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SISTAHS WITH VOICES: INFLUENCES THAT AFFECTED THE COLLEGE
CHOICE OF HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO CHOSE TO
ATTEND A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION INSTEAD OF AN
HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

By

Angela Denise Duncan
B.S. Northern Kentucky University, 2002
M.A. Bowling Green State University, 2008

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational & Counseling Psychology,
Counseling and College Student Personnel
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

December 2013

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A Dissertation Approved on

November 18, 2013

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Michael J. Cuyjet, Co-Advisor

Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter, Co-Advisor

Dr. Amy S. Hirschy

Dr. Beth E. Bukoski

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the African American women who played a role in making me the woman I am today. Your love, support, friendship, and commitment have been felt continuously throughout the years. Because of who you are to me, I enthusiastically pay it forward to the African American women who come behind me. “And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.” 2 Corinthians 9:8, NLT

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Philippians 4:13 reminds me that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I praise God for bringing me to this point in my life and academic career. The journey has had its ups and downs, but through it all I have become a stronger person and professional.

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ABSTRACT
SISTAHS WITH VOICES: INFLUENCES THAT AFFECTED THE COLLEGE
CHOICE OF HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO CHOSE TO
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Angela D. Duncan

December 19, 2013

Despite a long struggle to gain access, African Americans have always highly valued education. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) were established specifically to educate this group, but the integration of predominately White institutions (PWI) in the 1960s led to decreased HBCU enrollments and, thus, challenges to their continued relevance. The numerous options for higher education add to the complexities of college choice, especially for students who have various intersecting identities to consider (e.g., African American women). The purpose of this study was to discover what influenced eight high-achieving African American women who chose to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU.

Qualitative, collective case study methods were used to conduct this study. Both student participants and a person they identified as influential were interviewed. This method allowed comparisons and contrasts to determine how various identities and cultural backgrounds affected students' college choices. Data analysis was continuous permitting connections to the literature and between participants as data collection progressed.

Influences affecting the college choices of these women fell into four main categories: predisposition, university characteristics, perceptions of HBCU campus environments, and their intersecting identities. The availability of academic programs, scholarships, and the location of the institution were primary reasons given for these participants' choices to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU. Students also offered advice to other African American females making college choice decisions.

Admissions officers and high school counselors must understand that while scholarships are important, they are not always the greatest influence for this group. It is also important to engage the family during the college choice process and have discussions with the students regarding moving away from home. Essentially, it is important for those working with these students to understand their unique characteristics and how they use those characteristics when making college choice decisions.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

African Americans have always placed a high value on education (Billingsley, 1992; Freeman, 2005). Their strong cultural and historical beliefs in education helped lead to the development of educational institutions specifically for Blacks while also confronting discrimination from White institutions (Billingsley, 1992). The efforts to gain education despite the barriers shows the “faith, commitment, hard work, and endurance” of this group (Billingsley, 1992, p. 182). Strides continue to be made not only to enroll more African American students in postsecondary education, but also to close the achievement gap between White and African American students and increase African American graduation rates.

Statement of the Problem

Since the end of legal segregation in education (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), the amount of research focusing on African American students and college choice, especially the choice to attend an historically Black college or university (HBCU), has grown (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010). This growth primarily covered two areas: (1) to focus specifically on the college choice of African Americans and (2) to help explain why students choose to attend HBCUs instead of other institutions (Gasman et al., 2010). Many studies focused on background characteristics, academic differences, identity development, and various student experiences of African American students navigating both HBCUs and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004; Hartnett, 1970;

Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Stewart, 2008). However, few provided a comprehensive understanding of students who considered and ultimately chose to attend an HBCU (Gasman et al., 2010).

The few studies focused on the reasons students chose to attend HBCUs generally did so by comparing their reasons with those of students who chose to attend PWIs (Freeman, 1999a; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Norwood, 2009). McDonough et al. (1997) and Norwood (2009) used a national survey instrument to determine which factors were most influential in the college choices of African American students. Freeman (1999a) used qualitative focus groups to provide a chance for the students' voices to be heard and to provide greater depth into the reasons why students chose to attend either an HBCU or a PWI. The lack of research providing space for student voices to be heard makes it harder for one to gain a deeper understanding regarding how and why African American students make their college choices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a voice for African American women regarding the factors influential to their decisions to attend a PWI. Each of the participants in this study considered HBCUs in their college search process, but various reasons caused them to choose to attend a PWI. Though African American women outnumber African American men in college attendance, few qualitative studies have been conducted to explore how and why African American women make various college choice decisions. This study provides the opportunity for these women to tell their stories and share how they made sense of the college choice process.

Significance of the Study

Although numerous studies have been conducted regarding the college choice processes of various student groups, the majority have been quantitative studies using large, national databases (Perna, 2006). Studies have highlighted differences existing within and between groups based on race/ethnicity (Bateman & Hossler, 1996), gender (Smith & Fleming, 2006), and socioeconomic status (McDonough, 1991), but more research needs to be done to identify the nuances existing in these populations (Perna, 2006). This study helped fill the gap by examining how the intersection of multiple identities and other factors (e.g., family and college environment) influenced the college choice of African American women who have chosen to attend a public, four-year PWI.

Key studies conducted in the mid- to late-twentieth century focused on academic and demographic differences between African American students at HBCUs and PWIs (Gasman et al., 2010). This study is important because it provides a detailed examination of a group of African American women who considered both HBCUs and PWIs and the factors influential to their decisions to enroll at a PWI. The results reveal nuances important to admissions officers and other administrators interested in increasing the amount of African American women enrolled on their campuses. These nuances include the influence of family, university characteristics, and women's perceptions of the HBCU campus environment on the college choice process. Also included are students' cultural backgrounds and how high school and college counselors can help leverage the capital students have for positive outcomes.

Setting the Context

Though the first U. S. institutions of higher education were created in the 1630s, it took almost 200 years for African Americans to be granted access (Harper, Patton, &

Wooden, 2009). A small number of African Americans received college degrees in the 1820s, but no institution had a practice of consistently admitting this group until Oberlin College adopted a policy in 1835 (About Oberlin, 2012). Over the next 30 years a few institutions (i.e., Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, Lincoln University, and Wilberforce University) were created specifically for African Americans. However, college access for large numbers of African Americans did not occur until after slavery was abolished in 1865 (U.S. Const. amend. XIII, § 1).

Harper et al. (2009) wrote “many religious groups were active in the abolition movement and endeavored to continue their benevolence by addressing the poor state of literacy among freed African Americans” (p. 394). These groups, including the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Freedman’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the American Missionary Association, established and funded numerous private institutions in the south, which caused a shift in the racial makeup of postsecondary education (Harper et al., 2009). These schools were typically known as “normal” schools and primarily served as vocational schools to train teachers and clergymen (Cantey, Bland, Mack, & Joy-Davis, 2011). The shift to a liberal arts curriculum occurred in the 1910s and 1920s when HBCUs began working towards accreditation (Cantey et al., 2011).

Another surge related to public college access for African Americans took place with the passing of the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 (7 U.S.C. 301 *et seq*; 7 U.S.C. § 322 *et seq*). These acts not only provided funding to create higher educational institutions with an emphasis in agricultural and mechanical arts, but also legalized segregation in postsecondary education as long as the funds were distributed in a just and equitable manner (Harper et al., 2009). The quality of HBCUs was inadequate compared to PWIs, with poorly

trained faculty and inferior facilities (Harper et al., 2009). Although the new colleges established for African Americans were supposed to be equivalent to PWIs, several landmark cases emerged in the fight for equality.

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* schooling, treatment, and facilities and accommodations could be separate for Blacks and Whites as long as they were equal. This mandate was in effect for the next 58 years despite evidence educational institutions for African Americans were not equal to those of Whites. The decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ended legalized segregation. This decision by the Supreme Court was in response to cases from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. in which the parents of African American primary and secondary school students wanted the opportunity for their children to attend the White, public schools in their area (Samuels, 2004). Though segregation was no longer legal, wide integration of education did not occur immediately in primary and secondary schools because of opposition of some Whites (Harper et al., 2009).

Desegregation of higher educational institutions was also shaped by the *Brown* decision in two important ways (Samuels, 2004). First, the decision “called into question the constitutionality of segregation at all levels of higher education” (p. 64). Precedents regarding segregation in graduate and professional schools were referenced when making the *Brown* decision. The Supreme Court did not go so far as to determine whether or not the principles used to desegregate graduate and professional schools applied to primary and secondary schools (Samuels, 2004).

Second, the *Brown* decision “hardened the South’s resolve to stop integration at all levels—including higher education” (Samuels, 2004, p. 65). Some Blacks had been able to

enter White colleges and universities without serious consequences. However, many Whites did not want Blacks to attend the primary and secondary schools where their children went every day (Samuels, 2004). Some institutions were openly racist while others created “race-neutral” admissions policies that required applicants to have certificates signed by their secondary school principal or an alumni of the institution to which they were applying. Blacks had a hard time obtaining these signatures because the principals feared losing their jobs and alumni did not want to endorse Black applicants (Samuels, 2004).

Even though the *Brown* decision also applied to higher education, the signing of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d) made it clear segregation in educational institutions was no longer legal. The act maintained

No person in the United States shall; on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department of Education.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 (Pub. L. No. 89-329, 79 Stat. 1219) also helped create equal opportunities for African Americans and strengthen HBCUs. Title III, Part B (20 U.S.C. § 1060-1063c) specifically applied to HBCUs. Congress found the state of HBCUs is partly because of discriminatory acts of the States and the Federal Government. Enhancing Black institutions will help remedy these acts and ensure they continue to exist and participate in the Federal mission to have equal educational opportunities. Providing additional financial assistance to HBCUs was identified as a way to help decrease the institutions’ reliance on government support and encourage reliance on endowments and private sources (20 U.S.C. § 1060-1063c).

Affirmative Action

In 1965, President Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, “which required federal contractors to increase the number of minority employees as an "affirmative step" toward remedying years of exclusion for minority workers in those firms” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 397). The order also pertained to public colleges and universities. As a result, the number of African Americans entering PWIs increased.

Karen (1991) completed a review of college enrollments for African Americans, women, and working-class youth between 1960 and 1986. Enrollments for African Americans more than doubled from 4.3% of total enrollment in 1960 to 9.8% in 1975 (Gordon, as cited in Karen, 1991); however after 1976, enrollments for this group began to decline (Karen, 1991). The decreases were especially seen at HBCUs, which were created specifically for this group (Palmer, 2010). Many African American students chose to take advantage of access to PWIs which had more resources and stronger programs (Palmer, 2010). Despite creating access for African Americans to attend PWIs, the *Brown* ruling and enactment of affirmative action did very little to truly address the issues of racism in the United States (Donahoo, 2006).

Debates. The *Brown* decision, and affirmative action, made it illegal for postsecondary institutions to remain segregated if they wanted to receive federal funding. As more African Americans began to enter PWIs, some Whites started questioning whether or not academic qualifications had been lowered, giving African Americans an unfair advantage. Coleman (2003) explored the notion African Americans believed they needed to be more qualified and work harder than Whites to receive the same opportunities. He also looked at various standards used to predict educational and employment outcomes of Whites

and African Americans. He concluded those who opposed affirmative action had a weak case when using qualification standards because African Americans often exceeded Whites in this area.

While Coleman questioned the qualifications of African Americans in higher education, Wilson (1998) questioned whether or not affirmative action has harmed Whites. Wilson's (1998) study found although African Americans made small educational gains compared to Whites from 1974 to 1994, the slight losses by Whites was more likely the result of large gains by Asians, Latinos, and nonresident aliens. Affirmative action opponents have tried to use this evidence to abolish this policy, but a closer look at the data shows flaws in their argument. The main flaw is the fact "Black enrollment in higher education lags behind their percentage in the population" (Wilson, 1998, p. 221). This lag makes the argument of reverse discrimination weak. Both of these debates provide support for Donahoo's (2006) claim affirmative action does not address the racism still present in the United States.

Relation to student outcomes. Opponents of affirmative action do not support the use of race-sensitive admissions policies in higher education. One of the most common reasons given for the opposition is instead of helping students of color, race-sensitive admission policies stigmatize these students and create a "harmful competition with White classmates of much greater ability" (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. xxxi). Bowen and Bok (1998) published *The Shape of the River* to examine the degree to which race-sensitive policies have accomplished the following goals:

- (1) to enrich the educational experience for students of all races by enrolling and educating more diverse student bodies; and (2) to fill some part of what is widely

seen as a national “deficit” by preparing larger numbers of talented minority students for positions of responsibility in the professions, the business world, academia, government, and every other sector of American life. (p. xxxi)

The results and conclusions provided by the authors are based on a close inspection of the College and Beyond (C&B) database. This national database houses information from over 80,000 undergraduates who entered 28 academically selective colleges and universities in the fall of 1951, 1976, and 1989 (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Only data from the 1976 and 1989 cohorts were used for the study.

Bowen and Bok (1998) investigated the claim race-sensitive admissions policies harm, or stigmatize, students of color by looking at the academic performance, graduation rates, record of acquiring graduate degrees, and subsequent careers of Black students. There was evidence to show Black students performed at significantly lower levels academically than predicted by their standardized test scores. Though the reason for underperformance could not be directly connected to race-sensitive admissions policies, Bowen and Bok (1998) argued several colleges and universities had established programs to help these students achieve at their full potential (i.e., The Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program, which provides faculty advice, support, and encouragement for minority students to consider obtaining a doctorate degree).

Graduation rates for Blacks who matriculated at the C&B schools in 1989 was 75%, compared to only 40% for Black students attending all NCAA Division I schools (Bowen & Bok, 1998). These percentages are compared to 86% of White students from C&B schools and 59% from Division I schools. Additionally, the average dropout rate for Blacks attending all NCAA Division I colleges was 60%, compared to only 25% at C&B schools. The authors

found a large percentage of those students who did dropout from the C&B schools still reported they were “very satisfied” with their college experience (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Bowen and Bok (1998) examined the record of Blacks who acquired advanced degrees to determine how students admitted to college under race-sensitive admissions policies fared. Fifty-six percent of Black graduates from the 1976 cohort obtained an advanced degree, compared to only 34% of Black graduates nationwide. This percentage increased slightly to 58% for the 1989 cohort. The percentage of Black graduates receiving advanced degrees was equal to Whites in the 1976 cohort (56%), and slightly higher in the 1989 cohort (55%). Obtaining an advanced degree not only adds to the number of minority professionals, but also creates an opportunity for these professionals to “provide ‘networks’ similar to those that have benefited the majority White community for many generations” (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. 116).

After inspecting job histories and earnings data from the C&B database, Bowen and Bok (1998) found Black graduates had higher average earnings based on the selectivity of the institution. These students earned far more than all other Black graduates. Earnings gaps still existed between Black and White workers and between men and women (Whites earn more than Blacks and men earn more than women). The authors identified the gap between Black men and White men as most troubling because Black men still earn less than White men even when they had “the same grades, college majors, and socioeconomic backgrounds” (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. 264).

The authors also explored whether or not attending college with a diverse group of people had a positive effect on the students while in school and throughout their lives after graduation (Bowen & Bok, 1998). The results to this question are based on a combination of

factors including (1) the level of importance Black and White students placed on gaining the ability to work effectively with and get along well with people from various races and cultures and (2) the extent of interactions Black and White students had with each other and students from other racial groups (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Overall, “the vast majority believe[d] that going to college with a diverse body of fellow students made a valuable contribution to their education and personal development” (p. 255).

Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) also addressed the impact of diversity on educational outcomes. In response to challenges to affirmative action and increased pressure for colleges and universities to explain the purposes and benefits of diversity in education, the authors focused on three outcomes: theoretical outcomes, learning outcomes, and democracy outcomes (Gurin et al., 2002).

Theoretical outcomes. Gurin et al. (2002) argued as students go through psychosocial development, specifically identity development, it is important they interact with people who are different from themselves. Much of this development occurs during late adolescence/early adulthood, when many students first attend college. The authors stated “colleges that diversify their student bodies and institute policies that foster genuine interaction across race and ethnicity provide the first opportunity for many students to learn from peers with different cultures, values, and experiences” (p. 336). These experiences allow students to challenge the identities they had growing up in segregated parts of the U.S. and really learn who they are and who they want to become.

Learning outcomes. Cognitive growth occurs when students encounter the unfamiliarity of entering college, begin identifying discrepancies between their pre-college experiences and those of others, and when they gain different perspectives from other

students (Gurin et al., 2002). These diverse experiences challenge students to think more critically instead of simply accepting what was normal or routine for them in the past. This assertion was supported by the results of Gurin et al.'s study (2002).

Democracy outcomes. Democracy outcomes focused on whether or not education contributes to creating an informed citizenry. Gurin et al. (2002) contend “students educated in diverse institutions will be more motivated and better able to participate in an increasingly heterogeneous and complex society” (p. 339). Diverse interactions were found to be significantly related to citizenship engagement and racial/cultural engagement for all groups (Gurin et al., 2002). These findings showed having diversity in educational settings benefits the students and the entire country.

Both of the studies mentioned in this section reported positive gains for students based on the presence of a diverse educational setting. Bowen and Bok (1998) provided five suggestions for colleges and universities committed to increasing opportunity, more fully realizing the educational outcomes of diversity, and reducing racial division in American life. The five suggestions are

1. Work hard to build larger pools of well-qualified minority students.
2. Invest sufficient resources in the admissions process and in assessing performance.
3. Find ways to improve the in-college academic achievement of the minority students being admitted to academically selective colleges, including both their graduation rates and grade point averages.
4. We need to be much more open in talking about race-sensitive admissions and how well these policies have worked.

5. Finally, speak out! Leaders of colleges and universities, including Trustees, need to be more active and effective than they have been in explaining and defending their admissions policies to a broad public. (pp. xlv-xlvii)

It is not enough for college and university administrators to talk about the importance of diversity if no steps are taken to ensure all students have the opportunity to be successful. This must start by improving the level of academic preparation on the primary and secondary educational levels. All students should have access to a curriculum preparing them for college and to the information necessary to navigate the college choice process (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Admissions officers must also be given enough time and resources to adequately process applications and assess academic performance. Carefully selecting students based on a variety of factors, including race, is not a quick process (Bowen & Bok, 1998). In addition to having the time and resources to effectively practice race-sensitive admissions, colleges and universities also need to implement programs to help improve the academic achievement of its minority students. Data from Bowen and Bok's (1998) study showed African American students did not perform as well as White students with comparable academic ability and socioeconomic status. Increasing the amount of diversity on campus is beneficial to all students, but it is also important for minority students to have programs that help close the performance gap.

Finally, it is important for higher education administrators, and others who support race-sensitive admissions, to become more comfortable and vocal in talking about the policy. Evidence shows the policy is beneficial to all students. Administrators must be able to effectively explain and defend their use of the policy to their constituencies. Affirmative

action will likely continue to be debated for years to come. Those who support its use must continue to engage others on the substantive issues of the policy in an effort to create educational environments where everyone feels included (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Relevant policies and laws. Several cases have been brought before state and federal courts challenging the use of affirmative action in higher education. The outcomes of these cases continue to affect access to higher education for diverse groups. Relevant and well-known policies and laws from California, Michigan, and Texas are described below.

California. One of the major cases challenging affirmative action in California was *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). Bakke alleged his denial of admission to the University of California at Davis medical school was the result of affirmative action. During the time he was denied admission, some students of color were admitted with lower scores. The Supreme Court decided to prohibit racial quotas, but institutions could still consider race among other factors in the quest for diversity. The consideration of race in admissions decisions was eliminated with the passage of California's Proposition 209 in 1996 which amended the state's constitution making affirmative action illegal (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Tierney, 1996).

This change adversely affected not only the number of African Americans attending the state's flagship institutions, but also the number of faculty of color who were hired (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Tierney, 1996). Some students who qualified for admission chose to attend other institutions, including private institutions, because they no longer felt welcomed and, in some cases, adequately qualified (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Since 1999, California has applied a "Four Percent Plan" guaranteeing admission to at least one school in the University of California system to the top four percent of graduating high school students

statewide or the top four percent of their high school class (California-“Four Percent Plan,” 2012).

Michigan. In 2003, *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger* challenged affirmative action in Michigan. The Supreme Court decided in *Gratz* the use of racial preferences in undergraduate admissions was unlawful. However, affirmative action was upheld in the *Grutter* case because it was found the law school had a “compelling interest that could justify the narrowly tailored use of race in selecting applicants for admission to public universities” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 402).

Similar to California’s Proposition 209, Michigan voters passed Proposal 2 in 2006 to ban preferential treatment in education, public employment, and public contracts based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin (Michigan-Proposal 2, 2012). This law was overturned by a three-judge panel of the U.S. Appeals Court for the Sixth Circuit stating it deprived racial minorities of their 14th Amendment right to equal protection (U.S. Appeals Court Overturns Michigan Ban, 2011). This ruling meant public institutions in Michigan could use affirmative action. The case was appealed by the Michigan attorney general, with arguments being heard before a 15-judge panel of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals on March 6, 2012 (Burke, 2012). In November 2012 the full panel of judges upheld the previous ruling by the court in 2011 regarding Proposal 2 being unconstitutional (Goldsmith, 2012).

Texas. Since the ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) Texas had made changes to help increase the number of African Americans entering its public institutions of higher education. An African American student, Heman Sweatt, sued the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) School of Law because he was denied admission based on his race. Ultimately, the Supreme Court ordered the integration of graduate and professional schools; however, the

progress was halted in 1996 when a decision was made in the *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996) case. This case was brought by four White students who were denied admission to the UT-Austin School of Law. They alleged reverse discrimination because the school considered race as a factor in admissions decisions. In this case

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit decided in *Hopwood* that admissions practices considering race at the UT-Austin School of Law were unconstitutional. In 1997, then Texas Attorney General Dan Morales issued an opinion on the *Hopwood* case and applied its ruling to all areas in higher education including admissions, financial aid, and scholarships. (Heilig, Reddick, Hamilton, & Dietz, 2011, p. 12)

This decision forced all public colleges and universities in the District to create new ways of maintaining diversity.

Currently, Texas is operating under House Bill 588, which grants students who graduate in the top ten percent of their high school class automatic admission to any public university in the state (1997). “In theory, HB 588 would be a race-neutral admissions practice that would provide greater access to selective higher education to all qualified students in Texas” (Heilig et al., 2011, p. 12). While true for some students of color, enrollment shows 70% of African American students who qualify under the top ten percent plan chose not to attend the state’s flagship institutions (Heilig et al., 2011). Heilig et al. (2011) assert the reason for this disparity is likely because of the history of a negative campus climate for this group at Texas’ flagship institutions. As the plan decreased to only include the top eight percent of students in 2011, there was concern the number of African Americans attending the state’s flagship institutions would further decrease (Heilig et al., 2011).

Current state of affirmative action. The U.S. Supreme Court recently heard arguments in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013). This case was first filed in 2008 after several students were denied admission. They argued UT-Austin “could not use race as a factor in admission processes if there were other race-neutral options that would have the same results on diversity” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012, para. 1). The federal district court found in favor of UT-Austin and the decision of the district court was upheld in January 2011 by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Supreme Court delivered its opinion on this case on June 24, 2013, which centered on whether or not race-conscious admissions policies are still appropriate as set forth in *Grutter* and *Bakke*. This Court determined the District Court and Fifth Circuit did not use the correct analysis when considering and judging UT-Austin’s admissions process which required a standard of “strict scrutiny.” This level of scrutiny involves the Court determining that it is “necessary for the university to use race to achieve the education benefits of diversity” and that “no workable race-neutral alternatives would produce the educational benefits of diversity” (570 U.S. 11-345, 2013, p. 2). Since the District Court and Fifth Circuit failed to use this level of analysis, the Supreme Court vacated the District Court’s decision and sent the case back for further proceedings.

This section focused on one of the major obstacles African Americans have faced regarding higher education: access. Though the use of affirmative action has helped remedy past injustices in education based on race, recent and pending court cases demonstrate some people object to the use of racial preferences of any kind in admissions decisions. The objections still exist despite evidence of positive educational outcomes for students who attend racially diverse institutions (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Gurin et al., 2002).

It is important to understand the historical context of African American's access to higher education when studying the college choice of this group. Without the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown* and the enactment of affirmative action, African Americans might still rely solely on HBCUs to pursue higher education. When African American students navigate their college choice process, they have the option of attending both HBCUs and PWIs. The quality of programs, faculty, and facilities of these institutions are more equitable, though the larger size of many PWIs may allow for more programming options. This study will provide a better understanding of how and why African American women decide between attending an HBCU or a PWI. The current research will be explored using a conceptual framework, intersectionality, which acknowledges the role a student's various identities (i.e., race and gender) plays in her college choice. This framework is explained in detail in the next chapter.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and concepts are used throughout this study:

Historically Black College or University—[HBCU] a college or university established prior to 1964 with the purpose of educating African Americans (Gasman et al., 2010).

