

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE: A MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL
STUDY OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND INFLUENCE

by

GRALON ALMONT JOHNSON

B.S., University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, 2009

M.P.S., University of Arkansas William Jefferson Clinton School of Public Service, 2011

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Perceptions of family influence as a source of motivation to attend college were explored. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to investigate how, and in what ways, families shaped the pathway to higher education among 12 African American male collegians. Comparisons of these perceptions across family compositions and an extant model of family influence and college choice were also explored. The students in this study attended both public and private 4-year historically Black and predominantly White colleges situated throughout seven states in the Midwest and the South. A phenomenological qualitative research approach was employed to forward this study. Also, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) techniques were applied to data gleaned from face-to-face interviews. Results of the study revealed two overarching themes of family influence and college choice for African American males: (1) deliberate family involvement and (2) contextual family influences. Eight subthemes illuminate the overarching theme deliberate family involvement: (1) emphasizing hard work, (2) aiding with pre-college paperwork, (3) offering messages about value of college, (4) supporting extra-curricular activities, (5) encouraging positive decision-making, (6) cultural indoctrination, (7) providing affirming words and praise, and (8) regular accessibility. Four subthemes buttress the overarching theme contextual family influence: (1) family educational choices, (2) family participation, (3) family representation and reactions, and (4) family stress. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are also presented.

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Approved by:

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Karen S. Myers-Bowman, Ph.D.

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Dedication

For my parents – Gregory Sr. and Sonya – in your manifold sacrifices...

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“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

God:

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“We walk through this wide world with peace and with courage; we gained while we sat at thy sanctified seat...”

(Excerpt from UAPB Alma Mater)

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Humbly, I am

Gralon Almont Johnson, Ph.D.

CHAPTER I -

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.
The Holy Bible, King James Version, Proverbs 22:6

In Hebrew, the word for “train up” is *hanak* and refers to the careful nurturing and instructing of children, in accordance with their own capacity, unique personality and giftedness (Hildebrandt, 1988). According to Swindoll (2006), each child has a “way,” a characteristic manner that distinguishes him or her from all other children, including brothers and sisters. Still, at the heart of this process was the inculcation of fundamental beliefs, values, attitudes, and social mores, which would guide all children as they chose a path in the transition to adulthood (Berns, 2012; Kauffman, 1989). Today, this process is similarly described in scholarly texts. Specifically, in the context of the aforementioned proverb on childrearing, “to train” refers to what is generally known as socialization (Berns, 2012; Swindoll, 2006). Berns (2012) defined socialization as the process by which individuals “acquire the knowledge, skills, and character traits that enable them to participate as effective members of groups and society” (p. 6). This process begins at birth and continues throughout the lifespan. The responsibility for the child, particularly in the formative years, is on his or her parents. Thus, the family is the first and principal agent of socialization.

Parents are primarily responsible for orchestrating socialization, both within the home and the larger communal environment, which establishes the conditions for other important development-enhancing experiences for children (Ladd & Pettit, 2002). A clear example of this can be seen in how parents academically socialize their children. Among the many powerful predictors of students’ academic performance, aspirations, and decision-making are factors such

as engaging in bedtime reading and other home literacy activities (Fiese, Foxley, & Spagnola, 2006), selecting developmentally appropriate toys (Bradley, 2002), whether and how parents articulate their value of education (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007), parental education level (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004; Tavani & Losh, 2003), the amount of language directed to their children (Guralnick, 2006), helping with homework at home (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007), and parental-school involvement (Hill et al., 2004).

Context of the Study

The family's role in academically socializing or "training up" children varies across racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Hill et al., 2004; Yeh & Hunter, 2005). For African American families, dated works have accused them of being uninvolved or disinterested in the outcomes or educational processes of their children (Blackwell, 1975; Lewis & Looney, 1983; Rudwick, 1971; Staples, 1976; TenHouten, 1970). Nevertheless, over the last 20 years, an extant body of literature has emerged that counters the uninvolved narrative, highlighting the belief of African American families in the role and power of education (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Baugh & Coughlin, 2012; Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Brown & Hurst, 2004; Dancy, 2012; Freeman, 2005; Harvey, 2002; McAdoo, 2006; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Vernon-Feagans, Miccio, Manlove, & Hammer, 2001). African Americans have always placed a high value on education, considering it to be a primary asset of empowerment (Cuyjet, 2006; Freeman, 2005; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997).

Education is the medium through which African American families have found their place in life, a place that they persistently endeavor to transmit to their children (Billingsley, 1992; Freeman, 2005; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010). In fact, there is empirical consensus that revealed that the family, church, and community form a trinity to shape

the African American educational experience in the United States (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Baugh & Coughlin, 2012; Harper, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014). The understanding is that the African American family is the fountainhead from which academic development and epigenetic transfigurations occur (Brown & Hurst, 2004). Home life is subsequently extended to community factions like the church, which furthers African American children's intellectual grounding through Sunday schools and pageants where oration and aptitude are necessary (Allen, 1992; Anderson, 1988; Baugh & Coughlin, 2012; Brown & Hurst, 2004). The general thought continues to be that each generation should transcend the preceding one in terms of educational, social, economic, and political attainment (Bell-Tolliver, Burgess, & Brock, 2009). To achieve higher heights, these families have always maintained a deep historical and cultural belief in the effectiveness of a college education (Freeman, 2005; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007).

Need for the Present Study

In the 21st century, many American families, teachers, educational administrators, and policymakers believe that every person in a modern society should acquire some form of post-secondary education and training (Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). A college education continues to be regarded as the most certain path to economic stability and individual fulfillment (Chambers, 2009; Sledge, 2012). For example, increased levels of post-secondary education often led to greater career mobility, higher salaries, and increased quality of life (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Perna & Titus, 2005; Wolf, 2002). Additionally, employers have progressively used academic degrees as a means of screening applicants (Wolf, 2002). Further, a range of scholars averred that those who eventually choose to attend college are more likely than those who do not to be knowledgeable about things that have a direct impact on their day-to-day

adult and familial experiences (e.g., handling family finances, raising children, making informed decisions about a spouse, knowing how to read a lease, understanding how the markets can impact their retirement accounts, etc.) (Blau, 2001; Dahl & Lochner, 2012; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Wolf, 2002). Therefore, it is clear that the decisions students make about their post-high school plans, particularly concerning education, have an enduring impact on their lives (Barnett, 2004; Brown & Hurst, 2004; Harper, 2012; Herndon & Moore, 2002). Consequently, the need to develop a thorough understanding of the factors that influence college attendance becomes abundantly clear.

For all students, conceptualizing and ultimately deciding to attend college is a major step. When negotiating this consequential decision, students consider myriad factors (Harper, 2012; Sledge, 2012). Considerable attention has been paid to unpacking the variables that students navigate on their way to higher education (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Bergerson, 2009; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Strayhorn, 2008; Wesley & Southerland, 1994). This developmental process in which a student ultimately decides whether and where to attend college is generally referred to as college choice (Bergerson, 2009; Freeman, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). By and large, much of what is known about college choice has been buttressed by the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice that organized the process into three stages: predisposition, search, and choice (Chapter III provides a more detailed description of these stages). Though factors can vary widely by demographics, class level, and institution type, the most common factors cited as mattering to students when ruminating college choice have been relatively consistent: involvement from family, tuition cost, personalized attention from institution prior to enrollment, academic reputation, institution size, geographic location, campus aesthetics, and availability of

financial aid (Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob, & Cummings, 2004; Sledge, 2012). While having this knowledge is important to understand the elements that impact enrollment decisions, a critical void exists in the research literature: no extant study has investigated the college choice process with the family as the primary unit of analysis, despite the constancy of findings that have ranked family support and involvement as one of the best predictors of students' postsecondary plans. Furthermore, while existing work has effectively captured the college choice process among White student samples, similar efforts for African American students are sparsely found in the literature.

Accordingly, in order to fill the existing gaps in the literature, the purpose of this study was to investigate what African American families actually do to shape the trajectory towards and enrollment into college, specifically among male collegians. More directly, the current study employed a qualitative approach to build on extant research in three important ways: (1) it examined the influence of family on racially/ethnically diverse individuals; (2) it commenced a scholarly understanding of the influence of family on the pre-college experiences of a disproportionately underrepresented population of college students (African American males); and (3) it thematically captured the influence of family among African American male students who have successfully enrolled in college. In the following sections, I first identify the rationale to concentrate the study on African American men. Subsequently, I position myself in the socio-cultural experience of African American families and college choice. The research questions that directed this study were:

1. How, and in what ways, do African American male collegians perceive the family's role in the decision to pursue higher education?

2. How do perceptions of family influences compare to those identified in the Freeman (2005) typology of family influence and African American students' college choice?
3. How do perceptions of family influences compare across various family compositions?

Focus on African American Male Collegians

As the United States moves further into the 21st century, and competition for available jobs in the global marketplace is more intense than ever, the question of equality of educational opportunity remains of paramount importance. Are African Americans being properly prepared to meet the challenges of this emergent world? Data would suggest not. Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, there has been notable increase in African American enrollment in higher education institutions (Kena et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the representation of African American students in higher education is not proportionate to their representation in the general population (Brown & Hurst, 2004; Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). African Americans make up 13% of the total U.S. population, but only 10.6% of the students enrolled in higher education, while their White counterparts make up nearly 65% of college student enrollment (Harper, 2012). When accounting for gender, African American males' degree attainment—across all levels of postsecondary education (e.g., associates, bachelor's, master's, first professional, doctorate) is disturbingly low, particularly in contrast to their same-race female counterparts.

In his report entitled *Black male student success in higher education: A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study*—the largest ever qualitative research study on Black undergraduate men – Dr. Shaun Harper (2012) asserted that in 2002, Black men made up only 4.3% of students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the exact same proportion as in 1976. More alarming, Harper's report also showed that of all bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans in 2009, only 34.1% were male while 65.9% were female. Moreover, African

American male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education.

The disproportionately low number of African American males in higher education has been a serious concern for some time (Brown & Hurst, 2004; Clark & Crawford, 1992; Freeman, 2005). For example, colleges and universities, specifically predominantly White institutions (PWIs)¹, have been seeking ways to recruit more minority students (Brown & Hurst, 2004; Dancy, 2012; Kunjufu, 2001; Strayhorn, 2008). To do so, these institutions have turned to college choice research and theoretical models to understand how students make decisions about attendance (Strayhorn, 2013). Unfortunately, institutions face considerable challenges understanding this experience for African American males as “these men exist, but their stories of achievement are rarely solicited” (Harper, 2012, p. 13). This must improve if family practitioners, researchers, educators, policymakers, and others concerned are to make serious strides toward understanding who and what fosters African American men’s pathway to higher education.

The Pen and Positionality: Relation of Self to the Topic

*This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

William Shakespeare

The concept of positionality situates researchers’ reflection of themselves within various contexts and socially significant identities as markers of their relational position to a study (Bourke, 2014; Takeda, 2012). In other words, it enables the investigator to clearly articulate the

¹ According to Brown and Dancy (2010), Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning where White students account for 50% or more of the enrollment population. The majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions because of the binarism and exclusion sustained by the U.S. prior to 1964.

lens through which he or she construes a social world (Beverly, 2011). According to Bourke (2014), positionality often serves to inform a research study as opposed to invalidating it as biased. This is because, as Maher and Tetreault (2001) explained, “knowledge is valid when it takes into account the knower’s specific position in any context, a position always defined by gender, race, class and other socially significant dimensions” (p. 22). Moreover, positionality allows for a narrative discussion of the researcher’s attentiveness about how knowledge production is shaped by his or her own experiences, values, and beliefs. Accordingly, the following is my family’s own story. Specifically, the forthcoming narrative recounts the ways in which familial involvement, even under seemingly insurmountable odds, facilitated a pathway towards post-secondary education for my siblings and I.

My Roots

As a young child, the notion that my parents were “real people” with a life before my siblings and I were born was quite abstract. Even as they taught us the value of empathy and respect for others’ perspectives, in my formative years, I often struggled to humanize them as individuals with distinctive backgrounds. As an adult, I now realize that their idiosyncratic experiences were seminal to shaping their joint convictions about socialization, particularly in the area of education.

My mother, Sonya, is the youngest of 12 children and grew up in a one-parent home. Her parents separated when she was a toddler, and her father, Ulice Leatherberry, was non-residential throughout her school-aged years. My maternal grandmother, Alberta, supported their family by working in housekeeping for affluent, White families throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area. While my maternal grandmother was by no means among the well-to-do, she made a decent enough living to avoid public assistance programs. My mother was raised in a stringent religious

home environment, largely because her parents assumed leadership positions within their home church. For instance, her father was an associate Baptist minister, and her mother served in various clerical roles to their pastor until she eventually became chair of the church's Mother Board². Notwithstanding their involvement in the church, which necessarily involved a literate skill set, my maternal grandparents did not complete high school. In fact, my maternal grandmother often wrote out sermons for my maternal grandfather, whose formal education did not exceed primary school. Consequently, my mother and her siblings received no references to higher education as a part of their socialization or academic indoctrination. Her brothers, however, were expected to pursue military service, which is a route that they all took. Among her siblings, my mother was the only one to complete high school.

My father, Gregory (or Jack as he is colloquially known), also grew up in a one-parent home, having never met or known any details pertaining to his biological father. Raised in a household with seven other siblings, my father's familial background was marked by impoverishment. My paternal grandmother, Geraldine DuBois, did not complete secondary education. As a result, she was often without work. Therefore, their family regularly experienced bouts where their home was without electricity or heat. While his mother was a recipient of welfare, the aid was often insufficient to meet their critical sustenance needs. Given the severe nature of their social and economic predicament, my father and his siblings began to secure employment as soon as they were physically able. Under the circumstances, education often took a back-seat, especially among the males in my father's family. Like my mother's circumstances, talks of college were non-existent in my father's upbringing. While four of his siblings

² According to Peterson (2008), in predominantly Black church congregations, the Mother Board is "composed of women who have raised their children and have also shown a commitment to the church both in their participation in activities and financially" (p. 10). These "wise" women are generally over the age of 55 because age is celebrated as bringing status, respect, and prestige to women who have raised a child, whether biological or non-biological (Peterson, 2008).

completed high school (his three sisters and one younger brother), my father left during his junior year. However, in the semester he was slated to graduate from high school, my father successfully completed the General Educational Development (GED) exams.

The Early Years (1982-1990)

My parents made formal acquaintance in August of 1979 and were married three years later in September of 1982. By the time that they were wed, the eldest two of my siblings, Jacqueline (Jackie) and Tawnya, were born. My mother assumed the primary role for childrearing and managed all matters of the home. Undoubtedly, the home environment and academic socialization that my siblings and I grew up with reflected the headship and resilience of my mother. As early as age two, my mother began introducing each child to books, a practice that she was very adamant about. While we did not have very many books readily available in the small apartments that we initially occupied, we circulated the ones that we had acquired. We were attached to those brightly colored pages more than anything in the world, much like other toddlers are to teddy bears and toys. Fun, for my siblings and me, was learning to label items throughout the apartment by writing them out on index cards and sticking them to objects. Sesquipedalian words – those words containing many syllables – such as refrigerator, television, and countertop were among the many household items that we could say and correctly spell by the time we transitioned into pre-school.

Once we were in primary school, even our leisure time was occupied by educational activity such as watching educational programming (e.g., Sesame Street, Reading Rainbow, The Magic School Bus, Bill Nye the Science Guy) and creating short stories that our mother helped us to write. Rarely did my parents permit us to consume television content void of educational value. Additionally, weekend after weekend, our game of choice was “playing school” where we

took turns acting in the roles of teacher and pupil. My siblings and I created fictional curricula (usually by recycling old schoolwork), and taught lessons in reading, math, science, and art. Playing school was an activity that we maintained well into our adolescent years because the older siblings took pride in transferring their increased educational dexterity to the younger ones.

Perhaps the most powerful component of our academic socialization, however, transpired through what we called “Saturday Circles.” Each weekend, usually ranging from one to three hours, our mother assembled us in a semi-circle and shared her hopes for our future. Sometimes my father participated; nevertheless, my mother always facilitated these circles. The circles always opened with prayer and a church hymn. Subsequently, my mother told stories of her childhood and how having children of her own incited an unflinching commitment to our education. More specifically, my mother made it very clear that she and dad espoused more for us academically than they were able to achieve. Rearing us in this way, year after year, cultivated a spirit of unanimity among my siblings and me – a union marked by inexpressible feelings of responsibility to each other’s educational success.

During the early years, my father worked as a Certified Nurse Aid (now known as a Certified Nursing Assistant or CNA) to provide financially for the family. After the passing of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, nurse aids were created to meet rising demands in nursing homes and hospitals. Given the less rigid educational requirements at the time, coupled with the lack of standardized nurse aid performance procedures, swift placement of primary care providers ensued. For my father, the less austere educational requirements worked to his advantage and the GED was sufficient to transition into the burgeoning field. However, the expansion of roles for nurse assistants, coupled with heightened criticism from medical

associations regarding the unstandardization of training, warranted legislative changes in the existing practice laws for CNAs (Egenes, 2009).

The Challenging Years (1990-1996)

By the early 1990s, my father found himself unable to compete with the growing numbers of individuals with stronger educational credentials. Resultantly, after being released as a nurse aid, he did any work he could (e.g., maintenance for McDonalds, general warehouse work, gas station attendant, etc.) to financially sustain the family. Given the family's intensifying monetary needs, between having children, my mother began to engage in the "second shift," which Hochschild's (1989) classic volume described as employed women working a first shift in a paid occupation and subsequently working a second shift of child care and household tasks. Her mother's wit³ naturally lent itself to work mostly with in-home care agencies where she tended to the domestic needs of seniors and pediatric clients who were recovering after a hospital or facility stay. On most days, my mother brought the youngest children to work with her because she and my father were unable to afford child care. By 1996, the number of children in my family had grown to 12. Both of my parents struggled to maintain employment, and eviction hovered as a constant possibility for the family. We were extremely poor, and my parents were forced to apply for Section 8 housing vouchers, which pays a considerable portion of the rent and utilities in low-income households throughout the United States. The intergenerational cycle of poverty that my parents wanted so ardently to eradicate had become an undeniable reality for us.

At first, we found residence in the Arthur A. Blumeyer public housing projects in St. Louis. However, because of deferred maintenance throughout the decrepit complex, coupled with the area growing notoriously known for its high crime rates, my parents moved the family

³ Diamonds (1995) defined mother's wit as the directives of mothers to safeguard, nurture, and guide the activities of those under her care. According to Diamond, the maternal feelings and interpersonal skills of mother's wit are compulsory for all persons that provide primary care to the elderly.

to the JeffVanderLou (JVL) neighborhood. The decision to relocate the family to the JVL neighborhood provided us with improved schooling alternatives. Specifically, my siblings and I had access to magnet schools with specialized courses and curricula (e.g., visual and performing arts, JROTC, mathematics, science, and technology training, gifted and accelerated secondary education, and international studies). During these times, their commitment to our academic success remained a principal priority. They rarely missed a parent-teacher conference or a school function that we participated in (e.g., spelling bee, band performance, honor society induction, science fair competition, choir adjudication, etc.), even though it meant having to walk several miles to attend because we often did not have a vehicle. Further, in spite of the economic hardship, my parents were constantly on a quest to identify extracurricular choices that would supplement our educational exposure. Thus, we were required to become members of the Herbert Hoover Boys & Girls Club (now the Boys and Girls Club of Greater St. Louis), an organization that transformed our family's conceptualization of academic possibilities.

The Introduction to Higher Education Years (1996-2003)

Once my eldest sister, Jackie, approached her high school years, administrators from the Boys & Girls Club began discussing her potential for higher education with my parents. She had recently won the organization's highest membership award, and began to display serious vocal talent. Heeding the advisement of the Boys & Girls Club, my parents transferred her to a performing arts high school. When school instructors also took notice to Jackie's talent, they encouraged my parents to consider having her audition for college music scholarships. At the time, however, college was still rather esoteric to my mother and father. Consequently, they could not advise her on the mechanics of college enrollment (e.g., completing the admission application, campus visits for auditions, etc.). Fortunately, Jackie's choir instructor helped to

facilitate the process for my parents. By her senior year, she had been offered full music scholarships to Alabama A&M University and Florida A&M University (both historically Black institutions). In the following year, Tawnya had also been offered a full music scholarship to Alabama A&M.

My sisters' transition to college added a new layer to the academic foundation that had been established in our family. College became an active part of the socialization process in the Johnson home. Higher education was routinely associated with familial discourse. Also, any supplementary programming that we participated in (whether at the Boys & Girls Club or church), had to be marshaled by individuals who championed akin ideals about college. Thus, by the time that Greg (the third eldest) approached his senior year at the junior naval academy, the question that surfaced about attending college was simply a matter of *where* to attend. Inspired by the institutional ideologies, nurturing campus climate, and sense of identity and heritage described by our sister's, Greg was set on attending a historically Black institution as well. Thus, he enrolled and was granted admission to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) in the fall of 2003.

The Separation Years (2003-2007)

As the children were able to assume more responsibilities around the house, my mother began to work more hours, transitioning between child care facilities and in-home care. My father worked in hotel housekeeping, and subsequently at a nightclub. Collectively, we lauded the fact that for the first time in the family's pedigree – patrilineally and matrilineally – the Johnson's had sent the first male to college. However, nothing could have prepared us for the devastation that occurred the summer before my junior year of high school. Employment at the nightclub began to wane for my father, and family demands made it increasingly difficult for my

mother to balance a work-home load. While my family was no stranger to socioeconomic hardship, we had always endured it as a unit. However, by August of 2003, we found ourselves homeless. At the time, I was the second eldest of the children living with my parents. Like Greg, I attended the junior naval academy. Despite having a 3.9 grade point average and holding the highest cadet⁴ officer's rank among my class, I strongly contemplated not returning to high school. The anguish and mortification that my parents displayed was unbearable for me. Aware of the costs associated with dropping out (e.g., being unable to attend college), I began to actively search for employment in hopes of helping my parents to secure a new home.

My parents helped me to understand that dropping out of high school fundamentally countered every principle that they had imbued within us as children, and nullified every sacrifice that had been made over the years. I specifically remember my parents insisting that I considered the narratives I had always heard growing up – narratives that were organized around their profound desire for my siblings and me to attain higher academic, social, and economic heights. They made it clear to me that disrupting the pathway to post-secondary education was not only going to be impactful to my own life, but also to my younger siblings who were now looking up to me. Although mentally, emotionally, and physically difficult, my best friend's parents opened their home to me so that I could complete the school year.

For a provisional period, the rest of my family lived with my maternal grandmother. However, in order to make it easier for my younger siblings to get to school, my parents made the poignant decision to distribute my siblings among close family friends. Determined to reassemble the family as quickly as possible, my parents aggressively searched for employment. They eventually secured work at a motel where the owner agreed to permit them residence as

⁴ A cadet is a student or trainee in a military program (such as JROTC).

long as they were employed there. Gradually, my parents began to move my siblings into the motel with them. The fourth eldest, Gloria, decided to pursue postsecondary education in St. Louis so that she could help out around the motel. However, by my senior year, I had decided that I wanted to follow in Greg's footsteps – a practice that I had employed my entire life. Hence, with Greg's aid and my parent's blessing, I applied to UAPB and began classes in August of 2005. Even from afar, my parents provided critical emotional support to those of us who were in college. We talked almost daily, and the elder siblings routinely checked in on the younger ones to reinforce the value of college. When holiday breaks and summer vacation came around, we all lived and worked alongside our parents in the motel. While overcrowded in a lone motel room for nearly two years, my family found hope in the idea that education would someday afford us a better life.

The Reconnection Years (2007-Present)

By 2007, my sophomore year of college, my parents had saved enough to move the family back into a house. As the years progressed, and their stability slightly increased, my mother and father watched their children transition from high school-to-college graduates. Pursuing post-secondary education had become something of a rite of passage in our family – the definitive materialization of our parent's dreams. Also, due to advisement from mentors and collegiate professors, graduate school became part and parcel of the family's academic trajectory. In spite of the manifold obstacles that we encountered over the years, my siblings have all graduated high school, pursued some form of post-secondary training (with college being the principal choice), and started careers. We have attended and graduated from HBCUs and PWIs, both within and beyond the parameters of our home state. Exavier, the youngest of us

12, recently graduated from high school and will begin pursuing a college degree in Exercise Sciences.

In my estimation, the pathway to college for my siblings and me was predominantly shaped by family-related factors. Although non-family members were undeniably influential in supporting our journey, had it not been for the foundational seeds planted within our home, I tarry to assert that we would have made comparable post-secondary choices. My vacillation is largely because, among our extended family, with whom we spent a considerable portion of our formative years, the idea of college largely remains a mute subject and uncharted territory. Thus, my siblings and I were particularly fortunate to have had unrelenting academic inculcation from our parents, an experience research denoted is uncommon among first-generation college students whose parents often have “limited understanding of the college experience” (Hodge & Mellin, 2010, p. 131). Taken together, I have shared my story to position myself in this work by disclosing past-lived experiences and biases (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006). These reflections are offered to provide the context through which I understand how families shape the post-secondary plans of its offspring. In Chapter II, I situate the study in a rich historical context, which is necessary in order to clarify the distinctive reverence and esteem that African American families collectively espouse regarding education.

CHAPTER II -

(RE)FRAMING FAMILIAL INVOLVEMENT: A HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY'S QUEST FOR AND PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Education is the traditional opportunity through which Black families find their place in life. And having found it, they replicate their experience again and again through their children.

Andrew Billingsley

One of the most powerful supports for children's learning and development is family involvement. In research, promoting and supporting such participation among all families necessitates the production of a nuanced and sophisticated awareness not only of family processes and the outcomes associated with them, but also of the contextual factors that influence involvement, especially for ethnic minority families (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridgall, & Gordon, 2009). Accordingly, the ways in which African Americans participate in their family's education, across all levels, cannot be described or understood linearly. Indeed, their participation is rooted in a much larger historical context. It is a history of struggle and triumph. It is a history of a people descended from Africa who, even when it was dangerous or illegal to do so, aggressively pursued high-quality education and schooling to augment their social, political, and economic conditions. More specifically, this institution's history is one of agency and autonomy in which Black families, working in tandem with central community networks, endeavored to create and sustain their own academic institutions and programs. Hence, when considering the promises for a new era of educational involvement for African American families, especially in influencing the academic plans of its progeny, it is important to critically review the past.

Accordingly, in order to better understand the high premium that African American families' attach to participating in academic enculturation and decision-making today, this chapter chronicles the rich history of our journey to acquire education (across all levels). In a

general sense, the following queries are addressed in this chapter: (1) In what ways did the changing social and political climate in the United States influence how African Americans participate in their families' educational endeavors over time? (2) What kinds of obstacles have Black families faced regarding educational opportunities and what impact have they had? (3) What current sense of commitment and responsibility do African Americans have to their families as it pertains to their educational choices? While this chapter especially emphasizes historically noteworthy steps that Black families have made in terms of their involvement with, access to, and equity in higher education, it also underscores their experiences across foregoing levels of education (e.g., primary and secondary) in order to proffer a more fulsome and authentic representation of what was certainly a successive journey.

Pre-Transplantation: The African Family and their Indigenous Education

It will be found that education begins at the time of birth and ends with death. The child has to pass various stages of age-groupings with a system of education defined for every status in life. They aim at instilling into the children what the Gikuyu call "otaari wa mocie" or "kerera kia mocie," namely, educating the children in the family and clan tradition. Apart from the system of schools which has been introduced by the Europeans, there is no special school building in the Gikuyu sense of the word: the homestead is the school. . . . This is one of the methods by which the history of the people is passed from generation to generation.

Jomo Kenyatta (1961)

Across the African continent, societies were aggressively engaged in the process of transmitting and accumulating knowledge long before European invasion or colonization. In fact, scientific evidence reveals that the African continent has had one of the longest experiences with education, principally within family systems (Sudarska, 2006; Zulu, 2006). Educational goals were clear and structured, and remain inherent in many African childrearing cultures today (Zulu, 2006). Moreover, a historical examination of learning systems in Africa revealed that there were three major origins of educational practices within the continent: indigenous, Islamic-Arabic, and Western-Christian or Eurocentric (Gwanfogbe, 2012).

Lamentably, early pedagogical activity in Africa has been overshadowed in scholarship by fallacies which typecast the continent as historically illiterate, and/or by Eurocentric views that described the indigenous educational process as mostly informal (Agbemabiese, 2003; Zulu, 2006). Specifically, early European authors argued that since education necessarily involved writing, and original African education was essentially unrecorded prior to the foray of Islamic-Arabic educational systems, that meant no education existed (Marah, 2006). On the contrary, Fisher (2004) observed that some of the earliest written records revealed that formal education began in Northeastern African, in which basic communication skills, language, trading customs, and agricultural and religious practices were taught. In fact, Egyptian hieroglyphs remain as vestiges of such primordial learning systems (Fisher, 2004).

Nonetheless, some early European writers on general African customs went as far as to suggest that Africa, specifically South of the Sahara, was devoid of culture, history, or civilization (Marah, 2006). For example, Murray (1967) suggested that “outside Egypt there is nowhere indigenous history” (p. 14). Similarly, in Laurie’s (1907) seminal historical investigation of pre-Christian education, Sub-Saharan Africa was omitted from his analysis plan or exposition, because he postulated that Sub-Saharan Africa was primitive. Concurrently, Boas (1983) averred that early African communities were occupied by a people whose culture was meager and intellectually inconsistent, little diversified, simple, and homogeneous. In Boas’ estimation, what made a culture civilized was going beyond merely satisfying basic daily needs. Such thinking clearly reflected Western globalization ideas about structural adjustment and civilization.

The limitation of the aforementioned assertion is that it overlooked evidence to the contrary, particularly in both ancient Egypt and other regions of Africa. For example, Zulu

(2006) described the indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam or Eurocentrism. Specifically, he wrote that the transmission of values and the state of knowing or understanding gained through experience or study in Africa began in ancient Egypt about 3000 B.C. This early education was largely facilitated by priests and the intellectual elite within ancient Egyptian theocracy. They trained in the humanities and all subjects of the sciences, including mathematics and medicine, as well as in the applied sciences of engineering, architecture, and sculpturing (Lucas & Harris, 2012; Zulu, 2006). Indeed, the need for the continuation of these well-established civilizations made writing and formal education indispensable.

Beyond the Northeastern region of Africa, both past and contemporary scholars alike (e.g., Boateng, 1983; Brickman, 1963; Diop, 1978; Franklin, 2007; Gwanfogbe, 2012; Kenyatta, 1965; Mbiti, 1967; Obiti, 1973; Sudarska, 2006; Watkins, 1943), have described indigenous systems of African education prior to the coming of Islam and Christianity. For example, Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003), Diop (1978), Marah (2006), and other historians have underscored that Sub-Saharan Africa influenced the North African educational culture considerably. Specifically, in the classical text *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, Cheikh Anta Diop (1978) used archeological data to show that Kush (or Africa South of the Sahara) greatly influenced Egyptian civilization, and that the West African empires of Ghana, Songhai, Mali, and others contributed to the cultural unanimity of education across the continent. The inquiry of which region influenced which, and to what degree, of course warrants further examination (Marah, 2006).

Format, structure and content of Indigenous African Education

According to Zulu (2006), there has been the adverse tendency among contemporary Western scholars to discuss indigenous African education as a “stagnant, limited, and inoperative” paradigm (p. 36). This Western scholarship also generalized early African education as simplistic, thus neglecting to bring to light the myriad details of indigenous ways of knowing and their epistemologies (Zulu, 2006). The explanations often were predicated on the fact that there were no permanent school walls or credentialed teachers such as those found in the modern system (Okoro, 2010). While there was no solitary indigenous type of education or culture in pre-colonial Africa, there were important fundamentals shared across regions in regards to philosophical and sociological facets (Bray, 2000; Nunkunya, 2003; Zulu, 2006).

Prior to colonization, indigenous African education commonly included indoctrinating a sense of social responsibility to the home, village (community), or tribe among its young people (Marah, 2006; Nunkunya, 2003; Ociti, 1973; Okoro, 2010). In the broadest sense, traditional African systems of education were based on the values of preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism, and holism (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). These values can be understood as being embedded in the following cardinal goals identified by Fafunwa (1974): develop children’s physical and intellectual skills, instill reverence for elders and those in positions of authority, acquire a specific vocational training, actively participate in family and community affairs, and preserve the cultural and linguistic heritage of the ethnic community at-large. “Schooling” – or the acquisition of knowledge and skills, was not detached from other spheres of life (Marah, 2006). Thus, one’s social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational domains were all closely amalgamated (Marah, 2006).

As with most other societies, the education of the African child started at birth and continued into adulthood (Marah, 2006; Nunkunya, 2003). Children were socialized within their respective ethnic groups, and were expected to espouse the rules, rewards, and punishments of the ethnic community of which they were members (Marah, 2006). The family was the fountainhead of socio-political organization (Franklin & Moss, 1994). Throughout most of Africa, large clans (or groups of families) merged to form village states (Franklin & Moss, 1994). Thus, in the early years of life, the child's biological mother and extended family networks assumed the greatest role in their initial education, which included language training, social etiquette, and avoidance of affairs that the community held in contempt (Marrah, 2003; Nsamenang, 2004). In this arrangement, children were trained to live together harmoniously while practicing moderation, love for one's neighbor, and respect for authority (Ntahobari & Ndayiziga, 2005; Okoro, 2010)

Gender-role training was an integral component of an African child's early educational training and varied according to their capacities (Marrah, 2006). Specifically, boys were instructed in hunting, herding and raising cattle, fishing, agriculture, blacksmithing, and construction (Marrah, 2006). The education of girls often differentiated in accordance to the roles that they were expected to fill as mothers and wives (Marrah, 2006). Moreover, the education given to African youth prepared them for familial, agricultural, military, cultural, and political purposes in adulthood (Marrah, 2006). For example, given that most positions of authority were reserved for men, some of whom would go on to serve as kings of their localities depending upon nobility of origin or wealth, African boys also were taught to closely observe and imitate their father's craft (Marrah, 2006).

Oration was a critical educative device used in indigenous African societies. Oral narratives included riddles, poetry, folklore, chants and songs, dramas, proverbs and epigrams, and many other expressions (Bray, Clarke, & Stephens, 1998; Dei, 2002; Nukunya, 2003). Combined, these were composed for both the purposes of instruction and entertainment to transmit history, communicate political expressions, provide aesthetic pleasure, and teach ideal forms of conduct and morality (such as collective worldviews and identity) (Okafor, 2004). Children learned by listening to their elders and emulating them (Okafor, 2004). Education was transferred from generation to generation through this practice, eventually by esteemed stewards of oral tradition (Belcher, 2005; Finnegan, 2007; Mbiti, 1975). For instance, in West Africa these stewards were known as *griots* or “walking dictionaries” who served as genealogists and historians (Hale, 1998). Over time, griots held various other functions such as interpreters, diplomats, advisers to rulers, and mediators (Hale, 1998). All the same, the overarching aim remained to inaugurate youth into the philosophical and cultural values of the community (Marrah, 2006).

Another important vestige through which African children received education was through initiation ceremonies or rites of passage (Nukunya, 2003). Throughout Africa, initiation rites were used to recognize the passage from childhood to adulthood (Gwanfogbe, 2012). Boys and girls who were deemed poised for the responsibility of adulthood were evaluated for social, moral, intellectual, and practical proficiency among their peer cohorts (Gwanfogbe, 2012). The curriculum then, while tacit, was arranged in sequence to fit the anticipated milestones of different developmental stages that the culture recognized (Nsamenang, 2005). Their responses to rites of passage tests for integrity, concern for others, and endurance often were carefully assessed to determine apt vocational tracks (Adelunke, 2000; Gwanfogbe, 2012). Students who

excelled at these physical, emotional, and intellectual tests were commonly directed toward family leadership and priesthood, while those excelling in practical measurements were encouraged to cultivate their skills into specific trades (Gwanfogbe, 2012). Passage into manhood or womanhood was typically done separately as some societies involved circumcision (Gwanfogbe, 2012).

Prior to enslavement, African men and women maintained effective educational practices. African education was socially and culturally pertinent and practices were entrenched in family traditions. Given that education was integrated into African children's daily routines and the livelihoods of their family, parents – especially mothers – were empowered to be the first teachers and educators (Nsamenang, 2005). Nonetheless, African men, women, and children had their indigenous educational systems disrupted upon European subjugation and enslavement.

Education Shattered: African American Families in Post-Transplantation America

*I am the child they stole from the sand
Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.
I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea
carrying in my body the seed of the free.
I am the man who worked in the field
bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work I gave —
Children sold away from me, spouse sold, too.
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.*
Langston Hughes, excerpt from *The Negro Mother*

Historians have produced a breadth of important works on the domestic slave trade and its impact on Black families in early America. Among them are W. E. B. Dubois's (1896) *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, Fredric Bancroft's (1931) *Slave Trading in the Old South*, Michael Tadman's (1989) *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, Walter Johnson's (2001) *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market*,

Robert Gudmestad's (2003) *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade*, and various others. In this section, I review both classical and contemporary literature that explores the impact of slavery on early African Americans, their families, and their collective sense of being. Specifically, by discussing the functions of slavery, I underscore how this institution of systemic exploitation disrupted and reshaped African American families and, incidentally, their education. Hence, dehumanization is identified as disrupting these early African Americans chiefly by way of involuntary servitude and familial separation.

In indigenous African education, instruction was inextricably woven into everyday family affairs (Nsamenang, 2005). Children were educated in the family, strictly enculturated in traditional behavioral codes and sets of habits, expected to preserve the ethos of familialism, and were socialized to become an "integral entity indivisible in themselves, a distinct entity but not separated from others" (Sibisi, 1989, p. 65). Undeniably, the family considered it a sacred task to perform its duties correctly regarding the education of its tribe (Marrah, 2006). European slavery, nevertheless, disunited the African family and wholly restrained their ability to obtain any form of education on foreign terrain.

Bales (2000) defined slavery as the total control of one person by another for the purpose(s) of economic exploitation. For Africans in America, this control entailed the selling and purchasing of humans, often atrocious physical, emotional, and psychological violence, and exploitation for fiscal profits (Bales, 2000; Marable, 2001). Blackburn (1988) has argued that the slave was defined by the society from which he or she was excluded, and was subject to the authority of his or her master. The slave could not be a citizen of the empire in which he or she was owned. He or she was regarded as an outsider and without a supporting family (Bales, 2000).

In *Slavery in America*, Schneider and Schneider (2006) proffered a comprehensive analysis of the history, complexities and extent of African Americans' enslavement. Specifically, they defined and described the dehumanization of the enslaved. In their words, dehumanization was marked not only by the shock of capture, but also the "dreadful experience of coffles (slave processions), in which they traveled sometimes for hundreds of miles over periods of six months or more, enduring poor food, cold, and new diseases" (p. 10). In the cramped barracoons⁵ on the coast, incalculable numbers of Africans died due to malnutrition, unclean water, and disregard for their sanitation. Slavers callously disposed of Africans exhibiting conspicuous mutiny, physical ailments, dawdling, or any type of perceptible handicap. In many cases, this marked the beginning of familial dissolution for Africans in America.

Traumatized by confinement, African men, women, and children were plunged into repulsive, peculiar, and inhumanely packed surroundings (Schneider & Schneider, 2006). These captives were far removed from their homes and were largely inept at comprehending the language of their oppressors. Worst, was that several families (tribes) were mixed. Resultantly, they were often unable to understand one another (Davis, 2008). Moreover, African men and women were denied the emancipation that they relished in their native land in order to dehumanize and disempower them (Davis, 2008; Mercer, 1994). Ultimately, over the course of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, approximately 12.5 million Africans were sold into New World slavery, with nearly 400,000 being directly shipped to what became the United States (Gates, 2013).

⁵ A barracoon was a type of barracks used historically for the temporary confinement and transportation of slaves (Rodríguez, 1997).

Involuntary Servitude

Involuntary servitude was a palpable strategy employed by White slave owners to dehumanize the enslaved and lock them out of the flow of information (Williams, 2012). Indeed, the use of unpaid labor rested at the core of slavery in America. In the early 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to Africans as a cheap and copious labor source, as well as a less precarious choice over indentured servants or aboriginal natives (Schneider & Schneider, 2006). For example, given their knowledge of the landscape, Native Americans (or American Indians) proved unsatisfactory to Europeans as slaves, because regular escapes were much more achievable (Schneider & Schneider, 2006). On the contrary, Africans were believed to be accustomed to subtropical climates that frequently killed European laborers. Thus, many Whites regarded them “divinely created for just such a purpose” (p. 4). Concomitantly, W. E. B. DuBois (1896) poignantly captured a comparable sentiment in *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, noting that the colonist themselves declared slaves “the strength and sinews of this western world” as the newfound settlements could not “subsist without supplies of them” (p. 8).

Slavery in America was governed by a body of laws developed between the 1660s and 1860s. These laws, or slave codes, encompassed all aspects of the enslaved lives (Franklin & Moss, 1994). Central to these restrictive codes was that slavery was a permanent condition, inherited through the mother (Tolman, 2011). Thus, the first African Americans were property. They were possessions of White owners who had the power and right to sell them, relocate them, or to “gamble or mortgage them away” (Williams, 2012, p. 12). Being property themselves, the enslaved could not own property. They could not be a party to a contract nor offer a court testimony except when the offense involved another enslaved person (Franklin & Moss, 1994; Williams, 2012). African slaves were forbidden to act in self-defense against a White person;

however, the murdering of the enslaved often happened with impunity (Franklin & Moss, 1994; Williams, 2012). Insubordinate slaves were brutally punished often by whipping, branding, isolation, and hanging (Franklin & Moss, 1994).

