds.), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach* (pp. 69-87). Albany: SUNY Press.

McDonough, P.M., Antonio, A.L., & Trent, J.W. (1996). Black students, Black colleges: An African-American college-choice model. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 3,* 9-36.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, P. (2006, June 22). GED battery no substitute for diploma. *Education Week*, 25, Issue 41S, Page 8. Retrieved on July 28, 2006, from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/06/22/41s_ged.h25.html?qs=ged

Morgan, S.L. (1996). Trends in Black-White differences in educational expectations: 1980-92 [Electronic version]. *Sociology of Education, 69*, 308-319.

Morrow, V. (1999). Conceptualizing social capital in relation to the well-being of children and young people: A critical review [Electronic version]. *Sociological Review, 47*, 744-765.

Mortenson, T. (2003, August 9). Fact sheet: *What's wrong with the guys?* Retrieved August 5, 2006, from http://www.postsecondary.org/archives/previous/GuysFacts.pdf

Murphy, L.P. (2004). The evidence of things not seen: College-going for young Black women from inner-city metropolis (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2004). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3122007)

Murrell, P. (1999). Responsive teaching for African American male adolescents. In V.C. Polite, & J.E. Davis (Eds.), *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education* (pp. 82-96). New York: Teachers College Press.

National Center for Education Statistics (1998). *Indicator of the month: Early literacy experiences in the home* (NCES 1999-003). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 30, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999003.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics (2005). *2005 digest of education statistics tables and figures.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05/tables/dt05_185.asp

National Center for Education Statistics (2006). *The condition of education 2006* (NCES 2006-071). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Noguera, P.A. (2003). The trouble with Black males: Environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African American males [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 38,* 431-459.

Nunez, A., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., & Carroll, C.D. (1998). *First-generation students: Undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education* (NCES 1998-082). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved June 5, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98082.pdf

Oakes, J. (2004). *The college track: America's sorting machine.* Retrieved August 7, 2006, from PageName_E_JeannieOakes

Ogbu, J.U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of "Acting White" in Black history, community, and education [Electronic version]. *Urban Review, 36*, 1-34.

Palmer, M.M. (2003). College choice?: The experience of high school seniors from an urban low-income community (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 2003). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3111917)

Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of Research (Volume 2).* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Paulsen, M. B. (1990). *College choice: Understanding student enrollment behavior.* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 6. Washington DC: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.

Perna, L.W. (2000). Differences in the decision to enroll in college among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites [Electronic version]. *Journal of Higher Education, 71,* 117-141.

Perna, L.W. (2005). The key to college access: Rigorous academic preparation. In W.G. Tierney, Z.B. Corwin, & J.E. Colyar (Eds.), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach* (pp. 113-134). Albany: SUNY Press.

Perna, L.W. & Titus, M.A. (2005). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences [Electronic version]. *Journal of Higher Education, 76*, 485-518.

Perry, K. F. (2004). The perceived factors that influence college choice among low and middle-income African American high school seniors: A comparison between a predominantly White and predominantly Black high school (Doctoral dissertation, Seaton Hall University, 2004). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3136107)

Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. (2003). *Young gifted and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students*. Boston: Beacon Press

Pitre, P.E. (2002). An exploratory study of college choice: A comparison of African American and White Maryland high school students' aspirations toward college attendance (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 2002). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3078272)

Pluviose, D. (2006, April 6). Study: "Acting White" accusation has damaging legacy for Black students. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education.* Retrieved August 7, 2006, from http://www.diverseeducation.com/artman/publish/article_5718.shtml

Reynolds, A.J., Mavrogenes, N.A., Bezruczko, N., & Hagemann, M. (1996). Cognitive and family-support mediators of preschool effectiveness: A confirmatory analysis [Electronic version]. *Child Development, 67*(3), 1119-1140.

Rhymes, E. (2004, July 22). "Acting White?": African American students and education. *The Black Commentator.* Retrieved August 7, 2006, from http://www.blackcommentator.com/100/100_cover_acting_white.html

Riessman, C.K. (1993). Narrative analysis. *Qualitative Research Method Series, 30.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Riessman, C.K. (2002). Analysis of personal narratives. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 695-710). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Riordan, C. (1990). *Girls and boys in school: Together or separate?* New York: Teachers' College Press.

Riordan, C. (1994). Single-gender schools: Outcomes for African and Hispanic Americans. *Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization, 10,* 177-205.

Rivers, C. & Barnett, R.C. (2006a, March 15). *"Boy crisis" in education is nothing but hype*. Retrieved August 5, 2006, from http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2671

Rivers, C. & Barnett, R.C. (2006b, April 9). The myth of "the boy crisis" [Electronic version]. *The Washington Post,* p. B01.

Roderick, M. (2003). What's happening to the boys?: Early high school experiences and school outcomes among African American male adolescents in Chicago [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 38*, 538-607.

