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THE PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE IMPACT OF HIGH
SCHOOL COLLEGE COUNSELING ON COLLEGE CHOICE

A Dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Education in the Department of Higher Education at the University of Mississippi

By

TOMMY (T.J.) WALKER

May 2021

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Abstract

Making decisions about college can be challenging for rural students. Guidance counselors and other adults influence these decisions because of their close relationships in high schools and communities. Since rural students are coached into pursuing college as a mechanism for obtaining a better life, it is beneficial to explore their lived experiences regarding college counseling and college choice. This dissertation in practice explores the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation in practice to the rural students in the state of Mississippi. So many times, these students are overlooked and undervalued. I hope my writing gives them a more prominent voice. I hope it allows leaders in secondary and post-secondary education to better understand their lived experiences as they attempt to access college. As a former resident of Prentiss, Mississippi, I know the challenges and uncertainties they may face as they think about their plans after high school. I hope this paper inspires rural high school students to pursue their dreams, even if they seem far-fetched. There is a big world out there, and I encourage these students to go out and explore it. I also encourage them to remove the hurdles of fear, uncertainty, and imposter syndrome. If I was able to find my way to my version of success, so can they. I wish them the best of luck as they leave high school and decide about the next phase. Find what fits, whether directly to work, the military, community college, technical college, or a university. Ask questions. Keep asking questions. Make sure to gain a complete understanding of the college options. It can be done! God, bless!

Acknowledgments

I thank God for allowing my life's journey to include the pursuit of this degree. I choose to believe that my life is in your hands. Your grace, mercy, and favor have allowed me to start the program and finish. Many prayers were lifted as I dealt with doubt, fear, insecurities, and fatigue. I was often reminded of Philippians 4:13 throughout the journey. It states, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

I am so grateful to my wife, Ashley Walker, for the support and encouragement. You were there every day during the highs and lows of the journey. As you dealt with your own educational and professional pursuits, you still made yourself available to me. I appreciate you more than I can ever put into words. I am richly blessed to be able to walk through life, side by side, with you.

To my parents, Mildred and Tommy Walker, Sr., I thank you so much for the many years of guidance and instruction. You have been the pillars on which I have stood my entire life. I am who I am because of you two. My mindset, attitude, behaviors, gestures, morals, and values were all shaped by you. I love you both so much.

I thank my siblings, Tony, Stevie, Kim, and Tonya, for your support. Our parents taught us how to work hard for what we want. We all chose different paths yet support each other no matter what. I don't think you realize how influential you all are to me. As the last child, I have watched your lives unfold and learn lessons from your experiences. I wish you and your families the wealthiest blessings God has for you.

I thank my Cohort IV (C4) family for all the slack messages, cheers, tears, and laughter. We made it, you all! Best of luck to you all as you move on to the next chapter. I hope you use this newly discovered free time wisely.

To Dr. McClellan, I thank you for challenging me to be a better scholar. You pushed me to "think beyond the water spiders". I will never forget this statement. It lives with me forever. You made me deal with my discomforts and overcome them. Your leadership during this process has been top tier. I could not have asked for a better dissertation chair. I sincerely appreciate everything you have done for me. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Katrina Caldwell, Dr. Whitney Webb, and Dr. Susan McClelland.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Positionality.....	5
Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate.....	10
Literature Review.....	12
Conceptual Framework.....	23
Methodology.....	34
Research Questions.....	38
Chapter II: Data.....	40
Research Design.....	41
Data Presentation.....	43
Participant Biographies.....	44
Data by Interview Question.....	48
Theme Clusters.....	77
Chapter III: Analysis and Recommendations.....	84

Data Interpretation.....	86
Recommendations for Practice.....	95
Recommendations for Research.....	103
Limitations.....	104
Conclusion.....	105
List of References.....	108
Appendix.....	123
Appendix A.....	124
Appendix B.....	129
Appendix C.....	130
Appendix D.....	131
Appendix E.....	134
Appendix F.....	135
Appendix G.....	136
Appendix H.....	137
Appendix I.....	138
Vita.....	139

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study.....	34
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Goldrick-Rab (2016) asserts, "Higher education is valuable because it improves the social fabric in immeasurable ways" (p.252). Labaree (1997) defines three primary goals for higher education: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. The democratic equality goal addresses the need to maintain our democratic society using higher education to prepare students for constructive roles in the community democratic process (Labaree, 1997). According to Tichnor-Wagner and Socol (2016), education is framed as "a public good that prepares people for citizenship and political participation in a democratic society" (p.3). The social efficiency goal of higher education aims to make students fit into a social structure and fulfill the demands of the existing marketplace (Labaree, 1997). "Both vocationalism and stratification serve the purpose of preparing youth to carry out economic roles in the free market" (Tichnor-Wagner & Socol, 2016, p.4). The social mobility lens sees higher education as a mechanism by which students are granted an opportunity to move ahead in the social structure or maintain their current position (Labaree, 1997).