Most slaves lived on large farms or plantations (Grooms, 1997). In some cases, it was the slaves themselves who built the living quarters to meet the plantation owner's aims (Davidson, 2002). On all accounts, the enslaved were subject to the authority of the White masters who sought to make their slaves totally dependent on them (Davidson, 2002). Slaves were treated as instruments, and many fell victim to masters who took sexual liberties with them (Foster, 2011). In the 17th and 18th centuries, Black slaves primarily labored on the tobacco, rice, sugarcane, and indigo plantations, which became the foundation of the Southern agrarian economy (Behrendt, 1999). Over time, tasks would range from domestic work where select slaves took custodial responsibility for laundry, meals, and other jobs of the master's home, to those where more specified training was involved (i.e., bricklaying, carpentry, and construction on canals and railroads) (Behrendt, 1999).

Familial Separation

The separation of family members also was commonly employed during slavery to both dehumanize the enslaved and eradicate the utility or spreading of indigenous learning (Tolman, 2011). Indeed, as Stevenson (1996) wrote, "the legacy of involuntary exodus was overwhelmingly destructive to their marriages, kin groups, and communities" (p. viii). For slave masters, removing these first African Americans from their extended family was very important to making a slave. Consequently, masters worked methodically to erase the identity of their slaves, indicating to everyone that the slave had no family. Although not all enslaved people experienced familial separation, it constantly hovered as a possibility (Williams, 2012).

According to Williams (2012) slave owners were exclusively responsible for deciding whom and when to sell. Naturally, this meant that slave owners also made decisions about whether or not to ignore familial bonds. Hence, each slave owner's death, each auction, and each sale threatened to divide enslaved children and parents.

The decision for mothers and young children to be procured jointly usually had profitable financial implications for the dealer and purchaser. For example, children who were nursing generally had the best prospects of staying with their mothers (Williams, 2012). Lactating mothers suggested to the buyer that she was fertile. A woman with a first child often held the most value to slave owners because she was both fertile and ostensibly young enough to continue procreation (Williams, 2012). These children then, by law, acceded to their mother's status, thus also making them the property of her owner. Consequently, traders and purchasers included them in their negotiations for the mother (Williams, 2012). Mintz (2009) provided a description of slave children's experiences. Children as young as two or three were expected to work at domestic chores such as collecting trash and firewood, scaring away birds, weeding, and carrying water (Mintz, 2009). However, enslaved children generally entered the work field between the ages of eight and 12. Enslaved children were not exempted from punishment, and could be whipped or even forced to swallow worms for failing to adequately perform their duties. Given that enslaved parents had no legal authority over their biological children, however, it was difficult for them to discipline them. In addition, to undermine the authority of slave parents, masters would castigate and discipline the adults in front of their children (Tolman, 2011).

While definitive numbers are unknown, it was estimated that approximately one third of enslaved children experienced familial separation, especially in the South (Tolman, 2011). Severance usually transpired because enslaved children were sold away from their parents or the

mother and father were sold away from one another and/or the child (Williams, 2012). Boys were valuable if they demonstrated physical strength, while girls presumed to be between 12 and 15 were desired for their reproductive capacity (Williams, 2012). Hence, adolescents were especially sought out by slaveholders and traders for their ability to be immediately useful. Procuring the enslaved in their formative years secured a lifetime of servitude.

Disruption to African Marriages

One of the greatest misfortunes of the involuntary separation system was its effects on early African marriages. Some scholars have argued that slavery shaped a predilection for a feeble and fatherless Black family, which became typical of African Americans pre-and-post emancipation (Moynihan, 1965; Williams, 2011). Others, however, have fervidly opposed, retorting that Black American families found creative ways to adapt to their perilous circumstances and preserve familial ties (Berlin & Rowland, 1998; Gutman, 1977; Tolman, 2011; Wilson, 2009). As such, they have asserted that these families cannot be typified as weak or fatherless. What is unchallenged, however, was that slaves highly valued their family relationships, including marriage.

Many of the colonial statutes made no mention of marriage with regard to enslaved people. The law regarded the enslaved as commodities, not “legal persons with the capacity to enter into contracts, and marriage was very much a legal contract” (Williams, 2012, p. 25). When slave marriages were recognized, with the consent of their owners, it was generally to increase profits (Tolman, 2011). Moreover, Whites in positions of power made clear demarcations between the owner and the owned. Thus, even when permitted to marry, couples were not entitled to live under the same roof because each spouse could have a different owner several miles apart (Tolman, 2011). In some cases, the enslaved (especially men) preferred to marry

women from other plantations because they could not “bear to see her ill-treated” (Franklin, 2007, p. 4). Moreover, according to Williams (2012), permitting enslaved men the right to head households, through legal marriage, would have challenged White slave owners’ interest in absolute sovereignty. That is, a model of patriarchy – with a man at the helm of the household – entitled him to subservience. And the slave masters could not tolerate any obscurity over obedience to their authority. Therefore, civil liberties were followed through the White patriarchy only (Williams, 2012). Indeed, slaves could have none of that power.

Creating Community in Confined Spaces

Still, while the ideology of slavery purported that slaves were simply an extension of their masters will, African Americans persistently found unique ways to assert their own prerogatives. In doing so, African Americans created new kinds of cultural patterns that were not those of the Whites in the Americas (Gates, 2013). Specifically, the arts, craftsmanship, and indeed education were methods of countering customary legal restrictions. For example, enslaved Blacks expressed themselves through folktales and fables, a practice retained from African tradition. This practice, which dispersed within slave communities, enabled them to construct alternate realities in which they could experience vengeance and other prohibited impulses, while also transmitting pragmatic survival strategies to one another (Gates, 2013). In addition to folktales, slaves also crafted objects that reflected African customs. Specifically, items such rattles, pipes, drums, banjos, baskets, multihued quilts, rugs, and bowls were all products of creative expression amid abstemious slave conditions (Goffman, 2010). Further, music and dance held important spiritual and secular meaning for slaves. During restricted leisure time, for example, slaves would gather to “pat juba,” which entailed making complex rhythms with the hands, thighs, and feet (Sullivan, 2001). While sentiments regarding African

American music were varied among slave masters, most were especially wary of the dissident potential of their activities (Smith, 2005). South Carolina, for example, barred the beating of drums in 1739, holding the trepidation that their cadences would be employed to encourage rebellions (Smith, 2005).

Moreover, the family remained crucial to the slave community, largely because there were no other institutions to which slaves could be overtly devoted (Franklin, 2007). In fact, slaves felt that the worst form of punishment was “an owner’s interference with their family relations” (Tolman, 2011, p. 9). They would rather endure food deprivation, increased work responsibilities, or even physical violence in order to remain intact with their families (Taylor, 2005; Tolman, 2011). Despite slave owners’ forceful efforts to advance a lethargic attitude among Blacks toward this critical institution, their commitment to the family and the African principle of communalism persisted (Franklin, 2007). Further, notwithstanding laws and customs in the colonial slave system that prohibited the enslaved from learning to read and write, a small proportion managed to achieve some degree of literacy in the antebellum period (Williams, 2007). Thus, the following section will explore how African Americans, through determination and ingenuity, disturbed the power relations between master and slave by fusing their passion for literacy with their hopes for emancipation in the Antebellum and Reconstruction Eras.

The Antebellum and Reconstruction Eras: Religion, Resistance, and (Re) Constructed Families

Religion was inextricably associated with education in colonial America. In fact, the earliest American colonial colleges, which were primarily private and certainly all White, were established to perform two functions: train literate clergy and prepare men for public life in ministry and other professions (Duster, 2009). Thus, many of these institution’s first graduates

became clergymen in Congregational and Unitarian churches throughout New England (Bethell, Hunt, & Shenton, 2004). Given that the colonies held allegiance to the British crown – where separation of church and state was nonexistent – the faculty believed it their task to infuse a secular curriculum with Christian theology (Duster, 2009). In these institutions, the dominance of the clergy was uncontested as faculty bodies, boards of trustees, and the presidents of these colleges were “also all men of the cloth” (Duster, 2009, p. 100). By the middle of the 18th century, a spate of religious piety emerged throughout the American colonies. Additionally, clergymen of the First Great Awakening ignited widespread evangelical conversions by conferring notions of the spiritual equality of all people. This was delivered through vivid, emotionally charged sermons underscoring the corruption of human nature and drastically impacted the American republic (Harvey, 2011). In Northern colonies, these revivals inspired some converts to become missionaries to the American South (Heyrman, 1988). For example, by the 1750s, some clergymen relocated from New England to the Carolinas to expand their influence to surrounding colonies (Heyrman, 1988). While many slaves came from regions of Africa that had scant or no contact with Christianity, evangelical Christian missionaries commenced their first successful expeditions into preaching a message of gospel equality to small, strewn, but receptive African American audiences (Harvey, 2011). By deriding the White slave masters as callous and lacking in godliness, missionaries roused the hearts and minds of African Americans who questioned and abhorred their subordinate social status (Harvey, 2011).

In many respects, the Christianizing campaigns (or evangelical movements) throughout the eighteenth-century Atlantic world were the gateway to Black education in early America because they were part of a “large-scale, intercontinental experiment in plantation pedagogy” (Watson, 2009, p. 67). The Charles-Town Negro School, which was supported by the Society for

the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), was an example of this entryway to education for Blacks. The school opened in Charleston, South Carolina in 1743 and provided a rudimentary education in Christian religion for hundreds of slaves (and eventually free Blacks) until it closed in 1764 (Watson, 2009). It was originally known as the Codrington Plantation, whereby the SPB envisioned itself as an epicenter for the Christianization of the literate and submissive slave (Watson, 2009). The philosophy that buttressed the school was that literacy and Christianity would complement slavery (Watson, 2009). Thus, the Church purchased young male slaves to serve as catechists (lay schoolmasters), who were responsible for educating their fellow slaves (Watson, 2009). Their goal was for the instructors to accelerate the speed of language acquisition, and ultimately conversion (Watson, 2009). Hence, these catechists were expected to encourage their students to read the Bible as well as share their religious training with fellow slaves (Bonomi, 2003).

On the brink of colonial independence, revolutionary rhetoric about liberty presented Black Americans with the inspiration and language for advancing their hopes for freedom (Holton, 2009). For many slaves, the ability to read and write meant freedom (Williams, 2007). If nothing else, they believed that education would afford them the intellectual capital to maintain relationships amongst family members estranged by the slave trade (Williams, 2007). The times were marked by the gradual divide between abolitionists and supporters of slavery. Even so, slaves were optimistic that the assertions of the patriots would be applied equally to them. Despite the rhetoric, most Black Americans remained enslaved after the Revolutionary War. The battles were primarily for the independence and fiscal advancement of White Americans (Gates, 2013). When the armies left the field, America was a nation of farmers, established on notions of freedom even though our largest farms were worked by slaves (Gates,

2013). According to Gates (2013), there were approximately 700,000 slaves in the United States at its birth with no rights and no power.

Within two decades, however, each state in the North was on the road to abolition (Holton, 2009). In fact, not all Blacks were enslaved during the latter years of the antebellum period (Holton, 2009). For example, as E. Franklin Frazier (1957) described in *The Negro Family in the United States*, mulattoes – Blacks with White ancestors – were at times emancipated by their White fathers. Their kinship ties to Whites led to patterns of stratification, especially in obtaining education, higher-status work, and property (Frazier, 1957). Nevertheless, these free Blacks were not treated as equal citizens. In fact, the first U.S. citizenship law of 1790, for example, defined membership in the republic as a privilege of White men (Harvey, 2011). Further, free Blacks, who were chiefly found in Northern states, were required to bear papers denoting their freedom (Williams, 2007). If not, they faced the possibility of being captured and sent to the South where they could be sold back into slavery (Williams, 2007).

In the North, to assist Blacks as they emerged from slavery, the African Free School was established in New York by a group of wealthy and influential members of the Manumission Society (White, 2004). Founded in 1787 on the principles of racial equality and with the aims of abolition, the African Free School provided education to African American children for the “enjoyment and right understanding of their future privileges, and relative duties, when they should become free men and citizens” (Andrews, 1830, p. 8). Disparate from White charity schools of the time, which were designated exclusively for the poor, the African Free School developed into a hub of “Black community aspirations for a better future” (Rury, 1983, p. 187). This institution stood at the vanguard of a string of Free Schools that eventually materialized in New York City (White, 2004).

However, as Northern Black populations became better educated, better organized and more politically shrewd, education grew into a matter of controversy (Williams, 2007). Still, because the North was home to a burgeoning abolitionist movement, a steady population of free Black people began to dispute the status quo (Dickerson, 1986). Notably, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones organized the Free African Society in 1787. Allen, with the backing of the Free African Society, went on to found the first predominantly African American Methodist denomination (known as the African Methodist Episcopal church) in Philadelphia after discovering the extent of White clergymen's racial discriminations toward African Americans (Dickerson, 1986).

In other parts of the young nation, challenges to slavery, slave education, and class-privilege dissolved quickly in the wake of the revolution. Specifically, while small free Black communities started to surface in Southern cities at the end of the 18th century, the agrarian demands presented overwhelming obstacles for Southern slave masters who wanted to free their slaves (Gates, 2013). By the late 18th century, the mechanization of Great Britain's textile industry prompted a major demand for American cotton. The production of the Southern crop was limited by the complexity associated with manually removing the seeds from raw cotton fibers. But following the advent of the cotton gin in 1793, the central importance of the African slave was solidified. Specifically, within a few years of the cotton gin's materialization, the South transitioned from a large-scale tobacco producer to that of cotton (Behrendt, 1999). This switch reinforced the region's reliance upon African slave labor. Hence, it was not uncommon for slaves in Northern states to be sold to slave traders who took them South to Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, or South Carolina. Once a family member was sold and taken South, it became almost impossible to reconnect with them (Williams, 2012). In her book *Help*

Me to Find my People, Williams (2009) underscored an account that expressively captured the difficulty of family dissolution among slaves during this era. She highlighted the experience of former slave Charles Bell, who was four-years-old when purchasers dismantled his family: “My poor mother, when she saw me leaving her for the last time, ran after me, took me down from the horse, clasped me in her arms, and wept loudly and bitterly over me” (p. 24).

A distinctive characteristic that set this “Second Middle Passage” apart from the first was America’s escalating racial bias, which was tightly woven into the country’s social, political, and legal fabric (Williams, 2012). For instance, Harvey (2011) noted that throughout the South, few slave masters exhibited interest in imparting religion to their Black slaves. For many of them, Blacks were heathens and Christianity was a religion for Whites. Specifically, slave masters were troubled by the revolutionary potential of slave Christianization and slave literacy, claiming that it made their slaves too proud. Some successful slaves had sued for freedom and asserted that Christianity contradicted slaveholding. In all likelihood, they had learned “limited reading and writing skills in church” (p. 22).

Thus, the White-Southern elite paid meticulous attention to instilling a sense of racial inferiority into slaves. Strict discipline, teaching slaves to despise their own culture and history, cultivating a belief in the master’s superior power, and inculcating a deep sense of his or her own helplessness and dependence were all employed as tactics to ensure the fruition of a substandard mind-set among Blacks (Tolman, 2011). Slave masters also established strict hierarchies to keep the enslaved divided from one another and to discourage organized revolts. Skin-color caste systems – which separated lighter-skinned, skilled, and privileged house slaves from darker-skinned, lowly field workers – are an example of such a hierarchy (Andersen, 2010). Moreover, education constituted one of the terrains upon which White slave owners and Black slaves waged

a continuous struggle. Fearing that education would encourage slaves to think of themselves as equals and demand improved treatment (or even freedom), slave owners were especially adamant that the enslaved were totally prohibited from learning to read and write (Tolman, 2011). Literacy, according to Williams (2009), pointed out to the world that this “so-called property had a mind, and writing foretold the ability to construct an alternative narrative about bondage itself” (p. 7). Consequently, White legislators enacted laws in slave states to disallow teaching enslaved and sometimes free Blacks to read or write (Williams, 2009). By 1845, 12 states had passed antiliteracy statutes or educational restrictions on slaves (Williams, 2009). In rare cases, some slave masters were motivated by their religious convictions to instruct their slaves (Tolman, 2011). This was primarily done when record-keeping tasks were needed for the benefit of the slave owner, and the instruction was very basic (Tolman, 2011).

Given the absence of legal education in the South, slaves in both rural and urban areas managed to identify alternative methods of learning. Indeed, acquiring education grew into a communal effort on plantations (Williams, 2009). For example, slaves with sharp acuity and memory skills would listen closely when masters and other Whites gathered. Concurrently, Williams (2009) draws from the narrative of Henry Walton Bibb, who became an author and abolitionist in Canada but was born a slave in Kentucky:

Slaves were not allowed books, pen, ink, nor paper, to improve their minds. But it seems to me now, that I was particularly observing and apt to retain what came under my observation. All that I had heard about liberty and freedom to slaves, I never forgot. Among other good trades I learned the art of running away to perfection. (p. 355)

Williams (2009) also wrote that slaves who were responsible for picking up the mail often dawdled long enough to eavesdrop on White men discussing the newspapers. Hence, slaves would know of decisive events before their slave owners. In many cases, Black men were the ones who transmitted this information among fellow slaves because they were more likely than Black women to be hired or sent on errands in town. These errands into town enabled Black men to obtain better knowledge about how to move without being detected. This also meant that men were more likely to escape in pursuit of freedom for their families, as women remained behind tending to the responsibilities of childbearing and child-rearing. This epoch, according to Williams (2009), marked the foundation of a legacy of co-dependence on fictive kin among African Americans. By forming community within the plantation, slaves organized “clandestine school meetings before dawn and late into the night” (p. 13). Despite legislators who mandated that magistrates disband these illicit gatherings, Blacks continued to create learning spaces for men, women, children, dismantled families as well as in-tact and/or newly formed ones to create an underground culture through which they affirmed one another’s humanity.

Black Resistance and the Genesis of formal education for Blacks in America

Hinks (2010) proffered the term Black resistance to characterize the seditious efforts African Americans employed in their attempt to ascertain an improved future for themselves and their families. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, like Henry Walton Bibb, many slaves understood how precarious their freedom was during the pre-Civil War period. However, while fraught with risks, slaves asserted their frustrations with familial dissolution, the lack of access to education, and overall bondage through various methods of resistance (Williams, 2009). One of the most reputed methods used were rebellions. Although antiliteracy statutes are often associated with Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831 – which indeed was one the bloodiest slave

revolts in American history – several other rebellions preceded this one. Notably, Gabriel’s rebellion in Richmond, Virginia in 1800, was a revolt of slaves in what was known as German Coast, Louisiana in 1811. Another was Denmark Vesey’s South Carolina uprising in 1822 (Rodriguez, 2007; Starobin, 1970). In response to the pattern of slave revolts, stringent slave codes and laws were enforced to restrict slaves’ movement and their ability to assemble in groups (Rodriguez, 2007). The fugitive slave act of 1850, which mandated that Northerners return accused runaway slaves to the South, is an example of such legislation.

In the North, where circumstances were not as restrictive regarding the education of Blacks, African Americans were more likely to have reading and writing skills than Southern Blacks. Many had access to formal education. Under the auspices of religious and other benevolent societies, African American schooling in the North occurred in formal and informal as well as public and private settings, especially by Quakers, abolitionists, and missionaries (Duster, 2009). In fact, as W. E. B. DuBois (1899) noted in *The Philadelphia Negro*, between the 1820s and 1830s, several new public schools were opened in Northern states for African American children. The Gravelly Hill School for free Blacks in Virginia, the Adelphi School for the Instruction of Poor Children in Philadelphia, The Abiel Smith School in Boston, the Baltimore School for Colored Girls (later renamed St. Frances Academy), and Clarkson Hall by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society are all examples of learning spaces created for Northern Blacks. Duster (2009) indicated that in some states, legislation also was passed to endorse the building and fiscal support of these schools, and also required that children attend primary and secondary schools. Paradoxically, even these efforts were sparse as the quality of care was often substandard to White schools, they were void of Black instructors, and several cities were altogether without public African American education. To improve upon these disparities,

African American church leaders and businessmen began erecting organizations such as the Pennsylvania Augustine Society for the Education of People of Color (PASEPC), which offered classroom space, teachers, and financial aid to students of African heritage.

Access to Higher Education

African Americans commenced accessing higher education in the 1820s. In 1823, preacher and politician Alexander Lucius Twilight completed his higher education at Middlebury College in Vermont (Bennett, 1988; Random & Lynch, 1988). Hence, Twilight is the first African American known to have earned a bachelor's degree from a college or university in the United States. Amherst and Bowdoin graduated two more African American students three years later, respectively (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). By 1833, the United States witnessed its first college to openly admit Black students. Founded in Ohio by a Presbyterian minister and a missionary, Oberlin College was the first of its kind to offer baccalaureate degrees to African Americans and women (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). While some institutions had graduated one or two African Americans prior to Oberlin's founding, no others had enacted policies that specifically admitted them in large numbers (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Berea College in Kentucky followed, admitting both White and Black students in a coeducation environment. Bowdoin College of Maine pursued the same trend, eventually becoming the site where Harriet Beecher Stowe – whose husband was a professor of theology at the time – wrote the best-selling abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Duster, 2009). While these institutions were certainly progressive for the time, the large-scale preclusion of Blacks from acquiring formal education persisted (Brown & Freeman, 2004).

Conversely, unlike the elite institutions that restricted admission to a limited segment of society, the development of the first association of institutions classified as historically Black

colleges and universities (HBCUs) shortly emerged (Brown & Ricard, 2007). According to Brown and Ricard (2007), the aim of these nascent institutions was to train former slaves and their offspring. Cheney University, established originally as the Institute for Colored Youth, has the earliest founding date of an HBCU (Brown & Ricard, 2007). For most of Cheney's initial history, secondary education was its highest level of instruction (Brown & Richard, 2007). However, during the Civil War, HBCUs like Cheney also welcomed "people of all races and ages who felt that freedom would not be complete until they learned to read and write" (Brown & Ricard, 2007, p. 117). This instruction would be expanded to higher education as opportunities widened for Blacks during Reconstruction. Cheney, the Ashmun Institute (later renamed Lincoln University of Pennsylvania), and Wilberforce University (the first private, Black-controlled university) were the only HBCUs founded in the U.S. prior to the Civil War (Brown & Freeman, 2004). Still, given their locations, African American's were constrained in their ability to make full use of them (Brown & Ricard, 2007).

Towards an Emancipated Future: African Americans and the Civil War

In his book, *The Negro's Civil War*, Pulitzer Prize-winner James McPherson (2003) provided an in- depth analysis of the aspirations of Blacks during the American Civil War. Indeed, the quarrel between those who could encumber Black learning and those who could facilitate it continued right up to the Civil War. Further, McPherson (2003) contended that African Americans' aspirations to acquire not only equitable access to education but also, above all, the human dignity that had long been denied them began to be realized through military service. In McPherson's (2003) words, many laymen and historians have wrongly inferred that the roughly four and a half million Blacks in the United States in 1865 were merely docile and uncomprehending recipients of freedom. Instead, Blacks played a critical role in the tragic drama

of civil war. Blacks, who still felt the anguish of the 1857 Dred Scott decision that denied citizenship to them, had almost no sovereignty over themselves or their families. Their suffering was exacerbated by the fact that in 15 Southern states Blacks were refused many of the rights of basic humanity as well (McPherson, 2003). While Blacks had sparingly begun to have the benefit of education in Northern states, they were yet subjected to segregated spaces and many were denied suffrage. For example, except for Connecticut, only the New England states permitted Blacks to vote on equal terms as Whites (McPherson, 2003). In Ohio, only Blacks whose visible admixture of White blood was palpable were allowed to vote (McPherson, 2003). Most White Americans were neither proslavery nor problack. They “generally acceded to the South’s claims to the right of ownership of human beings. Often when they did raise their voices against the institution it was not done in support of the enslaved but in defense of the rights of White men who were forced to compete with slave labor” (Holzer, Medford, & Williams, 2006, p. 4).

As the 1860 presidential election loomed, inflexible differences ignited between the free and slave states regarding the role of the national government to disallow slavery in the territories that were not yet states (McPherson, 2003). McPherson (2003) averred that Blacks and abolitionists, like Fredrick Douglas – who was arguably the nation’s most prominent Black at the time – were exasperated. However, anti-slavery advocates also hoped that the collective plight of African Americans would bring to national attention the need for slavery’s eradication. While none of the four political parties of the time defended the idea of abolition, Douglas initially offered sentiments in support of President Lincoln and the Republican Party. Later, however, Douglas recanted his assertion in favor of Gerrit Smith, the candidate of the Radical Abolitionist party. However, not all Northern Blacks shared Douglas’ sentiments. Many Blacks continued to

support the Republican candidates despite the party's restrained position toward abolishing slavery. After Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in 1860, a cohort of Southern slave states formed the Confederate States of America. And by June of 1861, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee had all seceded from the Union. By the middle of that year, the war had begun.

According to McPherson (2003), at the outset of the Civil War, the Lincoln administration insisted that restoring the Union – not abolishing slavery – was its overarching aim. However, thousands of enslaved Blacks abandoned their plantations as the Union army engrossed Confederate territory (McPherson, 2003). Blacks, both free and runaway slaves, saw the Civil War as their last hope of progressing toward the liberty that they so passionately desired for themselves and their families. Consequently, they began to seek refuge within Union military camps in unprecedented numbers. While initially issuing a noninterference policy with slave property, so many slaves had fled their plantations that the Union could not impede the flow of Blacks who willingly volunteered to serve on its behalf. By describing the alarm of a Virginian slave master, Holzer et al. (2006) captured the widespread consternation of slave owners who found that Blacks used the tensions of the war to their advantage:

Upon returning from patrol duty in early May 1861, John T. Washington of King George County, Virginia, discovered that five of his enslaved laborers had packed their meager belongings and fled his plantation. When he made inquiries, Washington learned that several of his neighbors had lost their bondsmen in similar fashion. (p. 4)

As Holzer (2012) noted, for many Northern soldiers, encounters with runaway slaves were their first introduction to the revulsion of Southern slavery. Blacks, who had departed from

their families, braved Confederate fire, and risked being returned to their master's, converted some Whites to abolitionism. Moreover, many slaves, especially those who had been employed to dig trenches for the Confederate Army, also brought valuable military information about Confederate locations with them. Eventually contraband camps grew into a ubiquitous component of Union encampments, and Blacks were employed to supply military aid. Even Black women provided labor to support the Union, especially in laundering and cooking. From the moment the Civil War began, President Lincoln faced pressures for emancipation. Specifically, according to Blair and Younger (2012), abolitionists and radical Republicans encouraged the president to make the nation's conflict a war against slavery. For Lincoln, a call for emancipation had to be connected to a pragmatic certainty of military victory, and needed to be sustained by a solid theoretical and constitutional basis. Furthermore, President Lincoln wanted substantiation that the Union could actually enforce the proclamation and protect the freed slaves. By the summer of 1862, the Union army – with the uncontested aid of African Americans – had secured the necessary victories for the president to issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation later that September. This preliminary proclamation ordered the cessation of Southern rebellion by the beginning of the following year. When the Confederacy refused to yield, President Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

The Emancipation Proclamation initially freed only the slaves in the rebel states. However, as the armies of the United States drove their military success deeper into the South, they freed slaves daily with the authority of the proclamation (Blair & Younger, 2012). The Emancipation Proclamation had an immediate impact on the course of the war for African Americans and the country. Under the proclamation, African Americans could legally join the

Union's armed forces. Unlike past wars, in which Blacks battled for the expansion of American ideals that excluded people of the African diaspora, Blacks fought consciously against racialized barring (Hine & Jenkins, 2001; McPherson, 2003). For many Black men, in particular, fighting in the war was also a corridor through which they could ultimately demonstrate manhood in the eyes of their families (Cullen, 2001). Concomitantly, as Cullen (2001) surmised, African American men's participation in the war reshaped the antiquated narrative imposed upon them by Whites who saw their repression as "rhetorically defensible" (p. 496). More importantly, still, was that service in the Civil War empowered African American men with a newfound zeal to protect their families and loved ones (Cullen, 2001).

By the close of the Civil War in 1865, approximately 200,000 African Americans had served in the Union army and navy in over 160 units (Blair & Younger, 2012). In the months following the surrender of the last major Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant, the final irreversible tide of liberty ensued for African Americans as the 13th Amendment permanently ended the institution of slavery in the United States. While scholars have rigorously debated the meaning, significance, and motivations for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, what has not been impugned is the critical role of Blacks who were willing to bear arms for the Union (Blair & Younger, 2012). Certainly, the war efforts would not have been as triumphant without the assistance of African Americans (Blair & Younger, 2012; Holzer et al., 2006; McPherson, 2003). Moreover, in the Reconstruction Era to follow, nothing was more poignant than the "sight of separated families attempting to reestablish their relationships" (Franklin, 2007, p. 4). Indeed, slavery had not shattered the Black family.

“Help Me to Find My People”: The Quest for Familial Reconnection and Education in the Reconstruction Era

The massive movements of African Americans attempting to find their family members after slavery's abolishment was thoroughly delineated by renowned historian John Hope Franklin in Harriette Pipes McAdoo's (2007) edited text, *Black Families*. At the end of the Civil War, wrote Franklin, newly freed Blacks searched “frantically for family members separated by slavery” (p. 4). Given the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, which was created to assist in the transition from slavery to freedom in the South, some African Americans even wrote this department seeking aid in locating their loved ones. Others, having no strategy to which they could turn, simply took to the road looking for their spouses and children. Success varied among Blacks, and some even discovered that their spouses had remarried. Still, at the end of the war, many African Americans endeavored to legalize their marriages. In North Carolina, for example, nearly 9,500 former slaves had registered their marriages in 1866 by paying a 25 cent fee. Further, many Black couples participated in secular or religious marriage ceremonies to highlight the “extent to which the sense of family was a part of the very fabric of the Afro-American community” (Franklin, 2007, p. 4). African Americans suddenly found themselves with the right to officially marry, own property, and attend school.

For African American families, education continued to be seen as the entryway for improved opportunities in employment, political involvement, and economic ascendancy (Duster, 2009). During the 30 years following emancipation, a propagation of educational opportunities for African Americans emerged in the United States. To prepare students for vocations and/or further studies, Black churches began to house their own primary and secondary educational programs (Duster, 2009). At the same time, Black colleges and universities – many of whom were called normal (teaching) institutes – were founded in unprecedented numbers,

largely training teachers for work in Black schools (Duster, 2009). With the aid of churches, Northern missionaries, philanthropic associations, and even local communities, a sense of hopefulness beckoned as literacy rates among Blacks drastically improved (Brown & Ricard, 2007; Duster, 2009). Further, state governments, who were compelled by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, also began to found and fund these predominately Black campuses (Brown & Ricard, 2007). Specifically, the Morrill Act of 1862 – which entailed federal support in the establishment of state educational institutions largely in agriculture, engineering, and military science – preceded the second Morrill Act of 1890, which required the funding to be extended to schools for Blacks (Brown & Ricard, 2007). By 1890, the Black colleges were up to 200 campuses (Brown & Ricard, 2007).

While Reconstruction ushered in the widespread development of educational choices for African Americans, it was also accompanied by an era of “unprecedented ascendancy of the ideas and practices of White supremacy” (Duster, 2009, p. 102). Southern Whites did not generally support the notion of schooling for African Americans, whom they once held as property (Brown & Ricard, 2007). Further, for many Whites, the social and economic volatility in the region following the Civil War perpetuated their qualms that Black education would lead to racial mayhem (Brown & Ricard, 2007). Consequently, attempts to found the rapidly increasing Black colleges enraged many Southern Whites (Duster, 2009). The 1870 killing of the president of Talladega College, a Black institution in Alabama, is often cited as an example of the White disparagement with Black schooling (Duster, 2009). On the other hand, some Whites recognized the sociopolitical and financial advantages that these institutions could afford them. For instance, in the classical text *Schooling for the New Slavery*, Spivey (1978) contended that regulating Black education assisted Southern Whites in establishing a “new slavery” during this

era. Thus, many Southern states developed separate public Black institutions to have a legal recipient for the federal support (Brown & Ricard, 2007). Similarly, Roebuck and Murty (1993) also posited that public Black colleges and universities were created for the following reasons: “To get millions of dollars in federal funds for the development of white land-grant universities, to limit African American education to vocational training, and to prevent African Americans from attending white land-grant colleges” (p. 27). In the eras following Reconstruction, White supremacy was codified into restrictive laws (later called Jim Crow laws) that complicated racial uplift and prospects for education among African Americans and their families.

Jim Crow and the “New Negro”: Black Agency in the Renaissance Era

We boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people...But it is difficult to reconcile that boast with a state law which, practically, puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow citizens, — our equals before the law.

John Marshall Harlan, dissenting in *Plessy v. Ferguson*

In the immediate post-Civil War period, noteworthy occurrences transpired for African Americans and their families. According to Klarman (2007), beyond the abolishment of slavery and involuntary servitude, the 14th Amendment provided citizenship to the former slaves and guaranteed them equal fortification of the law previously extended to other citizens. Black access to colleges and universities had been expanding, and African Americans gained the right to marry, make legal contracts, and own property. They also began to achieve political rights, as Black men were permitted to vote and serve on juries. Despite White opposition, African American men also began to be elected to public office. For instance, Hiram Rhodes Revels, a Republican from Mississippi, was the first African American to serve in the United States Senate in 1870. Furthermore, African American children had finally gained access to public education. Nevertheless, the dawning of the 20th century brought about tyranny for African Americans and their families that did not abate with their freedom. As the 19th century drew to a close, nearly

eight million African Americans still lived in the South (Riser, 2010). Although they were no longer legally enslaved, the conditions of racial oppression for African Americans were calcified as they were relegated to second-class citizenship under Jim Crow laws (Riser, 2010). Since total control through the institution of slavery could no longer be effected, more “subtle forms of coercion and control were needed” (Mann & Selva, 1979, p. 171).

When the Supreme Court upheld a Louisiana railroad law requiring “separate but equal” accommodations for Blacks and Whites, the case buttressed an extensive constitutional basis for segregationist state laws (Hill, 1965; Klarman, 2007; Riser, 2010). More specifically, this case “made lawful for over fifty years the doctrine that Black Americans could be denied equal protection of the laws by compelling racial segregation and forcing Blacks to accept separate accommodations” (Long et al., 1975, p. 35). Thereafter, separate but equal became the law of the land as African American families in the South had their rights encroached upon under Jim Crowism (Riser, 2010). For example, most Southern Blacks lost their right to vote through Jim Crow’s prohibitive codes and requisites (Riser, 2010). Such requisites included property qualifications, poll taxes, literacy tests, and the “grandfather clause,” which limited voting to those Blacks whose grandfathers were registered voters (Riser, 2010). Given that male suffrage among African Americans had not been gained until the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, they were largely disqualified (Riser, 2010).

Jim Crow, however, did not simply entail the physical partitioning of Blacks and Whites. According to Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad (2003), in order to maintain their power, Whites needed more than statutes and signs that specified “Whites” and “Blacks” only. Whites had to avow and restate Black inferiority with every expression and gesticulation; indeed, “in every aspect of both public and private life” (Chafe et al., 2003, p. 1). With ominous accuracy, Howard

Thurman (1965) analyzed the framework of segregation in his cornerstone work, *The Luminous Darkness*. Specifically, he noted that beyond directing all matters of legislation and law enforcement, a White supremacist society must:

... falsify the facts of history, tamper with the insights of religion and religious doctrine, editorialize and slant news and the printed word. On top of that it must keep separate schools, separate churches, separate graveyards, and separate public accommodations – all this in order to freeze the place of the Negro in society and guarantee his basic immobility. (p. 1, as cited by Chafe et al., 2003)

Using racial superiority as a means of permanently dividing and conquering any possibility of cross-racial organizing, Southern Whites succeeded in putting into place the system of official Jim Crow statutes that defined Southern politics from the end of the 19th century all the way through the 1960s (Chafe et al., 2003). Further, given that the Southern economy was still largely agrarian, African American parents were slated to perform jobs that others did not want, and at a wage that hardly any others would accept (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). Fewer schools existed for Black children than for White children, and some were often pulled out to meet sharecropping demands (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). Where schools for Black children did subsist, the teachers labored under extraordinary burdens. Challenged with a dearth of material resources, these teachers also had an unvarying need to conciliate Whites in order to acquire both private and public funds for their dilapidated schools (Fairclough, 2002). At the same time, educators of Black children were expected to fulfill a range of roles beyond that of school teacher. As Fairclough (2002) contended, teachers of African American children at the onset of Jim Crow were also “public health workers, Sunday school teachers, home visitors, agricultural

experts, fundraisers, adult literacy teachers, racial diplomats, moral examples, all-around pillars of the community, and general uplifters of the race" (p. 14).

Additionally, many Whites sought to standardize their authority in order to ensure that Black hands would be perpetually available to cook, clean, care for their children, till their fields, and harvest their crops (Lewis, 2009). Hence, the interaction between the former slave holders and those who had been enslaved had not changed fundamentally when it came to interpersonal interactions and economic exploitations. Herein again, as Wilkerson (2011) suggested, virtually every aspect of Black life was controlled by an artificial hierarchy that replicated aspects of enslavement.

Whites also often used strong psychical and psychological force against African Americans who threatened to destabilize labor arrangements or who tried to relocate their families from the abuse on tenant farms (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). Lynching, for example, was widely becoming the weapon of choice for enforcing Jim Crow and the notion of White supremacy (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). According to Gates and Yacovone (2013), as many as three hangings a week occurred by the turn of the century. Some of these were highly advertised events and drew large White audiences (Lewis, 2009). White children would sometimes accompany their parents to these events of retribution to socialize them in the ideology of Black inferiority (Lewis, 2009). Beyond lynchings, rapes, public beatings, land embezzlement, and arson were commonly used tactics as well (Lewis, 2009). Moreover, these harrowing events spared no one in the Black family: man, woman, or child (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). Despite segregation, violence, disfranchisement, and economic exploitation, a byproduct of Jim Crowism was that it forced African Americans to be self-reliant. In *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South*, Chafe et al. (2006) described the

ways in which African Americans engaged in their own quest for agency during the Victorian period (1900-1930). Specifically, these authors delineate Black agency as the unrelenting efforts that African Americans employed to secure improved public services, better living conditions for their families, and augmented political participation. While Black families in rural communities often had less prospects of economic independence than their urban counterparts, by contrast, an independent professional class began to develop among the latter (McAdoo, 2007). Churches were the mainstay of Black families (McAdoo, 2007). The church provided the chief means for self-expression and leadership, and “erected a shelter against a hostile White world” (Frazier, 1957, p. 20). Thus, working with their churches and inspired by the model of civic organizations (such as the National Association of Colored Women), African Americans began to establish their own communities, schools, insurance companies, grocery stores, banks, barbershops, and other enterprises of economic advancement (McAdoo, 2007). Indeed, a Black neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma was even colloquially coined the “Black Wall Street” due to its flourishing population of prominent Black businesses and millionaires at the time (Gates & Yacovone, 2013).

In addition, notwithstanding the variables inspiring their founding, the establishment of Black colleges (both public and private) continued to persist during this period (Brown & Ricard, 2007; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). At a time when many Southern states were averse to sponsoring schools for African Americans, the multiple levels of instruction at these institutions made it easier for them to teach Blacks without having to build and operate additional academic facilities (Brown & Ricard, 2007). Also, providing educational programs to African American students with nominal skills offered Black colleges a way of crafting a “niche” for their advanced curricula (Brown & Ricard, 2007). This niche entailed accepting students as they

were, versus expecting them to come already equipped for higher order learning. Moreover, while many of these campuses were of generally poorer quality than the historically or Predominantly White institutions (PWIs), Black colleges became the “primary teachers of the previously under and uneducated populace, central repositories of cultural heritage, and stalwart beacons of community uplift” (Brown & Ricard, 2007, p. 120).

Furthermore, family stability in the Black community was alive and well at the beginning of the 20th century. As Franklin (2007) emphasized, in the years before World War I, “most rural and urban Southern Blacks lived in husband- or father-present households and subfamilies” (p. 5). Additionally, Frazier (1939) posited that African American men also used these nascent economic arrangements to place themselves in positions of authority. For example, given their overwhelming ascendancy in church leadership, African American men capitalized on these positions to consolidate their role as familial patriarchs – leaders of the family and the home. Further, hooks (2004) argued that while some African American men found community with aboriginal natives – whose mores did not entail male patriarchy or the subservience of women and children — a considerable segment of African American men espoused the dominator model set by White slave masters. Numbers also increased among Black women over 40 who headed father-absent households and subfamilies, as some husbands died or went away to work (Franklin, 2007). McAdoo (2007) defined subfamilies as nonrelatives who are close and involved in the family as relatives. The practice persisted, moreover, for young, single mothers to reside with their parents or other adults to alleviate the task of heading a household (Franklin, 2007; Gutman, 1976). Gutman (1976) maintained that in 1900, kin-related households, strong parent-child attachments, and long marriages were common among rural and urban Southern Blacks.