Predominantly White Institution—[PWI] term used to describe colleges or universities where Whites account for at least 50% of student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

College Choice—"a process that captures the academic, social, economic, and familial influences that shape a child's journey from kindergarten to post-high school" (Smith & Fleming, 2006, p. 76).

Postsecondary and Higher Education—terms used interchangeably to describe education obtained after high school graduation.

College, University, and Institutions of Higher Education—terms used interchangeably to describe the organizations providing education past the high school level.

Social Constructivism—a worldview in which researchers form an understanding of a topic based on participants’ subjective meanings based on their “interactions with others...and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

Cultural Capital— traits learned and/or gained from a person’s parents or other close family members that help determine class status (Bourdieu, 1977).

Social Capital—the types of connections students make and the networks in which they interact to gain the knowledge needed to move into the position to which they aspire (Bourdieu, 1977).

Intersectionality—“the multiple, interconnected layers of existence and identity (including but not limited to the existential, political, social, and personal—and ranging from race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, culture, and religion, to one’s relationship with oneself and with others)” (Gines, 2011, p. 275).

Community Cultural Wealth—“an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77)

High-achieving—students who earned at least the minimum high school grade point average and standardized test score to be eligible for at least one of the institution’s academic scholarships (3.25 GPA and 20 ACT).

Research Questions

One central question and three secondary questions were examined to address the purpose for this dissertation described above. These questions include:

1. What influenced the college choice of high-achieving African American women who chose to attend a four-year, public PWI instead of an HBCU?
 - a. How were African American women's choices to attend a four-year, public PWI influenced by their families?
 - b. How did the intersection of multiple identities¹ influence African American women's choices to attend a four-year, public PWI?
 - c. How did African American women's perceptions of the PWI and HBCU campus environments influence their college choices?

Expected Findings

Although few qualitative studies have been conducted focusing specifically on factors influential to the college choice of African American women, numerous studies have been completed regarding the college choices of African American students in general. Based on results from previous studies, at least five themes were expected to emerge from the data. First, parental influence on college aspirations and choice were expected to differ based on gender (i.e., parental influence on daughters versus sons; Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Second, having access to scholarships and financial aid plays a role in college choice (Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). Third, women attending different types of high schools had different levels of access to college information and encouragement from school personnel (Freeman, 1999b & 2005; McDonough, 1991). The differences in high

¹ For this study, multiple identities include a student's academic, cultural, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It also includes her social experiences and geographic location.

school type were expected to affect college choice. The availability of specific academic majors and programs was the fourth theme expected to be influential to African American women's college choice (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 2002; Hayden, 2000). Finally, having a friend, family, and/or mentor connection to an HBCU was expected to have a positive influence on HBCU attendance (Freeman, 2005; McDonough et al., 1997).

Guiding Paradigm and Perspectives

The paradigm guiding this research is social constructivism. In this paradigm “the aim of inquiry is *understanding and reconstruction* of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113, emphasis in original). By using this worldview, I seek to better understand the world in which I live and work (Creswell, 2007 & 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As I conducted this research, I used open-ended questions to gain information regarding how the participants made meaning of their college choice based on their subjective views of their lives (Creswell, 2007 & 2009). As a researcher, I also acknowledged how my background shapes my interpretations of the participants' stories based on my own “personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

In addition to viewing this research from a social constructivist paradigm, this study was also viewed through a cultural studies lens. In its basic form, “cultural studies involves an examination of how the history people live is produced by structures that have been handed down from the past” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 187). This perspective allows for the researcher's and the participants' lived experiences, as well as historical perspectives of African American women's lives, to shape how the data are represented (Marshall &

Rossman, 2011). The cultural studies perspective also connects with the concepts of intersectionality and community cultural wealth framing this study in that it helps to bring in “multiple discourses from voices that are frequently left out of the academy” (p. 24).

Summary

This chapter began with a statement of the problem, the purpose of this study, and its significance. The next section detailed the context of this study, based on the historical perspective of African Americans and access to higher education. The definitions of various terms used throughout this document were given followed by a list of the research questions being explored. Finally, a brief review of the expected findings was presented along with an explanation of the paradigm and perspective guiding this research. The following chapters provide a detailed literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, implications and conclusions.

CHAPTER II.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a general overview of college choice. The next two sections focus on the college choice of African Americans and women, respectively. The information provided focuses primarily on college environments and current participation patterns. The section focusing on African Americans includes a subsection on family while the section on women also includes subsections on historical perspectives and specifically about African American women. The fourth section highlights the conceptual frameworks selected to guide this research: Perna's conceptual model of college choice (2006), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth. This section also includes a discussion about the seminal college choice model: Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model. The chapter concludes with a summary of how the results of this study help fill a gap in the literature.

College Choice

Research regarding college choice has been on the rise during the past 30 years (Bergerson, 2009). The topics have included not only the college choice processes of various groups (e.g., students of color, high-achievers, low-income students; Coneal, 2002; Engberg & Allen, 2011; Freeman, 2005) but also the emergence of numerous college choice models (Perna, 2006; Tierney & Venegas; 2009; Yosso, 2005). Many studies framed college choice in terms of three main perspectives: sociological, psychological, and economic (Bergerson, 2009; Paulsen, 1990). These perspectives

help researchers gain a better grasp on factors influential to the college choice of various student groups.

The sociological perspective includes student background characteristics such as race, gender, family income, educational aspirations, and high school curriculum (Paulsen, 1990). This perspective often comes with the assumption “individuals with higher levels of academic preparation and achievement receive greater encouragement from ‘significant others,’ including parents, teachers, counselors, and peers” (Perna, 2006, p. 111). The higher level of encouragement could increase students’ educational and occupational aspirations (Perna, 2006). Institutional characteristics and the way students perceive the overall climate of higher education and specific institutions are included in the psychological perspective of college choice. Finally, the economic perspective is a part of the rational choice model, which assumes students make their college choice based on weighing the costs and benefits of attending college (Paulsen, 1990). The benefits include increased earnings, better health, and a lower probability of unemployment (Perna, 2006). If students do not believe their economic situation will improve as a result of college attendance, they may choose to go directly into the workforce.

In addition to the three perspectives described above, researchers have considered how cultural and social capital, also sociological constructs, influence students’ college choices. Cultural capital refers to those traits learned and/or gained from a person’s parents or other close family members that help determine class status (Bourdieu, 1977). If students do not have the language skills, mannerisms, or knowledge considered valuable, they may not feel they have the ability, or cultural knowledge, necessary to

successfully navigate the process of applying to or selecting an institution of higher education.

Social capital focuses on the types of connections students make and the networks in which they interact (Bourdieu, 1977). Greater social capital often allows students to gain knowledge and information from others who are in the position to which they aspire. This can be shown through the amount of knowledge a student has about the college search process and the information and other messages he or she receives regarding financial aid and scholarships. Access to social capital has been viewed as a method the dominant class uses to maintain its position (Bourdieu, 1977).

While looking at college choice from the sociological, psychological, and economic perspectives provides valuable information, these perspectives focus on student characteristics considered valuable. Many of the students exhibiting these characteristics are in dominant groups for race and socioeconomic status. Yet, although often viewed from a deficit standpoint, students outside of historically privileged or dominant groups exhibit cultural knowledge and skills which allow them to navigate the college choice process and other unfamiliar environments (Yosso, 2005). The valuable nature of these cultural attributes is not often shown in traditional college choice models. This research will be viewed through an intersectional lens which accounts for the various identities with which a student identifies and the cultural characteristics accompanying those identities.

African Americans and College Choice

“African Americans have always placed a high premium on education, believing it to be the one commodity that could empower them” (Freeman, 2005, p. 1). Zamani

(2003) wrote although the number of African Americans attending postsecondary institutions has increased, it is still debatable whether or not all students have “equal access to opportunities for success” (p. 6). A number of legislative policies have been implemented to help correct inequalities, but many students, including African Americans, continue to struggle. The challenges these students face in pursuing higher education vary, but one of the primary challenges is discrimination based on race.

Gaps still exist in research regarding factors influential to the college choice decisions of under-represented groups (Freeman, 2005; Perna, 2006). Research shows the importance of considering the role race plays in students’ college choice decisions (Freeman, 1999b; Freeman, 1999c; Kim et al., 2009; Pitre, 2006). Freeman (1999b) stated

Although, at first glance, it might seem perplexing to educators that race factors play a role in students choosing to participate or not participate in higher education, in the broadest sense, the very fact that African Americans lag behind the participation rate of Whites in higher education is an indication that race does factor in the college choice process (p. 6).

Each of the studies mentioned provides different reasons why consideration of race and development of different initiatives for these groups is important.

African American students in Freeman’s (1999b) study identified three categories of race factors influential to their college choice: family or self influences; psychological or social barriers; and cultural awareness. Family influences stemmed from family members wanting students to attend college to achieve beyond their current level (Freeman, 1999b). They did not want the student to remain at their current

socioeconomic level. Students used “negative motivation” (Freeman, 1999b) to influence themselves. These students were exposed to people or environments they did not want to imitate. Those situations were used as motivation to perform well academically and move toward postsecondary education.

The psychological and social barriers included not being presented with the option of a college education and not being pushed by or receiving encouragement from parents or school personnel (Freeman, 1999b). Some students did not recognize the benefits of a college education and, therefore, lost hope in their future (Freeman, 1999b). Intimidation also served as a social barrier for students. Students who attended inner-city schools were used to seeing mostly other Black students. If they chose to attend a PWI, they did not feel comfortable because of cultural differences between themselves and the majority students (Freeman, 1999b).

Finally, students felt increasing cultural awareness in the high schools would help motivate more African American students to attend college. The students were typically only exposed to Black history during the month of February; the remainder of the year they felt their history was not seen as relevant (Freeman, 1999b). When students feel their culture is relevant, they believe pursuing higher education is a viable option and will work harder to get the most out of their academic experience (Freeman, 1999b).

When Freeman (1999c) considered how economic expectations affected the college choice of African American students, she found expected costs and future earnings, recognition of job market ceiling faced by group members, and the desire for wealth and comfort rather than for a specific occupation were most influential. The students in this study may have thought about going to college, but when they considered

the job outlook, they saw how obtaining a college degree did not always translate into having a higher level job. They were torn between going to college to show future students African Americans can accomplish this goal and feeling like they were investing in an education that might not pay off in the future (Freeman, 1999c).

Students commented about receiving less favorable job treatment because of their skin color. Some also felt they had to be two, three, or four times better than their Caucasian counterparts once they graduated if they wanted to get a good job (Freeman, 1999c). Freeman (1999c) stated “the combination of African American students’ perceptions of job market limitations plus more or less equitable job treatment creates an insurmountable barrier in the minds of students considering whether or not to invest in higher education” (p. 11).

The last theme in this study pertained to students entering higher education for future wealth and comfort instead of a specific occupation. Students were interested in earning money to increase their standing and position in society (Freeman, 1999c). Freeman (1999c) found although students’ college aspirations may come from the desire for wealth and comfort, their perceptions of job market limitations may prevent them from actually attending college.

Kim et al. (2009) explored the effects of expectations about financial aid on college choice. The study found enrollment rates for African American students were lower than those of Whites and Asians when the actual amount of aid offered was more than expected (Kim et al., 2009). Although more aid was awarded, it still may not have met the standard of being adequate for African American students (Kim et al., 2009).

Based on the results, it was recommended institutions tailor financial aid packages for students from various backgrounds (Kim et al., 2009).

Pitre (2006) compared the aspirations and perceptions of college attendance of African American and White students. Pitre (2006) found African American students were just as likely as their White peers to aspire to college attendance but had significantly lower levels of academic achievement. The lower level of achievement may result from African American students not being aware of college admissions requirements at the beginning of their high school career (Pitre, 2006). Stronger ties between high schools and institutions of higher education was suggested to help provide the assistance needed to support all students as they prepare for and gain admission to college (Pitre, 2006).

The studies described above highlight the perceptions some African American students have regarding the ways race and socioeconomic status influenced their college choice process. Though African American students aspire to attend college, some may not be exposed to various higher educational resources early enough to gain a better understanding of academic requirements or financial aid. It is important for administrators at secondary schools and higher educational institutions to connect with these students early to provide them with information to assist them in navigating the college choice process. This information should also be provided to family members since they are often an influential factor in a student's college choice.

Family

Prior to desegregation, the family, school, and community each played a part in the educational achievement of African American children (Edwards, 1993). Teachers

and administrators worked with parents to ensure the educational structure was meeting the needs of the children and the local community. The schools “helped African-American students and parents to fully understand what was taught, why it was taught, and for what roles African-American children were preparing themselves” (p. 356). Most importantly, parents, teachers, and administrators worked hard to safeguard their children against educational injustices and systematic genocide (Edwards, 1993).

After desegregation, the roles African American families, schools, and communities played changed. Edwards (1993) stated

Segregated schools were truly community-based ones, and those of today have little or no concern for a community in which they have never lived, don’t understand, and most likely don’t feel the need to understand in order to do their job. (p. 365)

This was in response to the reality many schools serving large minority populations are often managed by majority White and wealthy school boards, and majority White administrators and teachers. Schools may not be successful in educating African Americans without emphasizing the unique importance of the people and their communities (Edwards, 1993).

African Americans families have a history of being actively involved in their children’s education. However, they “are often accused of not being involved or interested in the outcome or the educational process of their children” (Freeman, 2005, p. 11). Freeman (2005) argued this accusation may come from a conflict between how institutions define involvement and how it is defined by African American families.

Epstein (1995) developed a framework of six types of involvement used by educators to “develop more comprehensive programs of school and family partnerships” (p. 705). The six types are

Type 1: Parenting—Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Type 2: Communicating—Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress.

Type 3: Volunteering—Recruit and organize parent help and support.

Type 4: Learning at home—Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

Type 5: Decision making—Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Type 6: Collaborating with community—Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. (p. 704)

Though this model makes valid suggestions for creating supportive environments for learning at home, conducting parent-teacher conferences, having parent volunteers, and active participation in parent organizations, institutions do not always consider how cultural backgrounds affect the ways in which parents are involved with schools (Wright, 2009).

Some African American parents agree with Epstein's (1995) involvement framework while others find helping out with homework and providing a place for a child to study as being an adequate level of involvement (Trotman, 2001). Both Fields-Smith (2005) and Trotman (2001) highlighted African Americans who are single parents and/or low-income may want to be more involved in their child's education but inflexible jobs, low teacher expectations, and parental educational level serve as barriers to creating working relationships with teachers. While some parents may not always be physically or financially active in their child's education, the level of expectations they have for their children is still high (Trotman, 2001). Ultimately, if schools hope to establish greater levels of involvement and home-school communication with African American parents they must "acknowledge the range in dispositions, backgrounds, experiences, and strengths among African-American families" (Edwards, 1993, p. 366).

As mentioned above, students in Freeman's (1999b) study identified a desire to surpass their family's educational level as part of the family influence on their college choice. Family members may not have attended college themselves but wanted the student to be a catalyst in moving the family forward. This theme, in addition to automatic college attendance expectations from the family and avoidance of negative role models, was also found in a later study by Freeman (2005). Some students automatically knew they were expected to attend college after high school. Others grew up in areas or households with negative influences (e.g., being pressured to sell drugs or having a family member who is an alcoholic). These students saw higher education as a way to have a better life than they were given as children (Freeman, 2005).

Smith and Fleming (2006) found African American parents were actively involved in their student's college choice process from beginning to end. Parents in the study played a role in students' decisions of where to go to college and whether to attend a two- or four-year institution. They also found the level of aspiration and encouragement from parents was based on the gender of the student (Smith & Fleming, 2006). Daughters were predisposed to attending a four-year institution while parents accepted a wider range of post-high school options for their sons. The daughters also received more positive encouragement to perform well academically and to take advantage of all college has to offer. On the contrary, sons were "consistently encouraged to not get into trouble, finish high school, and make pragmatic, local postsecondary education choices" (Smith & Fleming, 2006, p. 94).

Family socioeconomic status also plays a role in the college choice of African American students. Willie and Reddick (2010) conducted case studies on two middle-class, two working-class, and two low-income Black families. Children in the middle-class families were actively encouraged to pursue higher education. It was a value often emphasized in the home. Parents in the working-class families wanted the best education possible for their children so the children would have a better future to look forward to than the parents. One family wanted their son to attend college but left the final decision up to him. The lack of continuity in employment, health status, residential living, and marriage partners caused the mother in a low-income family only to be able to hope for high school graduation for her children.

Though Willie and Reddick (2010) found differences in the families' educational aspirations for their students, Freeman (2005) points out the importance of looking

beyond socioeconomic status when exploring the family influence on African American students' college choice. Families at various points on the socioeconomic spectrum influence their children to pursue higher education (Freeman, 2005). The influence of family is seen in all stages of college choice for African American students and should be acknowledged in the recruitment process.

College Environments

During the time of segregation, HBCUs served “as both vibrant cultural centers where African-Americans could define and redefine Black culture and also counter public spaces where the political challenges to the hegemony of Jim Crow would ultimately emerge” (Cantey et al., 2011, p. 3). Once *Brown* was enacted and PWIs were forced to integrate, HBCUs no longer served as the primary provider of higher education for African Americans (Cantey et al., 2011). These students now had more options for postsecondary education to consider and from which to choose. This change caused some to begin questioning the continued relevance of these institutions. The next subsection will address the current state of HBCUs, including information about their continued relevance. Then, results from various research studies pertaining to African American students' experiences at both HBCUs and PWIs are provided. This information helps bring together how historical perspectives have shaped the types of institutions these students select and how it affects their interaction with the different environments.

Current state and relevance of HBCUs. In 2010 HBCUs enrolled 16% and graduated about 20% of all African American college students (Gasman et al., 2010). More than 300,000 students attend these 105 institutions (Policy, n.d.). Many of the institutions are thriving while others are struggling to survive (Gasman et al., 2010).

These institutions are located in 20 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Most are located in the south and southeast regions of the country with a few in the midwest and northeast regions.

One hundred and one institutions are accredited, including one two-year, private college; 11 two-year, public colleges; 48 four-year, private colleges and universities; and 41 four-year, public colleges and universities (Where are the HBCUs?, n.d.). During the 2010-2011 academic year, total enrollments at HBCUs ranged from fewer than 200 students to almost 15,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Over 25% of these institutions offer a doctorate and/or a first professional degree as the highest degree (Mercer & Stedman, 2008). The majority of the remaining colleges and universities offer either a bachelor's or master's as the highest degree.

Since 1980, six executive orders have been signed by six presidents to provide federal governmental support to strengthen HBCUs (About Us, n.d.). The federal support is funding through the Title III, Part B (20 U.S.C. § 1060-1063c) program “to establish or strengthen their physical plants, financial management, academic resources, and endowment-building capacity” (Program Description, 2012, para. 1). Despite the additional help HBCUs are receiving from the federal government, many continue to struggle from the effects of historical inequities in the education of African Americans.

While HBCUs struggle with decreased enrollments and budgets, they must also face the challenge of justifying their continued relevance in American higher education (Harris, 2012). Harris (2012) emphasized just as PWIs contribute to the success of White students, HBCUs do the same for Black students by creating spaces where these students can “thrive educationally, professionally, and personally” (p. 336). These institutions

served as the primary access point to higher education prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and continue to serve as the only institutions where Black persons are at the core of the academic center (Harris, 2012).

The main areas of concern causing some to question the continued relevance of HBCUs are accreditation, funding, and leadership (Cantey et al., 2011). Though HBCUs have been known to have a culture of excellence, the lack of accreditation of specific undergraduate and graduate programs (e.g., business) make it difficult to attract faculty and students (Cantey et al., 2011). This inevitably affects the amount of tuition revenue and other funding received by the institution.

As mentioned before, the federal government currently provides funding to help strengthen HBCUs. Historically, these institutions have depended heavily on government funded sources (e.g., Pell grants and veteran benefits) to survive (Cantey et al., 2011); however, they are not stable sources. Though HBCUs do receive some private donations, the institutions struggle to attract and maintain leaders who are able to establish new donors and/or secure large donations. HBCUs must find ways to streamline the selection process for its leaders so not only are they able to hire strong leaders but also the timeframe to hire them is reduced (Cantey et al., 2011). The struggles of HBCUs based on accreditation, funding, and leadership are compounded by the suggestion “that in the age of Obama, we are in a post-racial era and racism is no longer an issue whereby the need for Historically Black Colleges and Universities are no longer an existing need” (Cantey et al., 2011, p. 5).

Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf (2007) challenged HBCUs “exist at the intersection where the ‘American Dream’ of unbridled possibilities meets the ‘American

Nightmare’ of persistent racial-ethnic subordination” (p. 273). These institutions have provided educational opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities since their founding. They have continued to be a village of “meaning, purpose, sustenance, nurture, support, and affirmation” (Harris, 2012, p. 335). As decisions on the national level are made regarding the continued use of affirmative action in college admissions, the relevance of HBCUs may become even more apparent, especially regarding racial and ethnic student enrollment.

Bowen and Bok (1998) computed a hypothetical calculation regarding the change in the percentage of Black applicants admitted to five C&B schools under a race-neutral admissions policy. In 1989, 42% of Black applicants were actually admitted to the five C&B schools included in the calculation. Each of these institutions had race-sensitive admissions policies at the time. Under a race-neutral policy, it was estimated the percentage of Black applicants admitted would drop to only 13% (Bowen & Bok, 1998). This calculation was hypothetical, but the authors were able to compare it to actual numbers from the University of California at Berkeley after the institution implemented race-neutral admissions policies. African Americans applicants were admitted at a rate of 48.5% under race-sensitive admissions. This rate dropped to 15.6% under the race-neutral policy (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Both examples show the number of Blacks, and likely some other students of color, admitted to selective institutions will significantly decrease if race-neutral policies are implemented. HBCUs have a history of providing educational opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities (Harris, 2012). These institutions can help fill the gap created when these students are no longer admitted to selective colleges at high rates.

Student experiences with HBCUs and PWIs. “The main draw to HBCUs for African American students is the empowering, family-like environment that boasts small classes, close faculty-student relationships, and life with fewer racial microaggressions” (Gasman et al., 2010, p. 3). When African American students attend HBCUs they benefit from being a racial majority. Therefore, they do not have to worry about assimilating into a predominantly White environment while also adjusting to other pressures as college students (Stewart, Wright, Perry, & Rankin, 2008). In addition to adjustments based on race, African American students may also face other changes depending on whether they attend an HBCU or a PWI. Some of these changes are mentioned in the following section.

Considering HBCUs and PWIs. Freeman (2005) was interested in identifying if students from certain high school types were more likely to consider HBCUs or PWIs. Four themes emerged in the study. First, students who attended predominantly White private schools considered HBCUs in an effort to connect with their African American community. They also struggled with living a double life based on expectations from some to be African American while also “acting White” at school.

The second theme focused on private school students feeling a lack of cultural awareness (Freeman, 2005). Some students felt their White peers did not understand the African American culture, while others admitted the curriculum at their high school did not include information about their culture. This connects back to the first theme of students’ desires to connect to their cultural roots.

Unlike students who attended private, predominantly White high schools, those who attended predominantly African American, public high schools leaned more toward

attending PWIs (Freeman, 2005). These students commented that attending a PWI was more reflective of the “real world” since the world is not all Black. The comments validated Freeman’s observation that these students were often culturally isolated. This isolation pushed them to consider PWIs because of “their perception of the responsibility and value of sharing their culture” (p. 93).

Both groups related to the fourth theme: having an HBCU connection. When the students had a family member, teacher, friend, or counselor who attended or supported HBCUs, it had a strong influence on the type of institutions they considered (Freeman, 2005). HBCU alumni are often very connected to their alma maters and can serve as an information and recruitment source for students.

Based on these findings, Freeman (2005) suggested admissions counselors at HBCUs should connect with their alumni and teachers at all high school types, but especially at private high schools. Admissions counselors at PWIs should establish relationships with predominantly Black high schools but also understand additional resources should be in place when the students arrive on campus to help them deal with culture shock.