Rooney, P., Hussar, W., & Planty, M. (2006). *The condition of education 2006* (NCES 2006-071). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 15, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006071.pdf

Rossman, G.B. & Rallis, S.F. (1998). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Rudestam, K.E., & Newton, R.R. (2001). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Small, L.H. (2007). The quest for excellences: A case study of academically high-achieving Black males in a suburban high school (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2007). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3270871)

Smith, M.J. (2001). Low SES African American parents: Playing the college choice game [Electronic version]. *The Journal of College Admission,* 171, 16-21.

Smith, M.J., & Fleming, M.K. (2006). African American parents in the search stage of college choice: Unintentional contributions to the female to male college enrollment gap [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 41*, 71-100.

Smith, R.A. (2005a, January). *Black boys: The sad facts.* Retrieved May 19, 2005, from http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2005_01/smith_sidebar2.htm

Smith, R.A. (2005b, January). *Saving Black boys.* Retrieved May 19, 2005, from http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2005_01/smith.htm

Smith, R.C. (2002). Analytic strategies for oral history interviews. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 711-731). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Smith-Maddox, R. (2000). Educational aspirations of African American eighth graders [Electronic version]. *Race, Gender, and Class, 7*, 58-80.

Spencer, M.B. (1986). Risk and resilience: How Black children cope with stress. *Social Science, 71*, 22-26.

Stage, F.K., & Hossler, D. (1989). Differences in family influences on college attendance plans for male and female ninth graders. *Research in Higher Education, 30*, 301-315.

Stage, F.K., & Manning, K. (2003). *Research in the college context: Approaches and methods.* New York: Brunner-Routledge.

St. John, E.J. (1991). What really influences minority attendance?: Sequential analyses of the high school and beyond sophomore cohort. *Research in Higher Education, 32*, 141-158.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Suskind, R. (1998). *A hope in the unseen: An odyssey from the inner city to the Ivy League.* New York: Broadway Books.

Swanson, D.P., Cunningham, M., & Spencer, M.B. (2003). Black males' structural conditions, achievement patters, normative needs, and "opportunities" [Electronic version]. *Urban Education, 38*, 608-633.

Terenzini, P.T., Cabrera, A.F., & Bernal, E.M. (2001). *Swimming against the tide: The poor in American higher education.* New York: The College Board, Research Report No. 2001-1.

Thelin, J.R. (2003). Historical overview of American higher education. In D.B. Woodard Jr. & S.R. Komives (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed., pp. 3-22). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tierney, W.G, & Auerbach, S. (2005). Toward developing an untapped resource: The role of families in college preparation. In W.G. Tierney, Z.B. Corwin, & J.E. Colyar (Eds.), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach* (pp. 29-48). Albany: SUNY Press.

Tierney, W.G., & Colyar, J.E. (2005). The role of peer groups in college preparation programs. In W.G. Tierney, Z.B. Corwin, & J.E. Colyar (Eds.), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach* (pp. 49-68). Albany: SUNY Press.

Tyson, K. (2005). It's not "a Black thing": Understanding the burden of acting White and other dilemmas of high achievement. *American Sociological Review, 70.* Abstract retrieved August 7, 2006, from Research Port.

United States Census Bureau. (2004). *School enrollment: Social and economic characteristics of students (Table 13).* Washington, DC, United States Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch. Retrieved September 21, 2006, from http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html

United States Department of Agriculture. (2006). *National school lunch program.* Washington, DC, United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved September 13, 2006, from http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/AboutLunch/NSLPFactSheet.pdf

United States Department of Labor. (2006). *Occupational outlook handbook: 2006-07 edition.* Washington, DC, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections. Retrieved August 3, 2006, from http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco2003.htm1

Valadez, J. R. (1998). Applying to college: Race, class, and gender differences [Electronic version]. *Professional School Counseling, 1*(5), 14-20.

Venezia, A., Kirst, M.W., & Antonio, A.L. (2003). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K-12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations* (Stanford University's Bridge Project). Stanford, CA: The Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research. April 17, 2006 from http://www.stanford.edu/group/bridgeproject/betrayingthecollegedream.pdf

Warren, C.A.B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 83-101). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Wasonga, T., Christman, D.E., & Kilmer, L. (2003). Perceptions and construction of meaning of urban high school experiences among African American university students: A focus group approach [Electronic version]. *Education and Urban Society, 35,* 181-201.

Wilson, C.D. (1997). The college choice process: A longitudinal study of decision-making among students and families (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1997). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 9727317)

Wilson, K.R., & Allen, W.R. (1987). Explaining the educational attainment of young Black adults: Critical familial and extra-familial influences. *Journal of Negro Education, 56*, 64-76.

Wood, J.M. (2004). The experience and meaning of postmenopausal women's sexual desire: A grounded theory study (Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2004). *Digital Dissertations.* (UMI No. 3141028)

Yin, R.K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Zill, N., Collins, M., West, J., & Hausken, E.G. (1995). *Approaching kindergarten: A look at preschoolers in the United States* (NCES 95-280). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 27, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/95280.pdf