While the percentage of African American college graduates had grown immensely, Black ownership was on the rise, and a small Black middle-class was emerging, a massive propaganda war on Blacks surfaced, intending to debase them (Burrell, 2010). In particular, as Burrell (2010) described, a Black inferiority marketing campaign swept the nation, often in the form of racist caricatures and memorabilia on kitchen utensils, postcards, and other objects or printings that depicted Blacks (and their families) as animalistic, unintelligible, lascivious, and savages. The Pickaninny, the Tom, the coon, the tragic mulatto, and the Jezebel were among these racist visual representations (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). These marketing ploys were designed to legitimize violence and shape future attitudes towards African Americans (Gates & Yacovone, 2013). The combination of hate groups and hate crimes, derisory educational conditions, systemic oppression, and a vast demand for Northern workers during World War I provided the necessary impetus for scores of African American families to escape the South during the Great Migration.

Migration(s) and the Competing Ideologies of Black Education

The Great Migration chiefly shaped the contours of the Black family's educational, socioeconomic, and political experiences during the early 20th century (DuBois, 1917; Frazier, 1939). According to Wilkerson (2011), given that American merchants were unable to export goods to Europe during World War I, the cotton market collapsed. Consequently, thousands of farmers, both Black and White, lost their businesses. Also, boll weevil infestations wiped out millions of acres throughout the South, which slowed production. Wilkerson (2011) further noted that the mechanization of Southern agriculture lessened the need for unskilled Black labor. Thus, substantial numbers of African Americans left their homes and sought to re-establish their families elsewhere. Happening in two major waves, the first flow of African American families

came mostly from the Southeastern states (e.g., Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia), and resettled primarily in the Northeastern cities (e.g., New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Boston, and Baltimore). Others came from the Deep South (e.g., Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas) and moved their families northward into new Black urban communities (e.g., Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, and Cleveland). Finally, a second wave of over three million Blacks moved north between the 1940s and 1950s (Wilkerson, 2011).

This major exodus of African American families produced drastic changes in the labor patterns within the Black community. For example, according to Wilkerson (2011), the percentage of African American males who worked in manufacturing, transportation, and communications – which were largely filled by White men in the decades prior – leaped from 14% in 1890 to 36% by 1930. Additionally, within the first three decades of the 20th century, the number of businesses owned by African Americans climbed from 20,000 to over 70,000 (Wilkerson, 2011). Further, more African American children were enrolled in schools and by 1955, illiteracy among Blacks was only at 15%—as compared to 61% in 1890 (Wilkerson, 2011).

Moreover, Franklin (2007) posited that the migration of African Americans to the urban North during World War I and subsequent years “did not adversely affect the stability of the Black family to any significant degree” (p. 5). The Black family, however, did begin to differ in characteristics from the Black families a generation earlier, as the extended and augmented households progressively increased in importance over the simple nuclear one. In spite of these changes, there was no significant increase in male-absent households or subfamilies. By 1930, for instance, six of seven African American households had either a husband or father present.

Franklin draws on an excerpt from Herbert Gutman's (1976), *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, as an additional example of this pattern:

At all moments in time between 1880 and 1925—that is, from an adult generation born in slavery to an adult generation about to be devastated by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the modernization of Southern agriculture afterward—the typical Afro-American family was lower-class in status and headed by two parents. This was so in the urban and rural South in 1880 and 1900 and in New York City in 1905 and 1925. It was just as common among farm laborers, sharecroppers, tenants, and Northern and Southern urban unskilled laborers and service workers. It accompanied the Southern Blacks in the great migration to the North that has so reshaped the United States in the twentieth century. (p. 5, as cited by Franklin, 2007)

Nevertheless, the mass resettlements of African American families to the North began to heighten racial anxieties among Northern Whites. Prior to the migrations, there was an implicit assenting of the small populace of African Americans in these cities (Wilkerson, 2011). As porters, domestics, or preachers, some Blacks had risen to levels of professional jobs. They were in some ways safeguarded, however, because their population was so small. But when the escalated numbers of African American families moved north, fierce discrimination in these cities ensued. And while northern Whites were not as obstructionist toward African Americans' rights as in the South, the structural inequities were just as astringent (Wilkerson, 2011). For example, White banks limited access to African Americans through informal policies of "redlining," real estate firms refused to sell homes to Black families in predominantly White

districts, and White laborers lamented that African Americans were lowering wages by flooding the employment market (Wilkerson, 2011).

Against the backdrop of increased racial tension, the continual expansion of Black education took place. And during the first decades of the 20th century, African American educators – both men and women – contributed extensively to a growing Black intellectual tradition that addressed the social, economic, and political realities of African American life (Alridge, 2009). Among them were Alexander Crummell (1819-1898), Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963), Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), and Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956) (Alridge, 2009). As these thinkers put forth their respective philosophies, the Black audiences for whom they were primarily targeted (and received) were sharply dichotomized by class, especially as academic, social, and professional opportunities evolved (Duster, 2009). This is the larger context in which contemporaries Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois – arguably the two foremost Black leaders of the era – argued competing ideologies about how African American families should civilize themselves, especially as it pertained to education.

According to Duster (2009), to at least publicly circumvent any appearance of direct competition for higher educational access with Whites, Washington pushed the ideology that African Americans should concentrate on the trades and manual labor. Specifically, Washington championed the notion that African Americans would garner the respect of Whites and be fully integrated into all strata of society by complying with discrimination for the moment, and focusing on uplifting themselves (self-reliance) through hard work and practical trades. Washington's accommodationist philosophy spurred the Southern states to "support the building and development of separate Black institutions of higher education, but keeping them primarily

as trade schools” (p. 103). Advocating for African Americans to remain in the South, Washington furthered his belief in industrial education and racial conciliation by founding the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama. Tuskegee taught a range of practical subjects (e.g., basic farming, carpentry, brickmaking and bricklaying, print shop, home economics, etc.), concomitant with Washington’s accommodationism to existing social and political circumstances for Blacks and their families (Duster, 2009).

Contrarily, DuBois espoused a different ideology for the African American community, family, and especially African American men (hooks, 2004; Marable, 2004). In particular, DuBois was an adamant proponent of resistance and militancy as the best method to improve Blacks’ standard of living (hooks, 2004; Marable, 2004). While Washington stressed industrial training designed to aid African Americans in acquiring decent jobs, DuBois insisted that higher education and radical political action were the keys to eradicating racial oppression (Marable, 2004). He also believed this militant resistance was critical in the making of men (hooks, 2004). A serious intellectual, DuBois felt strongly that universal vocational training alone only served to perpetuate the subservience of enslavement (Marable, 2004). However, he did not categorically oppose vocational or industrial education. For example, as Alridge (2009) stated, DuBois recognized that “not all Blacks would obtain a classical education or attend college and that a segment of the Black population needed to become skilled laborers, building an economic foundation that would support academic engagement” (p. 28). Nevertheless, he also argued that the Black community had better prospects of attaining equality, agency, and a sense of collective purpose if its most talented members studied in the liberal arts (e.g., literature, philosophy, history, mathematics, and art), just as Whites (Marable, 2004). Through their intellectual gravitas, DuBois further posited that these gifted, artistic, and classically educated African

Americans – the Talented Tenth – would be in the best position to lead the Black community in securing equal treatment and increased economic standards (Marable, 2004).

Although both scholars focused on education, the two also had fundamentally different social-political philosophies. Consequently, their African American adherents were often juxtaposed by class and status (Alridge, 2009). For example, Washington’s emphasis on practical education and the need for African Americans to secure skills that would enable them to help themselves resonated well with the Black working-class. These African Americans, many of whom were industrial capitalists, believed in a social system for Blacks where industry, trade, and capital were all privately controlled and operated by other Blacks (Alridge, 2009). Many of his proponents, who ranged from laymen, ministers, businessmen, and liberal educators, also believed in the necessity of industrial education to ensure the sociopolitical and economic advancement of the Black race (Alridge, 2009). Marcus Garvey, who was an admirer of Washington, applied his ideology of self-improvement and racial pride to the establishment of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) (Harlan, 1998; Stein, 1986; Walters, 2002). Advocating for economic improvement through Black-owned enterprise (e.g., stores, banks, restaurants, clothing factories, etc.), the UNIA grew into the largest secular organization for people of African descent during this era (Summers, 2004; Walters, 2002).

DuBois, who championed for both Pan-Africanism and cultural nationalism, garnered the support of a burgeoning Black middle-class that had emerged following the Civil War (Duster, 2009; Peterson, 2007). This class of African Americans, who E. Franklin Frazier (1957) colloquially termed the “black bourgeoisie,” distinguished themselves by their classical education, strong cultural traditions, and community values. Further, Dubois’s beliefs that social respectability was inextricably linked to the making of men appealed to a distinctive population

of well-educated, African American men (especially in the North) who espoused ideologically bourgeois constructs of manliness (Peterson, 2007). These men – who drew upon White models of manliness to inform how they constructed themselves as socially respectable – were often members of fraternal organizations (such as Prince Hall Freemasonry), fell within middle-class economic lines, and upheld dominant ideas of class and gender (Peterson, 2007; Summers, 2004). Specifically, their view contended that social progress within the African American community should be ideally measured in patriarchal terms of male-headed families and homes (Gaines, 1996; Summers, 2004).

The ideologies of prominent African American thinkers of the early 20th century revealed that they thought systematically and pragmatically about the importance of education to uplift African Americans and their families. Collectively, their philosophies were grounded in the political, social, and economic realities of Blacks in a White-dominated society (Alridge, 2007). Additionally, as Alridge (2007) surmised, these leaders, and others who came afterward, necessarily moved beyond the classical versus vocational educational dichotomy to “present complex and nuanced educational agendas that readily responded to changing situations and times” (p. 32). Indeed, such changes were indispensable as the calamities of the Great Depression and World War II collided with education (especially higher education) and the stability of Black families. These adversities were augmented for Black families as the dissensions over racial equality constrained the growing nation and continued to divide the country along color lines well into the Civil Rights Era.

The Civil Rights Era to Today: Evolving Terrains in Education for African American Families

The drama of the mid-20th century was built on a basis of earlier national struggles. For example, the first 50 years of the 20th century were replete with national and state legislation directed against racial minorities (Janzen, 2006). This included The California Alien Law Act of 1913, which denied Japanese ownership of land; legislation excluding Japanese immigrants was passed in 1924; immigration laws of the 1930s prohibited Mexican entry into the United States; a 1942 presidential executive order debarred Japanese Americans into concentration camps; and there were racial segregation statutes and laws denying the right to vote. Indeed, no person of color was spared.

For Black families, before the civil rights campaigns of the 1950s, the despair of the Great Depression was especially hard. By 1932, the unemployment rate was well over 50% for Black parents as they were the first to be fired from their jobs (Darity, 2008). The wages that Black parents received were at least 30% below those of White workers, who themselves were barely at subsistence level (Darity, 2008; Ward, 1982). Public assistance programs of the time often offered African American families substantially less than Whites. And gradually, particularly after World War II, many White families began to move away from inner cities to newer, suburban communities, a process known as “White flight” (Darity, 2008; Ward, 1982). In a large part, according to Darity (2008), White flight transpired as a retort to the increased numbers of Blacks in White urban neighborhoods. Discriminatory practices, particularly those intended to conserve the growing White suburbs, limited the ability of Blacks to move their families from inner cities to the suburbs, even when they could afford to do so (Darity, 2008). In combination with middle-class families and many businesses relocating to suburbs, economic restructuring, sharp declines in manufacturing jobs, and a shift to service occupations left once

thriving neighborhoods (especially in the north) in considerable economic ruin. Consequently, African American families found themselves disproportionately impacted as they were thrust into congested and polluted urban neighborhoods. On describing these “ghettos,” as they came to be known, Darity (2008) stressed that the crises in predominantly Black urban communities were marked by,

poorly underserved infrastructures, inadequate housing to accommodate a growing urban populace, group conflict and competition over limited jobs and space, the inability for many residents to compete for new technology- based jobs, and tensions between the public and private sectors left to the formation and growth of U.S. ghettos. (p. 313)

African American families also had to contend with racially hostile governmental and social practices that, according to Franklin (2007) ultimately began to affect the family fabric and composition that had for generations proved unusually resilient. Scholars have identified social, economic, and structural sources that contributed to the dramatic shifts in the Black family’s composition during this time. Up until the brink of the Civil Rights era, 75% of African American families still included both husband and wife (Franklin, 2007). But in the years following World War II (as thousands of African American men were drafted into the army during the war, many of whom were stationed in Africa, the Pacific, and Europe), the percentage of non-married, single-parent Black families rose dramatically (Sudarkasa, 2007). Specifically, young mothers living alone with their children “began in the late 1950s and mushroomed in the 1960s and beyond” (p. 174). Between 1940 and 1960, the percentage of unmarried African American mothers tripled.

Economically, the advancement of technology consistently lessened the need for manual labor, resulting in fewer job opportunities for less-educated African American men and women. As employment options continued to be strained, birthrates among young, less-educated mothers continued to increase. Resultantly, with the expansion of public welfare and public housing, these families' dependence on them increased as well. However, the policies for these programs discouraged and/or disallowed the multigenerational households that were characteristic of Black families, whether they were headed by women or by married couples (Sudarkasa, 2007). Describing the urbanization phenomena among Black families analogously, Coates (2009) cited economist and social theorist Thomas Sowell who posited, "The black family, which had survived centuries of slavery and discrimination, began rapidly disintegrating in the liberal welfare state that subsidized unwed pregnancy and changed welfare from an emergency rescue to a way of life" (p. 83).

At the same time, as women's liberation movements were on the rise, scholars also have suggested that it challenged many African American men to negotiate their own familial responsibilities (Collins, 2005; Sudarkasa, 2007). Particularly, as growing numbers of women contested inequalities in education, employment, and household tasks, some African American men altogether escaped the responsibility for their families (Collins, 2005). This was, as Collins (2005) suggested, the precursor for households headed by African American women, as an arsenal of African American men explored new and diverse ways to construct their manhood. As women liberation movements continued to achieve a higher status, birthrates among older, middle-class, and more-educated African American families declined. Still though, reliance on extended kinship networks for financial, emotional, and social support remained a distinctive characteristic of African American families, notwithstanding their differences (Sudarkasa, 2007).

Nevertheless, several researchers contended that the social and economic fabric of African American families were concomitants of the larger 20th century functions of racial segregation during this period (Collins, 2005; Franklin, 2007; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985; McAdoo, 2002; McDaniel, 1990; Sowell, 2010; Sudarkasa, 2007).

Despite the evolving composition of many African American families, their unanimity concerning education persisted. Apart from the church, education continued to be the primary institution through which African American families made contact with one another, invested their resources, and advocated their hopes for improved social, economic, and political conditions (Freeman, 2005; Gasman, 2007). However, with dual school systems still in place in many areas of the Deep South, and with de facto segregation a recognized reality in Northern urban areas, African American families still found themselves faced with enduring challenges to equal educational opportunities in America. On college campuses, while a few African Americans were allowed to pursue their studies at predominantly White institutions (PWIS), before the 1950s, 90% of all African American degree-holders were educated at historically Black colleges (Brown & Ricard, 2007; Davis, 1998, Duster, 2009). According to Harper et al. (2007), on the eve of desegregation, less than 1 % of entering first-year students at PWIs was African American.

While most higher education institutions suffered financially through the Depression, Black colleges – the preponderate educator of African American families – were more severely impacted. Private Black colleges had many of their philanthropic sources wiped out, while most Black land-grant institutions continued to be dismally underfunded (Harper et al., 2007). Black schools were forced to cut salaries, financial aid, and additional operating expenses to stay afloat. To aid in this financial crisis, Dr. Fredrick D. Patterson (president of Tuskegee University at the

time) organized a consortium of public and private Black college presidents to partner in their fundraising efforts (Gasman, 2007). By the middle of the 1940s, with Patterson at the helm, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) was established, enlisting the support of corporate philanthropic groups and thousands of individuals. African American families, also pooled their resources to support these universities during this time of national segregation (Gasman, 2007). At the same time, the NAACP – another organization that Black families actively supported – had turned its efforts toward school desegregation and educational equality (James, 2010). Specifically, Charles Hamilton Houston, who served as chief legal attorney for the NAACP, was primarily responsible for developing the legal strategy to combat the ubiquitous injustices in education, spanning several decades (James, 2010). Hamilton identified three targets upon which to build a legal precedent against segregation in American education: the disproportionate pay scales between Black and White teachers, the disparity in transportation provided to Black and White students, and the inequality in opportunities for graduate study at state-supported segregated institutions. Houston’s strategies and legal counsel on a series of cases (e.g., *Gaines v. Canada*, *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*, and *Sweatt v. Painter*) were the precursors to four decisive pieces of legislation for African American families in the realm of education: *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and Executive Order 11246 (James, 2010).

Brown v. Board of Education

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision that irrevocably changed the nature of education for African American families. Specifically, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation, including the operation of “separate but equal” facilities in public education would

no longer be legal (Brown, 2001; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2007). In effect, this decision nullified the legality of segregation that had been established in the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision. Writing the unanimous opinion, Chief Justice Earl Warren cited that America's systems of segregated schools was "inherently unequal" under the Fourteenth Amendment's "Equal Protection Clause" (Duster, 2009). As McAdoo (2007) maintained, African American families lauded the promise contained by the *Brown* decision. Nevertheless, the *Brown* ruling did not instantaneously "signal a victory for African Americans, as many whites were not receptive to the court's ruling" (Harper et al., 2007, p. 396). A year later, the Supreme Court had to reinforce "with all deliberate speed" the decision to demonstrate zero tolerance for the anti-integration position taken by some Whites (Harper et al., 2007). Still, the road ahead for African Americans and their families in the quest for academic equity was paved with resistance and open defiance. Perhaps the most dramatic test of the *Brown* decision happened in Little Rock, Arkansas only three years later. Nine African American students officially desegregated the all-White Central High School on September 25, 1957 (Fitzgerald, 2006). The event was so racially impassioned, nonetheless, that President Eisenhower ordered 1,000 federal troops to escort and protect them (Fitzgerald, 2006). Three years later in New Orleans, Louisiana, Ruby Bridges became the first African American to integrate an elementary school in the South. While several White parents pulled their own children out, and most of the teachers refused to teach while a Black student was enrolled, with the backing of the NAACP, Bridges attended William Frantz Elementary in 1960 (Bridges, 1999). She too was escorted by U.S. Marshalls for protection from the racially-xenophobic crowds. As Fairclough (2007) asserted in *A Class of Their Own*, in both cases, the families of these students were actively and intimately involved.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

While primary and secondary schools were at the core of the *Brown* case, the precedent applied to public postsecondary institutions as well (Harper et al., 2007). Concurrently, in the first three years of the 1960s, integration efforts had spread to college campuses, most of which sparked mass uproar and insurrection among many White parents. In 1961, for instance, African American students Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter were admitted to the University of Georgia after a federal district court ordered the institution to do so. A year later, escorted by U.S. Marshalls, James Meredith became the first African American to enroll at the University of Mississippi. And in 1963, despite the Governor's efforts to barricade their entry, Vivian Malone and James Hood successfully registered for courses at the University of Alabama. According to Brown (2001), however, the order to desegregate did not officially reach higher education until a decade after *Brown*, under the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson. Specifically, Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 provided that "no person in the United States, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, or the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (Malaney, 1987, p. 17). Also, Title VI restricted the disbursement of federal funds to schools refusing to integrate (Harper et al., 2007).

Higher Education Act of 1965

In 1965, the Higher Education Act, in tandem with integration, favored upon the institutions that were still largely responsible for educating African American families: HBCUS (Harper et al., 2007). More specifically, Title III of the Higher Education Act (entitled *Strengthening Developing Institutions*) offered financial assistance for their subsistence. According to Roebuck and Murty (1993), the term 'developing institutions' was added to the

legislation to avoid “designating Black higher education institutions as the primary recipients of the federal assistance made available in the funding” (p. 40). During the period in which African American families were beginning to explore educational options elsewhere, Title III funds under the Higher Education Act supported various administrative improvements, services to students, curriculum and faculty development, and exchange programs at Black institutions (Harper et al., 2007).

Executive Order 11246

In a speech at Howard University, a historically Black college, President John F. Kennedy advanced the term “affirmative action” in the United States (Bowen & Bok, 1998). An outgrowth and continuation of national efforts to remedy subjugation of racial/ethnic minorities and women, affirmative action was followed by detailed plans to augment the inclusion of historically excluded groups in education, employment, housing, business, and government (Harper et. al, 2007). Kennedy’s aims were officially actualized in 1965 when President Johnson signed Executive Order 11246. This legislation prohibited federal contractors (and sub-contractors of federally-assisted construction contractors) from discriminating in employment on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, or national origin (Bowen & Bok, 1998). That same year, affirmative action was systematically enacted in the United States (Harper et al., 2007). The policy efforts enacted throughout the Civil Rights Era opened doors for African Americans and their families to participate in education in ways that were once entirely inaccessible to non-Whites (Harper et al., 2007). Over the course of the subsequent four decades, educational policies continued to be expanded and/or amended (e.g., Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Improving America’s School Act, and No Child Left Behind), philanthropic dollars continued to be invested, a range of national, state, and local commissions and tasks forces were

formed, and various publications and documentaries were produced. While researchers contended that there are structural and systemic barriers that continue to generate disparities in educational access and attainment, they have also argued that, despite the odds, African American families persist in their investment and participation in education (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Harper, et al., 2007; Holzman, 2012; Richards & Awokoya, 2012; Sheldon, 2005; Simon, 2004; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). Indeed, as Freeman (2005) posited, their investment in education at present has everything to do with the historically unique ways in which they acquired it.

Conclusion

This chapter chronicled the rich history of African American families' journey to acquire education (across all levels) over time. Specifically, the chapter described the educational plight and successes for African American families throughout six critical periods in United States history: pre-transplantation Africa, post-transplantation Africa, the Antebellum and Reconstruction Eras, the Renaissance Era, and the Civil Rights Era. This historical synthesis makes clear that African American families have always considered education to be of seminal importance in order to effectively correspond and contribute in societal affairs. When any group of people has been deprived of the right to read and write, as was historically the case for African Americans, intuitively, they will affix a distinctive value on those skills (Freeman, 2005). For example, being shut out of the flow of information in antebellum America, African Americans recognized that they could not adequately navigate their surroundings without the necessary communication skills. As such, learning the basics of reading and writing became not only a main concern, but a necessity (Franklin & Schweningen, 2006; Freeman, 2005). This same commitment to education among African American families has persisted since the cataclysm

and legacy of slavery. In the following chapter, a review of pertinent theory and college choice research will establish a necessary context for exploring the pipeline to higher education among African American males.

CHAPTER III - THEORY AND RESEARCH

It is a test of true theory not only to account for but to predict phenomena.
William Whewell

Theory is often considered the basis for sound intellectual inquiry (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). According to White (2004), the overarching goal of theory is to explain and predict observable phenomena (i.e., human behavior). Given that theories contain general statements about specific instances, among these statements are propositions that take into account the context of the phenomenon, linked together in a systematic and coherent fashion (White, 2004). Similarly in family research texts, theory (or theorizing) is defined as the search for explanation – questioning the “why and how beyond one’s immediate observations” (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005, p. 6).

This chapter includes the theoretical frameworks of the study. First, it begins with a review of symbolic interactionism, underscoring how the theory shapes an analysis of the unique veneration that African American families hold regarding higher education. Additionally, classic college choice research is explored, which provides a necessary context for examining what is known about how students decide whether and where to attend college. Next, the prominent theoretical models of college choice that offer expanded ways of understanding the college search and enrollment processes are presented. Finally, two critical gaps are identified in the college choice research that draws specific attention to the need for the present study.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interaction theory is a viable lens to examine the emphasis that African American families place on higher education. Originally coined by Blumer (1969) to explicate the ideas of George Herbert Mead (1934), symbolic interactionism focuses on perspective,

interaction, and meaning-making, and places a particular emphasis on how individuals view themselves, others, and their situations. From this approach, it is believed that humans act (or react) toward things based on the meanings that they have developed for those things through interactions with others (Cast & Burke, 2002; Hollander & Howard, 2000; Stryker, 1980). Thus, one's definition of an interaction (or situation) shapes the expectations that he or she holds for self and others (Stets, 1988). This is referred to as shared meaning (White & Klein, 2008).

An important element of symbolic interactionism is the concept of self, which Mead (1934), Kuhn (1964), Blumer (1969), and Zurcher (1977) all argued is fluid and dynamic in nature. In the broadest sense, the concept of self is fundamentally social in origin because it involves the process of observing and conversing with oneself, and subsequently “responding” as we imagine others would. This process is heavily impacted by the messages we receive from others, especially those with whom we have much contact and whose opinions matter – such as our family members (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Across cultures, such messages (or shared meanings) are represented by symbols. However, symbols on their own do not have meaning. Instead, interpretation of a symbol's meaning is achieved through socialization within a particular culture (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuken, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

The meaning of college as a symbol is different for African Americans than for other cultural groups. As discussed in chapter two, this inimitability is primarily attributable to a history of oppression and discrimination in the United States where African Americans and their families were denied access to institutions of higher education (Brown & Ricard, 2007). For this reason, African American families have come to attach a high premium on the skills that their members can acquire through a college education (Freeman, 2005). Many African American parents socialize their children early on to share in a culturally symbiotic regard for education

(Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Baugh & Coughlin, 2012; Tolliver, et al., 2009). To ensure that the symbolic message and meaning of education is sustained and transmitted across generations, both non-fictive and fictive kin (such as the church and neighbors) participate in African American children's academic predisposition (Baugh & Coughlin, 2012; Freeman, 2005).

Furthermore, attending college for the mere sake of acquiring a degree is not the grounds upon which these families maintain their symbolic affinity for higher education. Instead, African American families view a college education as a means of augmenting their economic position within society as well as the ability to be mobile and advance to greater positions traditionally inaccessible to them (Baugh & Coughlin, 2012). In fact, although African American students are more burdened by the cost of higher education than their White counterparts, they are more likely to see the benefit from the investment for themselves, their communities, and the nation overall (Klineberg, Wu, & Douds, 2013). And so, the aggregate of potential resources which are symbolically linked to the possession of a college education provides African Americans with the backing needed to pursue this option, because it is expected to be a function of increased equity in employment opportunities and improved social and cultural capital.

College Choice

College choice has been defined as a “complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university, or institution of advanced vocational training” (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 234). According to Chambers (2009), almost 2,000 publications have investigated issues of college choice over the past 45 years. Most of this research has been divided in two distinct ways: 1) studies that examine the factors that influence college choice, and 2) studies that divide the college choice process into various stages

(theoretical models). Also, studies of college choice have been traditionally classified using two different academic frameworks: sociological and economic (or econometric) (Cooper, 2008).

Sociologists also have viewed college choice from what is known as the status attainment perspective. This perception focuses on how families' status levels (namely parents) impact the future plans of their children. Hence, sociological frameworks underscore variables such as student background, academic aspirations, educational achievement of significant others, cultural capital (cultural resources generally derived from one's family), and social capital (relationships with peers, schools, and community) as most salient in shaping college choice (Cooper, 2008). Economic frameworks employ econometric models and human capital theory to contend that students' decisions of whether or not to attend college are anchored in their evaluations of the perceived benefits associated with specific institutions (Cooper, 2008). Specifically, these studies commonly highlight fiscal variables such as cost of attendance, value of attending, and current labor market conditions as most critical in the college choice process (Cooper, 2008). Both sociological and economic perspectives offer valuable insight into how students, in general, conceptualize and navigate the decision to actually matriculate to college. Accordingly, the following section includes a summary of the early research on college choice and addresses the prominent models of college choice that were birthed out of this early scholarship.

Origins of College Choice Research

The early work of John Holland (1959) is commonly cited as the genesis of steady scholarship of students' college choice. He analyzed information about National Merit Scholarship students from 1957 to gauge what variables compelled them to choose a particular institution. Analysis of his quantitative investigation found that a student's background, specifically cultural and personal development from family, most influenced college choice.

Richards and Holland (1964) examined the ways in which students explained their choice of college. Their goal was to discover if typical explanations of, or influences on, a student's decision to pursue college could be organized into a few easily understood categories. Drawing from a sample of 8,292 high school students who took the ACT in 1964, results of a factor analysis revealed four categories of student choice influences: intellectual emphasis (i.e., high scholastic standards, reputable faculty, national reputation), practicality (e.g., close to home, affordable), advice of others (e.g., parental advisement and involvement, consultation with high school teacher or counselor), and social emphasis (e.g., coeducational, availabilities of fraternities and sororities, quality athletic program). In 1966, Berdie and Hood correspondingly studied the predictability of college choice by analyzing the results from a 1961 survey on high school graduates in Minnesota. Out of the 44,756 students who completed the survey, they included a random sample of 3,817 students. After assessing academic ability, as well as personal, cultural, and socioeconomic factors, similar to Richards and Holland, Berdie and Hood found that parents, peers, teachers, and counselors impacted a student's decision to attend college.

By the 1970s, there was a major surge in the production of college choice scholarship, and most included major national studies (e.g., Alexander, Eckland, & Griffin, 1975; Astin, 1972; Corazzini, Dugan, & Grabowski, 1972; Duncan, Featherman, & Duncan, 1972; Freeman, 1976; Hise & Smith, 1977; Jackson & Weatherby, 1975; Karabel & Astin, 1975; Nyquist, 1976; Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Sullivan & Litten, 1976; Wegner & Sewell, 1970). Also, according to Hoxby (2009), most of this research focused on variables that influenced a student's decision to enter a particular type of college. For example, Anderson, Bowman, and Tinto (1972) considered the effect of geographic accessibility to a college on the proportion of high school graduates

continuing their education beyond high school. Using a sample of over 20,000 high school graduates from Illinois and North Carolina, they found that students from low-income families had increased attendance rates when living in a community with a public college available (Anderson et al., 1972).

Christensen, Melder, and Weisbrod (1975) considered the predominant variables that most affected high school graduates' decisions to attend college: their own academic abilities, cost of attendance, and family background. With a sample of 440 high school graduates in Wisconsin, the results indicated that students whose parents were better-educated and had higher family incomes (than those who were less educated and had lower family incomes) were more likely to start college and attend a four-year rather than two-year institution (Christensen et al., 1972). Spies (1973) used survey data from a random sample of parents of high school seniors who scored 1100 or higher on the SAT. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of financial considerations on whether students applied to select groups of mostly private institutions. Like the Christensen et al. (1972) study, the main conclusion Spies drew from his economic analysis was that cost and family income were found to be statistically significant. This study also found strong evidence that matriculation to private institutions mattered more among better educated and higher-income parents (versus those with less education and lower incomes), who were also not as concerned as their less-educated counterparts with institutional expenditures. The dominant thought among college choice researchers at the time was that students tended to go to institutions where "the ability of the student population as a whole is similar to their own" (Shaut & Rizzo, 1980, p. 36). More specifically, these researchers argued that students of high ability – which included the student's academic performance, educational attainment of their parent(s), as well as the socioeconomic background of their family –

gravitated towards institutions that are highly selective, while students of lower ability were likely to apply to and attend less selective institutions (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Shaut & Rizzo, 1980).

Models of College Choice

Chapman Model (1981)

Models of college choice began to emerge in the 1980s as studies on the subject were becoming increasingly popular (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Stage & Hossler, 1989). One of earliest models of college choice was developed by Chapman (1981) (see Figure 1). Chapman's (1981) model describes that there are two primary domains of college choice: external influences and student characteristics. The external influences refer to factors such as "significant persons" (e.g., parents, friends, guidance counselors), institutional characteristics (e.g., cost, availability of financial aid, geographic location), and the prospective student's contact/engagement with an institution (e.g., campus visit, recruiting efforts). Student characteristics refer to one's family's socioeconomic status, aptitude level, educational aspiration level, and academic performance in high school. According to Chapman (1981), both influences produce a general expectation about college life. Together with the student's choice of institution(s) and the college's choice of students, Chapman concluded that all of these factors coalesce to inform student's college choice.

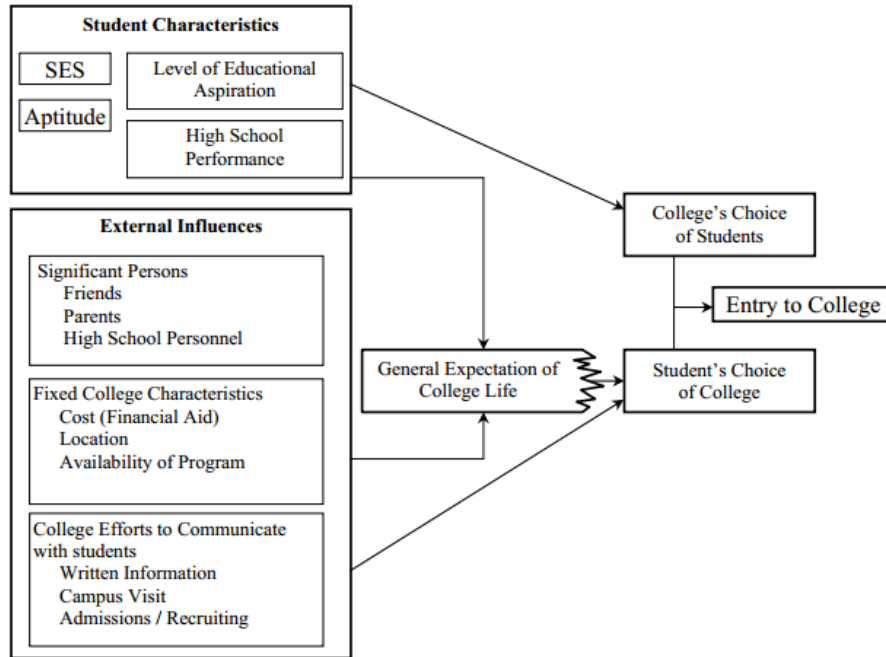


Figure 1. Chapman's Model of Influences on Student College Choice (1981).

Hanson and Litten Model (1981)

The Chapman (1981) model served as a catalyst for later models of student college choice. Among them was the work of Hanson and Litten (1982) who proposed a three-stage model (see Figure 2). The first stage, predisposition, is a two-step process involving the students' desire to attend college and is subsequently followed by the actual decision to attend. According to Hanson and Litten, many high school students consider pursuing higher education after graduation, but the actual decision to enroll (and attend) is the medium for action. They also contended that a parallel financial-aid activity transpires during each stage of the college choice process. The second stage of the model is referred to as the exploratory stage. At this stage, students actively seek out information regarding post-secondary educational institutions. Students acquire this information principally from college catalogs and brochures, school counselors, parents, peers, and friends. However, parents and peers are seen as the most influential source of information. The last stage, application/matriculation, commences with the

students' application for admission to the institutions they have selected. At the same time, the parallel application for financial aid occurs. The final stride at this stage is actual enrollment, which entails students' ultimate decision among schools that granted admission and offered fiscal aid.

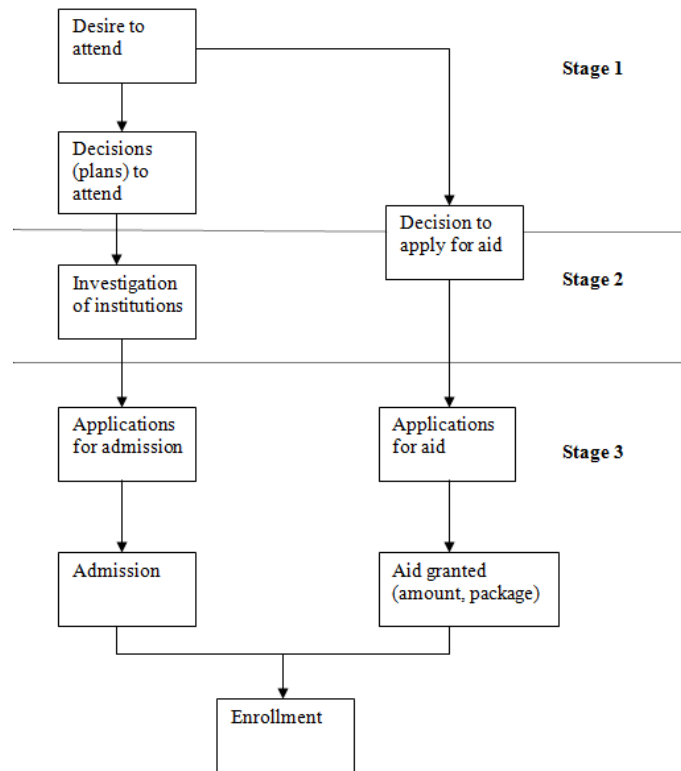


Figure 2. Hanson and Litten Model (1982).

Litten Model (1982)

In another study, Litten (1982) extended his work with Hanson by proposing an expanded model of the college choice process (see Figure 3). Specifically, he averred that college choice varied by factors such as gender, ability, geographic location, ethnicity, and parents' education level. Litten used Kotler's (1976) seven-stage process of college enrollment to buttress his expanded model. Also, like the Chapman (1981) model, Litten's extended work incorporated broader structural attributes. In particular, these attributes included family background, personal

characteristics of the student, environmental conditions, public policy, influences and media used, actions of the college, and characteristics of the institution(s). Litten's revised model also diverged from the former Hanson and Litten model in that the financial aid process was integrated as a critical component of the expanded attribute groupings, as opposed to being a separate part.

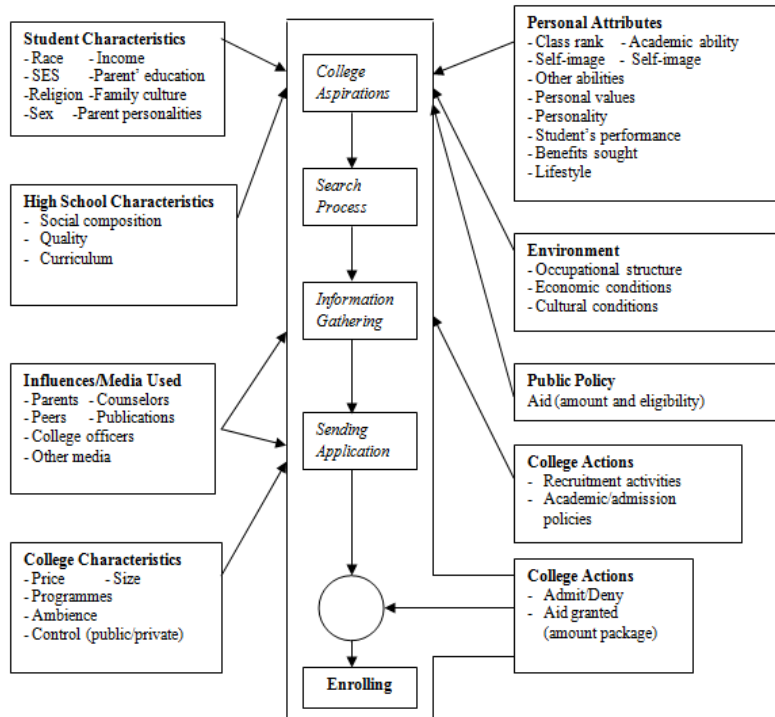


Figure 3. Litten's Expanded Model of College Selection Process (1982).

Jackson Model (1982)

The college choice model developed by Harvard's Gregory Jackson (1982) was considered pioneering because it was the first to include the notion of factors being more or less important at different stages. Akin to Hanson and Litten (1982), Jackson's model was divided into three-stages: preference, exclusion, and evaluation (see Figure 4). In the preference stage, Jackson discussed the attributes that are most salient in the school choice process. Specifically, he put forward that a student's academic achievement was the strongest predictor of post-

secondary aspirations, followed by his or her family background and quality of the high school. The next stage, exclusion, contained information-gathering activities employed to explore different colleges and universities. According to Jackson, during this phase, students weigh their choices by rejecting seemingly implausible options and acquiring further information about others. The challenge at this stage is that misinformation may result in students' eliminating positive post-secondary alternatives. The overarching product at this stage is known as a student's "choice set," which includes the institutions to which he or she will likely apply. Geographic location of the institution wields the greatest influence at this stage, followed by family input, the availability of accurate information, and academic vocational background.

The last stage of Jackson's (1982) model is evaluation. During the evaluation stage, students ultimately choose the institution that they will attend. Jackson highlighted attributes related to employment, college makeup, and cost as key at this stage. However, family background was also cited as playing a pivotal role in a student's evaluation system. A significant aspect of Jackson's model was the variables found to be important at various points of the process. For example, Jackson found social variables to be key at early stages and less important in the final stages. Economic variables, such as price, cost, and geographic location, were found to be significant in all phases, but most important later in the process. However, family background and parental influence were found to be important in all three phases of the model.