Similar to Freeman (2005), McDonough et al. (1997) also found family members, friends, mentors, and other role models had an influence on a student’s decision to attend an HBCU. However, school officials were more influential in encouraging students to attend PWIs. Additionally, McDonough et al. (1997) found geography and religion played strong roles in HBCU attendance. In this study, African American students were more likely to attend college more than 500 miles away from home (McDonough et al., 1997). Since most HBCUs are located in the south and southeastern parts of the U.S.,

these results would be expected for students attending HBCUs. Students who live in close proximity to HBCUs are able to access information about these institutions and learn more about the benefits of attendance. Also, an affiliation with the Baptist church either by the student or the college served as a strong predictor of HBCU attendance for African American students. The results from this study would add recruiting in Black churches to Freeman's (2005) suggestions for recruiting these students.

Attending HBCUs and PWIs. Nasim, Roberts, Harrell, and Young (2005) conducted a study to identify how non-cognitive factors differed across cultural contexts and which psychosocial factors best predicted academic achievement among African American students attending HBCUs and PWIs. The differences in non-cognitive factors were measured using the non-cognitive questionnaire-revised (NCQ-R), which was designed to measure the eight non-cognitive factors identified by Tracey and Sedlacek (1989) as a better predictor of minority student success in college. The eight factors include: positive self-concept; realistic self-appraisal, especially academic; understands and deals with racism; prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs; availability of strong support person; successful leadership experience; demonstrated community service; and knowledge acquired in the field.

Nasim et al. (2005) used the multidimensional inventory of Black identity (MIBI) to identify which psychosocial factors best predicted academic achievement among the students. Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith (1997) developed the MIBI to measure the three stable dimensions of the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI), which "focuses on African Americans' beliefs regarding the significance of race in (a) how they define themselves and (b) the qualitative meanings that they ascribe to

membership in that racial group” (p. 806). The dimensions include centrality, ideology, and regard. Nasim et al.’s (2005) study focused on the four subscales of the ideology dimension: assimilation, nationalism, humanist, and oppressed minority. This dimension represents a person’s philosophy regarding the ways African Americans should live and interact with others in society (Sellers et al., 1997).

The results showed students at PWIs had significantly higher high school grade point averages (GPA) and endorsement of oppressed minority attitudes. Those who endorsed the oppressed minority ideology recognized the similarities between the oppression of African Americans and other minority groups (Sellers et al., 1997). The subscale specifically measured “the degree to which African Americans believe that their issue of equality and discrimination are similar to those of other oppressed groups” (Nasim et al., 2005, p. 350). Students at HBCUs had significantly higher scores on the ability to understand racism, availability of a support person, and establishing long-term goals (Nasim et al., 2005).

In terms of predicting academic achievement, the factors of understanding and dealing with racism and availability of an academic support person showed the most variance for students attending PWIs. Humanist attitudes and high school GPA accounted for a smaller variance (Nasim et al., 2005). For students attending HBCUs, positive self-concept predicted the greatest variance while high school GPA accounted for a smaller portion.

Nasim et al. (2005) were not surprised students at PWIs had a stronger endorsement of oppressed minority attitudes. Those students are able to see the experiences of other oppressed groups on campus as they navigate a new campus culture.

The higher scores reported by students at HBCUs on establishing long-term goals and having a support person available was likely due to the supportive environments of these institutions and the greater amount of African American staff and faculty (Nasim et al., 2005). It was recommended PWIs work to make changes on the institutional level to include more African American faculty, staff, and administrators to help create a more positive climate for these students (Nasim et al., 2005).

Nasim et al.'s (2005) results regarding African Americans' higher scores for establishing long-term goals and having a support person available strengthen assertions by Stewart et al. (2008) regarding students at HBCUs benefiting from higher levels of engagement with peers and faculty. These students also benefit from being culturally affirmed through the rich history and traditions of HBCUs as well as being connected with African American mentors in their chosen career fields (Stewart et al., 2008).

Brower and Ketterhagen (2004) were interested in whether or not the expectations for success Black students at HBCUs and White students at PWIs had matched with the expectations the institutions have for their students. They also used the study to explore if there was a mismatch in the expectations Black students at PWIs had for themselves and those of the college. While the data showed the expected results (a match between Black students at HBCUs and the institution; a match between White students at PWIs and the institution; and a mismatch between Black students at PWIs and the institution), the mismatch between Black students at PWIs and the institution could be overcome. These students seemed to have worked harder to succeed, but their persistence from the first year to the second year was equivalent to those of White students at PWIs and higher than Black students at HBCUs.

Current Participation of African Americans

Every two years the American Council on Education (ACE) releases the *Minorities in Higher Education* report (Davis & Cook, 2011). These reports help ACE gauge “progress toward providing greater access and educational opportunities for all Americans” (Broad & Corcoran, 2010, p. vii). The information provided in the reports show increases and decreases in high school completion, college enrollment and persistence, and the number of degrees conferred based on race/ethnicity, gender, age, and institutional type.

According to the ACE report (Kim, 2011), the percentage of all 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in higher education rose from 31% to 42% between 1989 and 2009. Total enrollment was over 19.1 million students. The majority of these students (16.4 million) were undergraduate students. During this same time frame, the percentage of African Americans aged 18- to 24-years old enrolled in college rose from 23 to 35% (Kim, 2011), for a total of over 2.9 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a).

Though the percentage of traditional-aged African Americans rose 12%, a gap exists based on gender. Enrollment for African American women rose 14%, from 27% to 41%, while enrollment for African American men only rose 10%, from 20% to 30% (Kim, 2011). Ryu (2010) identified this as the largest gender gap among all racial/ethnic groups.

Between 1998 and 2008, the number of African Americans attending four-year institutions rose 58.6% from almost 891,000 to just over 1.4 million. During the same time frame, African American enrollment at two-year institutions rose 50.6% from over 636,000 to over 958,000 (Kim, 2011). The growth in African American college

enrollment is positive, but continued research regarding the reasons and influences of their enrollment is important.

Women and College Choice

Similar to the challenges faced by African Americans, women have also confronted barriers regarding access to and participation in postsecondary education. Though gains have been made in the last 20 years, there are still areas of higher education where inequality persists (Allan, 2011; Reynolds & Burge, 2008). This section begins with an historical perspective of women and college choice, including the impact based on gender and power dynamics. Information regarding current participation and the influences of different college environments is also provided. Finally, a review of literature specifically addressing African American women and college choice is presented.

Historical Perspective and Influences

At its inception, the purpose of American higher education, with the founding of Harvard College in 1636, was to prepare young men to become ministers and government leaders. Because society did not view women as suitable to such roles and girls lacked access to collegiate preparatory schools, women were also not considered as potential students in the colonial and most antebellum colleges.

(Allan, 2011, p. 5)

In the epigraph above, Allan (2011) highlighted the fact institutions of higher education were not created with women in mind. Since then, changes have been made to allow women to pursue higher education. Although the enrollment of women surpassed

enrollment of men within the last 30 years (Allan, 2011; Reynolds & Burge, 2008), the issue of inequity/inequality persists.

Gender and power. Gender is a socially constructed classification used to differentiate between masculine and feminine behaviors (Allen, 2004). Historically, thoughts about femininity and masculinity in the United States reflect ideologies of patriarchy (Allen, 2004). This view gives men certain privileges based on their gender, whether or not they want it. The privileges also come with power, which often causes both men and women to “reproduce and reinforce this gender hierarchy” (p. 42). Evidence of this hierarchy is shown through “traditional” gender roles (e.g., women responsible for childrearing and housekeeping, men responsible for working outside the home and being breadwinners).

Socialization regarding gender is communicated at an early age and is generally reinforced through the educational system (Allen, 2004). The types of behaviors teachers accept from boys are more lenient than those accepted from girls, who are expected to be “quiet and attentive” (p. 50). It has been documented that teachers call on boys more often, provide more specific feedback, and “encourage boys to persist in finding a solution for themselves but provide assistance for girls in solving the problem” (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman; as cited in Allan, 2011, p. 40). Additionally, gender bias exists in curricular materials when male and female characters are depicted in traditional gender roles and behaviors (Allen, 2004). The gendered experiences in primary and secondary schools also contribute to the choice of academic majors men and women choose in college (Allen, 2004).

The growing percentage of women enrolled in college is generally seen as a step toward success regarding gender equity (Allan, 2011). Some have framed these gains “as a loss or ‘crisis’ for male students despite the fact that there has been no less attainment in college enrollments by White men and college enrollments for men of color have also increased” (p. 42). The increase in enrollment among women has led to women earning the majority of degrees on most levels. As Allen (2004) presumed, the majority of the degrees earned by women were in health professions, psychology, education, other social sciences, and the humanities (Allan, 2011). Less than half of degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) were awarded to women. Allan (2011) stated

Drawing conclusions about the attainment of equity for women students based on overall numbers of women who have gained access to higher education belies important nuances related to their representation across fields of study, in particular in the STEM fields, where career opportunities tend to provide higher salaries than many other fields. (pp. 46-47)

Women may outnumber men in college enrollment, but the gender and power dynamic is still present.

Legislative policies and initiatives. Though disparities still exist between men and women, several legislative policies and initiatives have been implemented in the past 50 years to help close the gaps. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Pub. L. 88-38) required equal pay for equal work regardless of sex. Similarly, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000e) prohibited employment discrimination based on sex. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. § 2000d) and the Women’s Educational Equity Acts of

1974 and 1978 (Pub. L. No. 93-380) were initiatives focused on establishing equity in educational systems. Each of these policies have helped move the U.S. toward greater equity, but Title IX (20 U.S.C. 1681, *et seq.*) is most talked about regarding higher education.

Title IX requires “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (para. a). The programs and activities include admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, athletics, counseling and guidance, housing and employment, and others. Although Title IX, and other policies and initiatives, prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexism still exists in education (Mickelson & Smith, 1995).

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is charged with enforcing Title IX. More than 3,000 Title IX-related complaints were filed in fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011—more than ever before in a similar period (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The complaints included various issues, the majority of which pertained to athletics, harassment/sexual violence, different treatment/denial of benefit, and retaliation. Though data shows gains and success for girls and women in some areas, there is still room for more improvement in other areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Current Participation of Women

In 1988, the percentage of 18- to 24-year old men and women enrolled in postsecondary education was equal at 30% (Ryu, 2010). Since then, with the exception of the 1990 academic year, women have outnumbered men in college enrollment (Kim,

2011). Enrollment for women has increased 16% while enrollment for men has only increased seven percent. Since 2007, the enrollment growth among minority students has largely been because of women, but White women still outnumbered women of color by a two-to-one margin (Ryu, 2010).

Total enrollment for women was 11.1 million in the fall of 2009 compared to only 8.6 million men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). This total included 1.9 million African American women and one million African American men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). The majority of these women attended four-year institutions (5.7 million) while the remainder was either in two-year colleges or graduate school, 3.2 million and 2.2 million, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). The same was true for men with the majority attending four-year institutions (4.7 million) and the remainder split between two-year colleges (2.4 million) and graduate school (1.5 million; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).

African American Women

There are 519 million, 870 thousand Black Women on the planet Earth, give or take a dozen. There's a Black woman on each of the seven continents, in almost every country and in the space program. So no matter where you go, she's already been there. She travels with forces greater than herself. Her presence is everywhere. (Sharp, 1993, p. 7)

In response to the passage above, Howard-Hamilton (2003) highlighted although Black women have a presence across the globe, influence others, and frequently face adversity, their voices are often silenced. This is the result of many assumptions suggesting issues concerning women, and African Americans, in general also concern African American women in the same way (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Since this is not

true, postsecondary institutions must be diligent about creating awareness of and being knowledgeable about the unique needs of African American women (Constantine & Greer, 2003). For example, African American women may face discrimination and oppression on campus based on both their race and gender (Constantine & Greer, 2003). Even if these students choose to seek counseling to help with their adjustment issues, it is possible they may feel White college counselors are part of the system invalidating them (Constantine & Greer, 2003).

There are two main obstacles African American women face in higher education: systemic racism and small numbers (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). As described in previous sections, racism and gender inequality are still present in U.S. higher education. Though segregation is no longer legal, some forms of de facto segregation linger. This is shown when students of color choose to live in the same residence halls and eat together in the dining hall. These students are seeking spaces in which they feel at home. Students from the majority culture are welcome in these spaces as well, but do not often enter these places (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). De facto segregation is also seen when those in administrative positions reflect the majority population (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Some women may be selected for key administrative and faculty positions, but of those selected, few are women of color.

In addition to de facto segregation, African American women must navigate systemic racism on college campuses. Faculty members in this group often face challenges from students who doubt their capabilities and expertise (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). They are also expected to meet a different set of demands than their White colleagues. The same challenges to competence and experience are felt by African

American women who lead the departments in which they work (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Additionally, these faculty and department heads are more often sought out by African American students for support and guidance than their White counterparts.

Though women make up the majority of African American students in higher education (Zamani, 2003), the numbers at each institution, especially PWIs, are often too small to create a critical mass. Having a critical mass is “an important concept in recruiting and retaining African American students, faculty, and staff, as well as in alleviating some of the obstacles that African Americans face on college campuses” (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 96). When the numbers of African American women in faculty, staff, and administrative positions are small, the African American women students may lack the mentors and other systems of support most important to their success (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). A critical mass of any group, in this case African American women, helps those in the group feel more comfortable on campus. It also creates an environment where members of the majority group have the opportunity to more frequently interact with members of the minority group and view their thoughts and opinions as belonging to the individual instead of an entire group (Miller; as cited in Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

In the last 30 years, there has been a myth regarding the educational achievement and career attainment of African American women (Rosales & Person, 2003). The myth suggests Black women “have achieved high levels of educational and career attainment” (p. 53). Because these women are often compared to White women, Black men, or other oppressed groups, their specific needs have not been addressed (Rosales & Person, 2003). If the levels of achievement of these women were compared to White men, the disparities

would be clear. Responding to the needs of African American women students should not only be the responsibility of other women of color but the entire campus community (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Conceptual Frameworks

Numerous college choice models have been developed to explore the process students go through when making decisions about postsecondary education. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) presented a three-phase model, the seminal model for research on college choice. This model accounts for various student characteristics along with organizational influence on the high school and college levels. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) also consider the potential influence of state and federal policies on students' college choice. The next section provides more details about the different phases of this model.

Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Model

One of the most widely used college choice models was presented by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). This model consists of three phases students move through as they develop thoughts and aspirations about college and eventually make a decision about enrollment (Bergerson, 2009). As students move through each phase, various organizational factors at the pre-college and college levels are also at play that contribute to the outcome (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The three phases are predisposition, search, and choice.

During the predisposition phase, students go through a developmental process in which they “determine whether or not they would like to continue their education beyond high school” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). These goals and expectations are

influenced by factors such as parental involvement, friends, and involvement in high school (Bergerson, 2009). Organizational factors include the characteristics of the student's current school and how those characteristics (e.g., quality of academic programs and attitude toward education) contribute to the colleges and other options a student considers (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The search phase involves students learning more about themselves and the characteristics they want in a college or university (Bergerson, 2009). They gather information about different institutions and identify the colleges and universities to which they will apply (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students also take college entrance exams and determine how much financial support is available from their parents (Bergerson, 2009). During this time, colleges and universities are also actively recruiting students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). All of these factors help the student determine a choice set of institutions while also keeping in mind other options outside postsecondary education.

Finally, the choice phase happens when students take all the information gathered during the first two phases and use it to make a decision about which institution they will actually attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Throughout this phase, admissions officers increase the amount of contacts made with admitted students to encourage them to enroll. These interactions may be through telephone calls, campus visits, alumni functions, and scholarship offers. All of these factors lead to the student making a final decision about which institution to attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) acknowledged the role of institutional influence from a student's high school and the colleges or universities to which they are exposed. This influence includes having a college prep curriculum and access to co-curricular and

extra-curricular activities at the high school and the proximity to a college campus and the ways in which students are able to interact with different colleges and universities. They also discussed how financial aid policies created on the federal and state levels can heighten or lessen student and family anxiety surrounding the cost of pursuing postsecondary education.

For example, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) recommend policymakers develop programs to help parents and students, especially students of color and low-income students, better understand the difference between the list price and the net price of college attendance. Though both of these items are components of most students' college choice processes, discounting the influence of cultural background takes away a vital piece of the process for the African American women who are participating in this study.

Although Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model has been used in numerous research studies, it is not always the best choice when studying the college choices of students of color (Freeman, 2005; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Freeman (2005) argued that an expanded model including influences based on "family and kinship" and "school characteristics" would be more useful when considering the college choices of African American students. Family structures and the ways in which African Americans interact with different types of schools are important factors to understand. If the cultural and familial background of these students is not accounted for, a true understanding of the factors influential to their college choice is difficult to interpret (Freeman, 2005).

Smith and Fleming (2006) found the boundaries of Hossler and Gallagher's model (1987) needed to be loosened when applied to students of color. For example, though the seminal model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) shows a decrease in parental

involvement after the predisposition phase, the parents in Smith and Fleming's (2006) study were actively involved in all three phases of their students' college choice process. Parental influence in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model became secondary to peer and institutional influences once students moved into the search and choice phases (Smith & Fleming, 2006). If college and university administrators do not acknowledge the influence parents of color have on their children's college choice, the administrators may miss an opportunity to enroll students from this group. The results from both of these studies (Freeman, 2005; Smith & Fleming, 2006) show accounting for a student's cultural background and the contexts to which they are exposed are essential when studying the college choices of African Americans.

Based on a review of the literature and the goals of this study, I decided to use two main conceptual frameworks to support this work: Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice and intersectionality. Using both frameworks will provide a better understanding of the college choice of African American women within various contexts along with additional insight into which parts of their intersecting identities were most influential. These frameworks are explained in the following sections.

Perna's Conceptual Model of College Choice

Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice "draws on an economic model of human capital investment as well as the sociological concepts of habitus, cultural and social capital, and organizational context" (p. 116). This model has two assumptions: (1) enrollment decisions reflect the student's situated context and (2) multiple routes leading to college enrollment are possible (Perna, 2006).

The human capital investment model is at the center of Perna's (2006) model. Part of making the decision to attend college involves weighing the expected costs with the expected benefits. These two calculations are influenced by the student's academic preparation and achievement, along with the student's access to financial resources to pay for college. Perna (2006) added to the human capital investment model by proposing the process of determining the expected costs and benefits was set within four layers of context: (1) habitus, (2) school and community context, (3) higher education context, and (4) social, economic, and policy context. This model recognizes how individual differences and varying contexts influences students' college choice (Perna, 2006).

The first layer, individual habitus, refers to an "internalized system of thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions that are acquired from the immediate environment [that] conditions an individual's college-related expectations, attitudes, and aspirations" (Bourdieu & Passeron; McDonough; as cited in Perna, 2006). These expectations, attitudes, and aspirations are determined by what is considered reasonable or possible based on the student's background (Perna, 2006). This layer includes a student's demographic characteristics, primarily gender and race/ethnicity, as well as his or her social and cultural capital. With this definition, one would expect a student's college choice process to reflect the values and knowledge gained from parents and other close family members and friends. The amount of knowledge gained often varies in relation to socioeconomic status and access to information about higher education. Students who do not have the social capital necessary to begin their college search may look within their high school's guidance or counseling office for initial information about different colleges and universities.

The second layer of this model looks at the impact of the school and community context (Perna, 2006). Students from low socio-economic families often attend high schools offering limited access to college materials. Though we often view teachers and counselors as sources of knowledge from which students learn about higher education, these professionals may play multiple roles in the school causing them to be unavailable to form mentoring relationships with students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

The structures of some high schools create barriers in the college choice process for students of color and low-income students (Perna, 2006). The barriers may include the level of bureaucracy within the school (e.g., the number of steps involved to request transcripts and whether or not administrators encourage postsecondary education); how much access students have to teachers, counselors, and others with knowledge of postsecondary education; and opportunities to learn more about networking, problem solving, and labor and educational markets (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Without these connections and skills, some students may not feel confident enough to conduct a college search or may miss out on opportunities for scholarships and other funding.

The networking Stanton-Salazar (1997) refers to also applies to the communities in which students live and interact. Students from middle-class families often have numerous opportunities to interact with adults who are currently attending or have previously attended college. These students may also regularly see advertising for different colleges and universities in the area or be invited to educational workshops and events located in their area. On the other hand, students from low-income families may be the first in their families and/or communities to attend college. This group may be

motivated to pursue postsecondary education, but trying to navigate a process set up for those with a higher socioeconomic status is not easy (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

In addition to influence from the student's habitus, school, and community, the college choice process is also influenced by the higher education context. In this third layer, the marketing and recruitment strategies and the location of institutions can either attract or deter students. From past experience, I know some institutions use the same few students of color in all recruitment materials and/or select one student to be the "face" of the university. This student is often very involved on campus and is often a White male or female. When students of color view these materials, they may not immediately connect with the institution because they do not see anyone resembling themselves. If the same students of color are used for all materials, some may view this as a lack of racial diversity on the campus. Both of these strategies may deter students from applying to and/or enrolling in these institutions.

The location of the institution can also influence college choice. Many HBCUs are located either in rural areas or in parts of urban cities that are not considered the safest areas. This may deter students who would prefer to live in a safer area while also having easy access to a variety of amenities. There are also PWIs located in rural and urban areas; however, there is a much larger selection of PWIs than HBCUs from which to choose (Policy, n.d.). Overall, if students do not feel welcome during campus visits, or they have a negative interaction with a representative of the institution, it can greatly affect how the college or university is viewed. The location of the college, ability to be accepted into the institution, and cost of attendance are also considerations for students (Perna, 2006).

Finally, Perna's (2006) model addresses the influence the social, economic, and policy context has on the college choice process. This layer acknowledges the direct and indirect affect changes in social forces, economic conditions, and public policies can have on college choice. The types of messages regarding higher education sent from K-12 systems, state agencies, and postsecondary institutions themselves play a role in how students receive information, prepare for college, and thus, make college choice decisions (Kirst & Bracco; as cited in Perna, 2006). These messages may be positive or negative, and may be received differently based on the student's background and social status. For example, students may continually hear that the cost of tuition and living expenses is rising. A student who has performed well academically and is from a wealthier family may not be as concerned about the message because they are likely to receive scholarships and have easier access to additional funds to cover the remaining balance. For the student who has not done well academically or is from a low-income family, rising costs of tuition and living expenses can lower their aspirations for college and deter them from considering postsecondary education (Willie & Reddick, 2010).

Perna (2006) recognized there was more to the college choice process than just weighing costs and benefits. In her model she assumes

Although college choice is ultimately based on the comparison of the benefits and costs of enrolling, assessments of the benefits and costs are shaped not only by the demand for higher education and supply of resources to pay the costs but also by an individual's habitus and, directly and indirectly, by the family, school, and community context, higher education context, and social, economic, and policy context. (p. 119)

This proposed model addresses multiple contexts not fully considered in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. These contexts include cultural background, high school type, and campus environment (i.e., HBCU or PWI). Using this model for the current study allows me to determine how the context in which the participants are situated influenced their college choice.

In addition to looking at contextual influences, I also plan to discern the role participants' various and intersecting identities played as they searched for and selected a postsecondary institution. Adding an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991) to this framework creates the opportunity to probe deeper into the ways in which participants' separate and collective identities shaped their process. The next section discusses the concept of intersectionality along with a type of cultural wealth often possessed by students of color.

Intersectionality and Community Cultural Wealth

Perna's (2006) model places college choice within multiple contexts. Just as multiple contexts exist, students also have multiple identities and background characteristics that play a role in their college choice. The term intersectionality refers to "the multiple, interconnected layers of existence and identity (including but not limited to the existential, political, social, and personal—and ranging from race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, culture, and religion, to one's relationship with oneself and with others)" (Gines, 2011, p. 275). This definition highlights students are much more than just their race, class, and gender.

Crenshaw (1991) identified three categories of intersectionality in her focus on the location women of color face when discussions regarding violence against women of

color are viewed through the lens of only gender or race, not both. Structural intersectionality refers to situations in which the combination of race and gender cause African American women to experience violence in qualitatively different ways (Crenshaw, 1991). When social service agencies offer services for women who are victims of violence, services “based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (p. 1246). Since social structures are not often created with women of color in mind, they are often relegated to marginalized positions.

Political intersectionality “highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252). Women of color often face the conflict of choosing whether or not to participate in experiences focused on either their gender or racial identity, not both. Adopting a strategy only advancing one of the subordinate identities prevents the development of political dialogues to help empower women of color (Crenshaw, 1991).

Finally, Crenshaw (1991) addressed representational intersectionality. This category refers to the way women of color are represented in cultural imagery. The images constructed often reproduce racial and gender hierarchies in the U.S. and, thus, marginalize women of color. Each of these categories help show the importance of acknowledging that women of color often have different experiences than White women and men of color because of the intersection of their race and gender.