The evolving jobs of today and the future require post-secondary education (Morris, 2009). Having a high school diploma as one's only educational credential may lead to low-paying jobs and diminished career advancement opportunities (Morris, 2009). "By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school" (Carnevale et al., 2013, p.3). This notion, however, is not a new perspective on the importance of earning post-secondary credentials. Hunsake and Thomas (2014) note, "By the

middle of the 20th century, the marketplace was increasingly placing emphasis on higher education credentials" (p.2).

"Postsecondary education is a fundamental tool for achieving upward mobility and economic growth" (Burke et al., 2016, p. A-1). Accordingly, higher education institutions are expected to ensure that students develop discipline-specific competencies, skills, and dispositions (Chan, 2016). Bakari and Hunjra (2018) note that students believe they will be employed because they graduate from college. There are positive relationships between educational attainment and productivity, labor outcomes, and economic growth (Chan, 2016). Students with a college degree earn more money, experience better working conditions, and have better job benefits than students with only a high school diploma (Burke et al., 2016).

College Enrollment and Rural Students

Out of all the counties in America, about 70% are rural (Bright, 2018). In rural school districts, 12.5 million students are being educated (Kena et al., 2013). Rural students need college degrees to be competitive in the global marketplace because urban students outperform them by over ten percent in earning bachelor's degrees or higher (United States Department of Education, 2018). Lower parental educational attainment, family income, and lower academic achievement negatively impact college access and enrollment for rural students (Means, 2018). Poverty and loss of an economic base cause much tension because rural students must decide between staying in their communities or leaving for postsecondary education (Means, 2018). These assertions highlight the notion that the physical location in which a student lives and the social, economic, cultural, and political factors associated with rurality influence college choice.

The terms *rural* and *urban* are commonly used when discussing population size, and isolated areas with a population of 2,500 residents or less is an accepted designation for rural

(Ratcliffe et al., 2016). For many years, literature focused on rural students' needs and challenges has been limited (Johnson et al., 2014). Because there are gaps in the research, rural students' needs are being left out of key higher education conversations. Scott et al. (2015) state that rural students face significant barriers when making college decisions. These barriers include the lack of accessible resources, the collective histories of rural communities, and their preparation in high school. Their geographic location, education levels, family members' support, and various student perceptions impact college choice (King, 2010). Mississippi happens to have a high population of rural students, and it is reported that 153,850 Mississippi students were enrolled in college (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018). More contextual information regarding the concept of rurality is provided in my conceptual framework.

High School Counseling, College Choice, and Rural Students

Families complain about the lack of transparency in the college planning process, the confusing nature of applications, the scarcity of good information about college choice, and how the admission outcomes are unpredictable and illogical (Collegeboard, 2007). School counselors are asked to assist students who aspire to attend college, but they are not usually trained in college counseling (Clayton, 2019). "Public school counselors spend 23% of their time on college counseling" (Clayton, 2019, p.1402).

Educators in the K12, non-profit, and higher education sectors have joined forces through entities like the College Attainment Network (NCAN) to develop and implement ethical and equitable college counseling practices (NCAN, n.d). Capizzi, Hofstetter, Mena, Duckor, and Hu (2017) argue that exploring counseling practices and the stories students tell about them can improve student engagement, success, and overall well-being (p. 22). "While equitable access to quality postsecondary opportunities for disadvantaged populations of students is a significant

topic of research in education, the impact of growing up in a geographically isolated rural community on college access and success has been sparsely studied" (Koricich, 2013, p.1). Bright (2018) suggests that researching "rural culture and paying more attention to its needs could reduce the societal gaps that exist, allowing a better understanding of and more integrated help towards a population facing isolation and major barriers" (p.18).

Clayton (2019) suggests qualitative research should examine the students' experiences to understand their perceptions of the people and services provided around college counseling. To better understand the students' perceptions, researchers could conduct observations of student meetings, classroom presentations, and workshops (Clayton, 2019). With this research, policymakers will have the information needed to make better decisions about how students are served when receiving college counseling (Clayton, 2019). Additionally, the research will allow policymakers to develop and implement the most effective and replicable college counseling programs (Clayton, 2019).