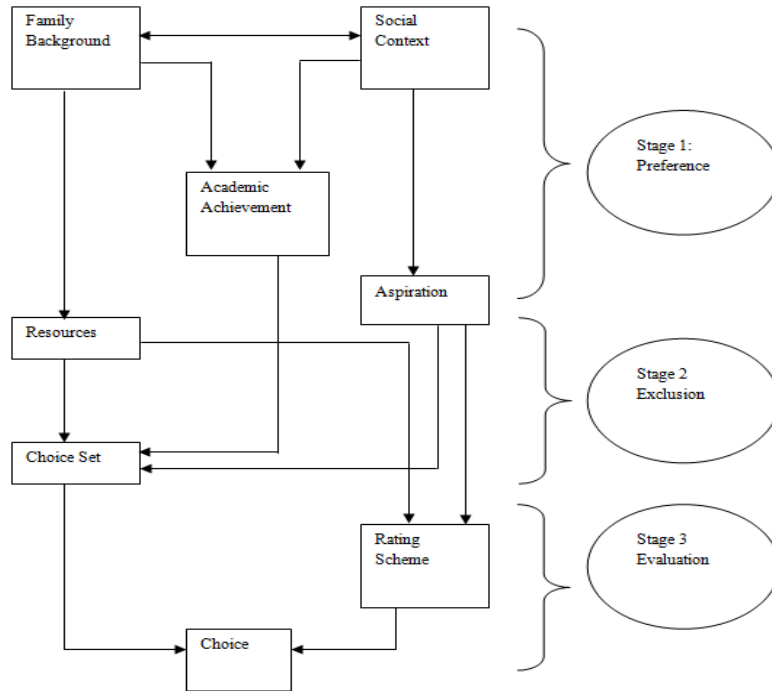


Figure 4. Jackson Model (1982).

Hossler and Gallagher Model (1987)

The aforementioned models provided the foundational basis for Don Hossler and Karen Gallagher's (1987) seminal work on college choice. Like the Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982) models, Hossler and Gallagher posited that college conceptualization and enrollment are embedded within three stages: predisposition, search, and choice (see Figure 5). Predisposition is an information gathering stage where students receive both verbal and non-verbal messages from influential bodies that shape their proclivity toward education beyond 12th grade. At this point, students may be undecided about whether they will attend college (Hossler & Vesper, 1999). Researchers have found that individual variables (e.g., academic level and involvement in extracurricular activities), social and cultural variables (e.g., race, gender, family socioeconomic status, parental income and education, family encouragement and involvement), and organizational variables (e.g., high school racial composition and teachers) are particularly vital

during the predisposition phase (Falsey & Haynes, 1984; Frost, 2007; Goldsmith, 2004; Hearn, 1984; Hossler & Vesper, 1999; Manski & Wise, 1983; McDonough, 1997; Qian & Blair, 1999).

The search stage involves the process in which a student engages to determine the type of post-secondary institution to which he or she will apply. Thus, at this phase, students have decided that they will attend college and begin to make use of various resources to search for colleges (McDonough, 1997). On average, students make decisions about college by the tenth grade (McDonough, Ventresca, & Outcalt, 2000). Scholars who utilized the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model to guide their own research have demonstrated that students continue to take into account their academic ability at this stage, as well as social and cultural factors (such as their family's income and the student's race) (Abraham & Clark, 2006; Dynarski, 2000; Freeman, 2005; Hamrick & Hossler, 1996; Kane, 2003; Litten, 1982; McDonough, 1994, 1997; McDonough, Korn, & Yamasaki, 1997; Thomas, 2004; Zemsky & Oedel, 1983). Policy factors, such as statewide financial aid programs, also heavily influence students' decisions at this phase (Perna, 2006).

The final phase, choice, refers to the student's ultimate selection of an educational institution. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), at this stage, students have decided to pursue college (predisposition) and have actively searched for, applied to, and received offers of admission to institutions. Occurring typically during a student's senior year, students in this phase face the task of choosing which college they will attend (Hossler, 2006). Parental encouragement and involvement, family socioeconomic status, availability of financial aid, and institutional prestige and ranking influence students' decisions to select a college (DesJardins, 2002; Griffith & Rask, 2007; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Reynolds, 2007; St. John, Musoba, Simmons, & Chung, 2002; Wolniak & Engberg, 2007; Xianglei, 2005).

Over time, scholars have heavily extended the original Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model which, in its original form for example, did not take into account factors such as a student’s race and ethnicity or gender (Freeman, 1999a, 2005; Hurtado et al., 1997; Maxey, Lee, & McLure, 1995; Perna, 2006; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). Nonetheless, across disciplines, the theoretical model proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) is seminal among those who explore how students conceptualize and navigate the decision to pursue higher education.

Stage	Individual	Social/Cultural	Organizational/Policy
Predisposition	Grade Level Academic Performance Extracurricular Activities	Race Gender Parental Income Parental Education Socioeconomic Status Parental Encouragement Extended Family and Peers	Teachers School Racial Makeup
Search	Academic Ability	Race Family Income Socioeconomic Status	Tuition Cost College Counselors Financial Aid Policy Postsecondary Marketing
Choice	Economic Expectations	College Rankings Parental Education Parental Occupation Socioeconomic Status Parental Encouragement	Financial Aid High Schools

Figure 5. Hossler and Gallagher Model of College Choice (1987).

Tinto’s Model of Social and Academic Engagement

The theoretical frame posited by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987, 1994) has attained near paradigmatic status for its extensive explication of students’ collegiate engagement, and demarks the start of the current, national dialogue on undergraduate retention (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Informed by Van Gennep’s (1960) anthropological model of cultural rites of passage, Tinto (1994) theorized that students who perceive incongruence between themselves and the institution will experience more difficulty transitioning and being fully integrated. As a result, they are less likely to persist. Tinto proposed

two, interrelated variables (academic and social integration) that are central to positively shaping students' perceptions of college. Specifically, Tinto suggested that how students perceive the college experience relates to the degree to which they engage in the social and academic communities of an institution. Negative perceptions of the college experience, then, become predictors of attrition.

The model (Figure 6) posits that students enter college with family and individual attributes as well as pre-college schooling. They enter with certain commitments, both to completing their degree and to remaining at the specific institution. Also, they enter an academic system that is characterized by grade performance and intellectual development, which together lead to academic integration. Finally, they enter a social system where peer group interactions and faculty interactions lead to social integration. Tinto (1994) postulated that students must separate from the group with which they were formerly associated, namely family members and high school peers, and undergo a period of transition “during which the person begins to interact in new ways with the members of the new group into which membership is sought” (Tinto 1993, p. 93).

He further added that students' who successfully transition to (and through) college do so because they incorporate the normative values and behaviors of the new group, or college. For Tinto, students who leave college prior to attaining a degree are those who are unable to effectively distance themselves from their family or community of origin and adopt the values and the behavioral patterns that typify the environment of the institution they are attending. While Tinto's model has been censured, supported, and revised over the last 30 years, it continues to significantly influence how scholars and practitioners view undergraduate patterns of college perception and engagement.

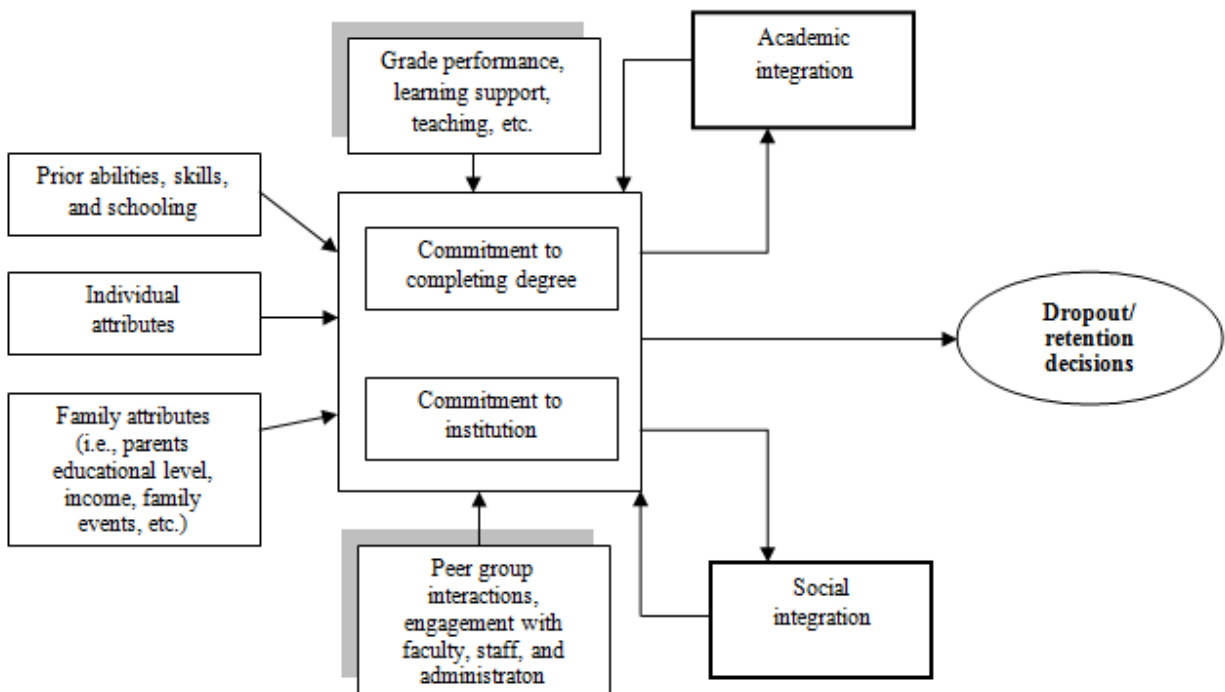


Figure 6. Tinto Model of Social and Academic Engagement (1994).

Identification of Gaps in the College Choice Literature

Family Involvement in College Choice

Undoubtedly, there is an abundance of research available related to college choice and matriculation. Indeed, this scholarship makes it clear that college choice is a complex, interactional process in which student factors, social and cultural attributes, and institutional characteristics interconnect to shape the decision making process (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; DesJardins et al., 1999; Perna, 2006; Tuitt, Agans, Choudaha, & Krusemark, 2008).

Interestingly, across the findings on college choice, family influence and/or involvement has consistently been found to significantly impact student's educational aspirations and higher education plans (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Baksh & Hoyt, 2001; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996; Clark & Crawford, 1992; DesJardins et al., 1999;

Freeman, 2005; Hearn, Griswold, Marine, & McFarland, 1995; Horvart, 1996; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Kinzie, et al., 2004; Kotler & Fox, 1985; McDonough et al., 1997; Perna, 2006; Sevier, 1992; Tuitt, et al., 2008; Xianglei, 2005). In most cases, the family was ranked as either the foremost influential factor or was listed among the top three variables in shaping students' postsecondary plans (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, & Zhang, 2013; Freeman, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008; Taylor et al., 2004). Despite the constancy of this finding, college choice models generally neglect to offer a full explication of how, and in what ways, families participate in the higher education plans of their children. Specifically, beyond parental education and/or family income, little is known about what families actually do, especially during the predisposition phase.

Scholars have argued that the information-gathering (or predisposition) phase is the most important of all the stages of college choice because this period is the most protracted and actually begins well before high school (Cochran & Coles, 2012). For example, it is clear that early exposure and familial socialization have a substantial impact on students' goal setting and acquisition (De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; McNeal, 1999; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Indeed, the process of learning, one's conception of how the world works, one's social-psychological orientations, and reconciliation between costs and awards – all of which inform how individuals come to make decisions – begin very early in life (Barnard, 2004; De Civita et al., 2004; Eamon, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Schreiber, 2002). Specific to academic decision making, environmental factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, geography, and parents' educational level) as well as school-related factors (e.g., high school climate, school counselors, and academic performance) are integral for students (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Kurlaender, 2006; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Stokes & Somers, 2004;

Tinto, 1975). Among these factors however, family members, particularly parents, are the most influential determinants of students' educational expectations and occupational aspirations (Cochran & Coles, 2012; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Hines, 1997; Lee, 1984; Otto, 1995; Parham & Austin, 1994).

The role of family involvement is especially key during adolescence where the relationships between social background and educational aspirations have been thoroughly researched (Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2004; Goldberg, Halpern-Felsher, & Millstein, 2002; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986; Sebald, 1989; Song et al., 2009). For instance, although adolescents actively begin to assert their autonomy from their parents/guardians in their high school years, they are still very much reliant upon their parents for their career growth (Peterson, Strivers, & Peters, 1986; Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996; Song et al., 2009). In fact, parental influence on adolescents' post-secondary choices is often stronger than any other group including teachers, counselors, mentors, or friends (Bardick et al., 2004; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005).

However, while many researchers emphasize family-related characteristics in their investigations of choosing college, the family as the central unit of analysis is virtually non-existent in the discourse on college choice. Many of these past studies included only demographic data and archival material or recapitulated findings from extant works to support their claims concerning the family (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). Other researchers employed paper-and-pencil surveys or large-scale assessment tools (such as the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory) to numerically quantify individual student responses (Dillon & Smith, 2013). Consequently, our understanding of nuanced family-related characteristics – such as whether, how, and why parents value, promote, and emphasize college attendance and in what

ways those values are (or are not) transmitted and interpreted by their children – have not been fully explored (Bell et al., 2009; McDonough, 1997; Prescott & Bransberger, 2012).

African Americans and College Choice

Previous research on college choice has effectively captured the decision-making process for the general student population. In fact, the masses of college choice research and theoretical models were constructed by responses from primarily White student samples (Baksh & Hoyt, 2001; Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob, & Cummings, 2004; Stage & Hossler, 1989). Similar efforts for African American students are sparsely found in the literature (Freeman, 2005; Pitre, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). According to Strayhorn (2013), extant college choice models are “limited in their explanatory power given that *different* students consider *different* factors when choosing *different* colleges” (p. 24). In other words, college choice research and theoretical frameworks would have broader explanatory power if they more closely and consistently measured pertinent social and cultural background factors (such as race and ethnicity) among diverse groups of students (Strayhorn, 2013).

College choice among the African American student population has not been a totally mute subject in research, nevertheless. At present, the majority of this scholarship has concentrated on African American student’s decision to attend an HBCU instead of a PWI (Allen, Harris, & Dinwiddie, 2008; Dinwiddie & Allen, 2003; Freeman, 2005; McDonough et al., 1997; Strayhorn, 2008; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Given the critical role that HBCUs have played (and continue to play) in creating a safe and inclusive learning atmosphere for African American students, such a focus is warranted (Cyprian-Andrews, 2004; Freeman, 2004; Gurin & Epps, 1975; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Thompson, 2005). Further, legal attacks on affirmative action and persistent disparities in college choice outcomes have sparked interest in

eradicating educational inequality for African American students (Allen, 2000, 2005; Ternanishi & Briscoe, 2008).

Even considering the shortage of research on the college choice process for African American students, findings in this area have been relatively consistent over the past 30 years. Such findings revealed that African American students have similar or higher academic aspirations than White students (Kao & Tienda, 1988; Klineberg, Wu, & Douds, 2013), parent's educational level influences African American students' college aspirations (Bateman & Hossler, 1996; Freeman, 2005; Qian & Blair, 1999; Strayhorn, 2008; Toldson, Braithwaite, & Rentie, 2009), and siblings, extended family, and other fictive-kin provide access to social networks that shape African American students' college plans (Freeman, 1997, 2005; Pitre, 2006). Additionally, African American students are more likely to attend college if they believe that it will yield economic returns for them and their families (Freeman, 2005).

Freeman (1999b, 2005), Horvat (1996), and McDonough and Calderone (2006) found that a high school's racial composition (as well as the race of available counselors) influenced the college search and selection process. Specifically, African American students from predominantly White high schools were more likely to consider HBCUs, while African American students from predominantly Black high schools were more likely to consider PWI's. Religion and geographic location also have played important roles in African American students' decision to attend college, especially an HBCU. For example, McDonough and Antonio (1996) found that African American students from the South were more likely to attend an HBCU than students from other regions of the nation. The authors also noted that the religious affiliation of a college was a consideration in their choice to attend a HBCU rather than a PWI (McDonough & Antonio, 1996). Timmermans and Booker (2006) reported that participating in church precollege

programs impacted African American students entering college. African American students' perceptions of cultural and social consciousness also shaped their decisions (especially in the choice stage) (Freeman, 2005). Specifically, African American students who opted to attend an HBCU communicated an interest in cultivating a stronger understanding of their racial and ethnic heritage.

Introducing the Freeman Model

Like past studies of college choice among primarily White student populations, scholarship on African American students has also accentuated the unprecedented role of the family during this process (Freeman, 2005; McDonough et al., 1997; Strayhorn, 2008; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). However, in the same way, understanding college choice from a family-level approach was not the intended focus of these studies. To date, Kassie Freeman's (2005) typology comes closest to exploring the phenomenon of African American families and students' college choice (see Figure 7). Addressing the social barriers that impact a student's postsecondary options, she argued that for African American students, predisposition toward college is undeniably filtered by culture. Influenced by the Chapman (1981) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) models, Freeman (2005) denoted three primary ways (realms) in which families influence college choice for African American students in general: a) college is an automatic expectation in their family, b) children are encouraged to attain education beyond the family level, and c) young people are encouraged to be self-motivated and to avoid negative role models.

African American students in the first realm of the Freeman (2005) model (automatic expectation in their family) enjoy "automatic support of their educational goals within their families" (p. 16). These students are likely to have parents or family members who are college graduates. Students in the second realm (encouragement to go beyond family educational level)

are encouraged by their parents or extended family members to go beyond their own level of education. Students in this category typically come from families in which parents are not college graduates. Finally, students in the last realm (self-motivation and/or avoidance of “what I do not want to be”) provide a different and important example of how African American families impact students choosing higher education. That is to say, even if a family member has not attended college or does not express a desire for a younger family member to attend, this does not automatically mean that these potential college students should be disregarded. Quite the reverse, students in this category are motivated to choose college in home environments that may seem to have negative or indifferent views about higher education.

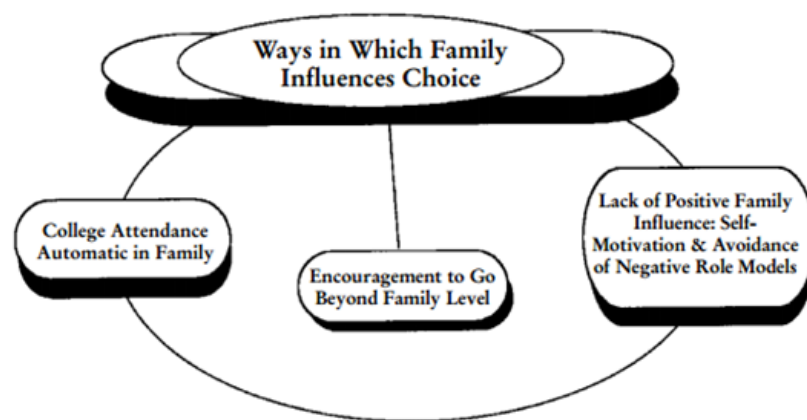


Figure 7. The Influence of Family on Student’s College Choice (Freeman, 2005).

While no particular model fully captures the dynamic nature of African American students’ decisions regarding college, there is little argument regarding the viability of Freeman’s (2005) model as a solid theoretical premise (Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Pitre, Johnson, & Pitre, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). At the same time, much remains to be known about the particular ways in which families foster college aspirations, especially among African American males – a population that Freeman (2005) argued have been “terribly under investigated” (p. xxii). In particular, no family-

level studies (or theoretical models) are readily available that explain how, and in what ways, families cultivate academic identities and ultimately college ambitions among African American men who were admitted to college and satisfactorily enrolled in courses. Even in Freeman's (2005) study, participants were high school students (grades 10 through 12) who were not actually enrolled in college, even though they expressed serious intent to attend.

Hence, the present study was necessary as research evidence suggested that there are unique factors that shape African American men's ability to access institutions of higher education (Chavous et al., 2003; Howard, 2003; Pitre, 2006; Toldson et al., 2009). Lamentably, African American male students receive "the least amount of attention, particularly from a research perspective, and yet could demonstrate the greatest potential" (Freeman, 2005, p. 19). Nevertheless, African American men have demonstrated distinct patterns in achieving higher educational goals that, if assessed at the family-level, could paint a fuller picture of college choice than existing models of this process currently explain (Freeman, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Toldson, 2008). Accordingly, Chapter IV describes the methodological scheme used for the current study in order to investigate the following overarching research question: how, and in what ways, do African American male collegians perceive the family's role in their decision to pursue higher education?

CHAPTER IV - METHODOLOGICAL PLAN AND PRAXIS

So when you are listening to someone, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of them, not just part of them.

Jiddu Krishnamurt

According to Hammersley (1989), it is critical that methodological plans be “devised in such a way as to capture those phenomena which hold the causal or functional relations that science seeks to discover. Those relations and the character of the phenomena that they relate to must be discovered, they cannot be legislated by definitions” (p. 121). As stated in the preceding chapter, most studies on factors that influence students’ college choice were conducted by using quantitative instruments, which generally neglected to capture the essence and full extent of their pre-college experiences. Thus, in order to discover more fully how familial involvement shapes African American males’ predilection toward higher education, qualitative methods were employed. First, this chapter introduces qualitative inquiry and the methodological technique that guided this study. Next, a profile of the sampling strategy is provided. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of data collection and analysis procedures. The research questions that directed this study were:

1. How, and in what ways, do African American male collegians perceive the family’s role in their decision to pursue higher education?
2. How do perceptions of family influences compare to those identified in the Freeman (2005) typology of family influence and African American students’ college choice?
3. How do perceptions of family influences compare across various family compositions?

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methods offer researchers an opportunity to explore phenomena about which relatively little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Additionally, qualitative methodology enables researchers to acquire a thorough understanding of a phenomenon or experience, as well as the flexibility to modify the design of the study to integrate new information and interpretations about what respondents share concerning their experiences (Patton, 2002). Such flexibility includes the capability of documenting the creative, diverse, unanticipated, and subjective side of human behavior, which cannot be predicted (Hammersley, 1989). Moreover, qualitative methods can disclose “the process or sequence of events in which individual factors and the particular social environment to which one has been responsive have united in conditioning habits, attitudes, personality and behavior trends” (Hammersley, p. 94).

Family phenomena are multifaceted, subjective, and private (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992). Thus, studies of family experiences necessitate techniques that are tailored to this complexity (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993). Qualitative methods are a particularly useful approach to exploring the family influence on African American young men’s college choice. The decision to identify, enroll, and transition to college is influenced by sundry social and cultural factors (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hurtado, et al., 1997; Perna & Titus, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008). These social and cultural factors often are nested within compound and diverse past-lived familial experiences of students (Freeman, 2005). Such nuances are not readily explained from homogeneous statistical analyses (Perna & Titus, 2005). Qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to offer complex textual descriptions of how individuals experience a particular research issue. This is often achieved through methods such as interviews and observations, which are superior for exploring and identifying the complex

relationships and interactions among families. Finally, as Patton (2002) asserted, qualitative data “tell a story” (p. 47). Thus, qualitative research methods enabled me to engage a rigorous process of uncovering the participants’ own unique family stories.

Phenomenological Approach

Family scholars place a high premium on research approaches that “facilitate the development of new ideas” (LaRossa, 2005, p. 837). Also, the methods employed to collect (and analyze) data demonstrate a researcher’s determination to ascertain an understanding of the ways reality is socially constructed (Morse & Richards, 2002). I drew upon these ideals in my selection of an appropriate approach for studying African American male collegians and their families. The problem that initiated this study was the lack of direct voices regarding how families shaped African American men’s predilection toward higher education. Given the diverse array of qualitative design structures, the five common traditions described by Creswell (2007) were considered: case study, ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, and phenomenology (see Table 1). However, given that specificities of familial experiences have not been well described and represented in college choice research, and in order to establish a rigorous understanding of this topic from what Creswell (2007) called the “essence of human experience” (p.13), phenomenology was selected as the best methodological fit to undergird this study.

Table 1. Common Qualitative Research Traditions.

Case Study	Develop an analysis of events, process, or program of a bounded case or cases using multiple sources of data.
Ethnography	Describe behavior and language of a culture-sharing group with the purpose of creating a cultural portrait.
Grounded Theory	Generate a theory by studying data, commonly collected from interviews and observations, about a process, action or inaction.
Narrative	Tell a story of the lived experiences, creating a portrait of an individual or few individuals.
Phenomenology	Describe the essence of a phenomenon shared by all of the participants, focusing on experiences, meaning, and context.

*Note. Adapted from Creswell, J. W. (2007). **Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches** (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.*

Phenomenology is an inductive qualitative research tradition which is rooted in the works of philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Mach (Reiners, 2012). However, it was formally introduced by German philosopher Edmond H. Husserl (1859-1938) at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, Husserl became largely regarded as the founder – or pioneer – of phenomenology, with the aim of converting philosophy into a strict science (Guignon, 2006). He believed that the way to distinguish science from philosophy was to shift attention toward meanings, feelings, imagination, and memory that connect people’s experience of objects (Guignon, 2006). Husserl termed this distinction “intentionality,” which refers to ones “directed awareness or consciousness of an object or event” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Hence, the central query for Husserl was: What do we know as persons? Consequently, phenomenological principles assert that scientific investigation is valid when the information gained comes from rich description that allows for understanding of the essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

While Husserl’s initial ideals have been modified, critiqued, and further developed over time – most notably by Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Sarte, and Merleau-Ponty – its premise has remained relatively steadfast. Specifically, according to Patton (2002), phenomenology

maintains as its foundational question, “What is the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experiences of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 104). At the center of this method is the systematic exploration of the nature of a phenomenon – that which makes something what it is (Patton, 2002). Similarly, van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as “the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (p. 10). He further posited that phenomenology claims to be scientific in a broad sense because it is “a systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of its subject matter,” which is one’s lived experience (p. 11). Data are derived from those who have experienced the phenomenon, often through open-ended strategies (e.g., interviews and observations), which describe what “all participants have in common” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). In the present study, the African American males were the experts on their experiences, specifically with describing how their families influenced their decision to attend college. Indeed, these students needed opportunities to descriptively share their lived experiences. By doing so, I was able to identify key family-related commonalities and divergences that existed among participants.

Finally, according to Creswell (2007), there are two distinct philosophical methods of exploring lived experiences: descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. These schools of thought have been largely attributed to Husserl (descriptive) and his student Martin Heidegger (interpretive). Because both approaches emphasize the importance of understanding human lived experiences, both are useful for guiding inquiries of interest to holistic science. However, as Wojnar and Swanson (2007) noted, the key distinctions between the interpretive and descriptive approach lie in,

(a) the emphasis on describing universal essences (descriptive phenomenology) versus understanding the phenomena in context (interpretive phenomenology); (b) viewing a person as one representative of the world in which he or she lives (descriptive) versus a self-interpretive being (interpretive); (c) a belief that the consciousness is what humans share (descriptive) versus a belief that the contexts of culture, practice, and language are what humans share (interpretive); (d) an assumption that self-reflection, and conscious “stripping” of previous knowledge, help to present an investigator-free description of the phenomenon (descriptive) versus the assumption that as pre-reflexive beings, researchers actively co-create interpretations of phenomenon (interpretive); (e) the assumption that adherence to established scientific rigor ensures description of universal essences or eidetic structures (descriptive) versus the assumption that one needs to establish contextual criteria for trustworthiness of co-created interpretations (interpretive), and finally; (f) the assumption that bracketing ensures that interpretation is free of bias (descriptive) versus the assumption that preunderstanding and co-creation by the researcher and the participants are what makes interpretations meaningful (p. 175).

The importance of choosing a philosophical school for a study resides in how its findings will be generated and used (Creswell, 2007). Hence, the philosophical school applied to the present study was interpretive phenomenology. Spiegelberg (1976) has identified interpretive phenomenology as a process and method for bringing out and making manifest what is normally hidden in human experience and human relations. In relation to the study of human experience, interpretive phenomenology goes beyond mere description of core concepts and essences (the “what” of a phenomenon) to look for meanings embedded in common life practices (the “why”

and “how” of a phenomenon) (Lopez & Willis, 2004). According to Lopez and Willis (2004), these meanings “are not always apparent to the participants but can be gleaned from the narratives produced by them” (p. 728). Thus, the focus of an interpretive inquiry is on what humans experience rather than merely what they consciously know (Solomon, 1987).

Finally, Wojnar and Swanson (2007) proposed that the end point of a phenomenological investigation is to present a theoretical model that represents the essential structures of phenomenon under study. Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) referred to such a model as a “universal skeleton that can be filled in with the rich story of each informant” (p. 104). Consistent with the Heideggerian tradition, if the true structure of the phenomenon is identified, Wojnar and Swanson purported that anyone who has experienced the phenomenon should be able to identify his own experience in the proposed model. Accordingly, in the final chapter, I present an expanded model of family influence and college choice for African American males.

Sampling Strata

Sites

According to Merriam (1998), “the case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent” (p. 29). For this study, two samples were needed. First, it was important to identify varied institutions to ensure a diverse representation of campus contexts. According to McLeod and Young (2005), it is necessary to investigate the factors that influence a student’s decision to enroll (and remain enrolled) at a specific type of institution. The characteristics of higher education institutions impact students’ experiences, while also informing their perceptions of, and decisions about, the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to select information-rich sites. Cases that are considered to be information-rich are those from whom we have the most to learn and that provide deep understanding regarding the topic of interest (Patton, 2002). These cases necessitate the inclusion of well thought out criteria for inclusion and reflect specific characteristics of a population of interest that will best equip the researcher to answer his query (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). For this study, seven institutions were selected as sites in accordance with criteria established by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

Originally developed in the 1970s, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is a framework for recognizing, describing, and categorizing the diverse types of American colleges and universities. The classification chiefly serves academic and research purposes where it is frequently necessary to classify groups of roughly comparable institutions. All accredited, degree-awarding institutions in the United States that are represented in the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) are included in the classification. For the purposes of continuity, its most recent update in 2010 retains the same structure of six analogous classifications that were originally revised in 2005: (1) doctorate-granting universities (awarding at least 20 doctoral degrees per year), (2) master's colleges and universities (awarding at least 50 master's degrees per year), (3) baccalaureate colleges (institutions where bachelor's degree recipients account for at least 10% of all undergraduate degrees and that award less than 50 master's degrees per year), (4) associates colleges (institutions where highest degree is associates, or bachelor's degrees awarded are fewer than 10% of all undergraduate degrees), (5) special focus institutions (schools concentrated on a singular field or set of related fields such as theology, medicine, engineering,

technology, etc.), and (6) tribal colleges (those belonging to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium).

For this study, associates colleges, special focus, and tribal colleges were not included in the institutional sample. Instead, the schools selected for this study were all four-year institutions, and comparable in size as stratified (or nested) by the Carnegie classifications. Additionally, in order to maximize the comparative value of the data, as well as to elucidate any subtle dimensions of the institutional context, the schools selected for this study were disaggregated by institutional type (PWI, HBCU), funding source (e.g., public vs. private), and geographic location. In the interest of confidentiality, the selected institutions were given pseudonyms (Table 2).

Table 2. Institutional Demographics

Carnegie Classification	Doctorate-granting universities			Master's-level universities		Baccalaureate colleges	
Institution Name	<i>Hurd State University</i>	<i>Lance State University</i>	<i>Middleton-Doctor University</i>	<i>Eastern Sanders University – Jackson</i>	<i>Pinckney University</i>	<i>Thompson-Simmons College</i>	<i>Singleton College</i>
Funding Source	Public	Public	Public	Public	Private (nonprofit)	Private (nonprofit)	Private (nonprofit)
Religious Affiliation	None	None	None	None	Jesuit; Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist
Settlement Classification/ Region	Rural/ Midwest	Urban/ South	Urban/ South	Rural/ Midwest	Urban/ South	Urban/ South	Urban/ South
Total student population (approximately)	24,000	9,000	8,775	13,800	3,100	2,040	600
Undergraduate population	20,169	6,900	6,749	11,200	2,500	2,027	Same

African American student population	4%	92%	71.6%	15%	76%	6%	89%
Male student population	52% (10,503)	37% (2,565)	36.3% (3,185)	47% (5,294)	30% (709)	42% (845)	34% (187)
Institutional Type	PWI	HBCU	HBCU	PWI	HBCU	PWI	HBCU

Participant Selection

The second sample needed for this study consisted of the students at the respective institutions. All participants were expected to meet predetermined criteria of importance. Hence, criterion sampling was used to select African American males. The strength of this form of sampling lies in selecting only respondents who can aptly contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). For this study, the first criterion for inclusion was that all participants were traditionally freshman-aged (18-21) and were in their initial year of college. The decision to limit the participant sample to college freshmen was based on the supposition that because these students are in their first year, and are not yet as inundated as their upperclassmen counterparts with the myriad activities of college life, they would be in a good position to explicatively recount the family-related variables that impacted their choice to pursue higher education. Furthermore, I sought to capture these students' experiences not too long after they completed the college selection process. This study used the definition of freshman (or first-year) student provided by Kuh and Sturgis (1980): a student who has not attended another college, has not earned more than 30 credits at the time of data collection, and who is enrolled on a full-time basis at his institution.

The next criterion for inclusion was that the participants identified themselves and their families as African American. Research on Black college students seldom distinguishes the within-group ethnic differences among them. For example, some Black collegians are Black American or African American, some are from Africa or the Caribbean, and others are biracial (White, 1998). The present study specifically explored the familial experiences of African American males in college. Consequently, the sampling frame was limited to those who recognized themselves and their families accordingly.

Once participants met the aforementioned criteria, stratified purposeful sampling was further employed to ensure that the sample had variance. Patton (2002) described this method as “samples within samples,” that can be nested (or stratified) by selecting particular cases that vary according to key variables. Similarly, Robinson (2014) noted that in a stratified sample,

...the researcher first selects the particular categories or groups of cases that he/she considers should be purposively included in the final sample. The sample is then divided up or “stratified” according to these categories, and a target number of participants are allocated to each one. Stratification categories can be geographical, demographic, socioeconomic, physical or psychological; the only requirement is that there is a clear theoretical rationale for assuming that the resulting groups will differ in some meaningful way. (p. 32)

In the present study, two of the research questions were aimed at understanding how perceptions of familial influences compared across various family compositions, as well as to compare the African American male students’ perceptions to those identified among the three types in Freeman’s (2005) model. This was achieved by looking at factors such as household

makeup (e.g., single-parent, dual-parent, having siblings, socioeconomic status, etc.) and family educational level (e.g., parents, siblings, etc.). Also, as noted in Freeman's work, families have shaped African American students' pathways to college in three ways: (1) communicating an automatic expectation, (2) encouraging them to go beyond the family educational level, and (3) serving as impetus for the type of negative life decisions to avoid. In tandem, these factors were used as a theoretical basis to stratify participants for inclusion in the present study. Specifically, this stratification took place prior to an official interview based on the students' responses to a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Sample Size

In qualitative research the size of the sample is determined by the quality or richness of the information as opposed to information volume (Merriam, 1998). Thus, "the basic rule is, there are no rules for sample size" (Erlandson et al, 1993, p. 85). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), sampling should be terminated at the point of redundancy—that is when no new information is forthcoming. A minimum number of participants from each site were set "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study" (Patton, 1990, p. 186).

Unit of Analysis

When discussing unit of analysis, Patton (2002) emphasized, "the key issue in selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study" (p. 229). Similarly, Babbie (2013) stated that the unit of analysis refers to the "what or whom being studied" (p. 97). Concurrently, at the end of this study, a central goal was to make a contribution to the family studies literature that offers a clearer understanding about how families are directly impacting higher education attendance

patterns among African American males. While I sought to glean this understanding from African American males who successfully made this transition, I was principally interested in how they understood, described, and perceived their family as a prominent compelling force in the decision. In other words, I hoped to be able to say something about families upon the study's denouement, not necessarily about the students themselves beyond their elucidation of this influence. Accordingly, the unit of analysis for this study was the family.

Data Collection Plan

IRB Compliance

Prior to data collection, I complied with all Internal Review Board guidelines and regulations by completing the necessary trainings and securing formal approval from the Kansas State University IRB.

Participant Recruitment

Once IRB approval was received, I commenced participant recruitment. First, I developed a leaflet that included the study description, criteria for inclusion, and information about how I could be contacted (see Appendix B). This information was circulated to university personnel at various institutions throughout different regions of the United States who were well-positioned to nominate African American male students who were freshmen, between the ages of 18 and 21, and were willing to be thoughtful and articulate about their families. My membership in Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.⁶ provided an important conduit of access to the participants. For example, most of the institutional representatives that assisted me with identifying students – whose campus jobs included residential directors, religious life coordinators, athletic academic

⁶ Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. is the first Black, inter-collegiate Greek-lettered fraternity and was founded on the campus of Cornell University on December 4, 1906. To date, the fraternity –which has been interracial since 1940– has nearly 300,000 members across 730 active graduate or undergraduate chapters in the Americas, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia. According to Dancy (2007), collegiate members of Alpha Phi Alpha comprise approximately 10% of total African American men enrolled in four-year colleges.

advisors, first-year experience advisors, and university professors – were themselves members of Alpha Phi Alpha or another fraternity (or sorority) in the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)⁷. On the two campuses where there was no fraternal ally, I wore fraternity paraphernalia when recruiting, as well as during all of the interviews.

Across each of the campuses, these strategic efforts, I believe, were important for establishing a sense of ease to the students' in a way that mitigated the need to be guarded and/or withdrawn. While the nature of their discourse varied from parsimonious to voluble, almost all of the participants referenced my fraternity paraphernalia, commenting that it positioned me in a "big brother" or "trustworthy" manner, as two students indicated. As participants were recommended, I contacted them via telephone or email to share the scope of the study and criteria for participation. This conversation gave me an opportunity to gauge their willingness to participate and their eligibility for inclusion. Subsequently, an interview was scheduled.

Interview-Guide Approach

Marshall and Rossman (1999) averred that data collection methods in qualitative research could be grouped into four categories: (a) participation in the environment, (b) direct observation, (c) in-depth interviews, and (d) document analysis. For this study, a semi-structured, interview-guide approach was used to gather data. The interview-guide approach was selected to account for how participants have "organized the meanings they attach to what goes on" in their experiences (Patton, 2002, p. 341). In the interviews, my goal was to place considerable emphasis on the students' pre-college experiences and, in particular, the role that family members played in the formation of their college aspirations. The questions sequentially

⁷ The National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) is a collaborative organization of nine historically African American, international Greek lettered fraternities and sororities. These nine NPHC organizations are sometimes colloquially referred to as the "Divine Nine".

addressed what exactly these African American males experienced, who and how their families influenced them, and what specific family-oriented factors ultimately compelled them to pursue college.

There are several strengths of the interview-guide approach that made it a suitable fit. First, the guide method includes a pre-determined set of questions that are to be investigated during an interview (Patton, 2002). This guide serves as a checklist during the interview and ensures that information is obtained consistently across participants. Additionally, Patton accentuated that the interview guide approach ensures that the interviewer will effectively utilize the time allotted. Further, Patton averred that a major advantage of the interview guide approach is that the data are somewhat more systematic and comprehensive because while the tone of the interview is relatively conversational, the skilled researcher knows when to probe for more in-depth responses or guide the conversation to make sure that pertinent topics are covered.

Interview Questions

Constructing effective queries for the interview process is one of the most critical components to the interview design (Turner, 2010). Researchers seeking to conduct such an investigation should ensure that each question permits the inquirer to delve deep into the “experiences and/or knowledge of the participants in order to gain maximum data from the interviews” (Turner, p. 757). Further, McNamara (2009) suggested several recommendations for constructing effective research questions for interviews. These include: (a) wording should be open-ended so that participants are able to select their own terms when responding to questions, (b) queries should be as neutral as possible (avoid wording that might sway or influence answers), (c) no more than one question should be asked at a time, (d) questions should be worded clearly (including terms pertaining to the participants’ culture), and (e) be cautious of

asking "why" questions. Accordingly, an interview protocol was developed to steer the interviews and substantively answer the research questions (see Appendix C). To account for clarity in "what is being asked" as well as to "help the interviewees respond appropriately" (p. 348), interview questions were organized around the following variables: (a) background/demographics, (b) family values regarding higher education, (c) students' interpretation of the college choice process, and (d) sensory probes.

Data Organization and Praxis

Patton (2002) proffered key factors for consideration when organizing qualitative data. Some of these factors included ensuring that field notes and transcriptions are complete, controlling for "glaring holes in the data" by collecting additional data if necessary, utilizing a rigorous system of figures to properly represent the data, and carefully assessing the quality of the information collected (p. 440). To aptly organize the data in this study, interviews were digitally recorded (with prior consent from participants). Subsequently, the qualitative data were transferred from spoken to written word to facilitate analysis. Specifically, verbatim transcriptions of the qualitative data were organized into text files using Microsoft Word. This process was employed because, as Patton (2002) asserted, "typing and organizing handwritten field notes offer another opportunity to immerse yourself in the data in the transition between fieldwork and full analysis, a chance to get a feel for the cumulative data as a whole" (p. 441). To aid with the transcribing process, the software Express Scribe was used.

Patton (2002) indicated that "the immediate post-interview review is a time to record details about the setting and your observations about the interview" (p. 384). Consequently, during each interview, I took sparse notes in a research journal without the preoccupation of recording things verbatim, as this can "interfere with listening attentively" (p. 381). After the

interviews were conducted, I returned to the research journal to document my thoughts and reactions more descriptively. This process became integral for the development of participant case summaries (discussed in the following chapter).

Data Protection

Careful consideration was paid to data protection. First, I employed Kaiser's (2009) "dominant approach" to protecting respondent confidentiality. Under this approach, the ultimate goal is absolute confidentiality for every participant, especially when data cannot be collected anonymously. First, the digital recordings were stored on an external hard drive and locked in a file cabinet that only I had access to. Also, to protect the identity of research participants, each student was assigned a pseudonym. My research journal was periodically photocopied as a safeguard should an inadvertent incident have occurred. These photocopies were stored in the locked file cabinets as well. Finally, according to Patton (2002), "it is prudent to make back-up copies of all your data, putting one master copy away someplace secure for safekeeping" (p. 441). Once interviews were transcribed, proofread, and checked against the audiotapes, saved back-up copies were kept on both my personal laptop and external hard drive. Hardcopies of each transcript were printed and kept in the locked file cabinet when not in use for analysis. The recordings were permanently deleted following the study's terminus and after careful determination that no additional follow-up interviews were needed.