Based on Crenshaw’s (1991) explanation of the importance of looking at Black women’s experiences differently based on the intersection of race and gender, Cole

(2009) proposed three questions researchers can use in psychological research to address intersectional questions. Each question builds on the next to help create a fuller picture of how “social categories jointly shape experiences and outcomes” (p. 171).

Initially, Cole asks psychologists to consider who is included within a particular social category. Answering this question allows researchers to identify the diversity existing within a specific group (Cole, 2009). Instead of only looking at one marginalized identity (i.e., women), researchers may find considering the experiences of women of color would help fill gaps existing in the literature that are likely different from the experience of the most privileged group in this category (i.e., White women).

Next, it is important to explore the role inequality plays in psychological research. This draws attention to the ways “historical and continuing relations of political, material, and social inequality and stigma” (Cole, 2009, p. 173) affect how persons with multiple category memberships experience various environments. Analyses techniques allowing researchers to view category memberships in terms of inequality can help them understand the connection between groups, and group members, “in societies organized around hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class” (p. 175). These hierarchies play a role in the perceptions, experiences, and outcomes of those with multiple category memberships.

Finally, Cole (2009) asked psychologists to consider asking where the similarities lie across the differences. This process “entails viewing social categories as reflecting what individuals, institutions, and cultures do, rather than simply as characteristics of individuals” (p. 175). The answer to this question challenges the idea in which social categories create homogenous groups without similarities.

Both Crenshaw (1991) and Cole (2009) highlighted the importance of considering the multiple identities with which people identify. These identities should not be viewed separately, but as characteristics impacting one another. By recognizing a person's multiple identities, one can begin to see how the privileged or oppressed nature of each identity influences the decisions he or she makes (e.g., college choice). The next few paragraphs present results of one study that used an intersectional approach (Smith, 2008) and one study that could be strengthened by using an intersectional framework (Freeman, 2005).

Smith (2008) completed a study regarding how first generation college Black female students were encouraged by their parents during the college choice process. He interviewed three low-income, single Black mothers who had daughters in high school. None of the mothers had college degrees and their parents had minimal levels of education. Though Smith (2008) conducted this research within a college choice framework, he also used an intersectional approach by considering race, class, gender, parental involvement, parental background, and level of academic encouragement. Each of these factors played a role in the participants' college choice process. Although only one of the women attended college, each of them successfully completed high school as their parents encouraged. Smith (2008) still considered the efforts given by their parents to be successful because of their understanding of education and work.

Freeman (2005) looked at gender issues, economic expectations, family influences, and various school influences in her study on African Americans and college choice. However, she looked at each influence separately as opposed to a collective group. The results presented based on the different areas is beneficial to those interested

in recruiting African American students, especially if there is targeted recruitment based on gender, social status, and/or high school type. However, analyzing the college choice of these students through an intersectional lens could have strengthened the study to show how the factors build on each other as students make a final decision.

Smith (2008) and Freeman (2005) completed studies that added to the research regarding the college choice of African American students. Though they used different approaches, both understood that various sources influence the college choice of this group. In addition to the various identities outlined by Smith (2008) and Freeman (2005), students of color also bring a variety of skills and knowledge to the process based on their cultural background. These characteristics help students navigate a higher educational system that was not created with persons of color in mind. In the following paragraphs I discuss Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth which outlines some forms of capital that are present and valuable as communities of color encounter different systems.

Yosso (2005) argued in order to accurately portray research of people of color, it is necessary to use a lens including their voices. Critical race theory (CRT) provides a framework to challenge the systems of race and racism helping dominant groups maintain power (Yosso, 2005). CRT is an extension of critical theory that is "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color" (Solorzano, 1997, p. 6). This theory was originally formed by legal scholars who wanted to analyze the ways in which the law was used to keep certain groups in subordinate positions based on race and ethnicity (Teranishi &

Briscoe, 2008). Since that time, the use of CRT has been adapted to other areas of study, including education (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

When looking at research regarding schooling of communities of color in the United States, deficit thinking is often used, which makes it appear students of color are not performing well because they lack certain capital: “Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Using CRT expands the conversation of what is considered normative by the majority by including the cultural differences within communities of color and identifying the cultural wealth these groups bring.

Community cultural wealth is “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Six different forms of capital are identified within this cultural wealth and build on each other. These forms of capital include aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Aspirational capital “refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77). Many students from communities of color may not have parents who attended college or have a high social status, but both the parents and the students have aspirations of greatness beyond what is currently available.

Linguistic capital looks at the various intellectual, social, language, and communication skills students of color bring with them to school (Yosso, 2005). Some of these students speak multiple languages, serve as interpreters for their parents and have

learned to communicate through storytelling and other forms of art. Through these experiences, students gain familial capital. Yosso (2005) stated

This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship. Acknowledging the racialized, classed and heterosexualized inferences that comprise traditional understandings of “family,” familial capital is nurtured by our “extended family,” which may include immediate family (living or long passed on) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends who we might consider part of our *familia*. (p. 79; italics in original)

This extended family helps students learn more about caring and coping with a variety of situations by understanding they are not alone when facing barriers and setbacks.

As described above, social capital includes the different networks and resources students are able to access. Within communities of color the help and support gained through different contacts is not only used by one person or family, but is shared within the community (Yosso, 2005). This is a tradition known as “lifting as we climb” (p. 80). The social capital gained through various contacts and resources can help increase students’ navigational capital.

Students and communities of color often have to navigate through institutions and structures made for the dominant group. Being able to successfully maneuver through these systems without losing hope and giving up highlights the resilience of this group despite the racism and other inequalities they face on a regular basis (Yosso, 2005). The skills and knowledge learned through challenging the inequalities forms resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). This resistance is often taught by parents who want their children to

challenge the status quo in order to have their voices heard and help move toward a more racially and socially just society (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) stated “the main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities” (p. 82). Although students of color typically operate in systems in which they are considered a subordinate group, it does not mean they do not have beneficial sources of capital. The six forms of community cultural wealth described above are used by students and their families to navigate the college choice process and, ultimately, to succeed in postsecondary education. The amount of “traditional” social and cultural capital held by these groups may not seem sufficient, but once a CRT lens is applied, the abundance of cultural wealth present within communities of color is clear.

For this study, I use the basic concept of intersectionality to better understand how participants’ cultural wealth contributed to their college choice. Though all participants share the same gender and racial identities, their socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and high school types differ. Each woman also has a different cultural background based on the environments in which she was raised and the structures of her family. My use of intersectionality focuses primarily on participants multiple identities, not on how those identities contribute to privilege and oppression.

Adding Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth to Perna’s Conceptual Model of College Choice

As mentioned previously, Perna’s (2006) conceptual model positions college choice within four layers of context: habitus; school and community context; higher education context; and social, economic, and policy context. Though the author identified

different items or characteristics to consider in each layer, I have made some adjustments to the model to better fit the purpose of the current research (see Figure 1). The adjustments made are based on the literature pertaining to the college choice processes of African American students.

The human capital investment model remains the center of the adjusted model. In the habitus layer, social class and academic ability have been added as demographic characteristics. While many students do consider their race/ethnicity and gender when making college choices, it can be argued that their social class and academic ability have a greater impact (Freeman, 1997; Pitre, 2006). If students have not performed well academically, they will be limited by the type and quality of institution to which they can be admitted. Similarly, students from lower social classes may not have the resources needed to conduct a thorough college search, resulting in missed opportunities to attend the best college or university possible. The resources include access to information about different colleges, scholarships, or funds needed to submit admissions applications and take entrance exams.

Cultural capital and social capital have been removed as separate parts of habitus and are included with the forms of capital making up community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). By adding community cultural wealth to the model, I accounted for the different types of capital often held within communities of color but not recognized as valuable by the majority culture. This capital assists students of color and their families as they navigate the college choice process and matriculate in an institution of higher education. Ignoring the cultural wealth students of color bring to their college search and choice processes may silence an important part of their experience.

Figure 1. Adjusted Version of Perna's Conceptual Model of College Choice

Though adjustments were made to the first layer of Perna's (2006) model, the characteristics outlined in the school and community layer have not been adjusted. Perna's model already included items in this layer that will help determine how exposure to different school and community contexts impacts students. Identifying the availability and types of resources available to students is an important part of how students make college choices. Also, discovering whether or not certain structural support or barriers influenced the choice process can help determine how the types of high schools students attended and their home communities affected their decisions.

In the higher education layer, the adjustments focus on highlighting the institutional characteristics. This includes location, the majors and academic programs offered, and if the institution is a PWI or HBCU. I expected to find the availability of majors and academic programs at the institutions had some level of influence in the college choices of the women who participated in this study. Also, the small number of HBCUs in the state where this study was conducted may influence why some women chose to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU.

Finally, I adjusted the fourth layer by bringing focus on the economic and public policy characteristics. Specifically, I looked at how access to financial aid, scholarships, and other state funding influenced participants' college choices. Additionally, I reviewed how policies such as affirmative action and Title IX shaped the way in which these women interacted with their institutions in the college choice process. Both of these policies helped increase access to higher education for African American women.

The adjustments to the model are not meant to significantly change the way Perna (2006) conceptualized college choice. Instead, the adjustments provide a clearer lens

through which to explore the college choices of the African American women participating in this study. Integrating community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) into Perna's (2006) model adds depth by accounting not only for students' cultural backgrounds, but also the ways in which the intersection of multiple identities shaped their final decisions. The adjustments also account for the differing campus environments of HBCUs and PWIs as well as the indirect impact of two public policies on participants' college choices.

Summary

It is clear all students go through a variety of steps or phases when considering postsecondary education. However, African American women are also challenged by historical discrimination in education of both their race and gender. By viewing this work through Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), I am able to explore not only how African American women make their college choice, but also how the intersection of various identities influenced their decisions. As mentioned above, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model is not always appropriate to use when researching the college choices of diverse groups. This model streamlines the college choice process into three phases without consideration of a student's cultural background or the various contexts in which he or she interacts. Framing this current work with Perna's (2006) college choice model and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) compensates for the deficiencies in the seminal model.

Perna (2006) suggested her conceptual model of college choice be used to guide research for more narrowly defined groups. She specifically stated it can be used to

“examine the ways in which race/ethnicity intersects with income, SES, and/or gender to influence college-choice decisions and behaviors” (p. 147). This study explored one central question: What influenced the college choice of high-achieving African American women who chose to attend a four-year, public PWI instead of an HBCU? It was expected the women’s cultural backgrounds and intersecting identities would play a role in their college choice. Furthermore, the study gave voice to the experiences of a group of students whose independent voices are often silenced.

CHAPTER III.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides information regarding the methodology used to explore the research questions. The first section outlines the research design, along with the rationale for this design. Next, a summary of the target population is given. The setting where the research was conducted is described followed by the sampling procedures and participant recruitment techniques. Then, data collection and data analysis techniques are described in detail. The chapter ends with information regarding reflexivity, limitations, ethical concerns, and positionality. Each section helps shape this study and provides information about decisions made to ensure rigorous research.

In review, this study explored one central question and three secondary questions:

1. What influenced the college choice of high-achieving African American women who chose to attend a four-year, public PWI instead of an HBCU?
 - a. How were African American women's choices to attend a four-year, public PWI influenced by their families?
 - b. How did the intersection of multiple identities influence African American women's choices to attend a four-year, public PWI?
 - c. How did African American women's perceptions of the PWI and HBCU campus environments influence their college choices?

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative, collective case study design (Stake, 2005) was selected for this study because it allowed for multiple cases to be studied together to examine the college choices of African American women. This extended form of instrumental study provided additional insight into a particular issue through an in depth look into both ordinary behaviors and different contexts (Stake, 2005). Stake stated “individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, with redundancy and variety each important” (p. 446). Though some researchers use collective and multiple case study (Yin, 1993) designs interchangeably (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007), this study did not seek to predict or replicate results across studies (Yin, 1993).

Using the collective case study approach I was able to examine the college choice of participants and the various factors influential in their final decision. I compared and contrasted each participant’s story to provide a voice for student participants and, thus, offer a clearer picture of the complexities related to how their unique identities related to the complexities of college choice. Although using this method does not allow for wide generalization, it was expected some of the participant’s stories would connect to what is already known about the various factors influential to the college choice of African American women.

As mentioned above, qualitative methods, specifically a collective case study, was used to complete this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) stated

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.

These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Quantitative methods have been used in previous studies regarding this topic and could be used to provide data regarding which factors are most influential in the college choice of African American women (McDonough et al., 1997; Norwood, 2009). However, using a qualitative approach provides greater depth regarding how and why certain factors influenced college choice.

Various strategies within qualitative methods were considered, but I determined using a collective case study would best explore the research questions. This strategy was chosen due to the values it places on the integrity of individual cases and then looks for commonalities and differences across cases (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Collective case studies allow researchers freedom to decide which parts of the collected data will and will not be included (Glesne, 2011). This strategy also positions, or bounds, the study within a specific system (i.e., PWI environments; Creswell, 2007). A collective case study was most appropriate for this study because I was interested in how the students' intersecting identities, and other influences, affected their decision to attend a PWI although they also considered HBCUs.

Population

The target population for this study was first-year, high-achieving, African American women college students. More specifically, this study focused on women who attend a public, urban, predominantly White university located in a southern state. Since college choice typically occurs during a student's senior year of high school (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), I assumed freshman participants would be able to recall the college choice process easier than students further along in their college careers.

The population included high-achieving students to control for the groups' academic preparation and the quality of institution to which they could be admitted. It is assumed students who have similar academic records have access to the same opportunities for higher education. High-achieving students are also likely to receive academic scholarships to help cover the cost of attendance (Wiggin, 2008). These scholarships can help lessen the financial concern many students have when making their college choice.

I was interested in identifying the factors influential to African American women's decisions to attend a PWI. Additionally, I wanted to determine why some factors were more influential than others to the participants' college choices. The campus and academic environments of PWIs and HBCUs are viewed differently depending on the person. Asking participants about their perception of HBCUs provided additional insight into the role the perceived environment played into their decision to attend a PWI.

Setting

The study was conducted at Metropolitan University (Metro, an alias), an urban, public, predominantly White, research university, located in a southern state. Metro

enrolled over 22,000 students in the fall of 2012. Over 50% of the students enrolled were female and more than 10% were African American. This university has 12 colleges and schools and incoming freshmen students had an average ACT score of 25. This university is located in a city with an estimated population of 602,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

This location was selected because of its rich heritage. Metro began as a seminary and established a separate college specifically for Black students during its expansion in the early-twentieth century. The university began desegregating on all levels in the early 1950s as it continued to grow. The history of the university helps shape its current mission.

The institutional mission of Metro focuses on excellence in teaching, research, and service. The university strives for the continued development of its diverse student population, including cultural and intellectual development. The institution also works to forge community partnerships positively impacting citizens locally, regionally, and nationally.

In addition to rich a heritage, students at Metro are exposed to a vibrant campus and community environment. The university is located in a large city providing access to a variety of entertainment, recreation, and arts venues. Students are also able to participate in over 300 student organizations.

Sampling Procedures and Participant Recruitment

A purposeful sampling strategy, specifically maximum variation sampling, was employed for this study (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select information-rich cases “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). Maximum variation sampling

methods help produce findings valuable for identifying uniqueness in each case.

Additionally, this particular approach to sampling allows researchers to discover shared patterns across cases and look at the significance stemming from the heterogeneity of each case (Patton, 1990).

The primary sample for this study was first-year, high-achieving, African American women who attend an urban, public, predominantly White, research university located in a southern state. I purposefully selected eight participants who met the following criteria: eligible for at least one academic scholarship from their institution and identify as both African American and women. The scholarships for which these students were eligible required them to have a minimum 3.25 high school grade point average and 20 ACT or 950 Combined SAT. Seven of the eight women in this study received full tuition scholarships plus stipends to attend Metro. The eighth woman was eligible for the scholarship, but missed the application deadline. As mentioned previously, it was assumed high-achieving students would have access to numerous academic opportunities, including attending both HBCUs and PWIs.

Once the initial sample was identified, I used maximum variation sampling to identify students from Metro who differed based on socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and high school type. The geographic location (i.e., rural, urban, and suburban) of the high school was also considered in the selection of the final participants. Each of these components has been shown to influence the college choice of African American students (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Freeman, 1999a; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). Creswell (2007) noted “this approach is often selected because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the

findings will reflect differences or different perspectives—an ideal in qualitative research” (p. 126). This variation provided this study with richer information regarding the college choice beyond the similarities based on race, gender, and academic ability.

Seven participants were able to identify one person considered most influential in their college choice decision. One of those seven did not follow through with providing contact information for her influential person and one participant’s mother did not respond to the request for an interview. The eighth woman spoke about her sister and mother being influential, but was not willing to provide contact information for them. Previous research has shown parents (Smith & Fleming, 2006), other family members, friends, and mentors (Freeman, 2005) have a positive influence on the college choice of African American students. Each person identified was the mother, sister, or mentor of the participant. I conducted interviews with five of the people identified. The information gained added depth to the participants’ stories and provided another perspective on their college choice process.

Once IRB approval was obtained from Metro, I worked with the Institutional Research Office staff and student affairs administrators to obtain the names and contact information (i.e., personal and university e-mail addresses, phone numbers) for students meeting the criteria described above. After the list was received, an e-mail was sent to each student inviting her to participate in the study (see Appendix A).

As students responded, I asked them to review, sign, and return a copy of the informed consent form to participate in this study (see Appendix B). Once informed consent was received, students completed a short demographic questionnaire to confirm they met the basic criteria (eligible for at least one academic scholarship from Metro and

identify as both African American and women) and to determine if they met the additional criteria established to obtain maximum variation (socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and high school type; see Appendix C). This process continued until eight participants were selected. Selecting eight students allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews with each student.

I completed 13 interviews with students and influential persons. Four student participants received a \$10 gift card. Gift card amounts were prorated for the other participants because they did not fully complete each part of the study.

Data Collection

Pilot interviews were conducted to test the protocol and interview guides created for this research. I used personal contacts to interview one student who met the criteria for purposeful sampling. I also interviewed the mother of this student using the interview guide created for an influential person. Informed consent was obtained from the student and her mother prior to the interviews. The data from these interviews were not included in the actual study, but were used to help identify any potential problems with the established protocols (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). The information also helped ensure the interview questions solicited responses valuable in answering the research questions.

Data collection occurred through individual interviews. Patton (1990) stated “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 278). I was interested in identifying who or what was influential to participants’ decisions to attend a PWI even though they also considered HBCUs in their search process. I explored how and why some things were more influential than others. I also looked for differences based on

socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and type of high school attended.

Conducting individual interviews gave participants an opportunity to share their unique perspectives regarding college choice.

I conducted interviews from April to October 2013. Each individual interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and took place in a location comfortable for both the researcher and the participant (e.g., campus office) or via telephone. Similar settings were used when interviewing those identified as most influential. All interviews were digitally recorded. One digital recording was lost due to a technical malfunction. I wrote Latrice's case the next day based on the hand-written notes I took. The document was then sent to her for review. I also asked her to provide additional information in her own words regarding the main factors that influenced her college choice. She reviewed the case and provided feedback.

The general interview guide approach (Patton, 1990) was used for the individual interviews. This semi-structured approach provided a list of questions or topics to be covered with each participant and provided flexibility to "build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style" (p. 283). The interview guides for the individual interviews can be found in Appendices D and E.

Prior to beginning individual interviews, I reviewed informed consent, reiterated the purpose of the study, gave a general overview of the topics to be covered during the interview, and asked participants if they had any questions. Consent forms were e-mailed to some participants and each influential person to digitally sign and return (see Appendix F). When conducting phone interviews verbal consent was recorded prior to

beginning the interview. The individual interviews were digitally recorded. I took written notes of insightful comments and nonverbal responses. All data were stored in a locked location only accessible to me. Any electronic files were stored on a password-protected computer.

Data Analyses

Data analysis was an on-going process (Creswell, 2007). Initial analysis began as field notes and was written and reviewed during the transcription process. Recordings from each individual interview were transcribed semi-verbatim by an outside company. The recordings were not all transcribed by the same person. Member checking occurred when transcripts were emailed to participants to review for accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Shenton, 2004). This process allowed participants to provide additional clarification, if necessary. Three of the student participants and one influential person reviewed the transcripts and responded. Individual case analysis and cross-case analysis techniques were used for this study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). Transcripts from each individual interview were read multiple times to create a detailed description of the participant's college choice. This description included data provided by the person she identified as most influential, if available. Writing individual cases allowed me to begin analyzing how various people, contexts, and experiences influential to the participants' college choices were similar to or different from previous research. I initially coded the data using the theory-based and in vivo codes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) previously identified (see Appendix G). One of the theory-based codes, friend, family, and/or mentor connection to an HBCU, was not utilized in this study. Though most of the women considered HBCUs in their college choice, no one mentioned having someone who

strongly encouraged them to attend an HBCU. During the second round of coding, additional codes emerged and were added to the original list. The codes were then combined to generate larger themes through which the data was interpreted.

Once individual case analyses were done, cross-case analyses were completed. These analyses provided additional information about similarities and differences related to socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and high school type. Though all participants chose to attend Metro, some factors were more influential than others to each student. At the conclusion of the case analyses, I looked for connections between theory-generated and emergent themes. After descriptions of each layer of the case study were written and the themes analyzed, the data were interpreted.

Reflexivity

Several steps were taken to increase the credibility and dependability (Guba, 1981) of this study. I triangulated the data sources by “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means” (Patton, 1990, p. 467). The data collected from students were compared with perspectives shared by the persons identified as most influential to the students’ college choice. After the data were analyzed, student participants and those identified as influential were asked to review the findings. Four students reviewed their written cases and provided feedback. Using analytical triangulation helped me learn more about the “accuracy, fairness, and validity” (p. 468) of the data analysis because participants responded to how I described their college choice. These triangulation methods allowed me to gain a fuller description of the participants’ stories and the components most influential to their college choice. When presenting the results, the triangulated stories allow readers to see how differing

experiences helped create a new reality for viewing the college choice for these students (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b).

Thick descriptions were created to help identify the complexities of the process (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Doing so helps readers determine if the findings can be transferred to other groups or settings. I present thick descriptions by describing the settings, participants, and themes in rich detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This process allows readers to feel as though “they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study” (p. 129).

Throughout the research process I kept a reflection journal (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba, 1981). This allowed me to openly acknowledge any biases and insider knowledge I brought into this study. As needed, I also shared with participants my perception of how intersecting identities (e.g., race, class, gender), family influence, and campus environment shaped my college choice and how I view this current study.

Full transcripts and the coding process were shared with one of my co-advisors, and with a colleague, both of whom are proficient in qualitative research. Further discussion about participants’ stories and the emergent themes enhanced the reflective consideration of voice. Sharing this information provided an audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba, 1981) to ensure the findings and implications connected directly to the data that was collected. This process also increases the credibility of this study by confirming researcher bias did not overpower the voices and thoughts of the participants.

Limitations

This qualitative case study gave voices to eight African American women regarding how their intersecting identities, family, and perceptions of campus

environments influenced their college choice. I intentionally limited the number of participants so I could conduct in-depth interviews with each woman, thus providing more detailed interpretations of their stories.

At the beginning of this project, I planned to recruit five participants from a PWI and five participants from an HBCU. Having two groups would allow me to compare and contrast the college choices of women who considered both types of institutions, but ultimately chose one or the other. After obtaining IRB approval to conduct research at an HBCU within the state, numerous barriers were revealed making it impossible to obtain a list of students on that campus who met my selection criteria. I was eventually told there were only five or six women in the freshmen class who met my inclusion criteria. I was able to get my recruitment email sent out to those students by an administrator on campus, but only one student responded. I spoke with the student about the project and sent her the consent form and demographic questionnaire, but she did not respond after several attempts. This process took place over four months. With further consideration and consultation with my dissertation committee, the decision was made to recruit all participants from Metro. Data collection was stopped after eight student interviews because of data saturation.

I recognize the additional limitations placed on this study based on only using one institution. I am no longer able to discover the similarities and differences between women attending a PWI and an HBCU. However, I am still able to provide information regarding participants' perceptions of HBCUs and why they ultimately chose to attend a PWI. The change caused a shift in the original purpose of my research, but still provides information important for those interested in the college choices of high-achieving,

African American women who considered both types of institutions, but chose to attend a PWI.