Problem of Practice

From professional experiences, I have observed the daunting task students endure when choosing to enroll in college. Guidance counselors, teachers, community advocates, and other adults greatly influence these decisions due to direct and indirect counseling practices. High school college counseling is often a complicated practice for individuals who engage with rural students. Since these students are encouraged to pursue higher education as their ticket to a better life, I wish to add to the body of research by exploring the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice. For this study, the term rural refers to communities with populations of 2,500 or less. Also, high school college counseling is defined as counseling administered by guidance counselors, college coaches, teachers, and other

adults who are paid or volunteer in the traditional high school setting. Additionally, college choice is framed around the students' decision to go to college and the selection of a specific institution.

Positionality

My background, current profession, and future aspirations shape how I view this dissertation in practice. Life in a rural town presented unseen barriers to college. Professional experiences uncovered more barriers for other students as I advised them. These experiences allow me to repeatedly see myself in students going through the same challenges I faced. Lastly, my future position provides a platform for large-scale change and impact. Since enduring the difficulties of being academically adrift, financially in debt, learning about the business of higher education, and best practices for advising students, I feel called to alter the landscape for rural students. My personal experiences, professional development, and academic attainment will allow me to advocate, lead, and impact more lives in the future.

Personal Position

My personal position stems from my upbringing in the rural town of Prentiss, Mississippi. In 2003, my senior year of high school, Prentiss had a population of 1,059. The nearest four-year institution was a 50- minute drive to the University of Southern Mississippi. Jackson State University was the next closest institution at 66 minutes. Dreams and aspirations of accessing higher education were low due to the lack of resources, information, and qualified teachers. In four years, we only had one college fair. We never went on college tours as a group. Exposure to higher education beyond the city limits of Prentiss was non-existent.

The higher education conversation was not a common topic in our household. My parents did not go to college, so they could not share the process of getting admitted, applying for

financial aid, or other necessary steps. Additionally, they could not communicate with us stories about their college experiences or share advice about specific academic majors. My parents wanted to give their children a better life than they experienced, so they advocated for success in education while in grade school. In addition to providing high-quality encouragement and emotional support, they taught us the values of hard work and dedication. By being living examples, our parents taught us Christian values, military discipline, and financial literacy.

My dad's military service in the National Guard allowed him to travel and learn about the challenging world his children would soon face. His military training coupled with his expertise in construction and our mother's patience and compassion allowed them to convey the value of perseverance in whatever capacity we performed. Our parents never forced us to go to college. Out of five siblings, four of us attended college. The other sibling went to the military for a short tenure. We had a simple choice to make, and that choice was either manual labor, military, or higher education. We knew our parents would support us with either option.

"Go to college, get an education so you will not have to work this hard and beat up your body as I have. If you choose to work with your hands, at least you will know how to do it". My father's words stuck with me as I transitioned from high school to Mississippi State University's campus. Attending a rural high school with limited college access resources caused me to select a college that was way beyond the assumed cost of attendance. There were no ACT prep courses in high school to inform us about the connection between ACT and scholarships. There were also no information sessions explaining the differences between a community college and a university. My composite ACT score of 20 was one of the highest in my school. The assumption was that my good behavior, 3.76 GPA, and 20 ACT score would provide lots of money for college.

Scholarships and financial aid were scarce. My ACT score was below the threshold for qualifying for academic scholarships. My parents were in the middle-income range, but personal assets moved me right above the range to be eligible for the PELL grant. I chose a college that was assumed to be a great fit. Thankfully, my parents prepared ahead and were able to provide substantial financial support. After accepting the maximum loan amount, my parents filled the financial gaps by either going into their savings or selling one of their assets: cattle. This was a fortunate situation on the surface. Below the surface, I was building debt by accepting the maximum loan each year.

More barriers appeared while drifting through college. Academic under-preparedness was evident. My first grade of F happened during my freshman year. I had no clue what I truly wanted to major in. I had no clue who to talk to when adversity struck. I was miles away from the two people that always guided and counseled me on all of life's decisions. At this intersection of life, my parents were unable to help me beyond providing financial support. I had to adapt and navigate my way through five years of undergraduate coursework. I was fortunate enough to graduate with my Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology in 2008. The undergraduate experience created the desire to make the college experience more seamless for others.

Professional Position

After completing my undergraduate degree at Mississippi State University (MSU), I joined the MSU Office of Admissions and Scholarships as an Admissions Counselor. My task was to recruit students from public high schools in Jackson, Mississippi, and the Mississippi Delta. I was responsible for over 50 high schools. These schools were located in very rural areas. The schools had high populations of underrepresented students. In essence, I had to convince students with limited information and resources that MSU was the best college choice.