The Researcher as a Measurement Tool

The researcher's level of sensitivity influences what data are compulsory in developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, what he brings to his work (personal quality) informs his ability to give meaning to the data, as well as his capacity to adequately interpret it (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), this research

positionality comes from various sources including what literature is consumed, professional experiences, and personal experiences. As such, the researcher's assumptions about the phenomenon being investigated are critical to the research and should be cogently articulated in the research process (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002).

As discussed in the first chapter, my personal life experiences make me an insider in relation to this research study. In particular, I am personally vested in this topic because I have experienced first-hand the transformative role that family life can play in shaping and modifying one's academic plans generally, and post-secondary plans more specifically. Without equivocation, I acknowledge my own family (and, in particular, certain familial values and practices), as being the most salient impetus for my decision to pursue a college education. As a result, this insider's view gave me insight into prospective areas to examine and pertinent sentiments important to the study. Opportunities to investigate familial factors more closely – and the hope that resultant findings would aid in the services and programming provided to ethnic minority families – incited my investment in this topic.

Managing Biases

In qualitative studies, the researcher is considered the instrument, not standardized quantitative surveys (Chawla, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Holmes, Murray, Perron, & Rail, 2006; Morse, 2003; Xu & Storr, 2012). Therefore, it is important for the investigator to be introspective about “relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, any expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research” (Greenbank, 2003, p. 796). Further, Simon (2010) recommended that qualitative researchers maintain a separate journal recording their own reactions and reflections of self

throughout the data collection process. The aforesaid suggestions informed how I managed my influence and biases in this study.

Specifically, I drew heavily upon the phenomenological tenets of *noeama* and *noesis* as developed by Husserl. According to McIntyre and Smith (1989), “the noesis is an interpretive or “meaning- giving” part of an act, while the noema is an act’s “meaning...the subject’s ‘sense’ of an object” (p. 10). In this case, an “act” is synonymous with experience and is “one of the temporal events that make up a person’s stream of consciousness” (p. 10). Further, to arrive at the core of the specified phenomenon, I employed Moustakas’s (1994) recommendation of integrating external perception (noema) and internal perception (noesis) by rigorously and continually assessing for and reflecting upon deeper layers of meaning rooted in the data. Similarly, in order to enhance attentiveness to the subtleties of the data, Brown, Stevens, Troiano, and Schneider (2002) described four phenomenological techniques that aided my own work:

(a) basic questioning of the data (i.e., who, when, why, where, what, how, how much, frequency, duration, rate, and timing), (b) analysis of the multiple meanings and assumptions of a single word, phrase, or sentence, (c) making novel comparisons to promote nonstandard ways of looking at the data and providing for a more dense theoretical conceptualization, and (d) probing absolute terms such as never and always. (p. 3)

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis has been defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). Similarly, Mayring (2000) defined this process as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts

within their context of communication, and follows “content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (p.2). Further, Patton (2002) noted that qualitative data analysis refers to any “qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p.453). The aforementioned definitions underscore that qualitative data analyses emphasize an integrated view of speech/texts as well as their respective contexts. Specifically, these analyses go beyond simply counting words or extracting content to assess themes and patterns which may be latent or manifest in a particular text (Patton, 2002). Instead, qualitative data analyses enable the researcher to understand the social reality of respondents in a subjective but scientific way.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological techniques were employed to analyze the data. The aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world (i.e., particular experiences, decisions, events, etc.) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The approach is phenomenological in that it entails meticulous inspection of the participant’s life world. In other words, IPA attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Essentially, a two-stage interpretation process is involved: (1) the participants are trying to make sense of their experience(s); and (2) the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants attempting to make sense of their experience(s). Therefore, IPA is intellectually linked to theories of interpretation (Packer & Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969; Smith & Osborn, 2007). In the present study, I endeavored to understand the ways in which African American male students perceived their families’

influence in their college choice. Accordingly, IPA was a suitable approach in that it positions a researcher to “find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations” that they have and/or are facing (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 55).

Coding

Patton (2002) purported that developing a manageable classification or coding scheme is the initial step of analysis. For this study, IPA facilitated the discovery of significant themes through open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding is the stage in the interpretive process where the raw data (transcripts) are initially analyzed. More specifically, these raw data are coded through a procedure which “fractures the interview into discrete threads of datum” (Jones, Kriflik, & Zanko, 2005, p. 6). According to Jones et al. (2005), a primary function of open coding is the ability to examine the data without any limitations in scope or without the application of any filters. Also, as Glaser (2004) indicated, it requires the researcher to substantiate and saturate categories, minimizes the risk of omitting an important category, and ensures the grounding of categories in the data beyond swift impressions. Further, the detailed and meticulous process of line-by-line coding helps the researcher interpret the transcript in new and unfamiliar ways, which also helps to test the researchers’ assumptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Axial coding is the phase of coding that Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined as “the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions” (p. 123). The aim of this form of coding is to add depth and structure to the existing categories (Charmaz, 2006). Also, as Charmaz (2006) explained, axial coding reconstructs the data that were broken up into separate codes by line-by-line coding. Thus, axial coding relates codes (categories and properties) to each other inductively. Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and

categories of analysis “come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1980, p. 306). In the final phase of coding, selective, the researcher selects a central (or core) category as a medium for the integration of the major categories identified through axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, as core categories become more palpable, the data can be filtered into thematic categories that are connected directly back to the research question(s).

In this study, I commenced the aforementioned process with the first transcript being read line-by-line, and I used the left margin to annotate what seemed interesting (or important) using my research questions as guide. As I moved through the transcript, I commented on similarities, differences, amplifications, and even contradictions in what was said. Then, I returned to the beginning of the individual transcript and used the right margin to assign codes. In other words, I tried to transform the initial notes into concise phrases that captured the essence of what was found in the text. It was common that similar ideas emerged as I went through, so the same code title was repeated. At this stage, the whole transcript was treated as data, and no attempt was made to omit or select particular passages for special attention.

Next, I took every code and organized them into a code book (via MS Word). Subsequently, I searched for connections between them – some of which clustered together naturally and others were more superordinate (or uniquely standalone) concepts. As the clustering of these early themes emerged, I checked them with the transcript to ensure that the connections actually worked for the actual words of the participant. I often cut and pasted participant phrases to support the emergent themes. Afterward, I moved through the additional transcripts using the codes from the initial transcript, but also acknowledged (and added) new codes as I worked through the transcripts. This was my effort at convergence and divergence.

My rationale was that by remaining aware of the codes that came before, it was possible to identify what was new or similar across the transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2007). In the end, there were nearly 200 pertinent codes in the code book. The final step was developing a master table of the themes. Thus, I repeated the aforementioned process by organizing and prioritizing codes to begin to reduce them (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The themes were not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Instead, other factors, including the richness of the particular passages that highlighted the themes and how the theme helped illuminate diverse aspects of the phenomena, were also taken into account. A step-by-step guide of the IPA process is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Step-by-step Approach to IPA

1. Look for themes in the first case	Transcript read several times; left-margin is used to annotate what is interesting or significant.
2. Return to beginning of first case, using the right margin to document emerging themes	Initial notes are transformed into concise phrases to capture essential quality of what was found.
3. Connect the themes	Analytical (or theoretical ordering) ensues as connections are made between themes.
4. Create a table of themes for first case/participant	Transcripts are checked to ensure connections work for the primary source material.
5. Continue the analysis with the other cases	Analyst can either use the themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis or put the table of themes for participant 1 aside and work on transcript 2 from scratch.
6. Create a master table of themes	The table of themes is the basis for the account of the participants' responses, which takes the form of the narrative argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the case.
7. Complete write-up	This stage is concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account; here the analysis becomes expansive again, as the themes are explained, illustrated and nuanced.

Note. Adapted from Smith, J. A., & Osborn (2008). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. London: Sage.

Memoing

To add further rigor to the coding process, I also used the analytic tool of memoing. Corbin and Strauss (2008) defined analytic tools as “thinking devices or procedures” that, depending upon the type of qualitative approach employed, are used to facilitate coding (p. 45). When analyzing the data, these tools can serve various purposes: (1) enabling the analyst to separate himself from personal experiences and/or the literature which may inhibit his ability to see new possibilities in the data, (2) thinking in non-standard ways, (3) augmenting the inductive process, (4) exposing assumptions on the part of both the researcher and the participants, (5) being attentive to what participants say and do, (6) reducing the likelihood of overlooking “diamonds in the rough” in the data, (7) compelling queries to be asked that expand the researcher’s thinking about the phenomena, and (8) aiding in the appropriate labeling of concepts and categories, as well as identifying the properties and dimensions of categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Bailey (2006) described memoing as the process of recording reflective notes to oneself while coding. In particular, memoing enables the analyst to discuss what he is learning from the data, pose hypotheses about connections between categories and/or their properties, and ultimately facilitates coding at a higher conceptual level (Bailey, 2006). To do this, and for the purposes of reflexivity, I engaged the process of the *epoché*, which requires the researcher to discharge his own assumptions and suppositions (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, as data were gathered and reviewed, memos were compiled to assist in the discussion of emergent categories and themes. Additionally, memos were used to enlighten the research process by enabling me to reflect on my own experiences in both an analytical and personal sense (Norton, 1999). To this end, Martin and Turner (1985) recommended that the researcher endeavor to identify themes and

then write a theoretical memo in a free-flowing manner. Indeed, my goal was to represent conceptually what the data reflected empirically in a systematic manner.

Additional Analyst

For the purposes of triangulation, my major professor, Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman, provided critical guidance in the coding process. As a co-analyst, Dr. Myers-Bowman advised me throughout the analysis process by offering feedback and verification of the data findings.

According to Patton (2002), a co-analyst is helpful in the data analysis process because,

it is data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn. (p. 556)

Determining Substantive Significance

Substantive significance is essentially the final phase of data analysis, and consists of drawing conclusions based on cross-case data displays and then submitting these conclusions to verification procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To determine substantive significance, Patton (2002) suggested that the analyst addresses the following kinds of questions: (1) How solid, coherent, and consistent is the evidence in support of the findings? (2) To what extent and in what ways do the findings increase and deepen understanding of the phenomenon being studied? (3) To what extent are the findings consistent with other knowledge? (4) To what extent are the findings useful for the study's purpose? Therefore, important steps were taken to account for dependability, transferability, and credibility.

Dependability

Comparable to the quantitative concept of reliability, dependability refers to whether or not findings are consistent over time and across investigators (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles &

Huberman, 1994). I consulted a peer debriefer to address dependability in my study. The peer debriefer, Dr. T. Elon Dancy II, is an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma whose scholarship informs the extant literature and practices incident to African American males in both colleges and other educational settings. In particular, the peer debriefer was asked to advise on all aspects of data collection, analysis, and results to ascertain similarities and/or differences in the conclusions drawn. Further, I constructed for the peer debriefer a detailed text describing the experience and verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews. Finally, the peer debriefer was asked to remark on the lucidity of the research plan and its potential for constancy over time and across researchers.

Transferability

Akin to the concept of external validity in quantitative studies, transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Trochim, 2006). According to Trochim (2006), transferability is “primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing” (p. 126). In order to enhance transferability, I provide thick, rich descriptions of the contexts that were central to the research (Patton, 2002; Trochim, 2006). Sufficient detail takes the reader into the setting being described (Patton, 2002). Thus, in the subsequent chapters, I use direct quotations so that participants are represented in their own terms and customs of expressing themselves. By proffering sufficient detail to depict a well-defined context, I enable viewers to make judgment for themselves about how sensible the transfer is.

Credibility

Finally, Trochim (2006) avowed that “the credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in

the research” (p. 126). From this stance, given that the purpose of qualitative research is to delineate the phenomena of interest from participants’ viewpoints, the participants are the ones who can “legitimately judge the credibility of the results” (Trochim, 2006, p. 126). Moreover, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended that research results be dissected according to three fundamental queries: (1) Do the conclusions make sense? (2) Do the conclusions adequately describe research participants’ perspectives? (3) Do conclusions authentically represent the phenomena under study? Accordingly, I emailed the research participants a textual description summarizing the essences and meanings extracted from their interviews to determine accuracy. They reviewed and approved the findings. This procedure served as the study’s member-checking medium. According to Creswell (2007), if accuracy and completeness are affirmed, then the study is said to have credibility.

Summary of Methods

This chapter described the study’s methodological scheme and praxis used to elicit the voices of African American men regarding the family’s participation in their decision to pursue a college education. In particular, plans for participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and determining substantive significance were discussed. In studying the phenomenon of familial involvement and college choice among African American males, qualitative methods were selected because they provided opportunity for depth and careful consideration of nuances that come with experiencing a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Given the dearth of extant literature regarding African American males and college choice, with family involvement at the helm, it was especially important that I captured the detailed experiences and voices of the participants. Moreover, by employing phenomenology as a lens, in addition to the IPA analytical technique, I was well equipped to fortify the study’s credibility, transferability, and dependability.

CHAPTER V -

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

In every conceivable manner, the family is the link to our past, bridge to our future.
Alex Haley

In Chapter V, I provide descriptions of the diverse characteristics of the study's participant group. While self-identifying as "African American" is a common thread that connects these students, given their sundry personal, social, and educational backgrounds, the participant group (and their families) is not homogenous. As noted in Chapter IV, I maintained a research journal as a continual record of the emergent ideas and impressions during (1) the research interviews, and (2) the transference from audio to written transcriptions. As a precautionary method to avoid encumbering the participant's train of thought, very few jottings were entered during the actual interview. Instead, immediately after, I identified a quiet place where I could be alone to quickly enter my immediate perceptions on a broad range of matters. These included the weather, the nature of the interview space, the time of day, my interpretation of the students' temperament and disposition (i.e., facial expression(s), gestures, communication volume, etc.), and moments where the application of the *epoché* appeared to be important or some commonality across the interviews were developing.

As the interview sequence ensued, my research journal became what Rubin and Rubin (1995) called a "self correcting interview" (p. 164). In other words, I made notes to myself regarding the interview's success or otherwise, the depth of the feedback provided, and the prospective importance of that data for subsequent interview probes not previously identified. Functioning as an *adieu-de-memoir*, or what Miles and Huberman (1994) coined memoing, the journal became richly intertwined in data interpretation. Still, the content of the journal was not used to establish a comparative framework across all of the interviews. Alternatively, the

phenomenological intent was to listen to the distinctive stories of each student. Consequently, it was only during data interpretation that any shared themes in these descriptions became active components in my own thinking. The aforesaid process provided the basis for the 12 case summaries. Taken together, the introductions presented in this chapter are an effort to concentrate, in a more meticulous sense, on the breadth and intricacies of the student's own influences and contexts. For the purposes of confidentiality, each of the 12 students was assigned a pseudonym. Finally, the introductions have been organized in the following way: (1) description of the students' familial background, (2) messages about college and involvement from the students' family, and (3) the student's general interpretation of pertinent pre-college factors.

At Hurd State University

(1) Paul grew up in a single-parent household where he was raised primarily by his mother, whom he communicates with several times a day. The eldest sibling of two sisters on his maternal side, Paul also has two brothers on his paternal side, where he is the middle child. Paul expressed having a very close relationship with his mother – who refers to him as the “man of the house” – as well as his sisters. Conversely, he felt estranged from his father and brothers. For two years (between 8th and 10th grade), his mother permitted him to live with his father, although she continued to assume primary responsibility for providing for him. Despite the disengagement he described concerning his father, Paul indicated that he was motivated by his father's actions and expressed it as the “fire behind me.”

Paul first began receiving messages about college when he was around 10 years old. His mother and uncle (maternal), neither of which attended college themselves, were responsible for providing these messages. Essentially, as Paul commented, they encouraged him to learn from

their own past-lived errors, specifically in the area of academic decision-making. When conversations about college were engaged, his mother and uncle often discussed it as “the only way to get a good job.” While Paul’s mother recently decided to pursue a college education – something Paul believes was inspired by his own academic journey – she laments having put the decision off for so many years. Nonetheless, he identified his mother as the most influential member of his family in the decision to pursue higher education. Specifically, Paul indicated that his mother consistently lauded his high school and extracurricular achievements, and made several personal sacrifices to support his educational and football needs.

At present, Paul has one relative who attended and completed college: a (maternal) aunt. He noted that her college choice, a predominantly White university in the Big 12 (or Big XII) Conference⁸, influenced his interest to also attend a university in the Big 12 Conference. Additionally, Paul mentioned that he wanted a campus experience that provided a “home environment” but would still be relatively close to his family. At the same time, he did not want college to be a financial burden on his mother, nor did he intend to enroll at a university that she was not comfortable with. Thus, a football scholarship to Hurd State – which is only a few hours’ drive from his hometown – provided an opportunity to cover the costs of attending, and met his mother’s approval. For Paul, going to college meant making his mother proud, being a leader for his sisters, and countering negative typecasts often imposed upon Black males raised by single-parent mothers.

(2) Like Paul, Daniel was on the football team at Hurd State University. Born in the Midwest, Daniel was raised in a two-parent household. His family moved to the Southeastern area of the U.S. when he was about 13. His father, a former minor league baseball player, was

⁸ The Big 12 Conference is a 10-school collegiate athletic conference headquartered in Irving, Texas. It is a member of the NCAA's Division I for all sports.

described as “a bit of a alcoholic” who Daniel has “a lot” of quarrels with. Despite the fact that the two “go at it a lot,” Daniel insisted that he loves and respects him. Additionally, he has a brother who is three years older, calling their relationship a “love/hate” one where the two are not “buddy buddy.” A self-proclaimed “momma’s boy”, Daniel emphasized the affinity he held for his mother, whom he says he has always had a “connection with” and talks to “probably everyday...if not, every other day.” Conversely, Daniel explained that he only talks to other members of his family (including grandparents) “here and there.”

Daniel did not grow up receiving messages about college. Although he has an older cousin who attended college, and indicated that he first heard about higher education around the seventh grade, in his own words, college “wasn’t like a priority.” It was not until his older brother, who struggled academically, was recruited to play football (at an HBCU on the east coast) that this changed in his family. According to Daniel, his parents paid to have tutoring provided for his brother, who ultimately did not complete his degree. Still, for Daniel, his parents’ efforts were indication that they were serious about both of their son’s post-secondary plans. Daniel also mentioned that both of his parents were responsible for shaping his decision to attend college. Nevertheless, he identified his mother’s involvement as being the most influential. His mother pushed him “hard” – both academically and on the football field. During one incident where he had an injury, he recalled his mother telling him, “You better get yo butt out there and play!” His grandmother reinforced these messages by providing verbal affirmation and reminding him to “Stay focused” so that he can “get that college degree.” Like Paul, Daniel’s family sees college as a means of ensuring he can “have a better job”, which they believe to be critical for Black men “in the world we live in today.”

Unlike Paul, Daniel did not want to attend an institution that he could “just drive back” home to. In fact, he saw the distance as a way to “stay out of trouble” and avoid hanging out with “some bad people.” Still, like his teammate, college had to feel like “a home away from home” in order for him to attend. His mother joined him on all campus visits and made her disdain or satisfaction about the campus and/or its athletic program well known to him. He summarized this by saying, “If momma like it...then I’m good.” Daniel dreams to play in the National Football League someday. Thus, in order to put himself on a path toward achieving this dream, Daniel averred that between his sophomore and junior year of high school, he knew he had to attend college. He cited his family “struggling growing up”, setting an example for the “young ones” in his family, and making his mother proud as further impetus for attending college.

At Eastern Sanders University at Jackson

(3) Jeremiah, who regularly referred to himself as “very family-oriented,” is the son of two affluent parents: his mother is an OB/GYN with her own practice, and his father is a pharmacist. When he was about 12, his parents got divorced. Still, he describes his relationship with them as “very honest” and “very, very, very close...very personal.” Jeremiah also has a younger brother whom he wants to be “a great inspiration for,” as well as ensure that “he wants to go to” college when he is of age. While he makes time to “hang out” with his “pops” – whom, although “more strict,” he is “really close” too – it is his mother that he feels the strongest connection with. Specifically, Jeremiah shared that he communicates with her “about everything,” including the appropriate ways to “treat” women, insight about life as an emergent African American professional, and to keep her updated on his recreational reading. Jeremiah, who is “very protective” of his mother, still makes time to “rub her feet at night,” an example of

their very intimate rapport. Racial socialization⁹ and a deep appreciation of the African American experience “back then” were paramount in his upbringing. Indeed, when it came to issues pertaining to racism and bigotry in the United States, Jeremiah averred that his parents “broke it down” to him “real fast.” In addition to their regular talks, Jeremiah’s mother instilled these values by encouraging him to read literature by African American authors like Richard Wright, W.E.B. Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, and Ralph Ellison.

A self-proclaimed “pretty popular dude” in high school, Jeremiah was active in football, played saxophone in the band, and was a member of his school’s honor society. By the age of 9, he was set on attending college. Observing his mother’s resolve and hard work, who was in medical school (at a PWI) at the time, had a profound impact on him. In addition to inquiring about “the last time” he “read a book,” she also chastised him when he “came in the house late” or tarried to complete his homework. He was further forbidden from “just sitting around” lethargically like his “other friends.” According to Jeremiah, his mother’s comportment during his formative years pointed to her seriousness about his future academic pursuits. Moreover, direct messages about college came from most of his family, “90%” of whom “went to college” themselves. From his father, who graduated from an HBCU, conversations about higher education were usually about “his bad college experiences” and what he “shouldn’t do in college.” Similarly, his maternal grandmother – the recipient of a trade in business and whom he travels home “every weekend to go see” – reinforced these messages by encouraging him to be thoughtful about “the future.”

By the time Jeremiah reached the college decision-making stage, he had a 3.8 grade point average and had made a 26 on the ACT. He had also been accepted by Pinckney University

⁹ Race socialization is defined as specific verbal and non-verbal messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity.

(which is included in this study) during his junior year. For Jeremiah's family, it wasn't a matter of "if he was going to college"; indeed, there was "no question about it" because "it is like a family tradition to go to college." To demonstrate their collective support, the family raised about \$6,000 for him at a trunk party, and "like 15 family members" joined him at his new student orientation. At the same time, Jeremiah was set on "not paying a dime" for tuition. Lured by the Black Greek experience during a step show with his aunt, coupled with his father's alumni status, Jeremiah was conflicted about the type of institution to attend. He commented that sometimes he wishes he "went to an HBCU" versus the PWI he currently attends where, in his opinion, "you get a lot of prejudice actions." Although his mother insisted that it was his "decision to make" because he "wasn't a little boy anymore," her own background at "a very, very hard Big 10, Northern White school" motivated him to "challenge" himself in similar ways. In the end, Jeremiah – whom claimed to "get homesick real quick" – did not like the idea of "being far away from home." Thus, "a full tuition scholarship" to Eastern Sanders University at Jackson and the ability to visit his "hometown every week" made the school "just seem like the right choice to make." College, in Jeremiah's assessment, was about his "future wife, future kids" who he was "doing this for." Further, attending college meant that Jeremiah "was going to be something," while also being in a position to serve as "a role model for Black males in high school that might not be on the right track."

(4) Luke was born and raised on the Southside of a major Midwestern city. His mother, who was diagnosed with cancer when he was "8 or 9 years old," died in 2011 – when Luke was in high school. His biological father, who Luke noted "was like a big gang leader," is incarcerated. To his knowledge, Luke has "22 brothers and sisters" on his father's side, whom he says are "all bad." Claiming that "majority" of his (paternal) "family is in gangs," Luke believes

that “it was kinda good, in a sense” that his father “was locked up.” To help me understand his point of view, he went on to discuss how many of his (paternal) relatives are “drug dealers” or “car crackers”, and despite the fact that they have “never went to college,” these relatives “got more money than a person that works a 9 to 5” according to Luke. His maternal relatives, conversely, were described as “always looking for handouts” and “are not financially stable.” Insisting, however, that his family is yet “loving,” worries about “getting killed,” “being broke,” or having his image printed “on a [Rest in Peace] shirt” fueled his motivation to make different decisions.

Following his mother’s death, Luke described himself as “just bad” and “reckless,” with an apathetic attitude about life and school. However, one day he experienced a sort of “revelation” after thinking introspectively of whether his mother would “be proud” of his decisions. Not too long after, Luke – who was now living with his grandmother (described as his “rock”) – was admitted to a charter school that boasts a “100% college acceptance rate.” The residential transition was “comfortable” for him to make because he split much of his time as a child between home and his grandmother’s residence. For Luke, because the Charter school “took their chance” on him after being “kicked out” of his previous school, he has been “trying to be on the right path” every since. Luke shared that his family was “supportive in the ways they know how to be” when it came to messages about college. By this, he meant that their messages were “always drilled” into his head. While Luke maintained that he “values what a lot of them say,” ultimately their words were “not valid” to him because they had not “set an example” by going to college themselves. Specifically, Luke contended, “if you [his family] not actually going, or can’t tell me the proper steps to get into college,” then there is little worth that he “can

really take from that.” He further summarized his sentiment by stating, “Seeing them broke, their lifestyle, the way they lived motivated me. What they said really didn’t motivate me.”

Classifying himself as “an independent student,” Luke purported that when it came to “filling out papers or applying to college,” it was all “self, self, self, self.” At the same time, he identified his grandmother – who “never went to a college class” and “didn’t probably even finish elementary school” – as most influential in his decision to pursue college. Citing her ability to “save a dollar” and the physical benefits of “her hustle and her grind” (i.e., nice home, car, fiscal security), Luke was richly inspired by his grandmother to reach for higher heights. Additionally, Luke persists that a slightly older neighborhood friend, who is “like family” because of his “genuine” disposition and for providing “guidance” that he “never really had” in a “father figure,” was instrumental in his decision to attend. Like his friend, Luke sees college as an opportunity to be a “trendsetter” in his family – especially “for the younger cousins” – as well as a way to push against “statistics” regarding young Black males. Although required to attend a summer bridge program, and insisting that he has encountered “a lot of racist people,” he is content with his choice of institution because he doesn’t “worry about getting killed.” Still and all, Luke made it abundantly clear that going to college meant augmenting his chances of financial security. Using an example from his (maternal) family, Luke denoted “I don’t wanna have to be 30 years old asking a 15 year old for \$20.”

At Lance State University

(5) During the summer before John started the third grade, his father left the family. As a result, his mother raised John and his older sister as a single-parent. Prior to his father leaving, John maintained “straight A’s” in school. However, during his first semester back, his grades and school behavior began to plunge. As a young adult, he now believes that his parent’s separation

was “probably why” he experienced a stint of academic decline. Presently, he describes his relationship with his father as “more like a relationship with an uncle” because, aside from the child support he provides, the two spend no time “doing different father-son activities and bonding.” In fact, John shared that his father tells him “all the time” of his hopes that his son will be a “better man than him.” Apart from his mother and sister – whom he communicates with everyday – John feels like there is “really just no one else” in his family whom he can “count on.” John also indicated that the separation has made him and his sister much more “protective” of their mother.

John recalls asking his parents questions about college between the first and second grade. His father completed an associate’s degree at a nearby community college in auto mechanics around this time, which sparked John’s initial curiosity. His mother started college at Lance State, but withdrew enrollment after marrying his father. Nevertheless, by adolescence, John was receiving regular messages about college from both his mother and sister. Specifically, his mother – who insisted that “college was the best way to go” – shared regrets of having not completed college, and was clear to communicate her hopes that John would someday “live better than she has” as opposed to living “from check to check.” When his school performance was unsatisfactory, John’s mother would “discipline” him. She also exclaimed that he had two choices following high school graduation: attending college or moving out on his own. At the same time, in order to praise him for “doing well in school,” his mother gave incentives that were tailored to his liking. John believes that his mother’s endeavors to cultivate urgency about education provided substantiation that she “really cares” and desired for him to “get a college education” in order to “be something in life.” Although inquisitive at a very early age, John was not certain about attending college until only a few months before the fall semester commenced.

While John identified his mother as being the most influential family member in his decision to pursue college, he also noted that his sister (who is currently in graduate school at Lance State), an uncle, and a cousin (also alumnus of Lance State) were important influences. His sister encouraged him to consider an HBCU, and assisted him in applying for financial aid. Motivated by her alumni status, John also began to take notice of the more tangible benefits of a college degree among his uncle and cousin (i.e., having a nice home, driving cars of their choice, feeling satisfied with their place of employment, etc.). Beyond these factors, John considered distance to his family and a campus environment where faculty, staff, and students would be “supportive” when making his choice. For John, attending college meant making his family “proud”, increasing the probability of enjoying benefits akin to his uncle and cousin, and being in a better position to “support a wife and kids one day.” Further, attending college represented an opportunity to prove wrong his maternal grandmother who, when John was between seven or eight, remarked that she did not “see” him or his sister “going to college.”

(6) Mark’s parents divorced when he was in middle school. Like his classmate John, Mark experienced academic decline after the separation. In particular, he failed the eighth grade, which he contended was “due to, you know, the divorce.” He went on to say, “Some people don’t believe that this stuff is real,” but insisted that it played a major role in his school performance. After attending private school for a year, Mark returned to public school and took to track and field as his “outlet” and “an escape from the situation.” He describes his relationship with his mother, an older sister, and a younger brother (on his dad’s side) – all of whom he communicates with daily – as “family oriented.” Like Daniel, Mark regards himself “a mom’s boy,” and indicated that he would willingly “do anything...just to make things happen for her.” Oppositely, he describes his father in ways analogous to John: “He was there financially.

But like, you know, physically he wasn't there, emotionally he wasn't there." Growing up, he also spent considerable more time around his "mom's side of the family", whom he says he has a "stronger connection with," and only visited extended family on his paternal side (whom he referred to as the "bourgeois type") during "family holidays or every blue moon."

Both of Mark's parents' attended and completed community college, and several of his paternal relatives received their college degrees. His mother completed her bachelor's degree in 2013, making her the first on the maternal side to do so. Despite the time lapse, Mark commented that he was motivated by his mother's persistence and subsequently named her most influential in his own decision to attend. Specifically, Mark shared that his mother "stayed on" him about "having a better life for himself" and doing "better than what they [his parents] did" financially, mostly through "in-depth conversations." She also attended all of his "track and field events during high school", as well as choir events and honors programs. Beyond his mother's involvement, Mark also received messages about college from aunts, uncles, and grandparents (on both sides). In their view, completing college would enable Mark to "give back to the community," "give back to your family" and "have more than what your family had or what your mom and dad have." Mark also recalled hearing relatives on his paternal side speak of more tangible benefits such as "internships" and, like John's relatives implored, "Driving nice cars, having nice houses."

Despite attending college football games as early as five, taking classes that "transferred over to college credits" during high school, creating an online athletic program for college recruiters in his ninth grade year, and receiving "several out of state scholarships to run track," Mark did not apply to college until a month before the fall semester started. His school of choice, which he coined "an accident," was determined only after a conversation with a Vice President at

Lance State who mentored his cousin during her undergraduate program. Ironically, Mark maintained that he “didn’t want to stay in state” because of his desire to “see something different.” Even when his mother offered her thoughts about the distance, Mark persisted that it was his “choice”, summarizing it by sharing, “I made the decision on my own.” Still, he remarked about how “understanding” his mother was, who demonstrated this by saying “It’s your decision; I’ll support you in this.” In contrast, Mark stated that his father “had no influence” when it “came down” to him “going to college.” In fact, he averred that had his father offered any input, he “wouldn’t even listen to it.” Nonetheless, for Mark, attending college meant having an opportunity to meet “new people,” have a better “outlet to the world,” further his education, and make his “family proud.” Mark also shared that going to college meant having an opportunity to show his “little cousins” that higher education is “the right thing to do.”

At Middleton-Doctor University

(7) The fifth of nine children, David was raised in the South by his mother and father. Describing his family as “well connected”, “very close”, and “not like broken families”, he grew up in a household that, although impoverished, was copious in encouragement and support. His much enmeshed nuclear family generally looks to one another for assistance and do not “mess with outsiders” (i.e., extended family, classmates, colleagues) in order to “bond as a family.” Many of his siblings continue to live at home or within relative proximity to their hometown. In order to avoid showing “favoritism,” David communicates with his siblings and parents on a daily basis, as “equal” as possible.

David’s mother took a few courses at the community college level, but never attended a four-year institution. Nevertheless, through regular conversation and “good words of encouragement”, his parents’ planted the idea of college in their minds as early as elementary

school. He described it as a “family value.” From his parents, the messages David recalls most regularly hearing were that a “better education equals better job.” Further, his parents hold strong altruistic values which they transferred to the children. As a result, the family views a college education as an augmented means of “helping people.” Notwithstanding this, David identifies his two oldest brothers as having the most impact on his decision to pursue college. A future law student and the other a soon-to-be pediatrician, David’s brothers transitioned directly to college from high school. This inspired him immensely, especially after taking a three-year hiatus following high school. Still, he constantly told himself, “If they can do it, I know I can.” His older brothers were also instrumental in supporting him through the college application process, applying for financial aid, and editing his essays.

Despite being a “late bloomer,” David most regularly praised his family for being “supportive” in the college choice process. When making decisions about where to attend, his brothers encouraged him to consider the availability of scholarships (to avoid putting fiscal strain on the family). Beyond this, David was exclusively interested in attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU) given (1) the “legacy” of “supporting Black people” and (2) because his siblings were all alumnus of HBCUs. At the same time, the campus had to be “not too far” from home, a “safe environment”, and a place that “feels like home” – all which he contended HBCUs provide for Black students. For David, attending college meant making his “family proud.” David made it clear that his academic pursuits were not merely about his own success. Instead, as he put it, “If I succeed, they...the family succeed.”

At Pinckney University

(8) The son of a taxi driver and nurse assistant, Matthew and his two younger brothers were raised in the South. While he is of Haitian ancestry, at the beginning of our interview,

Matthew hurriedly asserted that he and his parents self-identify as African American. He describes his parent's marriage as "a blessing," and suggested that the nature of his relationship with them is "more like a friend-parent, but not too much of a friend." When speaking of his regard for his parents, Matthew often used the word "respect," something he shared is a "main priority" in their "family life." Growing up, Matthew's parents had mixed work schedules which he expressed as "one by night shift and one day shift." Emphasizing his ill-regard for talking on the phone, Matthew still makes time to speak with at least one of his parents a day, who also live in the same city. Like David, Matthew specified that he doesn't show "favoritism" in family communication. Instead, he tries to "put them [his family] as even" as he can, although he tends to speak with his father more (because of his mother's travel schedule with work).

Matthew was the first (and only) participant to name his father as the most influential family member in his decision to pursue college. While in elementary school, Matthew's father went back and completed his high school education, eventually graduating valedictorian. This had a profound impact on him. According to Matthew, regular messages about college started then. In particular, he recalls his father "putting it" in his head by incessantly "talking about it" and "always asking questions about it." He and his brothers were not allowed to engage afterschool play (i.e., video games, television, etc.) until their homework was complete. His mother, who he depicted as a devout religious woman, demonstrated support through prayer and motivational expressions such as, "You can do it. You can do the work!" When necessary, his parents would "tag team" by inquiring about homework and school performance. Matthew further stated that when his grades were below a B, his parents were "on his head," insisting that he needed to "have good grades." Moreover, his parents attempted to incentivize academic success by buying him things. However, Matthew communicated an objection to these incentives

because the family “need the money for other things.” Nevertheless, these collective gestures led Matthew to believe that “vital” was the most apt way to define his family’s sentiments about college. Further, his family regarded college as a way to improve the ways in which African Americans “look” in comparison to their other-racial/ethnic counterparts.

Having heard these messages his entire life – from both his parents and extended “family back in Haiti” – coupled with not wanting to “embarrass his family,” Matthew endeavored to “show them” that he could “be serious about school.” In his own words, Matthew declared, “it [college] is important to them, so it is important for me also.” Heavily involved in activities such as football, soccer, band, and ROTC during high school, it was the latter – where he was commanding officer – that he “loved” most. Consequently, Matthew searched for a university with an ROTC program that would “help” him “to do it...to go to college.” Additionally, he was interested in a university with a strong engineering program. He also considered the distance from his family, which became more important to him once he “got to the 11th grade.” Specifically, Matthew cited concern about the family’s safety and welfare and a desire to “help” his parents with his “younger brothers still at the house” as the reasons. Further, Matthew was moved by the orientation staff’s authenticity and willingness to help, describing them as “being a family” and the HBCU campus as a place that “felt like another home.” Finally, a younger cousin’s summer work with a reality T.V. celebrity roused a curiosity about the types of internships that college could possibly afford him someday. Matthew made it clear that going to college meant showing an affirmative return on his parent’s investment in him, as well as being able to pay for his [future] children’s education someday, “for any college they would like to go to.”

(9) Joseph's mother was active duty in the Army much of his childhood until she was involved in "a bad car accident" which created physical complications to her back. Before the accident, his nuclear family – which also includes an older sister (and her son) and a younger brother – moved around quite a bit, largely in the South. His biological father is incarcerated, and his mother was briefly re-married to a fellow Army comrade. Resultantly, the family generally resided on a military base. However, Joseph's mother and "the man" separated during his freshman year of high school. He describes his mother as "all I had growing up" and someone with whom he is "pretty close" too. His younger brother, who refers to him as "his hero," looks to Joseph in more of a "mentoring" capacity. He and his older sister, conversely, have "butt heads" throughout most of his life. Joseph communicates with his mother at least once a week, and the two share a good-humored relationship marked by lots of laughter. Despite his biological father's "circumstances," Joseph hears from him by phone "at least twice a month" and stated that the relationship is "as good as it can be." Joseph also has two older brothers on his paternal side, only one of which he "just recently got close to."

Joseph recalls learning about college in "middle school" when he began "talking about it" with his mother. Despite the fact that on his father's side of the family "nobody went to college," and his mother did not pursue an undergraduate degree until "much later" in her adult life, Joseph declared that "college was an expectation" in his family. Joseph's mother, who recently completed a master's degree in business administration, "always expected" him to pursue a college education because he was "always smart." Still, he remarked that ultimately "the choice" was his to make. At the same time, his mother encouraged him to start college "younger than she did" so that he could "intern" and obtain pertinent vocational experience early on in his career. Joseph shared that his mother's struggles to secure a job often caused her to "stress" about

finances, something he fervidly did not want to “worry about” in adulthood. For him, acquiring a college degree would alleviate the odds of having his [future] children “grow up the same way.” Like most others in the participant group, Joseph names his mother as the most influential family member in his decision to attend college.

Joseph proclaimed that higher education “was a big deal” for him personally, and he “started getting serious about college” around his sophomore year of high school. Initially thinking he would “go to school on a basketball scholarship,” Joseph was forced to consider alternative routes when he tore his anterior cruciate ligament (or ACL) during his junior year. Afterward, he turned his “focus on academics” and his position as the commanding cadet of the school’s ROTC program. Joseph swiftly remarked that his college choice “was gonna be an HBCU” although he considered a predominantly White institution in the same state. Stating in a very matter of fact manner that the “prestigious” Pinckney was “a good school and it doesn’t matter what your major is,” Joseph saw the university as a double-win: (1) it would enable him to “build a closer relationship” with extended family that he only saw during his mother’s deployments and (2) the institution, in his opinion, “holds a higher level of respect” other than HBCUs in the state. Further, the smaller class sizes and opportunities to “build brotherly relationships” with other “Black males” solidified his decision. In Joseph’s estimation, going to college affords him the privilege of being socialized at “such a prestigious school,” and to increase his earning potential so that he “wouldn’t have to worry” if he “did need something.”

At Thompson-Simmons College

(10) After less than a minute into our interview, Abraham lamented that he “came from a pretty horrible household.” During the first three years of his life, Abraham, his younger sister, and an older brother (who has autism) lived with their mother. However, they were removed

from the home by family services who determined that she was “unfit” to parent. Consequently, the three siblings moved in with Abraham’s biological father and his new wife, who had three additional children of her own. For Abraham, it “sucked in that household” and his father, whom he says “never took the time to actually come nurture me,” also “sucked.” Attempting to illustrate his revulsion of a “pretty tumultuous” childhood, he described himself as the “Harry Potter” of his family because it seemed as if “everyone in the house” (aside from his biological siblings) felt hatred and contempt for him. He and his siblings continued to live amid the “horrible crap” until his father died in December of 2011, during Abraham’s junior year of high school. For Abraham, this is when he “got lucky.” Six months later, his stepmother – who demonstrated no interest in parental continuity – insisted that “family courts” should “decide what to do” with he and his siblings since she was not “getting any money” for the children “being here.” After a brief stint in a foster home, Abraham and his siblings moved in with his dad’s brother. It was there that he “transferred schools” and completed his senior year.

. Abraham exclaimed that he learned about college around the age of 16. No one in his family attended college, and he was never encouraged by family to pursue it. Aside from his sister and his brother (who is now living in a group home), Abraham stated that his family “at that point...was non-existent.” Apart from “like the TV,” messages about college were absent, and the prospect of attending college was “a pipe dream essentially.” While his new high school provided him with opportunities to “fill out college applications,” Abraham shirked the idea and wondered “how the hell” he would “pay for this.” However, as his senior year drew to a close, the class president met a mentor who became “really influential” in his life and decision-making. A successful entrepreneur whose husband was a board trustee for Thompson-Simmons, Abraham’s new mentor “pulled a lot of strings” to get him accepted to the college. Resultantly,

he felt “obligated” to attend Thompson-Simmons, even though he began to develop interest in a PWI outside of his home state. Notwithstanding her role in his life, Abraham shared that he doesn’t “qualify her as family,” emphasizing instead that “family is my sister, my brother, and like, that’s it.”