Though this research resulted in implications for high school counselors, undergraduate admissions officers, and other student affairs professionals, one should not attempt to generalize the findings to other students or institutions. The participants of this study are unique, thus making their stories unique. It is likely the stories are similar to those of other high-achieving, African American women, but the different contexts from which each woman made her college choice makes it difficult to generalize beyond this group of participants.

Ethical Concerns

The design of this study posed minimal risks to participants. Some participants may have been uncomfortable when answering personal questions. The participants, both students and those identified as most influential, were assigned an alias in the written document to protect their confidentiality. In addition, the university where the study was conducted is referred to by an alias. All identifiable information was stored in a separate, locked location where only I have access. Digital recordings and other identifiable information will be erased and shredded within three years of the completion of this study. I share an ample amount of the participants' experiences and perceptions throughout this study through the use of direct quotes.

Positionality

Creswell (2007) stated "how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research" (p. 179). Not only how I write, but also my passion and excitement about this

research come from a combination of my identity, past experiences, and values (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This research clearly connects to my college choice experience and my professional passion.

I am an African American woman who was a high-achieving student in high school. As a result, I received a scholarship covering full tuition, room, and board for four years at my undergraduate institution. I received two additional scholarships from outside organizations. I was also offered a partial tuition scholarship from another institution. Though I do not remember it being directly stated, I knew I should probably attend the institution covering the majority of my expenses. I grew up in a middle-class family, but I had an older brother attending college at the same time. I had an on-campus job while in college to help cover the cost of books and other miscellaneous expenses, but I did not have to worry about the major costs of attendance.

I began working in undergraduate admissions after college and quickly discovered my passion for working with high school students as they navigated the college search and choice processes. When working with students and parents I would get the usual questions about admissions requirements, costs, and housing, but found students of color also wanted to know about the diversity on campus. I could relate to their anxiety about fitting into the environment because I also attended a predominantly White university. My main goal was to make sure the students felt a good fit at the institution and knew they could come to me at any time for support.

While I have also gained experience working in academic advising, Greek life, residence life, and retention during the past ten years, my professional passion is still in undergraduate admissions. With this research I sought to more deeply explore how

African American women make their college choices and the factors influential to those decisions. As someone who has lived through the process I am exploring, I openly acknowledge the biases I bring into this study.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed outline for the methods I used to explore the research questions. I also stated my positionality as an active investigator of this study. The participants' and selected institution's identities will be protected throughout the project and when reporting the results. The procedures described above allowed me to gather rich data beneficial to identifying the factors most influential to the college choice of these African American women. The next two chapters will provide the results of this research and implications for admissions professionals and others interested in college choice.

CHAPTER IV.

FINDINGS

The first three chapters of this document provided background information related to the college choices of African American women. Also included was information about the methods used to conduct this research and how they would assist in answering the research questions. In the final two chapters, I present the findings and answer the research questions. Each section of chapter four presents the case of one of the eight women who participated in this project. Five cases also include additional information provided by the person she identified as most influential to her college choice.

Participant Cases

Thirteen women, eight students and five influential persons, participated in this study. Each interview was conducted via telephone or in person at a time most convenient for the participant. I was also able to interview five women the participants identified as most influential to their college choice. Two of the students did not identify an influential person, and I did not receive a response when I contacted the third participant's mother requesting an interview. These women provided their perspective on the students' college choice processes and gave insight into the expectations for success each student had placed on them. Information from both the student and influential person interviews were woven together to create the cases

presented below. Prior to the interview, each student participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). A chart summarizing this self-reported information is shown in Table 1 below. All names used in this document are aliases.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	High School Type	Parents Educational Level		Socioeconomic Status	Influential Person
		Mom	Dad		
Tiffany	Urban, Public	High School	Bachelor's	Middle	Angel, Older Sister
Barbie	Suburban, Public	Master's	Master's	Upper Middle	Shelby, Older Sister
Nakia	Rural, Public	Associate's	High School	Middle/Upper Middle	Mrs. Watts, mother
Mary	Rural, Public	Bachelor's	Some College	Middle	Dr. Bohannon, Metro Faculty Member
Jillán	Urban, Public Magnet	Master's	Some College	Middle	Mrs. Smith, mother
Cheryl	Suburban, Private Parochial	Some College	High School	Middle	Mrs. Oliver (no response when contacted)
Qadira	Suburban, Public	High School	High School	Lower ²	
Latrice	Rural, Public	Associate's	Less than High School	Lower	

The first five cases presented below include information from the woman participants' identified as influential to their college choice. The presentation of each case follows a similar format. It begins with a basic introduction of the participant and the

² Though Qadira self-identifies as middle class, her lived experiences while growing up and going through the college choice process more closely resemble a family with a lower socioeconomic status.

person she identified as influential, if applicable. Next, descriptions of the earliest time each woman thought of going to college and the types of expectations placed on them by family, friends, school, and others are provided. Then, information regarding the participant's college search process, including the number of applications submitted and her consideration of HBCUs, is given. The cases end with a summary about the woman's decision to attend Metro.

Tiffany

When I met Tiffany for the interview we were able to chat for a few minutes while walking up to the office from the lobby. She seemed calm, but also anxious to share her story.

Tiffany provided the following answer when asked about the earliest time she remembered thinking about college:

Probably when I actually started school. I started school when I was like one, and from then on up to kindergarten, once I officially started school out of pre-K, I always knew. My parents were like, "You're going to college whether you like it or not. There is no other option, no military, no nothing. You're going to college."

It's always been a known fact in our household.

She described this expectation from her parents as a weight on her shoulders. "They were saying I don't have a choice and if I didn't go I felt like they would disown me. It was a very confusing time." This confusion was caused by knowing a variety of options were available after high school graduation, but feeling like her path had been predetermined without her input.

I conducted a phone interview with Tiffany's older sister, Angel, to learn more about how she was influential to Tiffany's college choice. Angel recalled thinking about Tiffany going to college when she was 10 and Tiffany was eight.

She's always been a very eclectic child. She has always cut open her dolls and put food coloring on them. She was doing that at eight and then at 10 I was just like okay, you need to do something in this because you've always been this way. It's nothing new.

Tiffany had previously explained that as a child she would try to imitate surgical procedures she saw on television shows by cutting open her dolls and sewing them back up. These experiences prompted Tiffany to originally want to become a doctor.

At first, I wanted to be a doctor, but after I got sick for many weeks, I was like, "I don't like doctors." But I loved my nurses. That's probably a really bad reason to pick, but just my interactions with doctors and how they just walk in and look at you and give you these really big words about what's wrong with you, and then the nurses have to come in and tell you what he meant by that. That experience helped me go into the nursing field.

In addition to the high expectations felt by her family regarding college, Tiffany also had expectations placed on her by her church family, high school, peers, and a community group in which she participated. The youth in her church were asked about their academic performance each quarter. The members of the church expected them to go "to college...[and] do great things." The high school she attended expected excellence from each of their students and provided various resources to help students get prepared for and to succeed in college or the military. The same was true of the

expectations Tiffany's friends had for her. They did not focus on her grades, but rather pushed her to go to college after high school.

Tiffany was part of a community group from seventh grade through high school that focused on helping academically talented students who were disadvantaged socioeconomically stay on the path needed to be successful in high school and move on to college. Through this program, she was exposed to various colleges and universities, both HBCUs and PWIs, by hearing admissions presentations and participating in college tours. "Once you get to high school you go on a college tour for two weeks and you stay at [one public university and one private college in the state]. You stayed there, you did college work for two weeks, so that helped prepare me." Her participation in this group added another level of expectation that she would pursue postsecondary education. Though she has expectations coming from every direction, Tiffany felt having those expectations helped streamline the process and continues to help her stay focused on her education.

Tiffany officially began her college search during freshman year of high school. She knew she wanted to stay in state and attend a medium-sized institution located in a city. She was also looking for a university with a strong nursing program and where a friend or family member had previously attended. Tiffany felt having insider knowledge of the institution from a friend or family member would be beneficial if she ever had questions. Both her father and grandfather graduated from Metro, so when an issue comes up, she feels as if she is able to ask them for guidance on the best person to contact for assistance.

Though she considered both HBCUs and PWIs in her college search, none of the 10 schools to which Tiffany applied were HBCUs. When asked if race played a role in the institutions she considered, Tiffany stated

I don't think my race really did influence which college I chose. I have toured HBCUs, I have toured PWIs, but I don't think that had any real effect on which one I chose. My entire life I've always been kind of picked on by other black children. They're like, "You're very White and you talk proper." Personally, I knew that I probably would not be able to go to an HBCU and be completely comfortable because I've never been comfortable around a completely Black population. I don't mind it, but it's just weird because they all think I'm different. I'm really not. I'm still Black, but they're like, "You're just an Oreo: Black on the outside, White on the inside." I guess I'm saying I wanted to go somewhere I felt comfortable and wouldn't really be singled out.

She found PWI environments more welcoming and wanted to attend an institution that was racially diverse. Her perception of PWIs being more welcoming likely stemmed from her negative experiences when being in majority Black environments. She mentioned that at a PWI she would be exposed to a larger number of people of different races. Additionally, Tiffany felt the few HBCUs she did consider were too expensive, especially since she has four other siblings and did not want to accrue a large debt to attend college.

Tiffany primarily considered Spelman University and Clark Atlanta University, both located in Atlanta, GA. She "thought it was cool" to attend these institutions and had been told that Spelman "is where it's at for Black females." Once Tiffany began

considering whether or not she would fit in at an HBCU, and realized the higher cost of Spelman, she was no longer interested in attending an HBCU.

Angel agreed that going to an HBCU probably would not have been a good choice for Tiffany. However, she also feels there are negative aspects to Tiffany attending a PWI.

You kind of lose yourself and almost credibility, if that makes any sense, because you're Black. She is very smart and she loves to prove her point; however, I've noticed that she has been faced with comments where it's like okay, this Black girl is coming in here and she's giving the answers right or something along those lines. Not necessarily in those words, but okay, who do you think you are? Are you sure you're right? We've kind of experienced that. So that would be a setback, always having to prove yourself.

Angel mentioned she occasionally has conversations with Tiffany about these topics when situations present themselves. Despite these circumstances, Angel feels attending a PWI was a better choice for her sister.

Tiffany received a full tuition scholarship to attend Metro. She also received additional funding from the state scholarship program that she "just could not see [her]self throwing away [to go out of state] ...[she] worked very hard for it." In addition to the scholarship influencing her decision to attend Metro, she also wanted to be close to her family, church, doctors, and boyfriend. Staying in her hometown made it easier to get around and Metro also provided a variety of options for activities and majors along with a friendly environment.

Barbie

When Barbie walked into the office for her interview, I could immediately tell she was excited. She was full of energy and ready to tell me about her college choice process. Throughout the interview we shared moments of laughter as she described her desire to “go big.” She also discussed her dilemma between following in her sisters’ footsteps or making her own path. Barbie attended a large high school, and thus could not imagine attending a small college or university. The same excitement was felt when I interviewed Barbie’s oldest sister, Shelby, who was identified as an influential person in Barbie’s college choice process. Shelby graduated with her bachelor’s degree a few years ago and gave Barbie advice based on her own experiences as a college student and the things she wished she had known when going through her own college search.

Barbie was raised in an upper-middle class family and is the youngest of three daughters. She also has a younger brother. She attended a public high school in a suburban area and participated in the honors program. Barbie understood at an early age that her family valued education.

Everybody in my family is really big on education. Like even to my great, great, grandparents. Like they always said like: “Education is the most important thing...you can’t get anywhere without education. You need to, you know, learn to study. You work hard to get where you want to go.”

Both of her parent’s earned graduate degrees and her sisters had also graduated from college. Though her parents had master’s degrees, they still pushed their children to achieve at a higher level.

In high school, Barbie participated in the honors program and also completed the courses needed to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA). She knew her parents expected her to go to college after high school, but Barbie's mentor spoke to her about beginning to work as a CNA and then working her way up to become a nurse and then a doctor. Barbie decided the best path for her was to go directly to a four-year institution. This was probably a good decision because according to Shelby their mom's "running joke was that if you don't pick a college, one day you'll just wake up in the dorm room."

A large portion of the information Barbie found about various colleges and universities came from the College Board website (www.collegeboard.org). Through this site she found information regarding each institution's academic programs, cost, gender ratios, and percentages regarding racial diversity. While she continued narrowing down her choice set, she began to look for information regarding housing at each university. Barbie knew she wanted to attend a large university that was close to home. "I went to visit a smaller university and I was like: 'Can I leave yet? Can I leave the tour yet? Is it over?'" Because it was literally like a five-minute walk around campus, and I was like: "This is not for me.'" She did not want to attend an institution that was greatly imbalanced regarding the number of male and female students. She was conscious about cost as well because she would be paying for college herself.

Barbie applied to at least eight universities. Each of these institutions was a PWI. She did visit an HBCU during her college search, but that was primarily because her family is originally from a southern state and she has relatives that live close to the campus. Though she felt the students, faculty, and staff were proud of their HBCU, she had that same feeling on several PWI campuses.

The final decision for Barbie was between the in-state institution her sisters attended and an out-of state university that offered a strong program for her academic interests and medical school to continue her graduate studies. Barbie's sisters were well known on campus and had made various connections as undergraduate students. One of her sisters was a commencement speaker and both participated in a major scholarship program at the university focused on increasing the amount of high-achieving students from underrepresented minority backgrounds. Barbie described it in this way:

Oh, like it would definitely be easier for me to go because like all of my life I've followed in their footsteps, and they left like really good imprints, and you know, I'm -- hopefully, I feel like I'm better. So like it was just easier for me, I was like: "If I go to [the in-state university], it might be easier, and my minor is English, so I was like she was in journalism -- kind of know the same people." So I felt like it was easier for me to transition into [that university].

However, she decided she wanted to have a different collegiate experience than her sisters. She was not able to get into a program for pre-med majors, but is following the same guidelines so she will have met the prerequisites when it is time to apply for medical school.

Barbie did not receive a full scholarship to attend Metro. She waited until the spring of her senior year to apply for admission, so she missed the opportunity to receive large scholarships. She did receive one private scholarship from a local hospital. Metro was out-of-state for Barbie, but was still more affordable than attending the university in her home state. This choice also allowed her to be closer to home. Shelby was

under the assumption that Barbie would go away.... obviously I wanted her to go to my school, but [I] also was very proud of her for selecting a school that even has more in mind with her interest, but that she can get the biggest bang for her buck, so to speak.

Barbie is having a great experience at Metro making new friends and having new experiences.

Nakia

Nakia is from a middle/upper middle income family of four. Her older sister is also in college and was able to provide tips and other advice as Nakia went through her college search and choice process. The family lives in a rural part of the state where Nakia attended a public high school. Nakia's mom has an associate's degree and is currently working on a baccalaureate degree. Her father has a high school diploma. Nakia identified her mother, Mrs. Watts, as the most influential person in her college choice. I interviewed both of them via phone.

From a young age, Nakia knew she was expected to go to college. She could remember thinking about and hearing her parents talk about college when she was in elementary school. In her opinion it was "not an option not to go [to college]." Not only was she expected to go to college, but she was also expected to get good grades and take Advanced Placement (AP) and dual-credit courses during high school. During the interview with Mrs. Watts it became very clear why she pushed both of her daughters to perform well academically and go to college.

I didn't go to college straight out of high school. I'd been out of high school 14 years when I went and it really gave me a lot of satisfaction. Even though I went

back and I was an older student, I think at that particular time I was ready for it.

When I finished high school, nobody was really pushing me to go to college and from my experience in high school I really wasn't looking forward to going anyway because I felt like I wasn't smart enough. So I went back and what it did for me, I knew that was something. I have an older daughter, [Natesha], and I desired for [Natesha] and Nakia to go to college because it was going to open up a lot of doors for them.

Nakia had help from her parents, sister, and track coach when she began her college search during sophomore year. When asked about getting assistance from her guidance counselors, Nakia explained

I mean they made it clear that going to college was important, but as far as like an individual asset, there were only certain people that our guidance counselors targeted as far as like helping them with college and scholarships, and stuff like that. They were White [students] and they were in AP classes with us as well.

She had to find out on her own about scholarships offered by Metro, and noticed a lack of enthusiasm when she asked her counselor for an application for a prestigious summer residential program for the best and brightest students within the state.

During her college search, Nakia primarily focused on information regarding degree programs and expectations. She knew she wanted to attend a big institution “where academics were valued rather than just athletics.” She also enjoys being in racially diverse environments so she did not want to attend an HBCU. Nakia was also interested in running track on the collegiate level, but that was not a primary factor in her college choice decision.

The final choice for which college to attend was between three public universities located in Nakia's home state. She did not want to lose funding she earned through a state sponsored scholarship program. The scholarship could only be used for attendance at a college or university within the state. One of the colleges was in her hometown, and the other two were at least two hours away. She visited each campus and felt most comfortable at the two that were away from home. At one institution she noticed how friendly the people were and they offered to show her around. At Metro she enjoyed the diversity. She also visited a smaller, private university in the state, but said it was "very slow and [had] a boring vibe. It wasn't really like an exciting campus."

Nakia's primary reason for choosing Metro was because she received a full scholarship. She also liked the diversity on campus, its distance from home, and the urban location. Being able to walk onto the track team was an added bonus. Mrs. Watts was comfortable with Nakia's choice for many reasons.

I thought it would be good for her to get away from home. [Natesha] went to [the local university], which is pretty much six miles down the street from us and she did okay, but Nakia just has that type of personality and I thought she would have done good to just be away from home and, also, away from her environment as far as with the friends and different things like that.

Mrs. Watts mentioned that Nakia was interested in studying fashion, but acknowledged the best programs are in New York and California. Although Nakia is currently studying business marketing at Metro, her mom hopes she will pursue a graduate degree in that area after graduation. Overall, Nakia enjoys Metro and would not want to go anywhere else.

Mary

The interactions I had with Mary took place through email and phone. When she agreed to participate in the study, she had already gone back to her hometown for the summer. Mary identified Dr. Bohannon as someone influential to her college choice because she provided a wealth of information regarding the dental program at Metro. I was able to interview Dr. Bohannon, a Metro faculty member, in person. Though Dr. Bohannon was not aware of the influence she had on Mary prior to our interview, she did provide additional information regarding the search process.

Mary's family expected her to attend college after high school. She was raised in a rural area of the state and is the oldest child in her family. Both of her parents went to college and her mother earned a bachelor's degree. Mary's mother understood not all career paths require a four-year education.

My mom was just like if you feel like you want to enroll in cosmetology school or if I wanted to do a program like engineering or something like that, whatever I felt I wanted to do or what was best for me, but college was always expected.

Mary has aspirations of becoming a dentist so it was best for her to attend a four-year institution. These expectations also came from friends, a high school counselor, and Dr. Bohannon.

When asked about expectations communicated to her from her high school, Mary mentioned a meaningful relationship with her high school counselor. Mary served as a counselor's aide during her senior year of high school. Though she began her college search during freshman year, she was able to connect with her counselor in a different

way to learn more about college in general, financial aid and scholarships, and also begin receiving assistance with completing paperwork.

She always gave me advice like if you want to do this, then you need to take these steps, but I expect you to always remember your morals and you ultimately can come home, but I expect you to do great things and keep doing well.

The expectation to perform well and do more was echoed by Mary's friends, family, and coworkers. Those expectations continue to motivate her when she is facing an obstacle. She does not want to let herself or anyone else down, so she continues to push forward to graduation.

The process of thinking about college began during freshman year when Mary was completing courses to become a CNA. She admits she did not do a lot of research to find out about different colleges and universities. She did go on several HBCU trips offered by her high school. These institutions were located in Alabama, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C. During those trips she was able to learn more about each campus and what they had to offer. She also visited a few PWIs in her home state. Though she considered attending an HBCU, she did not want to move too far away from home. She knew she wanted to obtain a graduate degree in dental medicine so she was looking for a university offering both strong chemistry and pre-dental programs along with a graduate program in dentistry.

Mary's primary reason for attending Metro was not because of the scholarship she received. Her primary reason was the dentistry program. Mary was fortunate to connect with Dr. Bohannon, a faculty member in Metro's dental school.

Whenever I took a tour of the dentistry school, [Dr. Bohannon] kind of like took me under her wing and showed me things. She was like well, if you come, I'll be here. I'll help you out and what not. Then when I get in the Scholar Program at [Metro], I would actually shadow at her doctor's office. She was like when you come to the university and you want to shadow, you can always call me and there will probably be a spot for you to shadow. She was just an open hand for me to get more experience in the dentistry field.

Though Mary may not communicate with Dr. Bohannon on a regular basis, she knows Dr. Bohannon is available to help, if needed. Dr. Bohannon also serves as a resource when it is time for Mary to schedule classes and in making sure she is meeting the prerequisites needed to be accepted into a dental program.

Mary's performance in high school allowed her to receive a full scholarship to Metro. However, because she was raised in a middle-class family, she felt she had room to explore more options because her parents would be able to help her with the cost of attendance. Mary chose the university based on its strong academic program and location "away from home, but not too far away". She also felt at home in Metro's environment.

Jillán

When I first met Jillán, she had just finished her summer classes for that day. We met briefly so she could learn more about this research and complete the necessary paperwork. During this meeting we also selected a time for the interview. Jillán was one of a few African American women in the freshman class majoring in engineering at Metro. She identified two people who were influential to her college choice; her mother, Mrs. Smith, and Mr. Winburn, a staff member in the admissions office. Mr. Winburn was

instrumental in encouraging Jillán to apply for a prestigious scholarship offered by Metro. I chose to interview Mrs. Smith because she would be able to provide information regarding Jillán's interactions with Mr. Winburn and her college choice process in general.

Jillán attended a public, magnet high school in an urban area near Metro. The academic rigor of the school can make one assume that all students were going to college after graduation. This type of environment in high school did not greatly affect Jillán because she always knew she would go to college. Her mom was a teacher, with both baccalaureate and graduate degrees, and her father also completed some college so it was always expected that she would attend. Mrs. Smith stated "I had the expectation of her being successful. Education is the key to whatever you want to be, so I assumed she was going." Jillán just had to decide what her major would be and which institution to attend.

When first thinking about college, Jillán wanted to go out of state because she had been in the same area all her life and wanted a different experience. She originally wanted to become a doctor, but changed her mind after visiting a university in the South and learning more about the engineering program. She did consider attending an HBCU, but found not many offered engineering programs. Since she also knew there were not many women or minorities in engineering programs, Jillán focused her search on finding a university with a strong engineering program.

The college search process began during the summer between Jillán's junior and senior years in high school.

We were on vacation and figured while we were out, we should go and visit some colleges...I knew that was a time I needed to start looking because senior year would be busy. I needed to know where I wanted to go and apply to.

Jillán and her family visited two colleges during that time. Both universities had strong engineering programs and were out of state, in urban areas. Of those two institutions, Jillán decided to apply to one of them, though she felt the environment was very competitive and somewhat intimidating. In addition to the out of state institution, she also applied to two universities in her home state, including Metro.

Though Jillán ultimately chose to attend Metro, she initially wondered about the quality of education she would receive through the engineering program. She knew the program at the out of state university was competitive and felt it was a strong program.

I really wanted to go there but it just cost too much. I didn't get a big enough scholarship to go there. Most of the scholarships were for in-state students. I applied here (Metro) and applied for a couple scholarships and got [a] full scholarship here. That made sense to me. Why pay a lot for school when you can go for free, and there's still a good engineering program?

Once she visited Metro, she found she liked the atmosphere of the engineering school and also felt the people she met on campus were "genuine and friendly."

Mrs. Smith was not completely surprised Jillán chose to stay closer to home. "I just knew that she likes to be with her family. She does not like large cities, so I knew she would want to go to a small college. It was really based on what she wanted." Though she helped Jillán with different activities during the search process, Mrs. Smith was intentional about not sharing her opinion, thus allowing Jillán to make her own decision.

Though Mrs. Smith was not surprised by Jillán's decision to stay close to home, she did not expect her to choose to attend Metro.

Both campuses were really, really nice. I had not been on [Metro's] campus since I was in school. To me, it was not that I thought she should go to [Metro]. It was totally her decision. I am surprised she did because I tried to let her decide and weed out what would be best for her without giving my opinion. She tends to take on my opinion as her own.

Mrs. Smith helped Jillán weigh her alternatives as she was making her final choice. She feels her daughter is in a good program and will be able to market herself well once she has her degree.

Jillán received two scholarships to attend Metro, one of which covers a fifth year at the institution to earn a master's degree. She also receives funding from a state sponsored scholarship program. These scholarships, being close to home, and already having established connections in the area contributed to Jillán's decision to attend Metro.