Orchestrated on his own, Abraham attended student orientation at a flagship institution in a bordering state. In his own words, he “loved the city” and was “99% there” before eventually going with Thompson-Simmons. Nonetheless, Abraham commented that ultimately he would not have wanted to go “somewhere out of state and not really have” his mentor “as like a connection” for him. He further mentioned that he “wouldn’t wanna just up and like leave” his younger sister, whose resilience he applauds despite “never really” having a “mother figure” and who was “never really treated” like an “only daughter” by their father. Now a student at Thompson-Simmons, Abraham questions the value of college, calling it “overrated” and that “sometimes” he feels as if “it’s not worth it.” For Abraham, his mentor’s involvement and a dwindling interest in law school bolster his pursuit of college.

At Singleton College

(11) Peter grew up in a single-parent household in a major Midwestern city. His biological father “left” the family when he was eight, and his mother never remarried. According to Peter, his mother – who works at a post office in his hometown – played “both the mother position and the father position” during his upbringing, but “could never be a 100% father” for him. Resultantly, Peter “hung out with older people,” many of whom were “male figures” during his formative years. He calls them “family friends” who impacted” him “big” by “giving advice,” “knowledge,” and even teaching him to “tie a tie.” He has an older sister who attends college with him at Singleton, and a younger brother who is presently incarcerated. His younger

brother, described as being “close” in age to Peter, makes contact with him the most, calling “like three times a day...every two days.” For Peter, the regularity of his brother’s calls present no issue because he is “the one he [the younger brother] would rather talk to.” Referring to his mother as “like a best friend” and someone whom he “can tell anything,” Peter named her most influential in the decision to pursue college.

Ironically, Peter and Luke attended the same “college prep” charter school, although they were now on two separate college campuses about 374 miles away from each other. Peter recalls demonstrating an interest in college around the eighth grade. Never making “below a 3.0” grade point average and having scored a “21 on the ACT,” he undoubtedly believed that “college was for” him. However, it wasn’t until his “freshman or sophomore” year of high school that messages about college began to emerge in his family. Specifically, regular messages about “college wasn’t important,” because the family saw it as “a long term goal.” Instead, “the short-term goals were to pay the bills, put food on the table, and have some money.” When an older cousin made the transition to college, however, this changed. She began to describe how higher education could enable him to “experience something more” than what he was accustomed to. Additionally, his mother required him to “set expectations high,” something Peter believes has to do with his siblings who “just never liked school.” He, on the other hand, “was a school person,” so his mother “was there the whole way through high school, middle school” encouraging him to “do more things than she did...and finishing college was one of them.” His mother, who started but did not complete college, also made personal sacrifices (such as selling her car) to demonstrate her support of his college choice. Beyond her efforts, Peter’s extended family also paid a careful eye to his pre-college decisions. Describing them as “mostly having [his] back,” when Peter’s behavior “was headed down a wrong path,” they “took time out of their schedules”

to provide “cheerful words,” inviting him to spend the weekend, and spending “their own money” to help “get [him] out of a problem.” Like Jeremiah, Peter’s extended family also organized a trunk party, sending him off replete with “school supplies, pillows, sheets, and totes” and other celebratory gifts. Peter defined his extended family’s support as “all the encouragement” that he “could’ve ever asked for.”

For Peter, whose college choice was yet his “own to make,” higher education was an opportunity for self-discovery. Indeed, he described going to college as a chance to “find out” who he was “as a person.” This was particularly important to him because “not many people” from his neighborhood “go to college or get out of the neighborhood.” Identifying some of his pre-college decisions as “leading [him] down the wrong, into the wrong direction,” Peter wanted a campus climate that “would be quiet” and offer him “a way to settle.” Although not exactly certain he would actually go until receiving a “full ride scholarship” that he “couldn’t turn down,” Peter insisted that the campus could not be “too far from them [his family].” Moreover, Peter disclosed that attending college mattered symbolically for his mother who “always wanted” him “to be better than her.”

(12) Timothy is a native of the same major Midwestern city as several other participants. He has a twin brother, whom he is “very close” to. Three months following their birth, their mother was incapacitated after having her drink laced with a drug. This left her with permanent cognitive impairment. Their father, who Timothy asserted was always “on the run...ripping and running,” was incarcerated for drug related reasons. Thus, the infants were taken in by their (maternal) aunt where they lived for nine years in the South. Timothy describes his aunt, her husband, their children and others in their extended family as “always distant.” They made it a point to accentuate that they “didn’t have to” open their homes to them. Consequently,

throughout their childhood, Timothy and his twin were often left to “do” for themselves. Reflecting on this turbulent time, Timothy shared that he “was always angry” and that he “used to get into a lot of fights” because of it. When the twins reached the fourth grade, their father (who has 13 additional children) “got out the penitentiary.” Not long after, the two brothers moved into his home. Describing “that whole process and that whole thing” as “just terrible,” the twins “got into a fight with him” which Timothy pointed out was a turning point – he felt like he “got some type of power back” in his life. Specifically, this was the point where he decided to “take charge” of his “own life.” Timothy and his brother returned to their aunt’s home a few years later, who was now back in the Midwest. Frustrated with the continued familial dissonance, Timothy and his twin left after an additional three years there and were temporarily homeless. After “bouncing” from a “friend’s house to like a brother’s house or a cousin’s house,” Timothy and his brother experienced some stability when their (paternal) uncle took them in to finish their senior year of high school.

For his uncle, who is identified as most influential in his college choice, Timothy ardently conveyed that he is “the most grateful.” A retired law enforcement officer, Timothy’s uncle assumed primary responsibility for the twins not too long after Timothy was “kicked out” of his high school and “nobody else would take [them] in.” In Timothy’s view, his uncle – whose son was killed in a motorcycle confrontation – was “caring” and “doing basically what [their] dad should have been doing.” From most other relatives, college held “no importance.” According to Timothy, his family “didn’t push for [the twins] to go to college.” Instead, they suggested the local junior college, “a job,” communicated disparaging messages about their ability to succeed, or simply “didn’t encourage it” altogether. Ironically, Timothy and his brother were initially headed to the local junior college where they both had “a scholarship since junior year playing

[basket] ball for that school.” However, after several of their friends were killed – some of whom were their teammates – the brother’s began to consider leaving the city.

While a Singleton recruiter (whose presence Timothy saw as a “sign”) was important for expanding their options regarding college, ultimately, it was his uncle’s intervention that made college “a possibility.” Timothy proclaimed that he “wasn’t even thinking about college,” insisting that, due to the family’s vilification, a “college or university wasn’t even an option” until he was under his uncle’s tutelage. In addition to therapeutic messages that countered the events of his parents and other relatives, Timothy’s uncle found consistent and creative ways to “put the thought” of college in his head. Much like John and Mark commented, Timothy was also lured by the physical benefits that his uncle’s college education afforded him (i.e., “a really nice house” and “a bunch of nice cars”). Given that the decision to attend Singleton was made hurriedly “the day before school started” – which found their uncle happily taking them “back and forth” to procure “the room essentials,” “get transcripts,” “pay off the remaining school fees,” and purchasing a cell phone so that they “could communicate with him” – Timothy commented very little about his desires regarding campus climate. Nevertheless, for Timothy, it was abundantly clear that leaving the Midwest to attend college meant he “would be alive” and “actually survive and go out and do something” productive with his life. To this point he shared, “college really saved my life.” Finally, attending college also meant proving wrong many of his relatives. He captured this sentiment by asserting, “Since they don’t want me to go... I am really going to go [to college] now.”

Conclusion

As these illustrative case summaries attest, the present study is informed by 12 African American male freshmen – ranging in age from 18 through 21 – whose identities, meaning

making, families, and home backgrounds are sundry. They were enrolled at seven diverse institutions across the American Midwest and the South, spanning from large, public, land-grant, predominantly White institutions, to small, private, historically Black, Roman Catholic institutions. Indeed, messages about college and involvement from family, as well as the students' general interpretation of pertinent pre-college factors were rich and varied. Chapter VI reports the common themes across interviews that address the research questions, forming the basis for how practice and future studies should be expanded given this research.

CHAPTER VI - RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Creativity is not the finding of a thing, but the making something out of it after it is found.
James Russell Lowell

This chapter presents the findings from face-to-face interviews conducted with 12 African American male first-year collegians in order to understand how family dynamics, attitudes, and behaviors shaped their pathways to higher education. The following overarching research question guided this study: How, and in what ways, do African American male collegians perceive the family's role in their decision to pursue higher education? Through detailed narratives and reflections, I disclose the myriad ways in which the participants' family-related experiences are linked with their intentions to pursue a college degree. Additionally, I discuss the ways that participants' communicated familial influences fit the Freeman (2005) framework of college choice, which guided this study.

While constructive family attitudes (and actions) toward education appeared purposeful (i.e., intentional messages about the importance of a college education), there were also several instances where covert family beliefs, practices, and challenges played positive roles in shaping participants' attitudes (i.e., a desire to excel academically and professionally after witnessing the struggles of their parents). Taken together, results of the study revealed two overarching themes of family influence and college choice for African American males: (1) deliberate family involvement and (2) contextual family influences. Eight subthemes illuminate the overarching theme deliberate family involvement: (1) emphasizing hard work, (2) aiding with pre-college paperwork, (3) offering messages about value of college, (4) supporting extra-curricular activities, (5) encouraging positive decision-making, (6) cultural indoctrination, (7) providing affirming words and praise, and (8) regular accessibility. Four subthemes buttress the

overarching theme contextual family influence: (1) family educational choices, (2) family participation, (3) family representation and reactions, and (4) family stress.

Deliberate Family Involvement

The twelve African American male collegians in this study described deliberate family involvement in their pursuit of higher education as action-oriented activities executed by family members (i.e., parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.), at all grade levels, linked to his achievement, school success, and predilection for higher education. At the same time, their stories call attention to the ways in which race/ethnicity and gender play a distinctive role in how these families prepare young Black males for education and society.

“She always pushed us”: Emphasizing hard work

A number of the participant’s described hard work as a seminal family influence. They articulated statements that suggested their parent(s) and extended family members stressed and/or reinforced the importance of working hard to achieve his long-term academic goals. Most understood that hard work was important to their families because they were “*always on*” them “*when it came to school.*” While hard work in most cases pertained to academic performance, for some participants, family members encouraged hard work both within and beyond the classroom. Daniel, a football player at Hurd State University said, “*My momma and my pops, uh, ya know, they were just making sure I kept my grades right, and kept performing on the field, so they wouldn’t have to pay for college.*” Daniel went on to highlight his mother’s seriousness about his need to perform optimally in order to achieve college:

Like say if [I] had like a bruised injury or something and couldn’t play or something, she’d be like “Un un, you better get yo butt out there and play so you can get these [college] coaches attention!”

For some participants, “*discipline*” was also a method employed by their parent(s) to underpin their expectations for hard work. Matthew described how his mother and father used discipline to foster acceptable and appropriate academic behaviors among him and his younger brothers:

They disciplined us. We had to come from school, they sitting there, right there, and they'd be like, 'Alright, come over here, show me your work, I know you got homework.' If they catch you coming inside going straight to the television, oh you have a problem.

Similarly, John expressed how his mother’s disciplining imparted the value of hard work pre-college:

Well, when I did slack off of my lessons, she would discipline me. And to me that really let me know that she really cares and wants me to get an education so I can be something in life.

Participants also described how race was a factor in the ways that their families fostered expectations for hard work. Jeremiah, who attends a predominately White institution, recalled how his mother instilled the idea of transcending racial expectations for African American males in the classroom:

She would say, 'If they [White teachers and peers] think you can't do something, you go prove them wrong by working hard in school'; because you can always, you just have to believe in yourself basically. And I really, I want to say that was the most strongest moment.

Paul conveyed that he received corresponding messages from his mother about the importance of working hard as a young Black male:

With my mom, she always stressed that nothing's going to come easy to you as a Black male. You're not going to be given anything, so she kind of set the bar that I needed to work hard at all times.

Finally, participants communicated how their families linked hard work to increased opportunities for “a better life” for themselves. Luke captured this by describing how he interacted with his grandmother during the period where he considered his college options:

She was always on me. She was always on me. Uh, we butted heads probably because when you live with somebody, you gone butt heads. But like, I think my grandma felt like she had to, to a certain extent, she had to push me to work hard to get here. So it's a lot on her shoulders. She wanted to make sure I was good. So we butted heads a lot. But we butted heads because she got a big heart, and she wanted me to have a better life than she did.

Matthew, also reflecting on his college options, communicated his parents' desire for him to achieve long-term success through hard work, whether that included college or not:

And my parents always said if we can't be successful by school, we [still] have to have a life-term goal. They want us to have a life that's better than theirs. Like I am going, trying to go to the Army, and I am in the ROTC program here. So in high school, I used to be the commanding officer of the ROTC program. And my parents tried very hard to bring us up like that, like working hard.

“They sat down right there next to me”: Aiding with pre-college paperwork

Participants in this study discussed a range of ways that their families provided support with pre-college paperwork. Specifically, these students' depended on their family's aid and guidance with college essays, navigating various college websites, and applying for scholarships and financial aid. When asked to define a specific experience that exemplified family support of his college choice, Matthew, whose parents had never attended college, shared:

Financial aid, man, I remember I was having problems with that because I had to get a lot of other papers. It was stressful. And it was new to me and them. Even though they had never been to like a university, they still took me back and forth to get what I needed for the paperwork. Going back and bringing this and that. This was all still in high school. They actually took off work and they waited with me and everything. It was a long week when we had to do that stuff and they took all their time to be by my side. I was so happy.

Jeremiah, whose parents were very familiar with information about college, was less overwhelmed by the responsibilities related to college paperwork. Nevertheless, he called attention to the value that their assistance played in his pre-college process:

Um pretty much with paperwork, like my essay and stuff, I would let my mom review it. Um, but going over that, that was pretty easy for me. I applied for FAFSA with my mom and my dad, and I didn't get anything back. Yeah, but if I needed their help with the paperwork, they were always there for me. It really, really played a factor to have their help with reviewing stuff and sitting there with me.

David indicated that his parents were unable to provide any direct support with college paperwork. Instead, his older siblings, who were college attendees and/or graduates, took it upon themselves to use their knowledge about college paperwork in ways that alleviated the pressure of completing the documents independently:

And once I finally did say I was going, they were real supportive, my brothers and sisters that's already in or done [with college]. They helped me with the application process. They sat down right there next to me, and did FAFSA with me, proof read my essay, man everything. It was so helpful.

Similarly, John pointed out ways in which his older sister (who had completed college) and his mother (who had not attended college) were instrumental in supporting him with pre-requisite paperwork:

My sister, she basically knows, since I hadn't done it before, she basically helped me with my FAFSA and all of those essays and things. My mom, well my mom, she, once I informed her I was going to college, she started picking up things and moving here. She just told me all the time that it made her feel really good that I would be attending a college. I heard this from her a lot. When she moved, she helped me apply for a lot of scholarships, and I actually received maybe nine or ten of the scholarships. So she was involved with paperwork as well.

“It’s a great pathway for your career”: Offering messages about value of college

Participants discussed various ways in which their regard for college was shaped by the meaning it held for their families. Whether family members had attended college or not,

participants acquired meanings (or messages) about the value of college through their social interaction with parents, siblings, and extended family. In many cases, the value of college in the family was connected to a belief that it would heighten the participants' prospects of career security. To this end, Daniel stated, "*For my momma, it was clear: you go to college, you graduate college, you can have a better job.*" David's parents, despite having not achieved college, remarked about its value in parallel ways:

Well pretty much my mother and father didn't go on to college. My mother took a couple of classes, but she didn't really attend, uh, a formal university or school. And even though they didn't, they always told us its best that we continue to go on to school and get a better education, because better education equals better job. They, my family, they feel that those who attend college are the ones who get the good jobs in society. So the further you get your education, the better you have a chance of getting a better career in the educational field you're trying to go for, or the working field. Um, so they just feel like the better your education, the better you are able to get a really good job.

Joseph noted that his mother and extended family have articulated similar messages about the value of acquiring a college education:

Like, my mom and my aunts and uncles, they just always have said college, it's a great pathway for your career. Um, it really motivated me. And like, my mom, she always told me that it's good that I started off younger [going to college] than she did...so I have better time to build and get experience for a job. Cause with her, she got her masters in business administration. But, it's harder for her to get a job cause she doesn't have the business administration experience, cause she went back much later. So she said that, because I'm at a younger age, it'll be easier for me to get experience. And then through interns and stuff like that, it'll be easier for me to get a career faster.

Like Joseph, Peter was instructed on the value of college from multiple family sources.

He added,

Everybody, all my family was, they was encouraging for me to go to college. They encouraged me, like everyone. Seriously. Aunts and nem, all the family, because, it's just something they wanted to see me do and pursue, and to get that good job one day. So that's how my family influenced me. They all the encouragement I could've asked for man. They really had a value for college. And I can just recall my mother telling me to go because it will probably be one of the best experiences I will have in my life. My cousin, she went to college, she said, she said I should come to college because it's so much

different than what I know, and I should go to learn something more to prepare me to get that good paying job.

Beyond securing a job, Matthew's response indicated that his family's regard for college stems from an understanding of the duality of many Black students' existence in predominantly White spaces. Matthew commented:

My family, my parents, they really respect college. They always have, and they always told me. Because going to college, not everybody doing it. So like, for example, when they came up here, before I was a student, they seen Black students dressed up, and people in, you know, suits and business stuff because they're in college, and they have to show the White students and other races that they are just as able to be successful. They have to work twice as hard as the White students, and know how to interact with them, but they can't forget where they come from. So, it's just stuff like that, that made them value college. So cause I'm here, they are proud I'm here. My family believes college makes you more likely to be a success in the future, to have a job, and to provide for your family.

Finally, Paul's comments suggested a bi-directional influence in his family. Specifically, he discussed how the same support system that was responsible for instilling the value of higher education in him has developed an elevated sense of its value after having observed his matriculation:

I mean now that they see me going through college it's, it's that you need to go to college. And they all wish they could go back and do the same things I'm doing now just because of all the good things that come from college. But they were the ones who taught me that in today's world now, that you need a degree to get a good job or else you're going to struggle without it. That came from my family.

“Taken serious on the field and off the field”: Supporting extra-curricular activities

Several participants in this study were college athletes. For them, perceptions of family influence took on a distinctive role in the pre-college process: critical social support of their extra-curricular activities. These participants discussed ways that their families socialized them to be both competent in their sport as well educationally in order to combat typecasts of athletic prowess but academic inferiority among African American males. For some participants, the

support of extra-curricular activities served as the “lifeblood” while they navigated the pathway to college. Daniel shared:

I guess it all goes back to, goes back to my brother when he was going, going through the process. Like, I said, he aint really have good grades. And the last thing my momma and pops wanted was for their son to be labeled just talented on the field, but not in the books. So like, seeing them pay for tutors and stuff like that to get his grades up so he could get into a college, and be taken serious on the field and off the field, that really showed me like, ‘hey, they really want me to – they really want us to go to college and stuff.

Daniel then added:

I knew they wanted the same for me. I knew it from, um, them being on me hard. Uh, making sure I was doing right in school and making sure I was performing on the field. And you know, and telling me, you know, telling me if I had the good grades and I keep performing, I could go to college and go to a big school and stuff like that.

Mark drew attention to a broad range of extra-curricular support he received from his mother and extended family, and highlighted the role that race played in her participation:

Well my mom attended all of my track and field events during high school, all my choir events or whatever I had going on at school. Like, she didn’t want me being just some Black male who went to college cause he run fast. So I did like Beauty and Beau and all that stuff. And like there was an honors program going on, I was in that, she was there. My other family members were there, and pretty much they were just there, you know, during the process of high school. It’s the lifeblood, man. And really senior year, they were like, ‘Well next step college.’

Paul underscored efforts that his mother made to minimize the weight of feeling isolated or detached from the larger university-community when he became a college student-athlete.

This, in turn, impacted where he wanted to attend college:

So, for like football there might be a camp, uh...five hours away. And she’d drive in one night and take me there. And then, and I might have a visit at a school that’s two hours, two hours back the same way close to home and she would get up that morning and head out right after. With my mom because we’re just...we have that type of bond and we’re close. She wanted to make sure I didn’t feel alone where I went.

Timothy, who grew up feeling no sense of support from his biological parents, described how meaningful it was to his college choice to receive extra-curricular support from his uncle:

He would come, like, just do supportive stuff. Like me and my twin used to play in a league that was a park district league, basketball. And he would like come to our games or when we played like the tournament at the center, it is this big gym or whatever. He used to come to our games to support us. So, I feel like, making him most distinguishable, it was the support that he gave us in that way that nobody else did. That really made me wanna come to college, and have that support.

“Now I realize why she did it”: Encouraging positive decision-making

Several participants described how the balance of parental (or familial) authority and their independence was important for their outcomes, and ultimately their decision to pursue college. By and large, participants’ defined positive decision-making as a process of making a constructive choice between a number of options and committing to a future course of actions. For many of the young men, parent and/or family restrictions curtailed risky behaviors, encouraged academic seriousness, and promoted the idea of “*having more*” or “*being better*” than them. To support this point, Paul asserted that his mother “*talks about it all the time...and how she wish she could ’ve did the same things.*” John discusses his father’s lamentations in similar ways:

Because he also informed me that he wants me to basically be better than him. He tells me all the time. Even though he is a fireman, and he also has a job in the parts department in the car dealership. He doesn’t want me to have to struggle as much as he has.

Peter shared a comparable notion and described how his mother’s encouragement was linked to her hopes for a “better” future:

She, she was there the whole way through high school, middle school. She was there throughout my life, and she always wanted me to be better than her. She wanted me to do more things than she did and, finishing college was one of them. So I was like, it’s the only thing to do really. It’s the best choice I got. So yeah, it was mostly having my back.

Peter then went on to discuss how his extended family’s verbal and physical interaction added vigor to the idea of positive decision-making pre-college:

While I was in high school, if I looked like I was headed down a wrong path, they'd say, 'Come stay with me for the weekend' or 'You know you need to stop hangin' with them dudes.' So, before college, my family was mostly giving me cheerful words, motivating me to make positive decisions. But they took time out of their schedules to be available if I needed them. And even when I didn't like call them. They would just be watching out, looking, paying attention to my moves. All the encouragement I could've asked for man.

The idea of avoiding a “bad” peer group emerged from several participants when discussing how their families influenced their decision making. Daniel described ways that his mother used her parental authority to steer the course of his decision making, both in the classroom and with his peers:

And she stayed on me about my grades, and who I hung with. I aint gone lie, I hung around some people that do some bad things, but that's just how I grew up. It wasn't really a, a good place. My mom really didn't want me and my brother growing up there. We used to get in trouble and stuff growing up. So, she moved us to, you know, better our lives. Which at first I really didn't like. But after a while, you know, now I realize why she did it. 'Cause now I'm here.

Luke remembers his grandmother's guidance as the difference between life and death:

My grandma's the type of person that doesn't care about what somebody thinks. Like, she gone get it the best way she know how. And she wanted that for me. And so like, she always said like, 'You should go, you should go, gone head go.' Do something different. Make better choices. Get outta here. And I felt like this was the best balance for me. Like, back home, you worry about bullets. You worry about getting killed. You worry about you being on a shirt. Out here, you worry about running over a raccoon or a deer hitting your car or something like that. So, like, yeah, she wanted me to make better decisions.

In a similar vein, as a result of his mother's persistence, Jeremiah recounted feeling an inward obligation to make advantageous academic and peer choices, even when those decisions were incongruent with those of his high school friends:

My mom was always on me, always. You know, no matter if it was coming in the house late, no matter if it is getting my homework done, asking when's the last time I read a book, what was that book about, etcetera. So she was very, very, very influential to me like because she stayed on my head. Like, you know, she made sure that I wasn't just sitting around like my other friends, and that is what made me distinguishable, and when it came time to pick college, and I had a few choices instead of just like, 'I am going here' cause they only had one option.

Matthew also described examples of his parent's persistence, particularly when it concerned his academic performance. He elaborated,

My dad, man, he talked all day, in my head. When I am playing the game system, he'd be like, 'So I told you about this college thing, I need you to have good grades!' He was always in my head, even when I was doing homework. When I was doing homework, sometimes it was not only him, they tag team. [Laughs] They tag-team. He would be like, 'I see your papers are wrong, how you get a C!' 'But it is a high C'. She would say 'But still it is a C'...and I am like tag-team alright, I understand. So I would be like, "Man this C, this is not good, you gotta do better than that man.'

“It was important to make our culture look good”: Cultural indoctrination

Participants in this study described ways in which their families imparted cultural and race-related messages to them. Across these collegians, families used diverse messages – such as racial pride, racial barriers, egalitarian perspectives, and self-development – to indoctrinate them about the value of hard work, underscore the importance of their history, and instill the need to excel academically. Further, the participants' drew out ways that their parents, siblings, and extended family encouraged them to defy common negative typecasts often associated with young Black males. Jeremiah provided an elaborate account of his mother's use of African American literature to immerse him in a cultural appreciation for higher education. He noted,

*My parents raised me to just really have a strong mindset for college, especially as a Black male. Like I told you, my mom, she made me read. Like I used to read a lot of Richard Wright. I still do read Richard Wright. Like right now I am reading Richard Wright's *The Outsider* and *Native Son*, *The Black Boy*. Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man* you know stuff like that. WEB Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*. Um, who else, like Carter G. Woodson. Um, what is that book I was reading, *The Miseducation of the Negro*. Um so yeah, like I kind of got a knowledge of what life was back then, and I knew what those individuals went through to get to those points, so I viewed racism and being prejudice a big deal for me. So, because my parents put that knowledge right in front me. They actually were like, 'You are a Black male. There are not many of you in college.' So, it was essential for me to know that information and to know what I could be dealing with here at these, I mean PWI's, predominantly White institutions. So it was kind of set for me to know this.*

David discussed how his older brother's own racial socialization and his mother's culturally-related instructions shaped the types of messages they transmitted to him about college:

*The most influential were, and are still, my two oldest brothers. Um, they, they were the first to make it through, uh, with their bachelor degrees. And so they inspired me to go on as men – young Black men – uh, to keep going with my education because I know if they made it, I can make it. And it just look good as, as Black men, to be getting a degree. They know what my parents went through back in the day as Black people, and they know what it's like to be discriminated. So they worked hard to have it differently for us, and they always told those same things to me. 'Be serious as a Black man.' 'Take school serious so you can go to college.' And then, like, my mom would have us watching like *The Ernest Green Story* and like Black educational movies showing how, uh, like African Americans worked hard to make a way for, like, us doing it today.*

Matthew described how his family's messages about racism, racial pride, and transcending racial inequities through a college education were connected to broader hopes of cultural advancement and equality:

Our race, as Black people, you know we are not up there yet. It is like the way that racism is, Blacks are down below. My family talked about race, my dad and mom. They felt like putting college on our range helps, so they wanted to make sure we was ready for college or anything. They never made it seem like we were not smart enough or anything. Where I come from, it was important to make our culture look good, the Black, African American side should look awesome. College was like the thing that my dad and mom saw that would help to make us equal with Whites, Mexicans. Man, we are all the same. So they were always saying that education, that college was vital to make the race look better.

Paul experienced cultural indoctrination that was marked by the need to push against stereotypical, racially-motivated forecasts for Black males from single-parent households:

My mom, she has always pushed me to achieve the things that people say I can't achieve, as a young Black male. Uh, stuff like, 'You can't go to school here,' or 'You can't play at this level' or 'You can't get this degree' – just because that's the expectation people get from a single-parent household with the mom raising a boy.

Luke described a similar culturally-indoctrinating experience in his family and how it was important to his college decision-making process:

Like, my grandma she knew that I could be a drug dealer or a car cracker if I wanted to. But that's not the life she wanted me to live. Plus, I didn't wanna live in fear like these other Black dudes. My grandma taught me that, she sat down and talked to me about it all as, like, a Black man. As a Black man, going to college could help me so that I didn't have to like have a child and risk them losing me like my father lost me. Gotta break that cycle for Black men. Aw, it was always drilled into yo head.

“It kept me feeling good and positive about myself”: Providing affirming words and praise

Several participants in this study offered examples of the effects that their family's praise and/or verbal affirmation had on their decision to pursue college. In particular, they described ways that their families praise shaped their academic self-perceptions, which in turn enhanced feelings of pride and expectations for success in the future. In most cases, affirmation and praise was often demonstrated through regular communication between the family member(s) and the participants' to express approval, laud their performance(s), and offer critical emotional support. David, who took a three-year hiatus after high school, remarked about the ways that his brothers' encouragement ultimately ignited his decision to attend college:

He asked me multiple questions like, 'Where did I think I should go someday?' and stuff as far as like that. And I was telling them everything about the process before I decided to go. So, we talked, we talked about me possibly going to school and all that, all the time. Um, but with my older brothers, it's just always words of encouragement and advice. So, it kept me feeling good and positive about myself as far as going someday. That had a lot to do with me going.

Jeremiah offered perspective about the profound impact that his family's praise played in shaping his pathway to college:

Every weekend I would go to see my granny. I still do. I love talking to them, you know, to my family. They're the reason, they're what make me. Um, being around them, like them staying on me, always praising my achievements, it is what made me want to do more. Like they say like 'You can't give up. You can't. I know it is hard, you know.' They always told me about how smart I am, and how I could be what I wanted. They really are, they are unexplainable, like how much they on me, encouraging. But I love that, you know because I can actually say that somebody was there for me in my life to actually keep me on track.

John's position was similar to Jeremiah's. He, too, was lauded for his academic achievement and its anticipated connection to future success. He, similarly, recalled hearing these sentiments with some sense of regularity:

When I was in high school, my mom, we talked a lot. She always was like encouraging me like, on my school performance and about what I could accomplish in the future. She just told me all the time that it made her feel really good that I would be attending a college someday. I heard these kinds of supportive words from her a lot.

Peter, who grew up with his older sister and younger brother, described how his mother's affirmation was imbued with hopes that he would be the one (among her children) to opt for higher education someday:

She was always aiming for me to go to college. She made me set my expectations high and my goals high so I would. She talked about how smart I was and how I could go far someday. The encouragement came across clearly to me. Because my big sister, she wasn't at all interested in coming to college. And my little, my little brother he just never liked school. And I'm the only one that really was a school person, that did okay in school. So I know she wanted me to go to school because it was something that was part of me.

Mark recounted how the nexus between in-depth conversations and sentiments of his mother's satisfaction with his academic performance added to his motivation to attend college:

I just think she is the one, you know, who stayed on me about, you know, finishing school, going to college and having a better life for myself, you know. Like we had, man, we had so many in depth conversations about this, about that. All the time, about school and what I want to do after school. And, you know, really we just talked about basically everything. She was constantly saying how proud she was. I heard that like several times a week. That stuff motivates you to go hard when it comes to college man.

Matthew denoted how his gratitude toward his father's consistent encouragement of higher education and affirming words increased over time, ultimately landing him in college:

I think it is because the way he kept talking about it...like he kept putting it in our head. He kept saying encouraging words. When they said the same thing over and over and over again, and you just get tired of listening to it [laughs]. And you like, 'Alright, the way to make him stop, I have to do it' [laughs]. But the more I thought about it, I really wanted to do it. His love and words, they made me want to come to college.

“So we talked about it, like we always did”: Regular accessibility

In general, participants collectively described regular accessibility as the degree to which they were psychologically, emotionally, and physical accustomed to having access to their family members before and during the college choice process. Many participants reflected on patterns of family access (i.e., with parents, siblings, extended family) when asked who has had the greatest impact on their decision to pursue college. Most responded with haste as accessibility trends have been relatively consistent throughout their lives. For example, Joseph commented, *“It feels like I’m closer to my mom, just because that’s who all I had growing up. I’m used to her being there.”* Jeremiah described a maternal intimacy in similar ways, which has compelled sentiments of protectiveness even as a college student:

I am very close to my mother, deliberately closer to my mom. Like, I still rub my mom feet at night. [Laughs] Seriously, but you know I am closer to my mom, like I am very protective of my mom. Like if I see her being mistreated, like I go crazy like, you know, and I am just more protective of my mom, and I stick closer to her. But it’s always been like that, her being available for me. And, I mean, it stayed like that when college became a factor. I’m just used to having her there, and that makes all the difference.

John’s comments echoed corresponding notions of maternal accessibility. He further discussed how he and his sister were not accustomed to this access from extended family:

Well, me and my mom, we always had a great relationship. You know, we did more things than a mother and son do. And like I said, besides my sister, you know I wasn’t really close to anybody else in the family, and I didn’t really just have anybody else that I could count on. And, and we bumped heads occasionally, you know, when I got off track on my college path. But I felt that was normal, when your parents are actually in your life. I felt that, you know, she only did that because she loves me.

Peter commented on ways in which his mother’s proactive accessibility was commonplace before and during his college choice process:

‘Cause...like she would, she did a lot of research. Like a lot. Like she did everything that I did before – she did everything that I did before I did it. And she was like, she did the research. She was like, ‘Yeah, you know that school blah, blah, blah’ or something about

that school that I wouldn't like, and she had informed me on that. Then she had helped me find the best campus fit for me. 'Cause she was, she was tough on me, she was, like, put her foot down. But it's always been kinda that way, her being there for me, and I'm knowing she gone always be there. Even before college, she just put her foot down and wouldn't let me get off of that decision. So there was no turning around.

Matthew shared how he was used to negotiating consequential decisions with his father.

This same pattern continued during the college choice process, even when selecting a major:

I always made, like, talked to my dad before I made a big decision. Like with my major, I looked for an engineering program. Right now, I am in the electrical engineering program. I was going to choose mechanical, but my dad knows a lot about mechanical engineering already and I didn't want to not be of use...because he knows it already. So we talked about it, like we always did.

David explained how “positive” access to his parents and his siblings, despite the difficult social and economic situations they faced, provided him with “good pressure” to be serious about college:

I feel like my siblings and my parents did what they could. Because of the circumstances, they could've been negative, ya know what I'm saying, or not encouraged me to come. But they didn't do that. They kept pushing me, all of us, but they were considerate about it. You didn't feel no pressure. Well, you felt good pressure. The point is, they were there, and they was always there.

Timothy added reflections of consistent access to his uncle, who often used humor to impart the idea of attending college:

I do remember this one time, we was all in his backyard, and we was talking. I think me and my brother was back there cutting his grass or whatever. We must have messed up kind of the edges, so he was like... 'You all better go to college because you all not going to have a career in landscaping.' [Laughs] I don't know that was just one instance. And that was kind of typical of him, those kinds of things. Always being there, and always finding ways to put the thought out there.

Contextual Family Influence

The African American collegians in this study articulated the ways that contextual family influences, from their microsystem, informed their decision-making regarding college. Family

contextual factors, meaning the way in which the family operates within its structure, included constituents such as family educational level, family participation, family representation, and family stress. Participants in the present study revealed the richness in the ways that these factors were independently associated with their college choice.

“It made me wanna go, too”: Family educational choices

Participants in this study described sundry ways that their families’ educational choices (i.e., their level of achieved education and/or choice of higher education institution) influenced their decision to attend college, as well as played a role in the type of college that they attended. For example, when asked if anyone in his family had attended college, Paul provided insight to how his aunt’s choices shaped his own: *“My aunt actually went to [PWI in the North] ...that’s why I kind of wanted to stay in the Big 12.”* Jeremiah, who named his mother as most influential in his decision to pursue college, similarly described the ways in which her educational choices impacted his own higher education decision:

My mom went to a very, very hard Big 10, Northern White School, predominantly White school. You know, and um she actually succeeded, and like it is not like I didn’t want to go to a HBCU. I wanted to challenge myself, and not downing HBCU’s, it is just like she always told me to strive no matter what.

Daniel, who stated that college was not an initial expectation in his household, commented about how this changed once his brother attended college:

I mean, it wasn’t really like no thing in our house where my momma would talk to us like, ‘Hey you gotta go to college!’ It was just, with my brother, like I said, he was older than me and when he was playing football, that’s when colleges start calling him about football. So that’s when I started to realize about college and stuff. It made me wanna go too.

David described how his own college choice was tied to the family’s legacy of attending a specific type of higher education institution:

Um, also, most of my brothers and sisters went to HBCUs so – that’s historical Black colleges – so, it made me wanna go to one, because of the legacy in the family. Also, because of the history of supporting Black people, ya know? I mean, I wanted to not be just another face. I wanted to be safe. I wanted to be surrounded by students who looked like me. That’s all the stuff I learned from my brothers and sisters about HBCUs, so that, that is where I wanted to be.

Like David, John received several messages about the safe nature of historically Black colleges from a sibling. John described how these factors, which were often brought up by his older sister, also motivated him to attend a historically Black college:

When she graduated with her bachelor’s degree, that really motivated me. She told me all the time that she just felt like I would enjoy it, the campus environment, the faculty and staff, like hands-on support, and just that it would be a great experience for me, and being that it was an HBCU. I really liked what I heard about it.

Participants also described how they connected the comforts and material benefits that their family members enjoyed to their educational choices. Resultantly, the participants were motivated themselves to pursue college in hopes of enjoying similar anticipated benefits.

Matthew shared how his cousin’s internship with a popular reality television star propelled his excitement about the opportunities he could achieve through college internships:

My cousin, she got to college before me. So my cousin studied like fashion. But in college, she had a summer job intern doing fashion for, um, I don’t know who it was, but I know she was some famous lady from TV – she’s in movies, not a movie, a show. ‘I Love New York,’ something like that. She did makeup and fashion for them in [city in the South]. She showed me pictures and everything, and I was like, ‘Oh so she is really living the dream!’ And that motivated me, that motivated me even more like, ‘I have to get here, I have to go to college.’

Timothy described how observing the material benefits that he associated with his uncle’s college education had a profound impact on his seriousness about attending college:

Like, my uncle has a really nice house. Got a bunch of nice cars and stuff like that. Always show us like, and he isn’t afraid to do like dirty work either, even though he was a retired cop, you know, retired bus driver. He got a lot of different pensions and stuff like that. He let us know that a lot of that stuff wouldn’t have been possible had he not gone to college. Because he went to college before he became a police officer, and then he went

to college after he became like retired from police profession. And he just let us know, like just basically showing us the different stuff that we can have and the different stuff that we would be able to do once we get a college degree or going to college.

Luke provided an evocative twist on the impact of family educational choices and students' college choice. Specifically, through a series of rhetorical questions, he described how his family's educational (as well as personal life) choices carried greater weight in his college choice, even over their words of encouragement:

They didn't never go. So, I mean, like, what can you really – what can I really take from that? Like, 'Aw yeah, college!' Like, everybody family probably say that to a certain extent. But if you not actually going, or can't tell me the proper steps to get into college, like, yeah...Family...my family's supportive in the ways that they know how to be. A person can only give you so much if they didn't go through it. Like, I value what a lot of them say. But, um, like how could you tell me not to drink, but you drink like right in front of me? You know what I'm saying? You gotta set an example. How can you tell me about college if you never went? Of course you can say, 'Go to college because I didn't go.' But like, what help does that really do?

“They made sacrifices to reward me”: Family participation

In this study, participants discussed a range of ways that their family's patterns of participation over time motivated them to ultimately consider higher education. More specifically, participants were motivated by family resolve, healthy family competition, and sacrifices made by their parents and extended family. Luke described the impact that his grandmother's vocational tenacity, despite her limited education, had on his college choice:

She a hustler. So, you know, Grandma grew up, lived, born and raised Mississippi. All she know is Mississippi. When I tell you she ain't never went to a college class, didn't probably even finish elementary school or nothing, but always knew how to save a dollar. So, she made it from nothing. I tell you, she has no education at all. But she's very smart. Fill out her checks, know how to add, know how to do all of it. House nice. Car nice. All of that she did all herself, 'cause she got common sense. So, like seeing that, I was like, 'Ah yeah, she a hustler.' So, me wanting to grind on my own, for myself, to know how to make a dollar, legally, like she did...that is what like motivated me the most from her to go to college.

Joseph remarked about being persuaded by his mother's commitment to completing her college education, despite having not transitioned to higher education directly following high school:

Because, it's like, my mom, I would see her when she was in the Army I would see her working. Ya know, these long hours, doing this, doing that. And then after she got out, it was hard for her to find a job. Because even though she was in the Army, she never really took advantage of the college route. She didn't take advantage of it until like years after, till like once I got to high school. That's when she really started taking advantage of it. And then, that's when, so that's what really persuaded me. Cause I seen her going through what she had to do. She didn't let the time that had passed stop her. She kept going.

Mark similarly described the importance that his mother's determination to complete her college degree had on his own decision-making:

I should say, when she graduated from [HBCU in the South] in 2013 so, you know, that was like, 'If she can do it I can do it after all this time'...it was an example for me to keep on going and what-not.

Matthew explained that he was impacted, even during his formative years, by his father's academic resolve:

And every time we were coming from school, he was the one coming to walk with us and everything from elementary. He would talk about how he is going to finish his high school thing and he was top of his class for high school. And even with having three kids and going back to high school and still taking care of his kids, I respect him. So, like, being serious in school, it started there for me.

Participants also added ways that they engaged in healthy competition with family members – competition that they directly linked to their college choice. Paul's sentiment captured the essence of the notion of healthy family competition: “*Mom's working on one [college degree] now...And just because I'm going back to school and she kind of said 'You're not going to get a degree before me!'*” Matthew also remarked about the ways he interacted competitively with his cousin as it pertained to college:

And you know, she younger than me. So I was like, 'Oh yeah, you showing me up right now? [Laughs] Yeah, it's a family challenge, but healthy, not no beef or nothing. Just growing up, when we got together we would be talking about how we had to succeed, and talk about the different things that we wanted in life. And it already happened for her. I just can't wait for that to happen with me.

David inserted notions of constructive competitiveness in his interaction with his older brother, who wanted to attend law school:

Um, well I know at the time, one of my oldest—the oldest, he was just applying for, um, to go back for his law degree. So, it was like, kinda, like a race between me and him to see who would [Laughs] ...apply first to get back into school. And that's how, that's another reason why I attended college, too. Because we were racing to see who could all get into school that year. And that year it was me, him, and one of my sister's. So, like I interacted with him as far as that race.

The idea of sacrifices made by parents and extended family emerged as important family activities influencing the participants' college choice process. David discussed how his parents made monetary sacrifices to cover membership costs for him and his siblings to participate in after-school programming:

College, it was pretty important because, since my parents didn't, didn't go, and didn't feel they had the opportunity, they wanted their children to go on. And since us kids do have the opportunity to go on and have that opportunity, they wanted us to go. So that's why they started working hard, and, like my dad would do over-time at work, so they could pay for us to go to the Boys & Girls Club and get help with like homework and stuff. That...that like showed me they, like, they wanted us to go far in school.

Jeremiah provided an example of how his parents and extended family, who did not want him to have to juggle between class and work demands, pulled their fiscal resources together to provide him with monetary support for college:

I had a trunk party. Um, it was a lot of fun, even though I wasn't going far away, you know. My auntie told me that 'We are going to make sure you don't have no reason to come back and tell us that you are not graduating.' That trunk party I probably had maybe \$6,000 at the end of that trunk party. It was so much family there, and I had got so much money because you know, they saw that I was doing good and they like, they made sacrifices to reward me for that. And they made sure that I wouldn't have anything to

like stress about in college when it came to money. They just want me trying to stay focused on my grades.

Peter's family made sacrifices for him in a very similar way. He remarked about how it sent a very clear message to him about their support of his matriculation to college:

My family, they threw me a trunk party, and like it had, I ended up, like it, they brought me totes of stuff, not just little gifts like a lamp and bed sheets, they brought me like totes with school supplies. Yeah. And school supplies, like pillows sheets, all types of stuff then, I'll, well that showed me they cared cause they wanted me, they want to help me start my college career off right. They spent they own money and helped me in high school. Yeah, so basically they spent they own money, even when they had to borrow it.

Joseph recalled a particular experience which exemplified how his family sacrificed for him. Specifically, he described how a surprise party during his senior year served as the definitive representation of their support of his college choice:

Okay. So, when I had first got acceptance letters, my mom called all of my friends, all of her friends, some family flew in, and they had a big surprise party for me. It was a congratulatory party for me to get accepted. They found, like, the money to do all this stuff, and I know they like had some hard times in their own lives. At that moment, I knew that I had the support of my entire family. Not just my immediate family that was in the house. I had the support of my mom and dad's side of the family.

“I didn't want to embarrass my family”: Family representation and reactions

When participants were asked what attending college meant to them, they often referred back to their family. Specifically, they discussed how their decisions were often hinged upon its prospective impact on their parent(s) or family's public image. Having lived with these family members their entire lives seemed to play an especially significant role in how they prioritized this constituent. Matthew illustrated detailed thoughts about the ways in which he wanted his academic decisions to reflect positively on his parents:

But me, I didn't want to embarrass my family. Since I stayed with my dad – and my mom too – my whole life, it was more like I am going to show them I can be serious about school stuff and everything, because it is important to them. So, it is important for me also. And it helped them out, and made them look good. So, like even when we're at

church, church people come up to our family and be like, 'Your kids are awesome, they are gonna go far in school, they are a blessing to our church, they help us out with everything.' So, I like knowing that.

Peter provided parallel sentiments when discussing what attending college meant for him.

He drew a direct correlation between his academic choices and its potential bearing on his mother's image:

And, I mean, this is definitely important. Coming to college meant I could make my mom happy and proud of me. That's important, cause, ya know, she raised me, and, I, what I do, it's a reflection on her. I wanna do things that reflect positive on her. College, ya know, it lets...it helps me reflect positive on my mom.

David also described how his desire to make his family "look good" was connected to hopes that furthering his education would augment public perceptions of his parents.

Additionally, he added how he wanted to join his older brothers in projecting a public image of success that benefits their entire family:

Because like I said, my mom and dad didn't go. So I, I really couldn't look to them as much as far as the paperwork for college. But still, with them being around, and living with them, it just inspires you more because you want to make them look good, and better. That's what my brothers doing. They make the whole family look good. By going and graduating college. So I just always wanted to follow in their positive footsteps that they set.

Participants also remarked of how their academic choices were important for the ways that they made their parent(s) and/or extended family feel. David made the following observations about the ways that his parents' feelings mattered in his decision to pursue college:

College, it also meant making my family feel proud. They could, like, feel good about what I was doing with my life. It meant my momma's sacrifices, and my dad's, it meant that they didn't work hard for nothing, ya know? If I succeed, they, the family succeed. That's the attitude I got about it. I mean, I knew it wasn't no cake walk. But I had to do it for me, and so that my family would feel satisfied with what I did. So I'm cool with that.

Jeremiah articulated perspectives about how he evaluated and prioritized the way his parents would feel. Like David, Jeremiah noted that his choice to attend college was not exclusively about his own interests:

I really did take it all to heart, how going to college made them feel. And it did influence me to make sure I make them happy and proud of me. Finally going to college someday always meant that my parents were going to feel really proud of me. I wasn't just doing this for myself. I was doing this for my family.

Paul described how being his mother's oldest child and the only male were central components of his intent to make her feel good about his academic decisions:

I just like making my mom feel happy, and she talks about it all the time and how she feels so proud of me. She's always been there. She always went above and beyond...She taught me at a young age I had to be the man of the house, just because I'm the only boy. ...and because I'm the first child, she's always stressed about, 'You have to go to college.' So, I wanted her to feel good about that. And with her being able to say that I'm going to college now my sisters are jumping on board.

“I had to find an outlet”: Family stress

Participants described stressors that created imbalances between the demands on the family and the family's ability to meet those demands. More specifically, these stressors were major life events or transitions that caused changes in the family's coping patterns. For the African American collegians in this study, complex family stressors were broad, but still carried significant weight in how they understood and described their pathway to college. The nature and impact of these stressors varied, and included factors such as separation/divorce, death, financial hardship, and pessimism. John disclosed the effect that his parent's separation had on his academic performance. He shared how the process of academic recovery following the separation was a gradual one:

Well, when I was about to enter the third grade, my father left us. That is when we became a single-parent household. And it sort of affected my grades, even though I was younger, it affected my grades. At the time you know, since I was younger, I really didn't

realize it, but now that I am older I kind of understand that is probably why. And it took me awhile to care about school again. Because before then, you know, even though I was young, I maintained straight A's. But during my first semester back at school I started to make lower grades. But, I mean, eventually I got back on track.

Mark offered comparable reflections of the impact of divorce on his academic pathway.

He contended that the impact of divorce is no myth, describing how he turned to extra-curricular activities to cope with the stressor:

Well, my mom and dad divorced when I was about 13...12-13, something like that. During the divorce I ended up, you know, failing the 8th grade due to you know divorce. That, some people don't believe that this stuff is real with having to do with kids and stuff. Well, during my parents' divorce, I had to find an outlet. Mine happened to be what got me to college. So, I ran track. That was my outlet, you know, my way out of the situation. So I—I looked to that as, you know, an escape from the situation I should say.

Luke, who lost his mother to cancer, described how her death initially took a detrimental toll on his behavior and school performance. He went on to add how this changed when reflecting on what she might think about his decision-making:

And like from 2011 [when she died] until probably a year or a year-and-a-half later, I was just bad. Like, that's not an excuse, but I didn't know what else to do. Like, just reckless. Like, I just wanted to be in the hood all day. Or just don't care, don't listen. Stop caring about school, college, everything. But eventually I realized, I think I just had like a revelation, like 'Would she be proud of what I was doing?'

Economic hardship in the family was often cited as being a stressor that provided impetus for several participants to pursue college. Daniel described the nexus between his family's financial hardship growing up and his commitment to pursuing college:

Uh, just seeing my, just us struggling financially growing up. Always having, like, to worry about money. Knowing that I could change all that, uh, by, you know, going to college, and just trying to make my dream a reality, which is to, you know, make it to the NFL. Even if I don't make it to the NFL and I do graduate with a college degree, I can have a good job, which could, you know, help out my family and stuff like that.

David discussed the ways in which his parents' income resulted in the need for his older siblings to search for scholarships. He, in turn, followed in their example as to not exacerbate the fiscal demands that they put on their parents:

So, my brothers and sisters have gotten music scholarships. I thought maybe if I try something like that, uh, it will get me into college. Cause we know our parents couldn't pay, and we don't want to stress them about paying. They, a lot of times, had a hard time trying to work a job, and you know, pay for this and that. We didn't have the money like that. I knew that I needed a scholarship. So I had to go for what I could get the school to pay for, and not stress them, and that's what I did.

Luke poignantly described how observing his family's financial struggles played a monumental role in his choice to attend college, emphasizing again how what his family did was more substantial than what they said. His profound desire to avoid comparable patterns of economic hardship plunged him to see college as a need:

So, I found college important within my family because I didn't wanna be broke. I didn't wanna have to be 30 years old asking a 15 year old for \$20. So that's when like, that's when the factors came of college being important. Like, college always relates back to your choices and being financially stable. And my family, my family not financially stable. So my motivation from them was them not going. Period. Me seeing them broke, like they motivated me. Their lifestyle, the way they lived motivated me. What they said really didn't motivate me.

Joseph provided an example of how his mother's ideology about money, coupled with her fiscal predicament, was integral to prompting thoughts about the possible economic advantages of attending college:

Living with her, basically cause I seen – I seen how she was living. She didn't have a lot of money. I seen how she, like, would stress about like little stuff. Like, ya know, like wasting money. Like, if we don't eat all our food, she'll be like, ya know, 'You need to eat all your food because I don't have', this is her favorite saying: 'I don't have money to be throwing away like that.' So, that's what really made me think like, I need to go to college.

When asked to describe a family situation that compelled him to attend college, Paul described the impact of a bout in a shelter home and his mother's financial instability when he was growing up:

It was...just going from the bottom and working our way to the top. Cause I've, we've had it to where there was a shelter home, and like basically no money. But now at this point in my life, my mom is more financially stable, and now we have...she can...she's able to give me everything I need.

Jeremiah, who comes from a lineage of college graduates, described how he also drew inspiration to attend college from relatives who had not attended. Beyond their financial struggles, Jeremiah was impacted by their precarious lifestyles, suggesting that going to college would afford him an easier life:

Seeing some of my family members, that didn't go [to college] gangbanging, selling drugs, you know, knowing that wasn't the life for me. Knowing I didn't want to have those struggles in my life. They don't have money to do this or that. Knowing that I didn't want to like just be jumpy all of the time, don't know what is fixing to happen. I want to live my life successful. Not saying that successful people don't have money problems, but just saying that when you have money from like college and getting a nice job, life is a lot easier. Like you do things that you want to do, you know money don't make you happy, but it does make life easier, so of course I saw things that I didn't want to see myself doing, and that was another determining factor of what made me want to come to college.

Finally, participants described how pessimistic messages from family about their academic prospects and abilities were a decisive factor in their choice to attend college. Indeed, they described themselves as being motivated by their family's skepticism regarding their ability to succeed in college. John recalled an example of pessimism that he has harbored since elementary school. In particular, he described his grandmother in this way,

Well, when I was younger, my grandma, I remember her saying that she didn't think my mother's kids – meaning me and my sister – she didn't really see us going to college. And that message sort of influenced me to prove her wrong. It has always been in the back of my mind. I was probably 7 or 8, that is why I think it kind of stuck.

Timothy provided a descriptive narrative of how his family’s messages of pessimism included suggesting alternative pathways to college. Specifically, like John, he was keenly motivated by their discourse to do otherwise:

None of my family went to college. I don’t remember them even speaking about college until I was on my way to college, to be honest. And then, a lot of them, it was mostly encouraging us to stay and go to junior college. Nobody really wanted us to go to college. And I remember when we first got enrolled into college, one of my cousins’ was like, ‘You all are going to be sent back in about a month or two...they are not going to be able to take you all.’ And then I was just like, ‘Do they really think that me and my brother are like bad or something like that? Or just not good people?’ That made me want to go to college more. So it was like a slap in the face like, ‘Oh yeah, you don’t want me to go to school?’ So I am really going to go to college now.’

Abraham shed light on the ways that his experiences with pessimism and parental disengagement motivated him to both pursue college and serve as a support system for his younger sister:

My sister, I mean, she’s like, 17, and ya know, never really had like a mother figure. And people are always talking about, ‘Oh I had it so hard.’ And I’m looking at her, I’m like, she never really had a mother figure and like, she was always around this like father of hers who really like, ya know, she’s his only daughter, and yet she never really was treated like it. Like everything he said to her, and me, like, was so negative all the time. And so, I just wanted to go to college, and just show her different...to be around to give her some extra support and things like that.

Table 4. Summary of Themes

Deliberate Family Involvement	Contextual Family Influence
Action-oriented activities executed by family members, at all grade levels, linked to students’ achievement, school success, and predilection for higher education.	The way in which the family operates within its structure; the circumstances in which family events transpired.
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Emphasizing hard work</u></p> The degree to which parent(s) and extended family members stressed and/or reinforced the importance of working hard to achieve students’ long-term academic goals	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Family educational choices</u></p> The level of education achieved and choice of higher education institution (if applicable) by students’ family member(s)
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Aiding with pre-college paperwork</u></p> Family support and guidance with college	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Family participation</u></p> Patterns of family engagement that

essays, navigating various college websites, and applying for scholarships and financial aid

Offering messages about value of college

Meanings (or messages) acquired from family about the value of college through students' social interaction with parents, siblings, and extended family

Supporting extra-curricular activities

Active support received by students' family on activities that fall outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school education, performed by students

Encouraging positive decision-making

Process of making a constructive choice between a number of options and committing to a future course of actions, based on family encouragement

Cultural indoctrination

Diverse messages – such as racial pride, racial barriers, egalitarian perspectives, and self-development – to indoctrinate students' about the value of hard work, underscore the importance of their history, and instill the need to excel academically

Providing affirming words and praise

Regular communication between the family member(s) and the students' to express approval, laud their performance(s), and offer critical emotional support

Regular accessibility

The degree to which they were psychologically, emotionally, and physical accustomed to having access to their family members before and during the college choice process

occurred over time, including resiliency, competition, and sacrifices

Family representation and reactions

Students' perception of the ways in which their decisions were contingent upon its prospective impact on their parent(s) or family's public image

Family Stress

Major life events or transitions (i.e., separation/divorce, death, financial hardship, pessimism) that caused changes in the family's coping patterns

The Freeman Model

A sub-question of this dissertation was how perceptions of family influences among African American male collegians compare to those identified in the Freeman (2005) model. Findings from the present study do not refute the family-related factors in the Freeman model. As noted in Table 5, despite being introduced to college at varying points in their academic matriculation, as well as having been influenced by different family members to pursue higher education, the participants' identified college as either (1) an initial expectation in their families, (2) not an initial expectation, but something that they were eventually encouraged to do in order to surpass their families' educational level, or (3) there was no stated expectation from their family and the student drew primary inspiration from others.

Table 5. Students' Perception of College Expectancy in their Family

Student's Name	Time Introduced to College	Family member most influential in College Choice	College Expectation in Family
Abraham	High School (by non-family member)	None	NSE
Daniel	Middle School	Mother	CNIE
David	Elementary School	Two oldest brothers	CNIE
Jeremiah	Elementary School	Mother	CIE
John	Elementary School	Mother	CIE
Joseph	Middle School	Mother	CNIE
Luke	Elementary School	Grandmother	CNIE
Mark	Elementary School	Mother	CNIE
Matthew	Elementary School	Father	CIE
Paul	Elementary School	Mother	CIE
Peter	Middle School	Mother	CNIE

Timothy	Elementary School (by non- family member)	None	NSE
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**NSE (denotes there was no stated expectation to attend college), CNIE (denotes college was not an initial expectation, but student was encouraged to attend), CIE (denotes college was an initial expectation)*

The African American male collegians in this study construed their family's involvement in ways that made attending college feel like an automatic expectation. For example, Jeremiah – whose parents were both college graduates – expressively deciphered his family (nuclear and extended) as expecting him to attend college:

College was everything to my mom. It made her. Because in (town where mother works) there are a lot of – it is a predominantly White city. She has her medical practice office in (predominantly White Midwestern city), so her education made her name, like who she is. My dad being a pharmacist, you know it is not like you have just a bunch of Black pharmacist. It is White. It is the country we stay in, it is just like that. Um, and like they just really engraved in me to go to college. My family is very, like they all went to college. You know they all succeeded in life, not everybody, but majority of them succeeded if they went to school. So you know, it was like, you know what you are doing right after school. So it wasn't like even a question, 'Oh I am going to college.'

Matthew also perceived his family as automatically expecting him to attend college after he completed high school. He commented,

They said, all they said all the time was, 'I want you to test out college.' They didn't want to force me into it, but I know that is what they really wanted me to do. They were expecting me to go. They wanted me to go to college, and to be successful. It didn't matter what kind of college, they just wanted me to go.

John, whose extended family showed little confidence in his ability to pursue higher education, discussed college as being something his mother expected for him and his sister to do:

It was just, like, just really important to my mom. As for my extended family, some of them are surprised to see me where I am, because they didn't really anticipate I would do this. My mother, she was always instilling it to me and my sister though. Finishing up grade school, I always felt like college was something I automatically had to do once I moved on to the next step, after high school. I never felt otherwise really, because my mom was set on college being the next step for us.

Additionally, participants articulated notions that their families saw college as an experience that would augment them past their own educational attainment, although it was not an initial expectation. Joseph's description of his mother supports this point:

It wasn't really like expected at first. 'Cause, with her going to the Army, like I said, she didn't do the college route at first. She didn't go back until I was a teenager, taking advantage of it. But because she knew what she went through, not having the benefit of college sooner, she knew I had to go to college earlier, and graduate. She didn't want her children to have to grow up the same way. So she encouraged me to do different.

David, who had several older siblings' transition to and complete college, still perceived college as something his parent's desired for him to do in order to go beyond their own level of schooling:

Well, pretty much, my mother and father didn't go on to college. So, I can't say that they like made me feel like it was automatic or something. My mother took a couple of classes, but she didn't really attend, uh, a formal university or school. But even though they didn't, they always told us its best that we continue to go on to school and get a better education...and to do more than they did with school.

Further, there were participants who determined that there was no family they could rely on for assistance when navigating the path to college or otherwise. Abraham's description of a "non-existent" family reflected perceptions of unhelpfulness and perpetual detachment:

Yeah like, when I was three, me and my sister and uh, my brother, we were taken away from my mom because she was like, um, unfit to be a parent. And so, we actually went to go live with my dad and his wife. And so basically we were there for like 16 years until his death in like 2011. Um...yeah, like I said, it sucked in that household. Ya know, it's like my dad – he sucked. No encouragement for school, nothing. He was not, he wasn't even a dad ya know, he was a father. He didn't like take the time to actually come nurture me or like, actually like, sit down, actually like show me what life's about.

Timothy commented similarly, describing himself and his twin brother as feeling no sense of authentic support from most of his family members:

My dad got locked up for like some drug stuff...and my mom actually fell into like a whole drug thing because something happened when she was at a bar or a club...and that spinned her out. Yeah, so we never really had a relationship with our mom or dad.

My aunt, we lived with her for 9 years until our dad got out of the penitentiary. But with my aunts, cousins, it is kind of distant, because everyone always had that type of feeling towards me and my brother...like they didn't have to be there. Everything they did was like they felt as they didn't have to, and we knew that they didn't have to, but they made sure to let us know like, 'We didn't have to,' you know? We kind of had to basically do for ourselves even when we moved in with our dad in [state in the South]. Because, like, even though he wasn't in the penitentiary anymore, he still kind of had that mindset, so it was like he left, but his mind was still there, you know.

Summary of Results

The 12 African American male collegians in this study offered invaluable insight into the ways that families nurture and/or obscure the pathway to higher education. This study helped fill a critical gap by focusing on the family as the primary unit of analysis. The two overarching themes and subthemes highlighted the key family influences, which included both purposeful and contextual constituents. In other words, conscious family activities specifically geared toward higher education alone do not fully describe their pre-college experiences. The participants' made it abundantly clear that their past-lived experiences, many of which were not always directly related to the prospect of them attending college, carried equal – and sometimes greater – weight in their decision. Finally, the participants' understood their families' as either automatically anticipating that they would attend college, encouraging them to pursue higher education, although it was not an early expectation, or having not communicated expectations about their matriculation to college.

**CHAPTER VII -
DISCUSSION AND NEW DIRECTIONS**

Ideas won't keep. Something must be done about them.
Alfred North Whitehead

This study explored perceptions of family influences that contributed to the decision to pursue higher education among 12 African American male collegians. Phenomenological techniques were employed to capture “the experience as perceived by the participants” (McMillan, 2008, p. 291). Participants were from sundry family and home backgrounds, including varied family compositions, patterns of communication, and levels of influence. Additionally, they were enrolled at seven diverse institutions across the American Midwest and the South, ranging from large, public, land-grant, predominantly White institutions, to small, private, historically Black, Roman Catholic institutions. This variety proved meaningful to provide strong framing for a topic unexplored from a family studies perspective. The participant reflections reveal that African American male students are able to successfully navigate the pipeline to higher education when there is ample assistance, engagement, support, and guidance from their families. At the same time, findings suggest that students, despite being exposed to seemingly insurmountable risks and patterns of familial disengagement, are able to draw inspiration from these family-related impediments to achieve their academic dreams. Moreover, when it comes to students’ predilection of college, family influence is fluid. Indeed, students are impacted by both intentional and tangible family support as well as ecological and inadvertent family factors.

This chapter begins by drawing important connections between the findings and symbolic interactionism theory. Specifically, by highlighting pertinent vignettes from the data, I illustrate how participants’ engaged the complex process of meaning construction to define and describe

their family-related experiences. Then, I discuss how the study's findings compare to the extant literature. Next, I share how the themes in the present study extend the Freeman (2005) model of family influence and college choice for African American students. Subsequently, I address the research question in which I compared the participants' perceptions of family influence across various family compositions. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of implications for family life educators and recommendations for future research.

Constructing Meaning: The Utility of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism theory served as a viable frame to examine how African American male collegians experienced, interpreted, and made meaning of their family's participation in the transition to higher education. Indeed, this theory focuses on perspective, interaction, and meaning, with an emphasis on how individuals interpret their interactions with others, how they see themselves, and how they make meaning from their situations (White & Klein, 2008). From this theoretical approach, we act toward things (including ourselves) based on the meanings that we have developed for those things through interaction (Burke, 1980; Cast & Burke, 2002; Charon, 1992; Gecas & Burke, 1995; Hollander & Howard, 2000; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980).

What appears to be rambling of our internal dialogue process is indeed important to consider, as human action is mediated by our interpretations of our own situation or behavior (Blumer, 1969). Similarly, the shortened, iterative-like presentation of speech in this section of the collegian's narratives indicates that they were constructing meaning during the moment. Indeed, they were attempting to reach understanding as they spoke (Lempert, 1994; McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007). As noted in Chapter III, the concept of self – which is an important element of symbolic interactionism – is fundamentally social in origin because it involves the

process of observing and conversing with oneself, and subsequently “responding” as we imagine others would. This process is heavily impacted by the messages we receive from others, especially those with whom we have much contact and whose opinions matter – such as our family members (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The African American male collegians in this study engaged in this process of interpretation and meaning construction throughout their interviews, which helps garner clearer understanding of their choice to attend college within the context of their families. This played out in diverse forms. For example, some participants engaged in the process of interpretation and meaning construction by introspectively questioning and then answering them during the interview, as Abraham did:

My family? Pretty tumultuous. Sucky – you know. They sucked. Why were they like that, man? I don’t know, it was probably – I felt as if I was like the guy who knew the crap that was going on. Like all the horrible crap that was going on, ya know? I was like the Harry Potter so to speak, ya know, just like...um, I don’t know. I’m trying to analyze it. It was horrible. Did they hate me? I mean, you know, yeah like, it seems like everyone in the house, like, they, it seemed like they hated me, ya know? Why? It seemed like they just like they really despised me. I would just try, ya know, to be a good person and things like that. Not to say that I didn’t, like, have like screw ups here and there, but...ya know, it was just like, it seemed like whenever there was a problem I was always in the middle of it.

Later in his interview, when asked what college symbolized to him – given the constancy of his bouts with familial detachment – Abraham constructed notions that reflected the cynicism of his home environment:

Pssshhh...college is overrated. I don’t know, people like, they have um, all these like seminars for like first-year students, and like um, like the first in your family to go to college and all that crap, and it seems cool but, I don’t know. It’s just like, it’s overrated. Like, I don’t know, it’s just like, sometimes I like feel like coming to college is not worth it, ya know. But, I mean, I mean, of course it’s an accomplishment. But, it’s just like...that’s nothing to really brag about. I don’t think so.

Luke illustrated how he engaged in meaning construction in his family while he was contemplating the transition to college:

They didn't never go. So, I mean, like, what can you really – what can I really take from that? Like, 'Aw yeah, college!' Like, everybody family probably say that to a certain extent. But if you not actually going, or can't tell me the proper steps to get into college, like, yeah...Family...my family's supportive in the ways that they know how to be. A person can only give you so much if they didn't go through it. Like, I value what a lot of them say. But, um, like how could you tell me not to drink, but you drink like right in front of me? You know what I'm saying, you gotta set an example. How can you tell me about college if you never went? Of course you can say, 'Go to college because I didn't go.' But like, what help does that really do?

Several participants asked me questions about why something transpired the way in which it did in their pre-college experiences, with an apparent expectation of an answer from me. These were different from other queries posed. They would suspend communication and make eye contact, as if awaiting a response. Timothy, for instance, asked, *"I don't remember...none of my family went to college. Like I said, I cannot remember them even talking about college until I was already on my way to college to be honest. Why? [Pauses for a response]"* He went on to ask, *"Why would they encourage us to go to ju-co¹⁰? Did they not think I was smart enough to do college work? [Pauses for response]"*

Jeremiah and David also engaged in an interactional construction of meaning with me during their interviews:

Sometimes I wish my mom – because I kind of regret coming to this college based off of like some of the things I experience here, ya know? Like before college, I know she wanted me to have the best opportunities, my whole family did, and I heard that my whole life. So I knew college was important. But you get a lot of prejudice actions here. Why didn't they push like an HBCU? [Pauses] Of course I still value college. It still has importance for me, and the fam. But, I just feel like my mom tried hard to get me to come here, because it is a predominantly White school. But some people here feel like they can do whatever they want, not putting any shame down on this school. It is just like some of the people that go to this institution... sometimes I wish like...[sighs] Man my family knew how it would be here! I wish my family would've helped me get to an HBCU. What you think man? [Pauses] Do you think I would feel different, like, about college? [Makes eye contact] (Jeremiah)

¹⁰ "Ju-co" is an abbreviation for junior college

Uh, maybe if both my parents would have attended college, it woulda made it even easier, right? [Pauses] Probably for us that have attended college? [Makes eye contact] Because we would've known more knowledge about the process, right? [Pauses] So, maybe if that had've changed. Or if they were in college, it would've changed my aspect or value toward college even more, don't you think? [Makes eye contact] Or, on the other hand, it probably could've actually changed less...Because some, not all the time when, um, people see their parents go off to college, some people tend to go in there and play around because they knew their parents had the experience or can help them a little more. So, they lack integrity to participate in the schooling process. So, maybe my parents not going made me and my brothers and sisters want to be one of those that did go. It made college much more important to us. Don't you think so? [Makes eye contact]
(David)

Finally, participants also engaged in a process of meaning construction and interpretation through a more free-flow type of dialogue. This process could be actively observed through a series of periphrastic monologues. These sections were distinctive from other parts of the interview in that they were marked by provisional silence, slowed speech, and self-reflections within them. Mark presents an interesting analysis of his relationship with his parents and how he understood the dichotomy in proximity as having been integral to his sense-making and college choice:

I'm a mom's boy so... [Long pause] Okay...Okay [slowed speech] ...You know, I'd do anything... [Long pause] I would break my back just to... [Long pause] You know, to make things happen for her, and all this and that, I would do that. She wanted me to attend college so badly... [Places hand on head] She really made me believe I could do it. That motivated me... [Pause] ...the whole time. My dad, you know... [Long pause] What was he thinking, man? I mean... [Long pause] I do love him... [Long pause] ...And you know he...he doesn't do the things I think he should do but he's...[Long pause] I have just always wondered why...like...Why didn't he ask about my school stuff? ...like [Long pause] ...that divorce really...I, after the divorce, spending you know, quality time you know...[Long pause] ...I just feel as though a dad should be there with the son more than, you know, out with his friends and stuff and like that. But... [Long pause] I'm gone be better than him. College... [Pause] ...like, a degree, like...I'm gonna be better than him. Like... [Long pause] ...I believe....I knows...I know that's also why I came to college.

Matthew's speech showed a similar pattern in the following excerpt as he engaged in an interpretive process to understand whether or not he would hold college in the same esteem if his family dynamics were different:

Um...[Long pause] ...would I....I don't know if I would have come to college if, my dad was not on me...[Long pause] Man, it used to really bother me, and I wanted to...go far away from them [Laughs] ...But I am so blessed to have them. Like...me and my little brothers, could we have these [college] opportunities, if he didn't push us? Let me think... [Long pause] I mean...it is great to have teachers and like counselors and principals and stuff tell you, 'Hey go to college.' But...I... [Long pause] I actually had parents that like cared...kept talking about it...like he kept putting it in our head. [Long pause] When I had found out about it more, like I really understood what it was, and how badly they wanted me to do it... [Long pause] I really wanted to do it. But I...I don't....I know, I don't think...I wouldn't care about it if they did not instill it, I don't think.

Similarly, Peter appeared to be recalling past interpretations of specific and contextual family influences, as well as constructing meaning during the actual moment of sharing his story. He explained,

I remember...man...My mom sacrificed her car. Like... [Long pause] ...man, I cannot believe my mom actually sold her car to help me pay for college someday. And this was way before I was even really sure, or got a scholarship or anything... [Long pause] Man, I never really thought about how important, like, the kinda impact it has had on me, stuff like that... [Long pause] Her sacrifices. And, I was gonna say this earlier... [Sighs] When my auntie died, like she...she really wanted me to go to college man. But she never got to see me leave. So man, this, going to college....it meant so much to me [Pause] It means so much to me. I just thought that it'll be something I could do for her as well as myself...[Long pause] Something I could do to, ya know, honor her...[Pause] Man, I am really growing as a man. I see that now. Everything that's happened, and that I went through, it made me into the person I am today...[Pause] It all got me to [student's college] ...and honestly I wouldn't...I think I wouldn't be here without my family's involvement.

Finally, notwithstanding their assorted backgrounds, almost all of the participants described a shared symbolic meaning of college within their families. Specifically, one of the most noteworthy consistencies that emerged from the data was the incredible grit of these families to foster an environment of academic permanence, regardless of their level of education, which was embedded in the families' practices, values, and discourse. When viewed in this

cultural context, there was a salient undertone in the participants' meaning making that provides compelling symbolic corroboration with extant literature: African American families not only care about, but also come together in the lifelong educational success of African American students (Brown, 2005, Davis-Kean, 2005; Fagan & Stevenson, 2004; Freeman, 2005; McAdoo, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). In fact, as the collegians in this study collectively described, the family is the primary influence in the predisposition of African American students' aspiration to, selection of, and matriculation to college (Brown, 2005; Freeman, 2005).

Nexus between the Findings and Extant Literature

The present study was birthed from the need to address two distinctive gaps in the literature pertaining to students' college choice: (1) the detailed nuances of family involvement on this process, and (2) the ways in which family influence was understood by an "understudied racial/ethnic collegiate population": African American males (Inkelas, 2014, p. 186). Seminal studies on college choice, even when they have included African American participants, were largely quantitative, essentially overlooking these students' own stated evidence of their lived experiences. According to Strayhorn (2008), "few studies have examined the role that nonacademic factors play" in facilitating the success of Black men in the path to college (p. 28). Further, despite the constancy of findings that have underscored the importance of families in this process, the relationship between family involvement and the transition to college has never been explored from a family studies perspective. Hence, I endeavored to contribute to scholarship by exploring the pre-college experience for African American male students, particularly as it relates to them and their families.

In order to address this void in the scholarship, the present study was guided by the following overarching research question: how, and in what ways, do African American male

collegians perceive the family's role in their decision to pursue higher education? As noted in Chapter III, past college choice models have had "little to say" about the specific role of families in students' college decision-making (Taub, 2008, p. 15). Instead, this research has often integrated the family's role into pre-entry characteristics, such as parental income, education, or occupation, or parents (who are usually the only "family" referenced) are included within an external or non-college reference group. While this scholarship does suggest a positive relationship between parental support and involvement *during* college on students' adjustment, persistence, and general well-being (Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), less was known about how college students' decisions are influenced by specific family involvement and behaviors *before* making the transition. Hence, it has been unclear how family involvement contributes to or detracts from healthy student decision-making before college, as well as how perceptions of family influences are shaped by students' background characteristics. That is, are students from different demographic groups (i.e., racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, etc.) impacted in different ways by the extent and nature of their family's involvement before college?

Deliberate Family Involvement

The 12 African American male collegians in this study are helping address this gap. First, the participants' identified family activity that was deliberate and directly linked to their achievement, school success, and predilection for higher education. One of the ways in which this transpired was through messages about the value of college. Blumer (1986), a premier founder of symbolic interactionism, contended that we act toward things based upon the meanings that the thing(s) hold for us. In alignment with symbolic interactionism, participants discussed various ways in which their regard for college was shaped by the symbolic meaning it

held for their families. Whether family members had attended college or not, participants acquired these meanings (or messages) about the value of college through a plethora of social interactions with parents, siblings, and extended family. In many cases, the value of college in the family was connected to a belief that it would heighten the young man's prospects for career security. Furthermore, participants' acquired a value for college through their families' emphasis on hard work and positive decision-making, both within and beyond the classroom.

The findings also reinforce the significant role that families play in assisting students' with college paperwork. Howe and Strauss (2007) asserted that today's college students' and their parents experience a deeper, more involved college choice relationship than any other youth generation in history. Throughout their childhood, these students have been more inclined to trust their parents than previous generations, and by high school they depend on their support (and guidance) with college essays, navigating various college websites, and applying for scholarships and financial aid (Crede & Niehorster, 2011; Howe & Strauss, 2007). While research has pointed to Black parents as being "more likely than White parents to be uninformed about the college choice process and less likely to have access to information that would help them," (Perna, 2001, p. 58), participants in this study described alternative ways of viewing this assistance. Specifically, many of the participants' received family support with college paperwork even when knowledge about the college-going process was limited.

Family support of extra-curricular activities during the pre-college phase played a distinctive role for the participants' in this study, which is similar to other scholarship on minority student-athletes. According to Thompson (2005), interpersonal relationships in the family are "important to individuals, especially college student-athletes" (p. 234). This is particularly true for minority student-athletes (Brooks & Althouse, 2000; Thompson, 2005).

Research has indicated that minority student-athletes encounter challenges that are not commonly experienced by non-minority student-athletes, and this as well warrants them receiving family support in the pre-college phase (Brooks & Althouse, 2000; Harris, Altekruze, & Engels, 2003; Thompson, 2010). For example, researchers have called attention to the racism and discrimination minority student athletes encounter from people within and beyond the university community, such as being treated differently than their White counterparts, being dealt with rudely or unfairly, and being denied access to team leadership positions (Njororai Simiyu, 2012; Singer, 2005). Further, minority student-athletes have often been perceived as competent in their sport, yet academically inferior to White student-athletes (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Kihl, Richardson & Campisi, 2008; Lumpkin, 2008). In fact, it has been noted that, in general, athletic coordinators often give greater attention to the athletic ability rather than the academic ability of minority student-athletes (Njororai Simiyu, 2012), and this happens quite often with particularly Black male student-athletes (Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008). Several participants in this study noted ways that they contended with similar factors, and emphasized the importance of their families' in helping them to navigate their higher education transition.

Further, participants' in this study described numerous ways that their college choice was shaped by cultural indoctrination, which is consistent with the scholarship on African American families. Over the past several decades, empirical interest has increased in the various strategies African American parents use to "impart cultural and race-related messages to their children" (Martin & McAdoo, 2007, p. 126). Initially, much of the scholarship focused on the content of parental messages (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Sander-Thompson, 1994), and then shifted to child outcomes (i.e., academic achievement, self-efficacy, self-esteem, subjective stigmatization, etc.) (Brega & Coleman, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Marshall, 1995). Across these studies,

scholars proffered that African American parents use diverse messages – such as racial pride, racial barriers, egalitarian perspectives, and (particularly for African American males) self-development – to indoctrinate their children about the value of hard work, underscore the importance of their history, and instill the need to excel academically (Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

Participants in the current study depicted analogous images of cultural indoctrination in their own families. Specifically, they underscored ways that their parents, siblings, and extended family encouraged them to defy negative typecasts often associated with young Black males. Several participants', particularly those who attended predominately White institutions, also indicated that their cultural indoctrination occurred through messages regarding the duality that many Black students' experience in predominantly White spaces. For example, Dubois (1965) pointed out that African Americans must not only look at society through their own eyes, but through the majority culture's eyes in order to survive (and thrive) in a majority-White society. Indeed, the African Americans students' in this study remarked about how their families' emphasized the need to balance and negotiate both cultural worlds in the transition to college (Dancy, 2012; Kimbrough, Molock, & Walton, 1996; Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Lastly, the participants' reflections of the impact that family praise, affirmation, and accessibility had on their college decision-making substantiates similar lines of research. According to Cameron and Pierce (2010), “verbal praise and positive feedback enhance people's intrinsic interest” (p. 216). Indeed, frequency of praise tends to be positively correlated with self-perceptions of ability among elementary school children, which in turn can enhance feelings of pride and expectations for success in the future (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). Several participants' in this study shared how their academic motivation, resolve, and even apathy were heavily centered on the level of verbal support (or lack thereof) they received from their families.

Moreover, accessibility played a central role in the students' college choice, especially when reflecting on the person(s) having the most profound impact on their decision to pursue higher education. Researchers have commonly coined this notion as parental presence, which has been found to have a significant effect on offsprings' educational achievement, continuing to do so throughout adolescence and even into adulthood (Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). Even when the influence of background factors (i.e., race/ethnicity, social class, family size, etc.) has been taken into account, consistent access to parents has had a positive impact on students' academic performance and social behavior (Barn, Ladino, & Rogers, 2006; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Contextual Family Influence

Participants' in this study also described integral ways that their college choice was influenced by contextual family factors. According to ecological systems theory, the contexts of human development can be organized as a set of nested systems. The most proximal among these nested systems is the microsystem, which includes the immediate environmental contexts (i.e., with parents, siblings, and extended family members) in which we interact at a given point in time (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). According to Bronfenbrenner, the proximal processes within the family have consequential implications for our development and decision-making. Further, considering that a substantial amount of children's time is often spent in this setting, there is a clear relationship between strong family participation and children's academic decisions and success, even into adolescence and early adulthood (Caspe & Lopez 2006; Henrich & Gadaire 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Kreider, 2013).

The participants' in this study similarly emphasized that their environmental contexts played a decisive role in their college choice. Some were influenced through positive influences.

Whether through constructive competitiveness, the desire to sustain positive public perceptions of the family, inspiration drawn from observing a family members' tenacity, or on account of sacrifices made, several of these students articulated narratives that accentuate the positive ways that environmental contexts shaped their academic decision-making that are comparable with the research literature (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Kreider, 2013). At the same time, other participants in this study described how their pathways to higher education were, at some point or another, made more difficult by family stressors such as death, economic hardship, and the divorce of their parents'. In the same way, substantial empirical evidence demonstrates that complex family circumstances (or family stress) is related to adverse academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for young children and adolescents, regardless of race/ethnicity (Berger, Paxson, & Waldfogel, 2009; Maurin, 2002; Morris & Gennetian, 2003; Shea, 2000; Taylor, Dearing, & McCartney 2004).

Concurrent with the existing literature, family educational choices were identified as carrying important weight in several of the participants' college choice. Research suggests that the levels of involvement parents have in their children's academics have been shown to vary based on their own educational choices. For example, families of lower socioeconomic status (SES) generally have parents who have achieved lower educational levels than those with a higher SES (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007). Consequently, these families may have fewer resources to assist their children academically, such as paying for tutors, affording learning enrichment programs, or providing computers (Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006). Further, parents with lower levels of education may not feel capable of assisting their children or playing a role in their educational life because they may not understand the material or feel comfortable with their intellectual abilities (Jenlink, 2009). Nevertheless, young children and adolescents,

regardless of their race/ethnicity or educational attainment, benefit when parents and family members are actively involved in their learning and educational development (Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). This conclusion is supported by decades of scholarship that suggests that family educational choices are “positively linked to [children’s] outcomes” in school (Voorhis et al., 2013, p. 1). In many African American families, as it was in the present study, studies show that even parents with lower levels of education do become involved because of a desire for their children to have upward mobility in the world, and to ensure that their children achieve things that they themselves did not (Davis-Kean, 2005; Hill, Harris & Graham, 2014).