Cheryl

Cheryl was one of the last participants to join this study. I communicated with her primarily via text messaging, but also occasionally through email. We were finally able to settle on a Sunday morning phone interview, which may have contributed to the brevity of our interaction. Cheryl identified her mom, Mrs. Oliver, as the most influential person in her college choice because of the support she provided throughout the process. However, Mrs. Oliver did not respond to my request for an interview.

Cheryl is the older of two children in a middle-class family. Although her mom completed some college courses, she considers herself a first-generation student. She may consider herself a first-generation student because her mom took a hands-off approach to Cheryl's college choice and did not have any concrete expectations for Cheryl regarding college attendance. Her dad received his high school diploma. Cheryl attended an all-female, private, parochial high school. She was one of three African-Americans in her senior class. Though Cheryl stated that race and gender did not play major roles in her college choice, her high school environment did make her want to attend a co-ed institution with a more diverse population.

It was expected that all graduates from the high school attended college. Cheryl remembers first thinking about college during her junior year because she and her peers began completing college visits and preparing for the ACT. These activities let her know it was time to begin her college search and focus on plans after graduation.

Cheryl only applied to two institutions in the city where she lives. "I never really searched for a college. I just applied to one college and I went there. They offered scholarships, but I just applied to one and went to [Metro]." She gained information about other institutions from college visits and institutional websites. She primarily looked for admissions requirements and scholarship information. Cheryl also knew she wanted to attend a large, co-ed institution. After speaking with her mom, and not receiving any full scholarships from out-of-state schools, she decided to stay close to home. "I am happy I did not leave because I am happy that I still have the support of my mom while I am in school." Cheryl commented that her mother was hands off and let her make her own

decision. However, she was supportive and continues to provide support during Cheryl's time at Metro.

Both schools to which Cheryl applied were PWIs, Metro and a private university. She was primarily interested in attending Metro. "I applied to [the private] University, but that was just because the application was free and I wanted to see if I could get in. I never had any intention of going." She briefly considered HBCUs during her junior year, but found she was not able to afford the cost of attendance. Cheryl did not specify the specific HBCUs she considered, but she did not want to incur any loan debt for her undergraduate degree.

The primary reason Cheryl chose to attend Metro was because of the full scholarship she received. The university also offered a variety of majors and a welcoming campus environment. Cheryl was one of only a few African Americans in her high school; she did not want to have the same experience in college. Though her peers did not have any major influence on her college choice, Cheryl stated

I was very ready to get out of that environment to go to a more diverse school.

Where they were going did not affect me in any way. If anything it's taking me away from the school that they were thinking about going to.

Being in a more diverse environment made Cheryl feel more invited. If she could go back to her senior year in high school, she would take more time to explore attending an HBCU, but she is not certain she would have made a different choice. The additional exploration of HBCUs may be because she could have found additional scholarships or other funding sources to make attendance more affordable.

Qadira

When I first met Qadira to complete paperwork, she was quiet and reserved, not engaging in much conversation outside of learning more about the study. This same demeanor was present when she entered the office where the interview took place. As we got started, she became more comfortable telling me the story about how she chose Metro, as her body posture was more relaxed and we shared a few laughs.

Throughout the interview, Qadira spoke about the influence of her mother and older sister on her decision to go to college. However, she was not willing to provide contact information for me to contact them to participate in this study. She perceived that her mother would not be able to recall the college search process and her sister was too busy.

Qadira is the second of three daughters in her family. While growing up, her family was in a lower income bracket, but they recently reached middle-class status. As her story will show, being socialized in a lower income bracket affected how Qadira approached her college choice. She considers herself a first-generation college student even though her older sister earned some college credits. Qadira's parents did not attend college, but her mother encouraged her daughters to attend college.

I talked to a bunch of relatives, some uncles. I have a lot of family, so, I talked to a lot of them. And then most of them didn't go. There's a couple that did. And the one's that did would always say go. And the one's that didn't would say go. So if everybody's saying go, chances are you should probably go.

This encouragement, along with a push from high school counselors, prompted Qadira to begin her college search.

Attending one of the top academic high schools in the state came with the expectation that students would attend college after graduation. Qadira described her counselors as “pushy” and stated “they just wanted us to apply and get in and just to make sure that we went somewhere.” The counselors provided information about different types of colleges and universities during students’ sophomore year so they would begin thinking about their futures. Based on this information, Qadira decided she wanted to attend a four-year university in her home state.

Initially, Qadira considered both HBCUs and PWIs. As she narrowed her choices down, it also became important for a college or university to offer both teacher education and Latin as major or minor areas of study. This greatly limited her choices because only two universities in the state offered those options, both of which were PWIs. While conducting her search, she also found that many HBCUs were located further away from home than she wanted to go, and often in more rural areas. Qadira wanted to attend a school in a friendly city that was not too busy, but also not “isolated and in the middle of nowhere.”

As mentioned above, Qadira’s family was in a lower income bracket until recently. Though her mom wanted Qadira and her sisters to go to college, she was not able to help fund the costs. She commented “Mom told me straight up, ‘you go wherever’s gonna pay for it, because I can’t.’” This fact meant Qadira had to find other sources of funding. Fortunately, students earned scholarships through a state-funded program based on their grade point averages each year in high school. These funds were awarded when students attended a college or university within that state. Qadira knew she did not want to lose this money, so she focused on colleges and universities within the

state. Her strong academic record and test scores made her qualified to receive a full-tuition scholarship and stipend from Metro.

In addition to the scholarship influencing Qadira's decision to attend Metro, she also found the people to be friendly.

The website was [also] very [user] friendly. Like if I needed to know an answer to something I knew where to find one. If I didn't know where to find it, I knew how to find someone that could find it. And I just didn't get that same feeling from [the other institution]. Like everything was jumbled and I couldn't find what I needed to find.

This type of environment, and being close to home, were the primary reasons Qadira chose Metro. She did not want to "go too far because she didn't want to fail." Though she felt limited because her parents could not relate to her college search experience, she was still motivated to attend college and be successful. During the times when she wanted to speak with someone regarding her collegiate experiences, she would visit with her boyfriend and other peers who had attended college. Having family and friends nearby helps her stay motivated to achieve her goals.

Latrice

Latrice showed interest in this research early in the recruitment process. We exchanged several emails before I received the documents needed to set up the interview. I also had to contact her several times to set a time for the interview. After hearing her story, I was glad I did not give up on her because she provided a unique perspective regarding the consideration of HBCUs. In the interview, Latrice said she would provide

the contact information for an influential person at a later time. However, she did not respond to additional requests for the information.

Latrice is from a rural town in the southern state where she attends college. She is the third of seven children and was raised by a single mother. Latrice attended a public high school in the same town. Her mother obtained an associate's degree and her father has less than a high school education. Latrice described her family's income level as low, which influenced which institution she chose to attend. She knew she would need scholarships and other financial aid to pay for college.

Growing up, Latrice felt going to college was expected of her. Her mother had obtained an associate's degree from a community college and her older brother recently graduated with his bachelor's degree. She has always been a high-achieving student and graduated third in her high school class of nearly 350 students. She stated on two occasions that she wanted to have a four-year college experience instead of attending the community college in her hometown.

Latrice's college search began during her sophomore year of high school. She was part of a competitive summer residential program and the Upward Bound (2013) program which is designed to help students from underrepresented backgrounds prepare for college. Because she was in these programs she understood the importance of beginning the search process early. The high school assigned a career/college coach to each student during his or her junior and senior years, but Latrice asked for a coach during her sophomore year. The career/college coach and guidance counselor provided different options for college and helped Latrice make some connections she needed during her search.

Overall, Latrice applied to 22 different colleges and universities. She knew she wanted to attend a four-year institution that was away from home and had a high level of student involvement. It was also important the college or university had high graduation and retention rates and a low student-teacher ratio. The institutions to which she applied were in-state and out-of-state; public and private; Ivy League, research, and regional; and PWIs and HBCUs. Latrice was able to explore a large number of options by taking advantage of application fee waivers for which she was eligible through her high school and the Upward Bound program.

Though gender did not influence Latrice's college choice process, she was surprised by the treatment she received from some institutions, which she perceived was based on her race. Latrice spoke unreservedly about calling a few colleges and universities to get additional information and updates on her admissions status. During the phone calls, she was not able to get all the information she needed, though she knew of other White classmates who called the same schools on the same day and received all the information they needed. She perceived that because staff members could identify her race from her admissions application they were not willing to provide the same information given to other students. She ended up having her career/college coach or guidance counselor call to get the information for her.

As mentioned previously, Latrice has always been a high-achieving student. Throughout the college choice process she "wanted to be accepted into institutions and receive scholarships based on [her] academic record, not based on [her] race or gender." She did apply for some scholarships allocated for African Americans or women, but on other applications that asked applicants to identify their race, she marked "other." This

desire to be recognized for her academic achievements and treated like all other students allowed her to remove institutions from her choice list that did not meet those expectations.

Latrice was very excited about the possibility of attending an HBCU. She participated in several summer programs hosted at these institutions and wanted to spend her undergraduate career on an HBCU campus. A man from her church had designated funding for a generous scholarship for a student who attended a specific HBCU. Because of her low income level, Latrice knew obtaining a scholarship would be an important part of her college choice process. When the time came for her to begin applying for college, this institution lost her admissions application on three separate occasions. Although representatives from the institution were actively recruiting her based on her academic achievements, Latrice became concerned because she did not want to attend an institution and worry about other important documents being lost. A similar situation happened at another HBCU to which she applied, causing her to “lose faith in the idea of attending an HBCU for an undergraduate degree.” These circumstances did not leave a positive impression on Latrice regarding HBCUs.

Choosing between 22 different institutions was not an easy process. Latrice visited both HBCU and PWI campuses and enjoyed both environments. She tried to enter all tours and college environments with a positive attitude. With the exception of some rude personnel at one specific HBCU, she had some powerful and influential college tours. The negative interactions she had with both PWIs and HBCUs made it a priority to select an institution where she felt the members of the campus would be helpful and supportive as she pursued her degree. Once Latrice was awarded a scholarship from

Metro, she was assigned a mentor through the program who contacted her on a regular basis to give her more information about the institution, and to see if she had any questions. The connection with a current student provided additional insight she did not receive from other institutions. Though receiving a full-tuition scholarship and stipend was one of the primary reasons Latrice chose to attend Metro, she also appreciated the personal connections she made before making her final decision.

Summary

This study focused on high-achieving, African American women. The student participants in each case presented above knew early on that they were expected to attend college after high school. These expectations affected each woman in different ways, but generally resulted in motivating her to perform well academically and qualify for a full-tuition scholarship to Metro. Although some of the women considered moving far away for college, they each ended up staying close to home, with the furthest being approximately two hours from home. Staying in state also allowed all but one participant to take advantage of scholarship money earned through a state-funded program. The other woman lived in a neighboring state only a few miles from Metro. Though not expected, each of those identified as influential to a participant's college choice was also an African American woman. More details about the themes resulting from this research are discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the major themes found in the research and how they answer the central research question: What influenced the college choice of high-achieving African American women who chose to attend a four-year, public PWI instead of an HBCU? I will also present data that provides answers to the three secondary questions: (1) how were African American women's choices to attend a four-year, public PWI influenced by their families? (2) how did the intersection of multiple identities influence African American women's choices to attend a four-year, public PWI? and (3) how did African American women's perceptions of the PWI and HBCU campus environments influence their college choices?

Also included in this chapter are implications for admissions professionals and high school counselors working with high-achieving African American women in the college choice process. Advice from the participants to African American females making college choice decisions are provided as well. Direction for future research concludes this chapter.

A qualitative, collective case study design (Stake, 2005) was employed which allowed me to compare and contrast participants' stories to determine how their various identities and cultural backgrounds influenced their college choices. This method also gave me the freedom to determine which parts of the participants' stories I would share

(Glesne, 2011). Data analysis was a continuous process (Creswell, 2007). As each interview was conducted, I began to make connections with the literature and also between the participants.

Predisposition: “Not going to college wasn’t ever an option to me.”

All the women in this study knew they were expected to attend college after high school. These expectations came from parents and family members as well as from their high school environments and community groups. The following subsections provide detailed discussions about the ways in which participants were predisposed to higher education by their families, high school environments, and community groups. The expectations set by family, the high school, and community groups are examples of the first two layers of Perna’s (2006) conceptual model which focus on a student’s habitus, including her academic ability, and the school and community contexts in which she interacts.

Parents and family

As presented in chapter four, Tiffany and Barbie recalled knowing at a very young age that education was valued in their families. Tiffany’s sister, Angel, confirmed the expectation when she stated that in their family “it’s always been we’re going to college, always known that.” Shelby made a similar comment when asked about the first time she thought about her sister, Barbie, going to college:

I can’t say that it was like a specific time that I first thought about it, because in our family, like both of my parents went to college. And so it was always, like, understood, that we will be going.

Mrs. Smith's statement regarding her expectation for Jillán was the most direct. She stated "if she had told me she did not want to go, I don't know what I would have done. I don't know if there would have been a choice. She was still going to go." Though not as direct, these same types of comments regarding expectations for college attendance were heard from the majority of participants and their influential person.

These women grew up in home environments where it did not seem like they had a choice whether or not to attend college. The value of education was instilled in each participant despite having parents with different educational levels and despite being from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Freeman, 2005). The aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) held by the family members was passed down to participants through the expectations of higher education. Cheryl was the only participant who did not perceive any expectations placed on her by parents or family members: "I am the first one in my family to go to school. There was really no expectation set for me." This sense of being predisposed (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) to higher education is common throughout the literature on college choice.

Though expected based on previous research (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Smith & Fleming, 2006), there was no direct evidence the level of expectations felt by these participants from their parents was based on their gender. Since many of the women only had female siblings, it is possible the expectations set for participants were based on the achievements of the older sibling(s). For example, Barbie has two older sisters who were high achievers in high school and college. It would not be surprising for Barbie's parents to also expect the same from her. Smith and Fleming (2006) found parents pushed their daughters toward four-year institutions and were more likely to be okay with their

daughters leaving home to pursue college. Though the family members in this study were actively involved in the search process, they gave the participants the space needed to make independent decisions.

Several of the women also possessed aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) which allowed them to desire a level of success beyond what they currently hold. Qadira mentioned her mom “always regretted not going....She always says she wants us to do better than her.” Mrs. Watts had similar reasons for encouraging Nakia, and her older sister, to pursue higher education:

I don't really want them to have to go work on an assembly line like I chose to. That's about it. I mean that's what made me realize that education really is important and that they needed to go to college to give themselves better opportunities for jobs.

Both mothers desired for their daughters to achieve at a higher level.

During each student interview I sensed the strong connection the women had to their families. They grew up in environments where expectations for college attendance and success were high. Some of the women's parents had attended college, while others were the first in their family to attend. Regardless of their status, each woman was strongly encouraged to attend college and achieve more than the current level of their family (Yosso, 2005). These data echoed Freeman's (1999b, 2005) previous studies regarding the college choice of African American students. Family members in the first study (Freeman, 1999b) wanted their student to serve as a means to upward mobility for the family. Students in the later study (Freeman, 2005) saw college as a way to a better life in the future.

Four women interviewed as influential to students' college choices were mothers or older sisters of the participants. These women held high expectations for their daughter or sister to perform well in high school. The student was then expected to go on to a college or university where she could receive a quality education and feel comfortable. The women had various levels of collegiate education, but each played similar support roles in the participants' college choice process. This support ranged from paying application fees and proofreading scholarship essays to helping the student sort through information about each institution and making a college choice. The support systems are still in place as students matriculate and face different obstacles (Yosso, 2005). These outside support systems likely replace those often missing in PWI environments based on the lack of a critical mass of African American women on the campus (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

High School

In addition to the expectations to attend college from parents and other family members, the participants also felt pressure within their high school environments. Cheryl stated she felt pressure from her high school because she “went to a private school where everyone went to college.” The other women in the study also expressed their high school administrators expected graduates to go to college, or as stated by Qadira, “they kinda made sure that everybody had at least some kind of plan after high school so they didn’t just end up doing nothing.”

Tiffany stated

They just expect excellence. They’re like, “We’ve given you all the tools that you need to go to college. Once you get there, no matter what pressures may come

your way, the parties, and now that you're out on your own and won't get in trouble for not going to class, it's totally up to you." That's their expectation: they expect excellence out of their students because they have trained them to be great students.

This sense of expecting success was felt regardless of the type of high school attended by the participant.

The expectations held by high school staff and administrators were supported by organizational factors within the high schools (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), which included the amount of college information made available to students and the rigorous academic curriculums offered (e.g., newsletters, college fairs, college tours, AP classes). Seven women stated their counselors provided information about different types of postsecondary options, scholarships, and the general things to expect as college students. Each of these resources provided students with social capital (Yosso, 2005) to which they may not have been previously exposed. As an example, Mary's counselor served as a primary resource during her college search. "Well, my senior counselor, me and her were really close cause I was an aide my senior year. We always had conversations about what is expected and, also, what I wanted to do in college." This connection to the counselor provided Mary with additional social capital (Yosso, 2005) as she moved through her college search and choice process because she had access to more information regarding what to expect in college and was provided with resources based on her interests. Mary was able to use her social contacts to better navigate the complexity of the college choice. As Yosso (2005) describes when discussing social capital, it is possible that having the additional contact helped Mary find out about and attain a scholarship. Mary is now able

to pass the knowledge and contacts on to others who are going through the college choice process.

Unlike Mary, Nakia did not view her guidance counselors as helpful. She primarily spoke with her family members and athletic coaches about her college plans. Nakia told me about a situation that occurred when she asked her counselor for an application for a summer program for outstanding students in the state.

I wanted to do that and I went and asked my guidance counselor for an application and she didn't seem like really excited about giving it to me, whereas I had another classmate and she went the same day as me and she was White, and they were like more enthusiastic about her filling out the application than they were with me.

This sense of neglect was also felt by Nakia when she was not told about a scholarship offered by Metro specifically for African American students. She found out about the scholarship on her own, but felt it was information the counselor should have mentioned. Though the neglect appears to be based on race, it is possible it was based on the counselor's perception of Nakia based on her race, class, and gender. She is a high-achieving female from a middle/upper middle-class family, but she may have been viewed as someone who was not prepared academically or focused on her future (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). Though the counselor did not provide the type of assistance Nakia expected, she was able to successfully navigate through her college choice process without losing hope (Yosso, 2005).

Community Groups

Both Tiffany and Latrice participated in community groups designed to help students from underrepresented backgrounds prepare for college. These programs gave both women the opportunity to gain additional knowledge about postsecondary education, including spending at least one week on a college campus during the summer. Though both women attended high schools that provided college information, the community groups offered additional social capital (Yosso, 2005) especially useful for underrepresented groups during their college search. This social capital included information about scholarships for students of color and exposure to HBCU campuses.

University Characteristics

The third layer of Perna's (2006) conceptual model focuses on the higher education context. Included in this layer are institutional characteristics that may attract or deter prospective students (e.g., major/academic programs, location, and scholarship availability). Based on prior research, it was expected the availability of academic programs (Feagin et al., 2002; Hayden, 2000) and scholarships (Kim et al., 2009) would influence students' college choices. However, location of the institution also affected this group. The next three subsections highlight the level of influence these university characteristics had on participants' decisions to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU.

Availability of Academic Program: "None of them offered what I wanna do."

The statement above was spoken by Qadira when asked about her consideration of attending an HBCU. She wanted to major in education, with a minor in Latin, so her choices were limited. There were only two universities within the state that offered a Latin curriculum and both were PWIs.

Jillán and Mary also had similar concerns when considering whether or not to attend an HBCU. Jillán planned to major in engineering while Mary wanted to major in chemistry with intentions of going to dental school. When asked about attending an HBCU, Jillán commented

I ruled it out since I knew I wanted to do engineering. I didn't just want to go to a school and have to go to a different school for engineering. It was a possibility. I could go there, do my four years, and go somewhere else, and do engineering.

Mary had similar thoughts about attending one institution for her undergraduate degree and then going to a different one for a graduate degree. "Well, I mean I talked to my mom a little bit about it, but most of the HBCUs that I was looking at didn't have the program that I wanted or it wasn't like what they were known for." Some HBCUs may miss out on some students of color based on a lack of academic program offerings.

Barbie was in a similar situation, though she was able to find pre-med programs at various institutions. Part of the draw to Metro for her was a pipeline program offered that prepared students to go into the medical school after graduation. For these women, the opportunity to complete undergraduate and graduate work at one institution was more important and appealing than attending an HBCU.

Location: "It's close to home."

There was a general consensus among participants regarding staying close to home for college. Seven of the eight women live in the state within two hours of where Metro is located and the eighth woman lives close by in a neighboring state. Mary wanted to be close to home, but did not have to be in the same city.

Well, I didn't want to be at home. I wanted to get away, but I didn't want to get too far away because if something happened my mom couldn't just hop in the car and come get me.

On the other hand, Tiffany was very excited to attend college in her hometown.

I was born and raised here. I absolutely love everything about [this city] because it's city enough but country enough. Everything is like 15 minutes away. It's just a perfect living space...If I want to be on campus, I can be on campus. There's other places and you cross the bridge and you're in [the next state]. There's options here. I wouldn't feel stuck on campus all day long.

The other participants were not as excited about the city as Tiffany. Qadira stated she wanted to be in a "friendly place" that was not a "busy, busy city," but also not "dead rural country." Her perception was that "all the HBCUs are kinda like isolated and in the middle of nowhere." She was not interested in attending college in a place where she felt isolated.

Another aspect of these women choosing to stay near home was because of their families. These women had close connections with their immediate and extended family members that serve as additional support and encouragement, when needed. This is reflective of the familial capital Yosso (2005) described. Jillán acknowledged

After I thought about it, being close to home and being in such a rigorous program, I felt that [it] would be better if I could come home. Also, I was talking to my dad about how I would have to start everything over if I went away, how I'd have to meet a whole bunch of new people, find a church to go to, and all that stuff.

Though Jillán was very interested in attending a university out of state, she is glad to have her family support system near by to lean on if problems arise (Yosso, 2005).

Cheryl is “happy [she] did not leave because [she is] happy that [she] still ha[s] the support of [her] mom while [she is] in school.” For Tiffany, being close to home was beneficial for staying on track.

I knew that if I went away that I wouldn’t get anything done, I wouldn’t be able to focus, because seeing them all the time is a constant reminder that you need to make sure you’re doing everything the right way. Staying here with those expectations and seeing those faces is a constant reminder that really helped.

The people Tiffany referred to includes family, church members, and friends who have high expectations for her to go to college and be successful. Tiffany’s increased knowledge and personal connections relate to Yosso’s (2005) thoughts on social capital because she can pass this information on to other family members, friends, and community members. Sharing the knowledge she’s gained helps elevate her social networks, while also allowing her to stay connected with supportive friends and family.

Four of the five women I interviewed as influential persons were either mothers or sisters of the participants. Each of these women wanted the student to attend the college or university where they felt welcomed and supported (Yosso, 2005) and would provide a good education. They also shared thoughts regarding the location of the institutions their daughters and sisters were considering. Mrs. Watts thought it would be good for Nakia to get away from home and some of her friends. Nakia is one of the three women in this study whose hometown is approximately two hours from Metro.

Angel expected Tiffany “to go far away from home because she’s always been an individualistic-type person. She’s not good with a group. She’s good by herself, so I always thought she was going to go away.” Despite this expectation, Angel wanted Tiffany to stay close to home because of some recurring medical issues.

Mrs. Smith knew Jillán wanted to attend a different university, but also felt it would be better for her to be closer to home. These thoughts were confirmed through a conversation she had with Jillán.

I asked her if she made the right decision. She actually did get into [the other university]. I asked her, “Did you regret not going there?” and she said, “No, I do not think I would have felt comfortable being so far away and not knowing anyone.” She is here right up the street.

The distance from home is different for each woman, but it is clear having the connection to family and access to support was influential to their college choice (Yosso, 2005).

Each woman in this study made it clear she did not want to travel too far away from home for postsecondary education. Staying close to home allows these women to maintain current family and social connections while also pursuing their career goals. This provides a continued reminder of the high expectations family and friends have for them. Additionally, the women know they can get back home quickly if an emergency occurs.

In addition to being close to home and family, participants also wanted to attend a school that provided options for co-curricular activities inside and outside the campus environment. Both Nakia and Jillán are participating in athletics at Metro; track and golf, respectively. Tiffany spoke about how much she loved her home city and all the options

available for activities on campus at Metro and around the city. Barbie also mentioned wanting to get involved on campus and try new activities instead of only sticking with the peer group she had prior to entering college. Having access to various attractions outside the classroom was important to these women as they made college choice decisions.

Scholarship Availability: “If you have a scholarship, take it.”

It was no surprise all the participants received at least one academic scholarship for postsecondary education. These women worked hard in high school to achieve high grade point averages and test scores, thus being eligible for scholarships to help with the cost of college attendance (Wiggan, 2008). Mary said “I was doing good in high school and everything... that’s what my goal was, to get a scholarship so I wouldn’t have to pay for college.” Though Mary wanted to get a full scholarship for college she knew her parents would be able to make up the additional costs, if needed. This was not the case for most participants. Without the scholarship, Cheryl and Qadira would have incurred loan debt. The same was true for Latrice who knew that because of her family’s lower income level “scholarships would be the way [she paid] for [her] college education.”

When speaking with Dr. Bohannon about her influence on Mary’s college choice, she recounted the conversation she has with many students regarding scholarships.

If you have a scholarship, take it. Take that burden away. Take that piece out of the picture. If you get a scholarship to more than one school, and then you have a choice of going to one that can maybe a little better prepare you and mentor you, pick that one.

She wants all students to attend a college or university that best prepares them for their career, but also recognizes the burden rising costs of education can place on a student, especially if their family cannot contribute financially.

Though her daughter has a full scholarship, Mrs. Smith has been told by some that Jillán may have found a stronger engineering program at a different institution. However, she feels Jillán can gain a good education at Metro and then make the connections necessary to advance in her career. In reference to Jillán receiving multiple scholarships, Mrs. Smith said “she had a golf scholarship plus the one scholarship she has. Really, it was a no-brainer. It was like, ‘You’re going to have money in your pocket. Why would you go somewhere else?’”

In addition to the full scholarships received from Metro, seven of the participants were also eligible to receive state funded scholarships based on their grade point average each year of high school. These awards would only be disbursed for students attending participating schools within the state. As Qadira expressed, she was staying in state for college because “if you don’t use it you lose it.” Having this additional money was important because even though her family recently obtained middle-class status, no additional funds were available for higher education. Nakia “wanted to go somewhere where I could use my [state] money.” These women wanted to receive the awards they earned for working hard in high school.

The availability of scholarship funding on the state level connects to the social, economic, and policy layer of Perna’s (2006) model. In order for students to be eligible to receive this funding, they had to graduate from a certified high school within the state and attend a participating college or university in that same state. This additional funding

varied based on the student's academic record. Having this program encourages the state's best and brightest students to stay within the state instead of taking their talents and abilities elsewhere. Since the participants in this study received full scholarships directly from Metro, they could use these funds for other purposes (e.g., books and school supplies).

Perceptions of the HBCU Campus Environment

Several women in the study mentioned a lack of racial diversity when talking about their consideration of both HBCUs and PWIs. Cheryl was the only participant who attended a high school that was not racially diverse. Seven of the eight women considered HBCUs in their college search. Nakia, who did not consider any HBCUs, commented

Well, I like being around diversity, ...so I knew I didn't want to go to a Black college...I also knew that I would be able to be around Black people and not just White people [if I attended a PWI].

Mrs. Watts expressed she had not heard many positive things about HBCUs and wanted Nakia to have exposure to a wide variety of people. When thinking of one particular HBCU within the state, Mrs. Watts stated

You know a lot of the students just go to party. I wouldn't have wanted that for her, so if [the university] had offered a full scholarship versus what she got at [Metro] I probably still would have said [Metro].

Barbie's sister, Shelby, had a similar opinion regarding attending any institution whose racial diversity was extremely skewed towards one group.

I did feel like it was more beneficial to maybe go to a school where you're operating in the real world. Because I hate to say it like that, but like, going back

to that really white college...like, that's not the real world, and neither...is, like, going through an HBCU.

Barbie did not have a strong opinion about HBCUs. She only considered a few HBCUs located near family living in a different state. She visited one campus during a family trip at the insistence of her parents. She had a good experience while visiting the campus, but had already narrowed down her choice set to two PWIs.

Prior research found having a friend, family member and/or mentor connection to an HBCU had a positive influence on HBCU attendance (Freeman, 2005; McDonough et al., 1997). None of the participants in this study had that type of connection. The reasons these women did not have an HBCU in their final choice set were varied. Mary, Jillán, Qadira, and Barbie were all focused on attending a university with strong programs for their academic interests. The combination of wanting to stay near home and have a rigorous program prevented them from giving serious consideration to an HBCU. Cheryl knew she needed a full scholarship to fund her education. She was awarded some smaller scholarships to attend an HBCU, but it was not enough to cover the full cost. The reasons for Tiffany and Latrice not selecting an HBCU were not as simple.

As I listened to Tiffany recount her feeling when visiting an HBCU campus, combined with the fact she had been called an “oreo” as a young child, I clearly understood why she felt PWI campuses were more welcoming.

I felt a sense of I kind of belong, but not really. I just don't like being anywhere that it's all one group of people, because I feel like you don't get that experience of being in a very diverse situation. It is nice to be around people who look like

you, but I feel like when I actually start my career I'm not going to be around just Black people.

I'm going to be around all different races, interacting with different people. I don't know a better way to put this, but every time I'm on an HBCU campus it seems like it's reverse racism, I guess, just a little bit. It's not so much in a sense of action, but in the feel of the campus. I feel like they probably consider me a very White Black person. I know I'm Black, but this makes me feel uncomfortable because I've been picked out before. I don't know if I'm Black enough to be here.

Tiffany's experience was surprising considering one of the main draws to HBCUs for African Americans is the benefit of being a racial majority (Stewart et al., 2008) and being in an environment that is often "empowering" and "family-like" (Gasman et al., 2010, p. 3). This description certainly did not match Tiffany's experience.

Unlike the other women, Latrice was very interested in attending an HBCU. While growing up she attended various summer programs on HBCU campuses. Her experiences in these programs caused her to begin her college search primarily by gathering information about and applying to HBCUs. She also felt her academic achievements would allow her to receive more scholarships and appreciation from these institutions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, her expectations were not met.

When the time came for me to begin applying for college, this institution lost my admissions application on three separate occasions. I faxed, mailed, and submitted an application online. I was very detailed and organized, keeping records and copies of all applications submitted. While contacting the offices I was told they

never received things and [I] was under the impression maybe it is just me, but I talked with other students and this seemed to be more of a universal thing of lost documents at certain HBCUs.

Latrice still has a desire to attend an HBCU at some point, but was not comfortable doing so for her undergraduate career.

Each of the women in this study had different interactions with both HBCU and PWI environments. In general, most women felt more comfortable and welcomed at a PWI instead of an HBCU. These feelings stemmed from various factors including being exposed to students from a wider variety of racial backgrounds, the availability of specific academic programs, and the perception of a lower cost of attendance for PWIs. Since staying in-state and being close to home were influential to the decisions of most participants, it is also possible that only having one choice for an HBCU within the state contributed to women's decisions to attend a PWI. Mary felt she "could make [Metro] home so I didn't feel out of place." Tiffany and Latrice's experiences with HBCUs were unique within this group, but may be reflective of other students with similar backgrounds.

Identities: "...based on my academic record, not based on my race or gender."

Freeman (2005) discussed the high value African Americans place on education. This notion was affirmed by each student participant and the persons identified as most influential to their college choice. Though education is considered essential by these women, being able to gain an education historically has not been an easy process for women or African Americans (Allan, 2011; Harper et al., 2009; Reynolds & Burge, 2008). The opportunities the participants in this study have to obtain education today are

the result of the struggles of many women (Allan, 2011; Reynolds & Burge, 2008) and African Americans (Harper et al., 2009) who came before them.

Chapters one and two of this dissertation provided detailed information about affirmative action and Title IX, respectively. Without the increased access to PWIs granted by affirmative action (Harper et al., 2009), the participants may not have had any options for higher education other than attending an HBCU. Likewise, the passing of Title IX opened the doors for increased participation for women in a variety of areas, including higher education. The effects of these policies, which are included in the fourth layer of Perna's (2006) model, opened the door for these women to have the option of attending Metro. Though the participants were not directly involved in the movement for greater access to higher education for women and African Americans, the implementation of these policies affected their college choices by providing the opportunity to attend PWIs.

As part of this study, I hoped to discern how participants' intersecting identities influenced their college choice. Each woman was directly asked to describe how her race, class, and gender influenced her college choice. Jillán stated

The engineering field itself is both. There aren't very many minorities and women. There aren't very many women in the major anyway. I expected that. The college choice didn't matter too much because I knew it was going to be that way. Though not directly stated, Jillán may face situations where political intersectionality (i.e., having to choose between her race and gender; Crenshaw, 1991) becomes apparent. It is likely she will receive information and have the opportunity to attend workshops on women in engineering or African Americans in engineering. However, programs based

on African American women in engineering are probably less likely to occur. Pursuing an engineering degree as an African American woman will help Jillán build navigational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). She will learn how to maneuver through an academic program and career field not created specifically for her, and also learn how to challenge the “norm” within the engineering field and create a presence as an African American woman engineer. Jillán focused on selecting a university with a strong engineering program because she knew there would not be many women or African Americans in any particular program. Being part of a strong program requires that she actively use her individual agency, and build resilience, to successfully matriculate (Yosso, 2005). She may also be faced with resisting negative comments by others who may not place a high value on her presence in the program.

Latrice was also able to identify influences based on her race, socioeconomic status, and gender. She always had a desire to attend college, but knew she would need a scholarship to cover the cost. This need prompted her to not only apply for general scholarships, but also to look for funding allocated specifically for African Americans and/or women. Latrice received a full scholarship designated for African American students.

Similar to Latrice, Qadira’s college choice was influenced by her socioeconomic status. Though her family had recently obtained middle class status, she understood financial help would be necessary to cover the cost of college. Her mother had already expressed that she would not be able to fund Qadira’s postsecondary education.

Mary was the only participant who stated her parents would be able to help pay any cost of attendance not covered by a scholarship. She stated the scholarship she

received “was not only just my race giving me the opportunity to go to this school, but it was also a good school to go to.” When considering her identity as an African American woman, Mary felt she was

trying to break stereotypes of, oh, there are a lot of people or at least a lot of female, African American women in college and drop out, so beside[s] trying, not being part of the stereotype or part of the problem or anything else as far as that.

Mary was aware of some perceptions others have of African American women and the ways in which this group is represented marginalizes her (Crenshaw, 1991) even though she is a high-achieving student.

Despite the participants in this study having at least two disadvantaged identities (i.e., being a woman and being African American), they were high achievers in high school and received scholarships for college. The expectations placed on them by family, friends, and high school administrators, along with different aspects of cultural wealth, helped them stay motivated to push through any obstacles that came their way based on their various identities.

In Their Own Words

While this study focused on the college choices of eight women, I also wanted to find out what advice they had for African American females currently conducting college searches. Their advice included things they wished they had known as they were going through the process. The advice fell into three categories: start early, stay focused, and choose for you.

Start Early

Cheryl encouraged other students to begin their college search early in high school. The participants in this study knew they wanted to attend college, but their college searches started at different points in high school. Cheryl suggested

You need to start looking for opportunities early on...I think you need to start looking sophomore year just so you can see some of the requirements that go along with these scholarships. You can kind of get your mind wrapped around what you need to be doing in school.

You can think you are doing well, but, as you know, with some of the scholarships out there sophomore year is never too early to pick your grades back up and get to that grade point and then start practicing for your ACT...It is not impossible. I think it comes from not knowing that you need to.

Being exposed to the college search earlier will allow these students to explore all their options. As Cheryl stated, starting early will also give students more time to find out the academic requirements for admission and scholarships. Once students get to junior and senior year of high school, it is difficult to raise the overall grade point average.

Preparing for the college search should be encouraged prior to high school, and especially, during the freshman and sophomore years (Pitre, 2006).

Stay Focused

Along with starting the college search early, participants also recommended students stay focused throughout the process. The number of college options available is numerous and can easily become overwhelming. Qadira encouraged these women

to not be deterred for any reason. If you want to go somewhere or you think you have an interest, explore every possibility. And don't write anything off just cause. Don't make excuses. So, if you're not completely sure what you wanna do, I'd say to look at everything. But if you know what you wanna do, I wouldn't waste your time looking at things that don't offer what you want.

Jillán had similar advice.

I would say keep in mind what your plans for the future are. I know a lot of people...go where their friends are going and all that stuff. Ultimately, the goal is to get a degree. Just to go somewhere that is going to benefit you the most personally and educationally.

Mary made it simple by encouraging the women to “make a conscious decision about where you're going.” All of these women were focused on their academic plans and choosing a university that offered a strong program in their academic area was the main priority.

Choose for You

Nakia wants these women to make sure they make “the best decision for them, and not be afraid to venture off and leave home and try something new.” Barbie put it this way:

Don't come to college with a mindset of, like, sticking with your friends from high school, I guess I should say. Look at it as a lot of the times that's what's going to hold you back from actually experiencing things.

Mary recommends students

Go on as many college visits as you can and see where you think you will fit in and what feels like home to you so that you don't have the urge to just go anywhere and basically just say I'm trying to get out of here.

Students may easily get distracted with all of the high school activities to complete and hearing about all the options for higher education. They are likely also receiving advice from friends and family members regarding where they should attend (Smith & Fleming, 2006). Although involving family in the process is important, it is equally important to find a campus environment where they feel comfortable and supported (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Implications

The intention of this study was to identify what influenced a group of high-achieving African American women to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU. Each of these women knew it was expected for them to go to college, but influences in each of their lives ultimately led them to attend the same university. The sections above highlighted the major influences which included being predisposed to higher education by family and high school environments, various university characteristics, students' perceptions of the HBCU and PWI campus environments, and students' intersecting identities. The following sections provide suggestions for admissions officers and high school counselors who are interested in the college choice of high-achieving African American women. The suggestions also reveal nuances important for those hoping to increase the number of students from this group enrolled in their institutions (e.g., engaging family members and providing programming specifically for this group).

Scholarships are Important, But...

When asked to give the primary reason for choosing to attend Metro, Jillán, Cheryl, Nakia, and Tiffany all responded “the scholarship.” Mary and Latrice listed the scholarship as a secondary reason for attending Metro. Barbie found Metro to be the most affordable option. Qadira listed location and academic program as primary and secondary reasons for her college choice. Receiving the scholarship removed the burden of paying for college from these women, but without the desired academic programs and campus environment, each woman may have chosen to attend another institution.

As outlined in Table 1, the participants in this study included four women from middle-income families, two women from upper-middle income families, and two women from lower income families. Only one of the women attended a private high school and the locations of the high schools were split between urban, rural, and suburban areas. In terms of parental educational level, five of the women had mothers with a higher level of education than their fathers, one woman had a father with more education than her mother, and the other two women had parents with equal amounts of educational attainment.

These differences may cause one to assume the availability of scholarships was less influential to women in a more advantaged group (i.e., upper-middle income students) than to women in a seemingly disadvantaged group (i.e., attending high school in an urban area; Griffin & Allen, 2006). One may also think the various income levels resulted in different expectations for higher education from family and friends (Willie & Reddick, 2010). Neither of these assumptions was true for this group of women. Instead, as Freeman (2005) found, African American families at all income levels were influential

to their children's pursuit of postsecondary education. This also applied regardless of parental educational level and high school type and location.

When working with students in this group, high school and admissions counselors should not assume students' aspirations for higher education differ based on their socioeconomic status or their parents level of education. They also should not assume the primary reason one of these students selects a particular college or university is based on the scholarship they receive. As shown throughout this document, various aspects go into the college choice process for these students (Freeman, 2005).

Family and Location Matter

Based on the information provided above regarding the influence of family and location on these participants' college choice, high school counselors and admissions officers working with students in this group should be intentional about engaging students' families as well (Smith & Fleming, 2006). Doing so allows family members to learn more about the process at each institution and more about the environment their student may enter. This provides a certain level of comfort that the student will be challenged and supported during their collegiate career. If the family is familiar with the institution, they may be able to assist their student successfully navigate through different situations (Yosso, 2005).

In addition to direct family members, counselors may also speak with students about the influence significant others may play in the college choice process. Both Qadira and Tiffany mentioned having boyfriends. Neither stated having a significant other was a strong influence in their decision to attend Metro, but each appreciates the support he

provides. It is important for those assisting these women with their college search to recognize the role of significant others.

Counselors should also have a conversation with students regarding their comfort level with being far away from family. Some students may have an initial desire to leave home, but further consideration (e.g., cost of attendance) may alter their decision (Rooney, 2008). This is especially true if the student is interested in attending an HBCU, since most who attend an HBCU are typically more than 500 miles from home (McDonough et al., 1997). Admissions officers at HBCUs should make sure students understand the various support services available on their campuses. They may consider setting up a visitation day to help students get connected to campus and allow parents and family members the opportunity to check out the environment in which their student will be living.

Considering Intersectionality and Community Cultural Wealth

Each participant had various identities that influenced her college choice. These identities included race, class, gender, high school type, parental educational level, and cultural background (Crenshaw, 1991). Those working with African American female students must understand the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and how various identities interact during the college choice process. The salience of these identities can vary based on the student and where they are in their college search process. High school and admissions counselors should work with students to help them identify how various identities may consciously and/or unconsciously play a role in their college choice. This may help the student begin the process of identity development and better understand why they do not feel comfortable in certain environments.

Throughout the discussion above, participants' stories have been connected to different parts of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth. It is important for both high school and postsecondary admissions counselors to be familiar with the various types of cultural wealth in order to help African American females leverage the capital for their benefit. Three forms of capital counselors may focus on for this group are aspirational, familial, and social capital (Yosso, 2005).

Each woman felt her family expected her to attend college after high school. Not only were they expected to attend, but family members also expected them to succeed, and in some cases, succeed at a level greater than previously obtained. These aspirations also allow students to maintain their hopes for a bright future, despite any obstacles that may arise.

Participants were also each closely connected to their immediate and extended families. A few of the women mentioned connections with community groups and other church members, each of which encouraged them to pursue higher education. These connections are an example of Yosso's (2005) familial capital because the women created support systems they could call on when faced with barriers during the college choice process and as they matriculated at Metro.

High school and admissions counselors might consider working together to offer programs geared toward helping students better understand the college choice process and what to expect as college students. These programs could include information about the admissions process, academic programs, financial aid and scholarships, housing, and student activities. It would also be helpful to have African American women who are recent graduates from the high school come and speak to these students about their

experiences in college. These students can provide first hand information regarding how they navigate the campus environment as African American women. Offering these programs gives students and families the opportunity to gain social capital, while also keeping sight of their future goals and better understanding what to expect as college students.

In addition to understanding community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and helping these students leverage their capital, high school and admissions counselors should be aware that the high achieving status these students carry may amplify the amount of capital they hold. For example, both of Barbie's parents have master's degrees and her older sisters have bachelor's degrees. Coming from a family that has clearly demonstrated a high value on education can contribute to Barbie having high aspirations for postsecondary education. It also increases the amount of social capital she holds because of the resources and networks she has access to through her parents and siblings. She can also receive advice from her family members regarding the best way to navigate the PWI environment as an African American woman.

The type and amount of assistance a student similar to Barbie needs is likely different from what a student who does not have as much capital may require. High school and admissions counselors must distinguish between the types of capital and determine which areas to focus on with each student. Doing so will empower the student to use the forms of capital that are abundant, while also connecting to resources and networks to further increase their total cultural wealth.

Suggestions from the Participants

The advice provided directly from the participants was geared toward other students, but can be used as a guide for those who want to help streamline the college search process and ensure students are making informed college choices. The suggestions in this section will be divided into the same categories: start early, stay focused, and choose for you.

Start early. Some college admissions recruitment plans include initially contacting students during their sophomore year of high school. The recruitment activities may not be frequent during this time, but admissions officers could be intentional about connecting with sophomores during visits to high schools by setting up times to speak with these students or by participating in community groups that often include students from various grade levels. Similarly, high school counselors could create a newsletter or host information nights geared toward freshmen and sophomores (Matthay, 1989). Though these activities may not be set up specifically for African American females, a special effort should be given to make sure these students receive the information.

Stay focused. When meeting with these students, high school counselors and admissions officers should ask the women about their academic interests. Once an academic area is identified, the high school counselor can make suggestions of institutions that offer those programs. They should also keep the student in mind when speaking with admissions counselors who schedule visits to the high school. On the other hand, if admissions officers discover their institution does not offer the academic

program the woman is looking for, they should be upfront about it and not try to convince her to attend even though the program is unavailable.

Choose for you. Some high schools coordinate college tours for students who want to participate. The schools may not be able to schedule a visit specifically for African American females, but the counselors should encourage these students to participate. Colleges and universities should consider hosting an open house event specifically for African American students. If this is not possible, they should try to have a day for all students of color to introduce them to the campus community and highlight the support services designed for them. Providing these services will allow women to experience different campuses for themselves and determine if they will be comfortable in those environments. Students may have friends and family members who attended certain institutions, but that does not guarantee they will find a good fit at those same institutions. These women should be encouraged to choose the college or university that is best for them.

High School, Community, and University Partnerships

In order to fully support the college search and choice processes of high-achieving African American women, it is important for partnerships to be formed between high schools, the local community, and universities. Faculty, staff, and administrators at the high school and postsecondary levels play a role in facilitating the college search process for these students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Many students look for college information in their high school's guidance office. They may also speak with their teachers and others at the school about their college plans. If a partnership exists between

the high schools and universities, students should have greater access to the information needed to make an informed choice (Matthay, 1989; Pitre, 2006).

Two of the students in this study participated in community groups while in high school. Others mentioned being involved in their churches and being encouraged by friends and co-workers during their college search. High schools and universities should connect with the local communities to offer programs pertaining to postsecondary education. It has been shown that African Americans place a high value on education (Billingsley, 1992; Freeman, 2005) and, often times, the parents of these students are involved in all phases of the college search process (Smith & Fleming, 2006). Connecting with parents and the community not only assists these students as they move through the college choice process, but also increases the social capital of the entire community (Yosso, 2005).

Role of High School and Admissions Counselors

During the college search process each participant interacted with her high school counselor. As shown in the findings, the interactions were both positive and negative, and ranged from being brief to having several conversations throughout senior year. Besides family members, high school counselors can serve as a primary resource for students seeking information about various colleges and universities (Perna, 2006).

Counselors should be sure to have information readily available for students about both PWIs and HBCUs. It is important for counselors to have contact information for admissions officers with whom to connect the student. They should also have information about financial aid and scholarships to help students fund their college education. For African American female students, high school counselors should make an effort to

connect with parents and other family members who are helping students with their college search. Each of these steps helps students make better connections to postsecondary institutions and make informed decisions.

Similar to the high school counselors, both PWI and HBCU admissions counselors should connect with students and their parents throughout the college choice process. Several participants mentioned their interactions with admissions counselors at Metro and other institutions. During conversations with these students, admissions counselors should be sure to provide information about the admissions process. They should also be willing to answer any questions the students or family members ask. If this information is not provided, students may feel it is based on their race or gender, especially if their peers are able to call the same institutions and get the information they need.

To increase the amount of high-achieving African American students applying and enrolling at PWIs, admissions counselors should be intentional about visiting high schools with a high percentage of African American students (Freeman, 2005). They may also connect with various community groups and African American churches that host college fairs. Counselors should consider speaking with students about the various services offered specifically for students of color. Though race may not be salient for some students, knowing there are spaces and services on campus available for students of color may help students better connect with the institution (Freeman, 2005). Admissions counselors should also make sure students of color are represented in the promotional materials and in their selection of tour guides. Although participants in this study chose

not to attend an HBCU where they would be part of the racial majority, they did desire to be in an environment where other African Americans were present.

Admissions counselors at HBCUs should be intentional about promoting the quality of academic programs available at their institutions. In recent years it has become widely known that some HBCUs have lost their accreditation (Harris, 2012). This may result in students and family members being uneasy about the quality of education offered at these institutions. Being assured about accreditation and the quality of the programs is important for these students as they make their college choice. These counselors may also connect students to current students on campus who attended their high school. This will provide an additional perspective and allow the students to ask direct questions regarding the student experience in the HBCU campus environment.

High school and college admissions counselors can play important roles during the college search process (Perna, 2006). The information provided to the students may be different based on the environment, but the primary goal should be making sure the student has all the information needed to make her choice. The connections she makes to high school and college admissions counselors during this process should also continue as she matriculates, if needed.