This study provides evidence of the impact of context and strong supportive relationships (i.e., individuals that students’ rely on for aid and guidance) as they pertain to students’ inclination to pursue higher education. Tinto (1993) explained that students’ college choice is a function of the degree to which they become both academically and socially oriented toward higher education. Supportive relationships and context (namely the family) facilitate this integration, and can augment or compound students’ sense of academic readiness, assist with their social adjustment to college, and enhance their sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This, in turn, increases the likelihood of attending (Strayhorn, 2008).

While the existing literature is useful, it obscures important distinctions in the testimonies of African American male collegians. First, the literature consists of mostly quantitative studies (McDonough et al., 1995; Strayhorn, 2008; Toldson, Harrison, & Perine, 2006; Watson, 2006). Second, the mass of studies – which are largely dated – followed a structuralist argument that essentially treated African Americans as a monolithic entity (Fleming, 1984; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Tierney, 1983). Additionally, the scant studies that have investigated the impact of “non-cognitive” variables on African American students’ transition to college combined men and

women (Freeman, 2005; McDonough et al., 1995), or compared racial/ethnic minority students to White students (Arbona & Novy, 1990; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). This study, which treats the African American family as the central component in the analysis, adds a critical component to both the college choice and – most importantly – the family studies literature, as it not only illuminates the college choice experience for African American males, but also expands what we know about how African American families nurture, sustain, and sometimes complicate the pathway to higher education.

Expansion of the Freeman Model

Kassie Freeman's (2005) model of family influence on African American students' college choice provided a constructive lens for this study. As noted in Chapter III, Freeman found that there were African American students, across all school types, who were "influenced by family members not necessarily because a family member had attended college or received a degree...but because the family wanted the student to achieve beyond the level of other family members" (p. 15). She also discovered that some students described themselves as their own motivators. Finally, Freeman described a "category of students that college choice theorists are most familiar with and have written the most about" (p. 16): those who felt an automatic expectation to attend college. Therefore, the following three factors formed the basis of her typology of college choice for African American students: (1) an automatic expectation in their family, (2) influences to go beyond the family educational level, and (3) self-motivation and avoidance of negative role models.

Essentially, results gleaned from the participants in the current study do not counter the family-related factors in the Freeman (2005) model. Indeed, the African American male collegians in my study construed their family's involvement in ways that made attending college

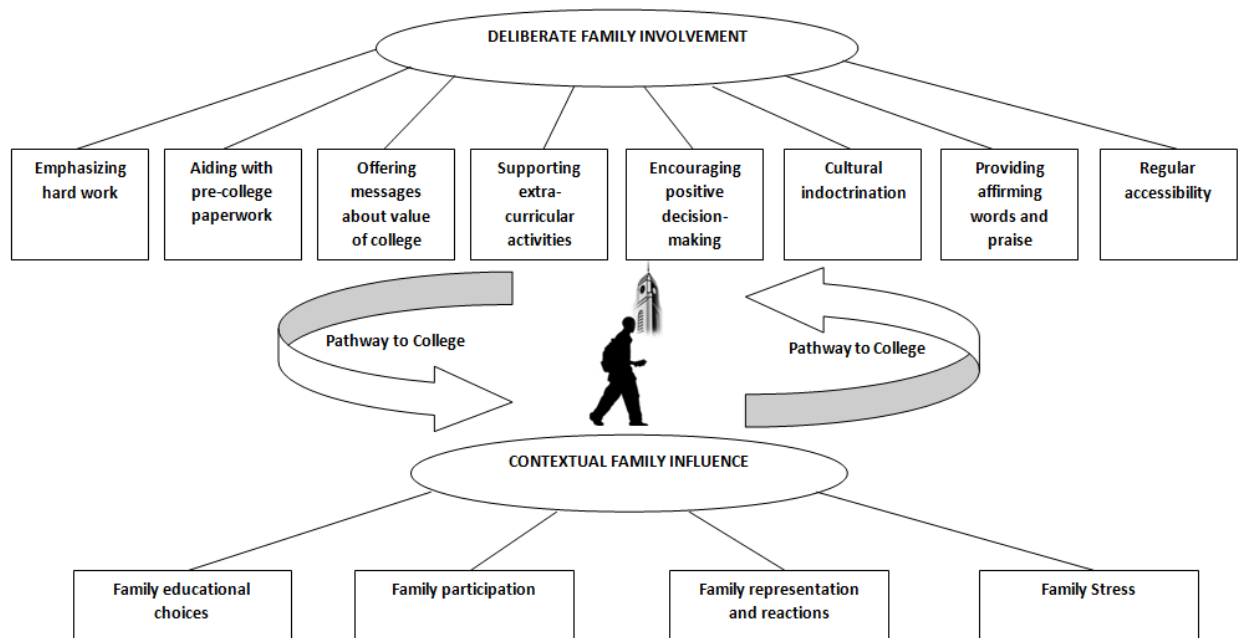
feel like an initial expectation. Additionally, participants articulated notions that their families saw college as an experience that would help them achieve more than their parents' educational attainment. Further, there were participants who determined that "there was no family to rely on for assistance" when navigating the path to college or otherwise. Undoubtedly, the exemplars provided in Chapter VI denoted how these students perceived family influences within these three types described by Freeman.

However, by centering the analyses on the family in the present study, we can expand what we know about the tether between familial influence and college choice for African American collegians. In particular, Freeman's (2005) model offers no in-depth illumination of explicit family practices that empower or encumber the college choice process. Thus, we have not been able to explicatively answer "why" and/or "how" the family influences the process. The African American male collegians in this study provided critical insight toward these aims. They provided perceptions of mixed communication patterns within (and outside) their families, shared explicit family ideologies informing their own regard for education, remarked about the ways that their predisposition was filtered by culture, commented about noteworthy (and complex) family relationship dynamics, reinforced the impact of couched and overt displays of family involvement, and poignantly indicated how they weighed the costs and rewards of their educational aspirations vis-à-vis their family. All of these played a vital role in their academic inculcation, ultimately influencing their pursuit of a college degree.

Taken together, Freeman's (2005) model does a plausible job of providing us with the "what" as it relates to African American students and college choice: the communal orientation of African American culture renders the role of the family, nuclear and extended, central in the college choice decisions of African American students in three overarching ways. The current

study confirms these findings. At the same time, it also extends our knowledge by adding the “how” and “why” facets of family influence. Indeed, the 12 participants described seminal family-related functions that can help create a more complex model of college choice for African American men. Figure 8 displays an expanded model of family influence and college among African American males.

Figure 8. Expanded Model of Family Influence and College Choice for African American Males



Perceptions of Family Influences across Various Family Compositions

Crosnoe and Cavanagh (2010) defined family composition (or family structure) as “the parental relationship context in which children are born and raised” (p. 597). For over a century, scholars have used family composition as an independent variable in research that compared different developmental outcomes and/or decision-making patterns among children (and adolescents) who lived in homes with different types of parental unions. For example, Amato

(2005) investigated the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of children from households with both biological parents and compared them to children who lived with single parents.

Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1992) compared school dropout rates of children who lived with continuously married parents to those of children born outside of marriage. Wilson (1987) assessed the intergenerational factors contributing to the risk of a premarital birth. More recently, Allen and Boyce (2013) compared how first-generation Black, middle-class sons interpreted the types of cultural capital transmitted for those with active versus disengaged fathers.

In all of these studies, and many others, researchers have investigated and argued that certain types of family structure are associated with particular aspects of the well-being of children. Specifically, researchers have posited that a family's structure can "constrain the availability of economic and social resources such as parents' ability to spend time with their child, be involved in educational activities, and expend monetary resources that can promote positive educational outcomes and well-being" (Schneider, Atteberry, & Owens, 2005, p. 1). Moreover, as Schneider et al. (2005) emphasized, research has consistently shown that family structure can facilitate or limit the ways in which parents are able to positively influence the future outcomes of their children.

Among the various studies using household structure as predictors, it is commonly used as a categorical variable, with some or all of the following categories: intact-family (with both biological parents), divorced single-parent family, other single parent family (such as single parent that is never married), adoptive family, step family, and other relatives (Bartoszuk & Pittman, 2010; Brown & Rinelli, 2010; Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). The family composition variable is then frequently used in analysis (Cavanagh & Huston, 2008; Heifetz,

Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2010; Walton & Takeuchi, 2010). Because of the importance of family structure, the participants' perceptions of family influences across the diverse family compositions were explored in this study. These variances provide an important context for the implications to follow. Essentially, the family compositions represented in this study can be categorized in the following ways: two-parent households, single-parent households (mother), and other relatives. This section provides a brief discussion of these various family forms.

Two-parent households

Based on the National Household Education Survey, Noel, Stark, and Redford (2015) reported that children and adolescents from two-parent homes are about twice as likely as those from single or stepparent homes to have a parent actively involved in school activities, such as volunteering at their school, attending school conferences and meetings, and participating in school events. Beyond direct support of their schooling, studies also demonstrate that children from two-parent families are more likely than those from single-parent families to benefit from more family resources, particularly in terms of parental income and availability of time to spend with children (Amato, 2001; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan 2002). These factors, in tandem, augment the students' likelihood to succeed and persist through the academic pipeline, as well as feel more positive about themselves (Noel et al., 2015). The advantages of these family structures on academic success continue through high school and beyond (Schneider, 2005).

The three African American collegians in this study who were raised in two-parent households shared common reflections in their predisposition to higher education. First, each participant described himself as being concerned with how his educational choices would impact his family's image. Specifically, they regarded their own academic success as a family success, and were therefore compelled to engage in their school work with a sense of exigency in order to

be responsible stewards of this image. Additionally, the collegians from two-parent households described themselves as having been impacted by siblings in their college interest and preparedness. These influences included active aid with pre-college paperwork, offering counsel on the types of institutions that they believed would appeal to them, and modeling patterns of academic and professional success, which they found especially inspiring. Next, the participants from two-parent households benefited from parents who, although they had not continued beyond high school, prioritized and regularly emphasized the importance of a college education to expand vocational opportunities. Further, these students all understood their matriculation to college as a way to pay homage to the manifold sacrifices made by their parents to support and supplement their academic achievement.

Single-parent households

Scholarship exploring the impact of single-parent households on the outcomes among young children and adolescents is well established (Amato, 2005; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Mulkey, Crain, & Harrington, 1992; Painter & Levine, 2000; Sandefur, McLanahan, & Wotjkiwicz, 1992; Sun & Li, 2002). Controlling for factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender, studies of single-parent households have investigated correlations between divorce and adolescent social adjustment and school behavior (Burt, Barnes, McGue, & Iacono, 2008; Manning & Lamb, 2003), parents' education level and the ways that translates into their academic expectations for their children (Moore, Whitney, & Kinukawa, 2009), familial separation and young children and adolescent cognitive development (Grych & Finchman, 1990; Tartari, 2007), math and science proficiency (Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010), and the likelihood to attend college (Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010; Walpole, 2003). In general, many of these (primarily quantitative) assessments indicated that children and adolescents from

single-parent households are at heightened financial, social, and educational disadvantages in comparison with their counterparts in two-parent households. In particular, scholars have noted that the lack of fiscal support from two parents often results in single-parents working more, which can in turn affect their offspring because they may receive less attention and guidance with their school matters (i.e., homework).

Also, having only one income earner puts the family at an augmented risk for impoverishment, which can take a psychological and emotional toll on children and adolescents, including low self-esteem, increased anger and frustration, feelings of abandonment, difficulty socializing and connecting with others, and lowered academic expectations (Hall, Zhao, & Shafir, 2014). Nevertheless, factors such as parenting techniques, positive child expectations, educational level, and quality of the home environment have been found to mediate many of these outcomes. For instance, Ricciuti (2004) found that single-parent mothers – whether the family was Black, White, or Hispanic – who espoused the aforementioned positive attributes greatly reduced or eliminated potential risks to young children’s and adolescent’s school readiness and persistence, as well as social or behavioral complications.

The six African American male collegians in the current study from single-parent households provided compelling and distinctive consistencies. First, they were all raised in homes headed by their mothers, and had a strained or non-existent relationship with their fathers (with the exception of one). Consequently, many of these student’s described themselves as a “momma’s boy” and underscored the protective nature of their regard for her. Interestingly, in this study, this was also the group with the most educated parents – mother’s who achieved some college, completed college, and/or completed advanced degrees. Also, the student’s from single-parent households were most likely to identify and describe attending college as an initial

expectation in their families. In fact, these students described themselves as having received considerable social and emotional support from extended family who shared in guiding their academic journeys. This often transpired through steady emphasis on constructive school and social choices in order to circumvent deleterious typecasts. Consistent with the research literature, several students from single-parent households also remarked about the ways that their parents' separation negatively impacted their school performance. However, they drew motivation to persist ultimately toward college from their mothers' tenacity and by identifying positive extra-curricular outlets. Finally, many of the collegians from single-parent households in this study had younger siblings. Hence, they regarded their own matriculation to college as a way to establish a newfound trajectory of possibilities for their younger brothers and sisters.

Beyond the nuclear family: Other relatives

Over the past 50 years, profound changes in family structures have modified the ways many families organize to raise children. Indeed, family forms have diversified as a consequence of divorce and the proliferation of single-parent households (Baker, Silverstein, & Putney, 2010). During times of such transitions, extended relatives often fill the gap in childcare (Simmons & Lawler-Dye, 2003). This is especially the case following family distress. Family distress can include death, economic stagnation (as manifested by reduction in jobs paying a living wage and offering benefits), or even parental absence (Bengtson, 2004; Kamo, 2001). Most commonly, when distress is the source of changes in family structures, grandparents become the principal guardians of children (Baker et al., 2010), followed by siblings of the parent(s) (Milardo, Gilligan & Fingerman, 2011). As noted in Chapter II, African Americans' cultural propensity for extended-familism has its roots in slavery and post-Reconstruction migration patterns.

Today, this tradition persists and rates of custodial grandparenting are particularly high in African American families (Harris & Skyles, 2008; Herring, 2009; Hill, 2004; Jimenez, 2002). When extended kin assume primary responsibility for child care, stability – which refers to the degree to which the child feels safe, fully integrated, and cared for in his/her environment – becomes an especially crucial need for children (Herring, 2009; Lawler, 2008). Researchers have argued that children and adolescents who feel little to no sense of stability when raised in these reconfigured families often experience high stints of psychological and emotional dejection (Leder, Grinstead, Jensen, & Bond, 2003). In many cases of familial instability and/or detachment when living with relatives, children have been commonly diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder, followed by post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, adjustment disorder, and depressive disorders (Gerwartz, Forgatch, & Weiling, 2008; Leder et al., 2003). However, positive correlations have also been found between strong social support and stability and children's (and adolescents) emotional and physical health when living with extended family (Baker et al., 2010).

The three African American male collegians in the present study who resided with their extended family members, either permanently or provisionally, described particularly exigent pathways to college. First, all three students had experienced the death of someone in their immediate surroundings. For instance, Luke lost his mother, Abraham lost his father, and Timothy lost his closest friend – of which, with varying degrees, provided momentum for their decision to pursue college. Additionally, the young men described largely detached communication patterns with their family members, marked by sentiments of rejection, isolation, and vexation. Having been reared in households where messages about college were virtually non-existent, and family members had acquired limited education, the three collegians did not

seriously consider attending college until high school. Interestingly, all three participants from this family structure also described a desire to attend college away from home, primarily to avoid the quandaries that they were accustomed to during their formative years. While Luke and Timothy eventually relished special support from an individual family member, the three students who resided with extended family were the only participants to discuss having been heavily motivated by a non-family member (fictive kin) as well in their pursuit of higher education.

Implications for Parents and Family Life Educators

Each of the collegians in this study was asked to provide recommendations for African American families when supporting their son's predisposition and matriculation to higher education. Their recommendations could be clustered analogously, and provide a solid premise from which targeted family life education for African American parents can be developed. The following six recommendations (with supporting exemplars) were provided: (1) increase familial expectations for African American males, (2) provide feedback on students' college choice, (3) offer verbal affirmation and accessibility, (4) promote the pathway early, (5) display balanced engagement, and (6) practice frugality.

Increase familial expectations for African American males

The participants in this study explained how important it is for African American families to cultivate an expectancy of academic seriousness and success among their sons. In many cases, this recommendation was buttressed by frustrations with those who projected notions of socially-clichéd (or diminutive) post-high school expectations. Abraham, Mark, and Paul avidly provided this advice:

Alrighty, that's the one I'm talking about! [Sits up in chair, and ceases to spin a coin in his hand.] Stop victimizing these kids, especially these African American males as if, like,

oh, yeah they aren't anything. Like, all they can do is like be a rapper, like be a football or basketball player – that's all, that's all they're worth. They can't actually like, go to college, and actually like become some hot shot lawyer or something like that. Like that's all I see, ya know? It's just like, parents, I don't know, accepting like—accepting just like an idea that that's all that your kids are worth. Like I never like see, like, a family like, actually like, 'Oh yeah, I believe in your academic abilities,' and like, 'Yeah, we're gonna make sure that you go to school,' and 'You're gonna get your degree!' and things like that, ya know? Like that's what I was wanting...(Abraham)

Talk to your sons and, you know, explain to them...like, don't fall into the statistics I should say. Don't just be another statistic and do what everybody else thinks you gonna do. It's like be different...where I grew up, well, where I went to school, there were a lot of Caucasian people...and there were certain Black males that walk around with their pants hanging low and all this and that. And they'll say, 'Oh he gonna be like every other Black guy' and 'He not gonna be nothing,' and 'He's not gone do nothing with his life' and all this and that so you know...be different. Show them that not all Black men are the same, you know. That's what moms and dads should be doing. The family, ya know? (Mark)

Stop listening to people, and the books, and the magazines...or the stereotypes saying, 'Oh, since they're in a single-parent house hold then they're probably not going to do much.' I mean we have to start setting the bar high for ourselves too because we all don't like being looked down on and we all like being the authority so, why not work for it? (Paul)

Provide feedback on students' college choice

Several of the participants encouraged African American families to offer regular feedback about a college campus and the overall process, including the factors that they like and those that they disapprove of, in a way that does not nullify their decision. Daniel, Matthew, Luke, John, Jeremiah, and David offer these words,

Be involved, and make sure you give them your opinion on what...what you think about a school or, what you like, what you don't like, cause all that matters at the end of the day, to they decision. Cause like, in my case, like I said, uh, you know, if my momma didn't like a school, or she didn't feel good about a school, even if I aint know the reason, it was a reason why she aint like that school, so...and she know me better than, uh, ya know, anybody. So, if she don't like it then, 9 times out of 10, she know I probably ain't gone like it. (Daniel)

Don't be afraid to ask questions about the campus, that is one big thing. Don't be afraid to ask your sons questions, because if you are afraid to ask an important question that he might need – but you think they are going get aggravated – it might not be good for him

later on. Just ask it at the right time, because it's a stressful thing, thinking about college. Then and there, that will help him out big time. (Matthew)

Give advice the best way you know how about the school. Uh, and always take advice in. It's like respect and education, like not a one-way street. Like, always be able to bounce ideas off each other about the campus and everything. Like, have real conversations. (Luke)

I would also say visit the school with them so the parent or family can know some of the...well, experience the campus environment that he is about to attend. They need to participate. (John)

Make sure they are very involved when it comes to that decision, because this is a life decision. Like, you are going to spend a lot of money on an institution, and you about to spend four years, three years, five years, however long it take you to graduate at this institution. You have to make sure he's going to be comfortable living there. He's going to eat there, he's going to do everything there, so you are going to have to make sure that your son, or child or grandchild is making the right decision. (Jeremiah)

I wouldn't bash a person in they decision. But I would try to make rational – give rational ideas or suggestions about the campus. Because you never know what can happen. So, I wouldn't...bash people's ideas or choices as far as what they wanna, where they wanna go for college. (David)

Offer verbal affirmation and accessibility

Participants in this study reinforced how critical it is for African American families to provide their sons with steady words of support (and praise) that affirms their belief in his academic potential through consistent physical interaction and availability.

But, for me, it's having that support. Give support. And, you know, be there physically, mentally, and emotionally to push them on through, show them the right path to go on to be successful. (Mark)

I wanted my parents to say like, 'Hey, good job on the test!' or 'Good job on getting straight A's' and things like that. I mean, I would actually tell these parents to actually – to actually be parents. Like don't just be a mother and a father, ya know, be a dad, be a mom. Ya know, actually affirm your kids future! (Abraham)

Stay supportive. Because it's a lot of students that go in who feel that they don't have enough support systems, um, coming from their family which uh, usually should have the most support for somebody that's going on to college. (David)

I just advise them to be engaged in that decision, telling him he can do it, because even if he doesn't say anything, that support can really have an impact on him, good or bad. Everybody isn't as strong. (John)

Be supportive. Be supportive. If your son wanna go to this school or that school, always be supportive. Be that person in the back of his head, when he filling out them college papers and he's like, 'Damn, I don't really wanna do this' be like, 'Man did you do your stuff?' Like too many parents get comfortable. I wish I, I wish it was like it was in the years past. Like, the parents, you would see a parent across the street. If they see you doing bad, they gone whoop you, then you get brung to your momma and she gone whoop you too. Like, be supportive. Like, that child – I didn't ask to be here. That child didn't ask to be here. So motivate them to do something good. (Luke)

And be very supportive of them. Be very, very supportive. Like whatever they need, realize that your sons, your kids' period, are like your biggest investment. And realize that whatever you do right now could affect their entire future. If you are supportive of them, that could make them be successful, and if you are not then that could be the one thing that hurt them because they don't have the resources and stuff to go to college and they don't have anything. Because everybody needs help from somebody, no matter who you are. (Timothy)

Promote the pathway early

The collegians in this study further recommended that African American families identify innovative ways to orient their sons to college as early as possible.

Like if you can help increase his chance to go to college, as early as possible, go and see what you can do with it. Families, I think they should...they should encourage young males to go to college as soon as possible, because a lot of young males say...young Black males...say that school ain't for them, they hate school, when in all actuality, they aren't being exposed. He don't know he can love it if ain't nobody helping him see that he can. (Peter)

Make sure you stay on them about the grades, make sure you stay on them about the ACT score way before, like, way before high school. Like tell them or just get them oriented and get them on that track to make sure that they are doing the right thing, so they can have these options even if they don't want to go to college. They had the option to go to college, so I would say just really, really be involved. (Jeremiah)

Get it in their head, when they're lil boys, start talking about college even then, like hey, 'This is what you do after high school.' At least then, like, they can't say they didn't know. You know when you like 10, middle school...when you like 13, high school...and, like when you 18, 19, college should automatically be next. (Mark)

Display balanced engagement

Participants highlighted the need for African American families to be balanced with their sons during the college choice process by not emphasizing minor details and/or overruling their choice of institution.

I would tell them, just relax. Don't stress out. Don't cry over spilled milk. Um, I feel like, don't pressure them so much. Like, let them make their decision. Cause like, at the end of the day, it's what they want to do. Like, even though you might have a specific school that you want him to go to, but at the end of the day, it's his choice. So just don't pressure him to go to a specific school. Just let it happen, and support whatever choice he makes.
(Joseph)

Just be there...and don't cloud their judgment. Let them, or allow your sons to make their own decisions. You know, let your sons live before they get to college, so when they get to college they won't just run wild and run free and stuff like that. I feel like that happens when the parent's or family not balanced in how they approach it. But definitely don't be too strict about small things, cause he should choose the school at the end of the day, where he feels comfortable. That would be my best advice. (Timothy)

You gotta let him make his own decision...so don't overwhelm him, I feel like. Give him time to figure out how he needs your help, he will tell you. But, like, if you always tryna do everything before him, you can probably frustrate him. Don't be too involved in the paperwork and this and that, but don't just be not involved either...like, have balance.
(David)

Practice frugality

Finally, participants encouraged African American families to save money as early as possible to support their son's long-term educational needs.

Save money. That \$200 pair of Jordan's that he want, nah! Ay, you gone need that \$200 when you need something in college. Like, my grandmother, she knew I would have them hard days, but she saved for me. Save money, like, if you can. He will need it. (Luke)

If you can, put some money up for him. My mom and dad have been doing that since I was little. I feel very, very...I want to say I benefited, I feel blessed. Having someone be there for me financially, when it came time to make that decision, I wasn't worried about money. It is not that many Black males, and it is not a lot of people, even Black females, going to college that have family have their back financially....so some of em don't even go. (Jeremiah)

I wish I had more, like, support financially from my family...my parents. Having to apply for so many scholarships, you are competing with a lot of people. That can be stressful

sometimes. I mean, I probably wouldn't be the same guy if things were different, so I'm a stronger young man for it. But I almost didn't get to come here if it wasn't for scholarships. So, having the additional money could really help. (John)

Delivering Family Life Education to African American Families

Who should FLE's target?

Within the extant research, as it was in this study, African American men consistently named their parents as being the most influential family members in their pre- and post-secondary academic decisions and/or persistence (Freeman, 2005; Martin et al., 2007; Perna & Titus, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008; Toldson & Lemus, 2012). For example, parent-child interactions were commonly found as the most robust predictor of African American adolescent success (Thomas, 2003). Specifically, when African American parents were actively engaged in their sons' academic endeavors by monitoring homework and other academic pursuits, restricting leisure activities (e.g., video games, television, and computer use), and creating a continuous and positive dialogue with teachers and school officials, they improved the odds of their son succeeding in school (Marbley, Hull, Polydore, Bonner, & Burley, 2007; Toldson & Lemus, 2012).

Myers-Walls, Ballard, Darling, and Myers-Bowman (2011) suggested that family life educators target their programming and audience as much as possible. Hence, given the scholarship and findings in the present study, parents should be the first line of contact for family life educators. Obviously engaging African American males themselves also will contribute direct and firsthand information (even beyond the findings in this study) about their own perception of academic predisposition and preparation. However, parents are primarily responsible for the educational orientation that their son's receive, determining the types of schools that they attend, as well as integrating them into intellectually-cultivating social contexts

(Toldson & Lemus, 2012). While numerous factors impact the academic achievement of African American men, parents are most crucial in the process (Freeman, 2005; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Senechal & Young, 2008). Thus, parents should be the first point of contact for family life educators.

At the same time, FLE's should understand that among African American families, parental involvement in their son's academic affairs could be complicated by certain barriers. For example, there could be sentiments of mistrust between parents and school personnel (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007). Also, given the disproportionate number of African American children raised in poverty (39%) and by single-mothers (nearly 67%), parents' work schedules or lack of transportation may not facilitate involvement in school decision making or school activities (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2013; Toldson & Lemus, 2012). Furthermore, some African American parents may be unsure about their role in their son's education, or they may not know how to work with their children (Bridges, Awokoya, & Messano, 2012).

When should FLE's be involved?

Early investments reduce the need for larger expenditures down the road for African American families. Specifically, early prevention measures are essential to changing a Black male adolescent's perception of the importance of persisting beyond high school graduation to the university/college level (Alsaker & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010). African American males who learn to prioritize their academic pursuits in middle school are more prepared to overcome the academic and non-academic factors that led to attrition, as well as to continue their education after high school graduation (Shubert, 2014). Even when they are much younger, programs such as Early Head Start resulted in improvements in Black males' social-emotional and learning

behavior, reduced parental distress, and increased parental involvement in educational activities at home (Barnett & Hustedt, 2005). Most importantly, African American males who participated in school readiness programs showed continual improvements when transitioning throughout the educational pipeline, such as having increased probabilities of graduating from high school (Vogel, Yange, Moiduddin, Kisker, & Carlson, 2010). For these reasons, effective prevention education should target African American families early on (especially during his adolescent years).

How should FLE services be delivered?

FLE's are highly encouraged to include parents/caregivers in determining an appropriate method of service delivery as family needs are specific and diverse. For instance, when African American male children come from home environments where they encounter multiple traumatic events (e.g., severe poverty, parental depression, community violence, etc.), they are more likely to experience hypersensitivity, irritability, grief, and anger – all of which can negatively impact their receptivity to strangers (such as a FLE professional) and make learning more challenging (Rich & Grey, 2005).

In addition, there are also practical techniques family life educators can employ when working with African American parents. These include offering incentives to participate (i.e., transportation, child care, and meals), scheduling programs months in advance, and keeping programming short (30-45 minutes) (Woodson & Braxton-Calhoun, 2006). FLE's are also encouraged to focus on the benefits of program content and not on research (Baugh & Coughlin, 2012). Further, there are unique cultural behaviors that have been found to be effective among FLE's in their service delivery to African American families. These include providing opportunities for prayer before and after programming, incorporating humor, including music,

maintaining direct eye contact, being informal and flexible in communication style, appreciating heritage and history, and respecting the role of elders (Chandler, 2010; Guion et al., 2003; Woodson & Braxton-Calhoun, 2006).

Also, establishing trust is critical for FLE's working with Black participants (Russell, Maraj, Wilson, Shedd-Steele, & Champion, 2008). A historical mistrust of educational, social, medical, and legal institutions has been associated with decreased participation in programming among African American individuals and families (Chandler, 2010; Russell et al., 2008).

Intergenerational narratives of racial chauvinism, inequity, and unscrupulous medical practices have propagated doubt of individuals who are outside of the Black community (Dancy, Wilbur, Talashek, Bonner, & Barnes-Boyd, 2004). That is not to suggest that non-Black FLE's would be ineffective working with these families. Instead, what matters most is that FLE professionals demonstrate cultural competence and sensitivity, and refrain from giving the impression that their programming will save participants (Chandler, 2010). Therefore, it is essential that FLE's working with African American families cultivate a climate of trust with parents, caregivers, or other important stakeholder(s) before determining goals and objectives for programming.

Where should FLE services take place?

The environment within which the programming occurs makes a difference for African American youth and families. For instance, African American males have responded positively to new information in small settings (Schanzenbach, 2014; Wilde, Johnson, & Muennig, 2011). Fortunately, several venues have been successful housing programs that serve predominately African American populations. A primary community pillar remains the church, which serves as a major influence in the spiritual, educational, social, economic, and political lives of African American families (Baugh & Coughlin, 2012). Additionally, organizations such as the Boys &

Girls Club of America, YMCA, Black Greek letter sororities and fraternities, and Big Brothers Big Sisters have established reputations of fostering accessible, familiar, and welcoming services to ethnic minority children and their families (Baugh & Coughlin, 2012). Specifically, these organizations have developed culturally-responsive services with flexible schedules and short programs (Woodson & Braxton-Calhoun, 2006), made use of extended family and fictive kin networks (Bell-Tolliver et al., 2009), offered incentives (Baugh & Coughlin, 2012), and provided transportation and child care when possible (Woodson & Braxton-Calhoun, 2006). Accordingly, family life educators working with African American families are encouraged to foster strong working relationships with faith-based organizations, historically Black colleges and universities, and minority-friendly civic organizations.

New Directions: Implications for Future Research

Results of this current study produce invaluable information for parents, K-12 administrators, university-level management (particularly enrollment officers, recruitment representatives, and multicultural student affairs units), researchers, family life educators and other personnel who are invested in what factors positively contribute to African American males' choice to attend higher education. However, while conducting this study, it became apparent that additional questions should be investigated in order to further close gaps on college choice, particularly as it relates to the family. For example, in this study I focus on the students' perceptions of nuclear family influences in their decision to pursue college. However, several participants referred to the monumental impact that their extended family members played in supporting or complicating their pre-college experiences. In a few cases, extended family (i.e., grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) carried even greater responsibilities than did parents.

Thus, future research should play a closer eye to the impact of extended family in assisting African American males in the college choice process.

Additionally, almost every participant who had siblings denoted unique ways that these relationships shaped their pursuit of college. For some students, this manifested in elder siblings serving as models of success, discussing the benefits of particular kinds of campus climates, and communicating expectations. Others were prompted to attend college in order to provide their younger siblings with newfound examples of academic possibilities and persistence. Indeed, the ways in which African American students understand and negotiate sibling relationships warrant further exploration.

When asked if there were any questions about the family's impact on their college choice that I should have inquired about, the only response I received from the collegians in this study pertained to the impact of fictive kin. As Shaw (2008) underscored, in many societies, fictive ties are equally or more important than comparable relationships created by blood, marriage, or adoption. Indeed, kinship establishes the base; but –according to some of the participants – not the totality, of what constitutes as family. Given that most of the participants' were first-generation college students, they did not necessarily have a frame of reference when it came to college. However, some participants described themselves as having benefited from discussions with fictive kin (usually close friends or mentors) that spurred their curiosity about attending an HBCU or PWI, as well as making a decision to attend college in general. Accordingly, it would be helpful to glean a deeper understanding of the roles that fictive kin play in African American students' pre-college experiences.

Further, given the specified scope, this study garnered the voices of only the African American males. They were tasked with providing representation of the family's involvement

with college choice. It would be useful for subsequent studies to compare these perspectives with those from parents, siblings, and extended family in order to offer a fuller depiction of family influence. While generalizability was not an aim of this research, it also would be helpful to expand the sample size in order to assess the degree to which the family-related factors identified are consistent (or disparate) with African American males at other higher education institutions. In the same way, a comparison of these influences across racial/ethnic groups could prove to be significant, particularly for college choice theorists as knowledge about family influence continues to be further clarified in college choice models.

Finally, the interviews in this study were told in a retrospective manner. This was done to ensure “success stories” (meaning the student actually applied to, enrolled at, and was in college courses). While the decision to include only college freshman was my attempt to minimize recall bias, it is possible that African American high school students would provide additional information as the process would be described from a more contemporary perspective. Moreover, subsequent research might also sample students who did not transition to college after high school to compare how perceptions of family involvement differ or correspond with “success stories” – those who, like the participants in this study, ultimately decided to attend college.

Conclusion

Promoting and supporting family involvement in college choice among African Americans requires that we continue to generate a nuanced and sophisticated understanding not only of family processes and the outcomes associated with them, but also of the contextual factors that shape involvement. Until relatively recently, research into an understanding of family practices was limited in two important ways. First, the literature was largely on White, middle

class samples, which both led to a “skewed understanding of how parenting behaviors are affected by socioeconomic and other contextual factors, and limited awareness of how alternative behaviors by other groups might lead to positive child outcomes” (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009, p. 10). The second limitation, as noted by several researchers (Demo & Cox, 2000; Garcia Coll et al., 1996; McLoyd & Randolph, 1985), has been the long-standing use of deficit models – which examine problems – rather than employing more strength-based models, particularly in the study of ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. These models have largely characterized ethnic minority parenting practices as deficient rather than as adaptive strategies responsive to unique historical and environmental demands (Garcia Coll & Pachter 2002). This deficits approach was influenced by earlier works like those by Lewis (1966), Moynihan (1965), and Rubel (1966). These findings, which were based on samples of low-income families with entrenched problems, were accepted without inquiry and construed as representative of parenting characteristics within minority groups (Taylor, 2000). Baca-Zinn and Wells (2000), however, reminded us that this deficits-based approach to examining parenting in ethnic and minority groups is based on the assumption that certain childrearing practices are more effective than or superior to others; this assumption has severely restricted research on adaptive parenting and family practices.

In contrast, research in the past few decades – including this study – has moved us away from a dysfunction-based to a strengths-based approach, and it acknowledges, measures, and examines the ways in which particular contextual factors and forces, such as socioeconomic disadvantage and racism, impact racial/ethnic minority families (Freeman, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008; Toldson & Anderson, 2010). As a result, light is shed on family involvement practices and the variables that support and/or constrain them. The increasingly nuanced scholarship about the

involvement of racial and ethnic minority families also suggests that there is both a strong desire to actively participate in their children's learning, and that when institutions reach out to engage them and address the barriers to involvement, families will be engaged in ways that benefit their children's long-term academic success (Weiss et al., 2009).

African American families have sojourned a long historical expedition in the pursuit of education, resulting in the freedom to attend any college or university of their choice. The collective resolve of the past persists today. Indeed, this study revealed several notions similar to the established literature on ethnic minority families and the educational outcomes of their offspring, specifically African Americans: these families report a desire to be involved, want their children to do well navigating the K-12 educational system, and hope that their children will achieve a better life through college. While further exploration is undoubtedly needed, these findings corroborate that the richest resource for understanding an African American students' learning experiences is the family. May the abilities, perseverance, and resiliency of these families never be overlooked. To close this dissertation, I draw attention to an extract by Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) whose prescient contention captures the quintessence of this work:

African Americans place a heavy emphasis on education because of its role in family and community. Education is about a liberated future that must be better than the oppressive past. Pressing hard for higher education for children today is linked to the strong educational aspirations of African Americans in the distant and recent past. The prospect of a successful future for one's children and grandchildren helps to justify and give distinctive meaning to the collective suffering and struggles of the past and the present. In many ways, Black parents do not differ from other parents who work hard to put their children through college. However, for Black parents the education of their children gives meaning to their struggle against racism as well as to other aspects of their individual and familial histories... The familial pressure is common to many American families, but it takes on an added dimension for those who are members of an oppressed group that has faced major racial barriers to education" (pp. 22-23).

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Do you and your family identify yourselves as African American?

Yes

No

Household Composition:

Two-parent household

Single-parent household (Mother)

Single-parent household (Father)

Guardian

Other _____

Yearly Family Income:

Below \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 to \$59,999
\$60,000 to \$79,999	\$80,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 to \$119,999
\$120,000 to \$139,999	\$140,000 to \$159,999	\$160,000 to \$179,000
\$180,000 to \$199,000	\$200,000 to \$249,999	\$250,000 and above

How many individuals lived in your household growing up? _____

Select the response which most accurately represents your situation. Please select only one.

In my family, going to college was:

- 1) An automatic expectation.
- 2) Something I was encouraged to do in order to go beyond the family's education level.
- 3) I did not receive much support. I was self-motivated to do differently than my family.

Other: _____

**APPENDIX B:
RECRUITMENT FLYER**



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

**ARE YOU A MALE BETWEEN
THE AGES OF 18 & 21?**



**ARE YOU CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN YOUR
FRESHMAN YEAR (FIRST-YEAR) OF
COLLEGE?**



**DO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY IDENTIFY AS
AFRICAN AMERICAN?**

**ARE YOU ENROLLED AT A FOUR YEAR,
BACCALAUREATE-AWARDING ,COLLEGE
OR UNIVERSITY?**



If you answered "yes" to the four questions above, you may qualify to participate in a study to better understand how families influence the pathway to college for African American males!



Please email Gralon A. Johnson at gralon@ksu.edu if you have any questions.

*This study has been approved by K-State IRB

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The questions will encourage you to reflect on your college choice process and, more specifically, the role that your family played in your decision making. Please feel free to speak openly as there are no right or wrong answers.
- Please stop me at any time if you need a question to be clarified.

**Stop and ask the participant to sign the IRB consent forms. Ask participant to sign two copies. Give participant one copy and you keep the second one. Consent forms should be signed before you turn on the recording devices.*

- The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy, and once the interview has been transcribed [explain the term *transcribe* to participants] you will have the opportunity to review your responses to ensure accuracy and provide any clarification necessary.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

General family demographic information

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself before you came to college.
2. Tell me about your family.
3. How would you describe your relationship with your family?
 - a. How often do you communicate with your family?
 - b. Do you communication with some family members more than others? How do you feel about that?

Value of college in the family

4. At what age did you first learn about college? And what do you recall your family telling you about college?
 - a. Who gave you those messages about college?
5. Who was the most influential in your family in your decision to pursue college?
 - a. Why did you select this person?
 - b. What did this person do that clearly distinguished them from other members of your family?
 - c. How long did you live with this person?
 - d. How do you think living with this person played a role in making them so distinguishable?
6. How would you describe the importance of college in your family growing up?
7. Did anyone in your family attend college? How do you think this influenced your college choice?
8. So why did you choose this college? Who influenced you to come to this college instead of going somewhere else?
9. How did your family support your college choice decision? (What did they do to demonstrate support of your college choice decision?)
 - a. Can you describe an experience that exemplifies this type of support?
10. What are your family's beliefs about people who are college educated?
 - a. How is this different from person to person? The same?

Student's college choice thought process

11. What did "going to college" mean to *you*?

12. When did you know that you were going to attend college?
13. Once you decided to attend college, how did you go about deciding *where* to attend?
14. What other family-related factors influenced your college choice decision?
 - a. Why were those factors the most influential in your decision?
15. Reflect on members of your family for a moment. What would they say about your enrollment in college? Why would they say this?

Sensory interpretations

16. Please describe how you interacted with [the person selected in question 5 of the aforementioned section] during your college decision-making process.
 - a. How do you feel about this interaction during that process?
 - b. Would you have wanted anything to be different?
17. If you were to go through the college choice process again, what would you change about your family's participation in that process and decision?
18. What advice for you have for other African American families for how they can help their children in the college choice process?
19. Is there anything that you think I should have asked that I did not?

Conclusion:

Thank you very much for your time. Your answers are a valuable tool in understanding how to help improve the pre-college experiences of African American males, particularly as it relates to how families support and nurture that process. I earnestly appreciate your contribution to this study!