Conclusion and Direction for Future Research

African American women outnumber African American men in college attendance (Kim, 2011; Zamani, 2003). These women having higher levels of educational attainment than the men has resulted in a plethora of research conducted regarding the needs of men, but very little about the needs of women (Rosales & Person, 2003). The suggestions for future research below show the need for continued research on African

American women. Though the number of African American women pursuing higher education has grown, it does not mean these students are exempt from needing resources and programming created specifically for them.

This study helps to fill the gap in the literature by identifying issues that influenced eight high-achieving African American women's college choices. Though the results cannot be generalized to other groups, there were many similarities between this group and the college choice process of African American students in general. This study brings awareness to high school and college admissions counselors regarding the concerns and needs of this group when going through the college search and choice processes.

The results of this research revealed numerous areas for future research. I was not able to include women in this study who considered both PWIs and HBCUs and chose to attend an HBCU. There are likely some differences in whom or what influenced women who chose to attend a PWI and those who selected an HBCU. Conducting research involving women who chose to attend an HBCU can identify nuances important for admissions counselors at both PWIs and HBCUs as they recruit these students to their campuses.

Most of the women lived in a state with only one HBCU. Since many participants sought specific programs and wanted to be in an urban location, they did not seriously consider an HBCU because it was located in a rural area and did not offer the desired academic programs. Women living in a state with various HBCU options may find their desired academic program in the location they want and be able to take advantage of an academic environment that was created with African Americans in mind.

As mentioned previously, all the persons identified as influential to the participants were African American women. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) discussed the lack of support these students may feel when there is no critical mass of African American women on a college campus. This study identified the ways in which students' families were influential to their college choice, but did not focus specifically on the level of influence the African American women had on these students. Being able to probe more into this area could provide valuable information regarding whether or not high school counselors and admissions officers should engage the entire family throughout the search and choice process or if they can focus more on the African American women to which the students are connected.

Future investigation must include an exploration of how the intersection of race and gender affect the ways in which African American men and women make decisions, which could not be explored in a study including only African American women. Having this knowledge will help high school counselors and admissions officers discern the differences in the interactions African American women have with males in their families and why the women in their families may have a stronger influence (Freeman, 1999b). It may also assist with identifying the best ways to approach these students throughout the process.

It is possible the influences identified in this research would not apply to other African American females. I purposely selected high-achieving women to help control for the types of institutions to which they could be admitted and the types of scholarships for which they would be eligible. I am confident the level of expectation for college attendance would be similar. However, students with lower academic records may

struggle to get into the institution of their choice. Depending on their grade point averages and test scores, the students may be eligible for some scholarship funds, but most likely not a full scholarship. Conducting a similar study on a group of students not classified as high-achievers would likely identify some nuances between the two groups.

It is important to explore the differences in parental influence of high-achieving African American men and women regarding their college choices. Smith and Fleming (2006) found parents were more encouraging to and had higher aspirations for their daughters than for their sons. None of the women in this study mentioned thinking about attending a community college during their search process. Each participant wanted to attend a four-year institution and some had plans to continue on to graduate school. Identifying similarities and differences between these groups would be beneficial to those interested in increasing the number of high-achieving African American students on their campuses.

The perceptions African American women have of HBCU campus environments should be further investigated. Many of the women in this study considered PWI campuses to be welcoming, and in some cases more welcoming than HBCUs. This could lead to the assumption that HBCU campuses are unwelcoming on some levels. Since HBCUs were established specifically for African Americans, it is concerning that some of the students in this study would not view the campus environment positively. Latrice was initially very excited about the possibility of attending an HBCU, but changed her mind because of procedural inefficiencies. Finding out more about the perceptions this group has toward HBCUs could be a step in the right direction for increasing enrollment

on these campuses and adding to the support for continued relevance of these institutions, which Harris (2012) identified as a challenge for HBCUs.

Though the basic concept of intersectionality was used to frame this research, I did not explore how participants' multiple identities contributed to privilege and oppression within their various environments (Crenshaw, 1991). Additional probing should take place to find out how African American women's race, class, gender, cultural background, and other identities play into the types of privilege and oppression they encounter in the college choice process.

The interviews for this study were conducted approximately 12-18 months after participants made their college choice. In future studies, it is recommended to complete interviews during students' college choice process, or within the first semester of their college experience. Since at least a year had passed, some of the women were not able to remember all of the details of their choice process (e.g., the names of all the institutions to which they applied). A shorter timeframe may provide additional data because the women can better remember the details of their choice process.

Overall, the women in this study appeared to have positive college choice experiences. The support from family and friends, along with receiving information from the high schools, was beneficial as participants moved through the search process and made a final decision about college attendance. High school and college staff members must understand the unique characteristics these students bring to the table and how they work together as students make decisions. The needs of this group should be recognized as different from those of other groups of students. Though the differences may be small, they can have a large influence in the end.

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APPENDIX A.
STUDENT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

UofL Institutional Review Boards IRB NUMBER: 13.0109 IRB APPROVAL DATE: 11/06/2013 IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/17/2014

Greetings!

You are invited to participate in a research study about African American women who chose to attend a predominantly White university instead of an historically Black university. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Louisville. The title of my dissertation is “Sistahs With Voices: Influences that Affected the College Choice of High-Achieving African American Women Who Chose to Attend a Predominantly White Institution Instead of an Historically Black College or University.” My goal is to determine who or what was most influential in your decision to attend the University of Louisville. I also hope to learn how and why those things were most influential to your college choice.

If you are interested in joining this study, you will be asked to complete and return a short questionnaire to verify you meet the selection criteria. If selected, you will be asked to participate in one individual interview. You will also be asked to provide the name and contact information for the person most influential in your college choice. This person will be contacted for an individual interview to provide additional insight into your college choice process. The interviews will last approximately 75 minutes. Interviews will take place at a time and location convenient for you.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question with which you do not feel comfortable. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason, without consequences.

Student participants who complete all parts of the study will receive a \$10 gift card. This amount will be prorated for those who do not fully complete the study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me by phone or email (addunc01@louisville.edu). Thank you for providing your time to this project and I look forward to working together with you.

Sincerely,
Angela D. Duncan, Co-Investigator
Dr. Michael J. Cuyjet, Principal Investigator

APPENDIX B
Subject Informed Consent Document
(Student)

UofL Institutional Review Boards
IRB NUMBER: 13.0109
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 11/06/2013
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/17/2014

**SISTAHS WITH VOICES: INFLUENCES THAT AFFECTED THE COLLEGE
CHOICE OF HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO
CHOSE TO ATTEND A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION INSTEAD
OF AN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY**

Investigator(s) name & address:

Dr. Michael J. Cuyjet, Principal Investigator
University of Louisville
Porter College of Education, Room 313
Louisville, KY 40292

Angela D. Duncan, Co-Investigator
University of Louisville
Porter College of Education, Room 386
Louisville, KY 40292

Site(s) where study is to be conducted:

University of Louisville

Phone number for subjects to call for questions:

Angela D. Duncan

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Michael J. Cuyjet, Ed.D and Angela D. Duncan, Doctoral Candidate. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Educational & Counseling Psychology, Counseling, and College Student Personnel. The study will take place at the University of Louisville. Approximately 10 subjects will be invited to participate.

Initials_____ Date_____

Page 1 of 4

DATE WRITTEN: 10/31/2013

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine which factors were most influential in African American women's decisions to attend a predominantly White institution instead of an historically Black college or university. I also hope to learn how and why those factors were most influential to their college choice.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to determine if you meet the selection criteria for this study. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. If you meet the selection criteria, you will be asked to answer questions in one individual interview. The individual interview will last approximately 75 minutes. You will also be asked to provide the name and contact information for the person most influential in your college choice. This person will be contacted for an individual interview to provide additional insight into your college choice process. The interview will be audio recorded. You will be asked to review written transcripts after the session. You will also be asked to review the analysis pertaining to your case once it is written. You may decline to answer any questions that may make you uncomfortable. The total length of this study is 30 days.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions. **There may also be unforeseen risks.**

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include an opportunity to share your experiences, adding to the body of knowledge about students' college choice. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Compensation

At the conclusion of the study, you will be given a \$10 gift card for your time while you are in this study. Per Human Subjects Protection Program Office policy (see U of L Investigator's Guide), compensation must be prorated for individuals who withdraw prior to the full completion of the study. Individuals who only complete the demographic questionnaire and interview will be given a \$5 gift card. Those who also review the interview transcripts and analysis of their case will be given the full \$10 gift card. Because you will be paid to be in this study the University of Louisville must collect your name, address, social security number, ask you to sign a W-9 form, and keep records of how much you are paid. You may or may not be sent a Form 1099 by the University. This will only happen if you are paid \$600 or more in one year by the University. We are required by the Internal Revenue Service to

collect this information and you may need to report the payment as income on your taxes.

This information will be protected and kept secure in the same way that we protect your other private information. If you do not agree to give us this information, we can't pay you for being in this study. You can still be in the study even if you don't want to be paid.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and Human Subjects Protection Program Office.
Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP),
Office of Civil Rights

The data will be stored and secured at the home of the co-investigator in a secured area for up to three years after the completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study.

Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the principal investigator at 502-852-0628.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the

institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

This paper tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature means that this study has been discussed with you, that your questions have been answered, and that you will take part in the study. This informed consent document is not a contract. You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a signed copy of this paper to keep for your records.

Signature of Subject/Legal Representative

Date Signed

Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form
(if other than the Investigator)

Date Signed

Signature of Investigator

Date Signed

LIST OF INVESTIGATORS

Dr. Michael J. Cuyjet
Angela D. Duncan

PHONE NUMBERS

502-852-0628

Initials_____ Date_____

APPENDIX C.
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name_____

Do you have a preferred alias? _____

Current University_____

High School Name and
Location_____

High School Graduation Date_____

Gender_____ Race/Ethnicity_____

1. From what type of high school did you graduate? (circle one)
Public School
Public Charter School
Public Magnet School
Private Religious/Parochial School
Private Independent College-Prep School
Home school
2. How would you describe your high school's location? (circle one)
Urban
Suburban
Rural
3. What is the highest level of education your mother obtained? (circle one)
Not sure
Less than high school
High School Diploma
Some College
Associate's Degree
Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree
Ph.D./Ed.D.
Professional Degree (M.D./D.M.D./J.D.) (medical/law degree)
Other (please specify)_____

4. What is the highest level of education your father obtained? (circle one)
 Not sure
 Less than high school
 High School Diploma
 Some College
 Associate's Degree
 Bachelor's Degree
 Master's Degree
 Ph.D./Ed.D.
 Professional Degree (M.D./D.M.D./J.D.) (medical/law degree)
 Other (please specify)_____
5. How would you classify your family income level? (circle one)
 Low
 Middle
 Upper-Middle
 Upper
6. Did you consider both historically Black and predominantly White colleges and universities in your college choice? (circle one) Yes No
7. Based on your high school GPA, were you eligible to receive one of your university's top academic scholarships? (i.e., 3.5 or above)*
 (circle one) Yes No
8. Based on your ACT score, were you eligible to receive one of your university's top academic scholarships? (i.e., 25 or above)* (circle one) Yes No
9. Based on your SAT score, were you eligible to receive one of your university's top academic scholarships? (i.e., 1130 or above)* (circle one) Yes No
10. Are you able to identify and provide contact information for one or two people you consider most influential to your decision to attend your current university?
 (circle one) Yes No

*Top academic scholarships include the full scholarship at Metro. You did not have to receive the scholarship.

APPENDIX D.

STUDENT INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

(partially adapted from McDonough, 1991 and Perez, 2007)

This interview is being conducted as part of a research study regarding influences that affected the college choice of high-achieving, African American women attending PWI instead of an HBCU. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time. You may also choose not to answer questions with which you do not feel comfortable. Your responses will be confidential and will not be connected directly to you when reported. You have received a consent form to sign, which indicates your consent to participate in this interview. This interview will be digitally-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. I'd first like to ask you about your college choice process. What is the earliest time you can remember thinking about going to college?
 - a. Tell me more about the experience.
 - b. When did you first start your college search?
 - c. Tell me about the circumstances that encouraged you to begin your search.
 - d. Who did you talk to about college your college plans?
 - e. What expectations were communicated by family? Peers? School? Others?
 - i. What role did those expectations have on your college plans?
 - f. How did your [race, gender, and/or SES] influence the colleges you considered, applied to, and ultimately attended?
 - g. Did gender, race, SES positively or negatively influence your college choice? Please give examples.
 - h. Did you have any other alternative plans besides going to college?
 - i. If so, tell me about those plans.
2. Where did you look for information about colleges?
 - a. What types of information did you find?
 - b. Who provided you with the information?
 - c. What type of information was most useful?
 - d. What type of information was least useful?
 - e. What were your thoughts about where you wanted to go to college? (specific schools; characteristics)
3. What people in your life have helped in your college choice?
 - a. Who has been most influential?
 - b. Tell me more about how each person has been influential?
 - c. How did your parents influence your college choice?

- i. Siblings?
 - ii. Peers?
 - iii. Others?
- 4. Next I want to ask about the different colleges and universities you considered.
 - a. To how many colleges or universities did you submit an application for admission?
 - i. What are the names of the institutions?
 - b. How did you come up with the list?
 - c. To which colleges did your closest friends apply?
 - d. Why did you choose the same colleges?
 - e. Why did you choose different colleges?
- 5. Now, I want to ask about your consideration of both HBCUs and PWIs
 - a. When did you first consider attending an HBCU?
 - b. Who did you talk to about this option?
 - c. What drew you towards HBCUs?
 - d. When did you first consider attending a PWI?
 - e. Who did you talk to about this option?
 - f. What drew you towards PWIs?
- 6. Were you able to visit both HBCU and PWI campuses prior to making your college choice?
 - a. If so, how did you feel on each campus?
- 7. Ultimately, what made you decide to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU?
- 8. I want to ask about your decision to attend Metro.
 - a. Did this university have something special you found attractive?
 - i. If so, what was it?
 - b. What was the primary reason you decided to attend this institution?
 - i. Secondary reasons?
 - c. If you could go back to senior year in high school, would you choose this institution again?
 - i. Why or why not?
- 9. What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were applying to colleges?
- 10. What advice do you have for female, African American high school students making decisions about college?
- 11. I would like to interview the person who was most influential in your college choice to better understand their thoughts about college and their expectations for you.
 - a. May I contact him or her? If so, please provide his or her name and

contact information.

12. Do you have any questions? Is there anything else you would like to share?
13. As I begin to analyze the data I have collected, may I contact you if I have follow up questions?

This concludes the interview. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. Within the next two weeks you will receive an email with a copy of the transcript for this interview. You are asked to review the transcript and provide any clarification you feel is needed. Once data analysis is complete, you will receive a copy to review.

APPENDIX E.

INFLUENTIAL PERSON INTERVIEW GUIDE (partially adapted from McDonough, 1991)

This interview is being conducted as part of a research study regarding people, contexts, and experiences influential to the college choice of African American women attending a PWI instead of an HBCU. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time. You may also choose not to answer questions with which you do not feel comfortable. Your responses will be confidential and will not be connected directly to you when reported. You have received a consent form to digitally sign and return, which indicates your consent to participate in this interview. This interview will be tape-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you verbally consent to participate in this study?

1. What is your relationship to [insert student name]?
2. Did you go to college?
 - a. If so, where?
 - b. What degree(s) did you receive?
3. When did you first think about [insert student name] going to college?
4. What made you start thinking about this? (probe for grades, everyone does, personal expectations)
5. When did you first talk to [insert student name] about going to college?
6. What expectations did you have for [insert student name] regarding college?
7. Did anyone talk to you about [insert student name] going to college?
 - a. If so, who?
8. What were your thoughts on where you wanted [insert student name] to go to college? (probe for specific colleges, appropriate choices, local/distant, type of institution)
9. How did you come up with the list?
10. Did those schools have something special you found attractive for [insert student name]?

- a. If so, what things did you find attractive?
- 11. What role did you play in the application process?
- 12. How often did you and [insert student name] talk about college?
- 13. Now, I want to ask about your thoughts of both HBCUs and PWIs.
 - a. What are your thoughts about [insert student name] attending a PWI instead of an HBCU?
 - b. What benefits, if any, do you think she is gaining by attending a PWI?
 - c. What drawbacks, if any, do you think she will have as a result of attending a PWI?
 - d. Ultimately, what are your thoughts about [insert student name]'s decision to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU?
- 14. Do you have any questions? Is there anything else you would like to share?
- 15. As I begin to analyze the data I have collected, may I contact you if I have follow up questions?

This concludes the interview. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. Within the next two weeks you will receive an email with a copy of the transcript for this interview. You are asked to review the transcript and provide any clarification you feel is needed. Once data analysis is complete, you will receive a copy to review.

APPENDIX F.
Subject Informed Consent Document
(Influential Person)

UofL Institutional Review Boards
IRB NUMBER: 13.0109
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 11/06/2013
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/17/2014

**SISTAHS WITH VOICES: INFLUENCES THAT AFFECTED THE COLLEGE
CHOICE OF HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO
CHOSE TO ATTEND A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION INSTEAD
OF AN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY**

Investigator(s) name & address:

Dr. Michael J. Cuyjet, Principal Investigator
University of Louisville
Porter College of Education, Room 313
Louisville, KY 40292

Angela D. Duncan, Co-Investigator
University of Louisville
Porter College of Education, Room 386
Louisville, KY 40292

Site(s) where study is to be conducted:

University of Louisville

Phone number for subjects to call for questions:

Angela D. Duncan

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Michael J. Cuyjet, Ed.D and Angela D. Duncan, Doctoral Candidate. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Educational & Counseling Psychology, Counseling, and College Student Personnel. The study will take place at the University of Louisville. Approximately 10 subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine which factors were most influential in African American women's decisions to attend a predominantly White institution instead of an historically Black college or university. I also hope to

Initials_____ Date_____

Page 1 of 3

DATE WRITTEN: 10/31/2013

learn how and why those factors were most influential to their college choice.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to answer questions in one individual interview. The individual interview will last approximately 75 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded. You will be asked to review written transcripts after the session. You will also be asked to review the analysis pertaining to your case once it is written. You may decline to answer any questions that may make you uncomfortable. The total length of this study is 30 days.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions. **There may also be unforeseen risks.**

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include an opportunity to share your experiences, adding to the body of knowledge about the perceptions of those who were most influential to an African American woman's decision to attend a predominantly White institution instead of an historically Black college or university. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and Human Subjects Protection Program Office.

Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP),
Office of Civil Rights

The data will be stored and secured at the home of the co-investigator in a secured area for up to three years after the completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

Initials_____ Date_____

Page 2 of 3

DATE WRITTEN: 10/31/2013

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Date Signed

Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form
(if other than the Investigator)

Date Signed

Signature of Investigator

Date Signed

LIST OF INVESTIGATORS

Dr. Michael J. Cuyjet
Angela D. Duncan

PHONE NUMBERS

502-852-0628

Initials_____ Date_____

APPENDIX G.
THEORY-GENERATED AND IN VIVO CODES

Theory-Generated Codes	In Vivo Codes
High school type	Participation in community group
Parental educational level	Location
Socioeconomic status	Predisposition
Availability of academic major/program	
Friend, family, and/or mentor connection to an HBCU	
Parental influence based on gender	
Scholarship availability	

CURRICULUM VITAE

Angela D. Duncan

E-mail : a.d.duncan@netzero.com

EDUCATION

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling and Personnel Services

December 2013

Emphasis: College Student Personnel

Dissertation Title: Sistahs with Voices: Influences that Affected the College Choice of High-Achieving African American Women Who Chose to Attend a PWI instead of an HBCU

Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH

Master of Arts in College Student Personnel

May 2008

Thesis Title: African American Students' Satisfaction with Academic Advising at an Ohio Community College

Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY

Bachelor of Science in Accounting

December 2002

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Washburn University, Topeka, KS

Assistant Director of Admissions

July 2013-Present

- Supervise, train, and evaluate Operations and Communication Coordinator, Transfer Admissions Counselor, and Web/Social Media Manager
- Oversee admissions student record processing area including ensuring prompt processing of student documents and determine staff training needs
- Manage transfer recruitment activities, including planning travel in a specific territory to attend transfer fairs, private visits to community colleges, and attend Phi Theta Kappa chapter meetings
- Contact transfer and returning students by phone and email to generate applications and assist with the admissions process
- Evaluate applications for admission, make admissions decisions, and recommend students for scholarships
- Complete unofficial transcript evaluations for transfer students
- Assist with planning and execution of admissions events, including Ichabod Transfer Days and community college advisor luncheons
- Act as liaison to education and kinesiology departments, the Leadership Institute, Multicultural Affairs, and the softball team
- Chair search committee for the Web/Social Media Manager and serve on the search committee for the Transfer Admissions Counselor

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

Doctoral Fellow

August 2010-June 2013

- Coordinated CSP Preview Days for prospective master's and doctoral students
- Maintained a list of prospective students and sent emails regarding application deadlines, program updates, graduate assistantship opportunities, and special events
- Maintained an internship database for current students
- Worked with program advisor to conduct a replication study regarding new student affairs professionals' competencies
- Coordinated a team to conduct an assessment of the M.Ed. program based on the 2009 CAS Standards

Developing Campus Leadership Instructor

August 2011-April 2013

- Led a team of instructors in developing syllabus and lesson plans
- Worked with team to examine leadership issues with current and prospective student leaders based on Komives', Lucas', & McMahon's *Relational Leadership Model*
- Helped students recognize and understand their leadership styles by identifying their temperaments and strengths using the *Keirsey Temperament Sorter-II* and *StrengthsQuest*
- Helped students develop their leadership skills through a variety of activities

Teaching Assistant—College Student Subcultures

August 2012-December 2012

- Assisted instructor with developing syllabus and identifying required articles relevant to class discussion
- Monitored weekly discussion board posts and helped identify topics for in-class discussions
- Reviewed completed assignments and assisted with grading

Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY

Doctoral Intern—Academic Resource Center

September 2012-April 2013

- Attended weekly retention meetings with representatives from the academic resource center, financial aid, residence life, and institutional research
- Contacted and met with second-year students who were on academic probation to establish a plan for bringing their grade point averages above probation level and provided additional support
- Followed-up with other second-year students and second-semester freshmen who indicated on their MAP-Works™ survey a risk of leaving the institution
- Participated in weekly financial aid appeal meetings

The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH

Hall Director

July 2008-June 2010

- Served as live-in director and supervisor of one residence hall comprised of approximately 400 full-time undergraduate students
- Selected, trained, supervised, and evaluated a staff of 12 resident assistants and one graduate assistant hall director
- Trained and supervised one full-time clerical specialist
- Acted as a student conduct officer and recommended the appropriate educational sanctions based on University policy.
- Responded to emergencies as a campus-wide, on-call professional
- Managed hall programming budget
- Assisted students and staff with personal and professional issues

Owens Community College, Findlay, OH

Part-time Enrollment Services Advisor

June 2006-May 2008

- Interpreted ACT/SAT scores, college transcripts, and/or placement test scores to determine appropriate courses for students
- Advised students on college policies/procedures, general education requirements, and major courses
- Planned and participated in recruiting events, such as college fairs, high school visits (responsible for 19 schools), career days, campus visits, and open registration
- Participated in the Student Success Mentor Program committee, including writing a grant to hire a manager to provide direct leadership for the mentors
- Supervised 5 student workers
- Assisted with ACT site administration/proctoring

Queens University of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC

Assistant Director of Admissions

July 2005-May 2006

Admissions Counselor

July 2003-June 2005

- Managed geographic territory and planned travel schedule, including more than 90 college fairs and private visits to high schools
- Contacted more than 1000 students by phone and email to generate applications and assist with the college search process
- Evaluated applications for admission and made recommendations to the admissions committee
- Conducted more than 150 individual campus visits per year
- Educated students (adult, high school, and transfer) and their parents about the admissions process
- Acted as liaison to business and communication departments, and general education faculty

PUBLICATIONS

- Cuyjet, M. J., & Duncan, A. D. (2013, November). The impact of cultural competence on the moral development of student affairs professionals. *Journal of College & Character*, 14(4), 1-9. doi: 10.1515/jcc-2013-0039
- Duncan, A. D. (2008). Adult learners: Supporting this growing population of students. In C. Palmer, J. Bonnet, & J. L. Garland (Eds.), *Serving adult learners: A handbook for effective practice*. College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs.

PRESENTATION

- Duncan, A. D. (panel member, 2013, March). *By Us, For Us: Professional Development for Black Women in the Academy*. The 2013 NASPA Annual Conference, Orlando, FL.

MEMBERSHIPS

NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

2006-Present

The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi

Inducted 2008

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

1999-Present