Many of my recruits were not academically prepared to move miles away from home. They were not financially equipped to pay the cost of attendance. They were also commonly uninformed about the career pathways they wanted to take. These students were just like I was at this point in life, yet my job title forced me to usher students into falling into the same cycle. At times, my morals conflicted with my job duties. There were times that I verbally instructed students to make other college choices because MSU was not the best fit for them. While these actions negatively impacted my recruitment statistics, they supported my moral plan of giving students the best advice I could give.

My professional journey took a shift in 2013 when I left my MSU job to join the Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF). At WHEF, I work for the Get2College (G2C) program as Director of the North MS Get2College Center. Daily, we provide high-quality, research-based college access and success programming for students across the state of Mississippi. This position allows me to share my personal story with families to guide them to an informed college choice. We have a particular interest in underrepresented populations, and we work earnestly to stay updated on issues impacting these students. "We envision a Mississippi where all people can secure the training and education beyond high school that will allow them to enhance their quality of life, strengthen their communities, and contribute to a vibrant and prosperous future for our state" (Get2College, 2019)

My current employer is committed to issues related to college access and success in the state of Mississippi. I have been blessed with the opportunity to learn more about higher education from a neutral lens. Our staff is annually granted the opportunity to participate in professional development across the United States with policymakers and fellow entities. This professional experience motivated me to seek higher education to be a better steward of the

leadership position. To do so, I completed my Master of Science in Leadership from Belhaven University in 2016.

Future Aspirations

My higher education journey and professional experiences have led me to pursue the Doctor of Education in Higher Education. In the future, I plan to continue serving in the college access and success sector. Whether the location changes or not, I am devoted to advocating for policies that impact rural college students. I have learned from twelve years of experience that it is essential to remain engaged through outreach programming. This dissertation in practice will support new policies and strategies for engaging with and supporting rural students. If I am granted the opportunity to take on an administrative role at a higher education institution, my personal philosophy will continue to be focused on the support of rural and other underserved populations.

At the very core of higher education, practitioners are in place to provide students with the opportunity to learn. To support student learning, I work to aid students through access initiatives that focus on the barriers rural students face. Affordability is a significant barrier for rural students. In my future endeavors, I aim to make college affordability more understandable and work to impact policies related to college costs for rural students. Policymakers, higher education administrators, student support staff, professors, and students will all need to be held accountable for their roles in this higher education world. More pressure should be placed on the leaders who deploy malicious policies that negatively impact the most vulnerable students, like rural students. I hope to, through my professional service, positively impact rural student attrition rates. When rural students drop out of college, they are unable to learn. When they cannot learn,

their life's trajectory could take a negative turn leading to vicious cycles that already plague rural communities.

Assumptions

Before going into the data collection phase of this study, I had three basic assumptions. I assumed rural college students might not have given much thought to their perceptions of the high school college counseling they received. If they had given much thought to the quality of the high school college counseling they received and their perceptions, our conversation might have prompted them to think critically about the topic. The act of thinking critically about their perceptions of the high school counseling they received had implications for my study.

I assumed some rural college students would be critical of the college counseling practices they experienced in high school. The critical perspective comes from an awareness of their rural community's conditions and the high schools they attended. This assumption comes from professional experience with rural high school students. Many of these students realize they are receiving minimal college counseling and understand the equity gaps.

The final assumption was that rural college students would be willing to openly share information about their barriers to making their college choice. Since this study was developed to provide awareness and changes for rural communities, rural students would cooperate fully. As a rural high school graduate, I was always willing to share my story to help the next generation. My willingness to share and communicate would be met with the same vigor and passion. Again, these were my assumptions.

Carnegie Project On The Educational Doctorate

This dissertation in practice was written in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements for the Doctor of Education in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi,

which is affiliated with the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED). The vision of CPED is to "prepare educational leaders to become well-equipped scholarly practitioners who provide stewardship of the profession and meet the educational challenges of the 21st century" (Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate, n.d.).

The Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate has three organizing principles to inform all good scholarship. The principles are (a) Equity, (b) Ethics, and (c) Social Justice (Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate, n.d.). I studied the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of college counseling on college choice. In the following section, I discussed the connection of my topic to each of the three principles.

Equity

The educational needs of rural areas receive a decreased amount of attention and funding, with most of the resources going towards urban areas (Bright, 2018). It is easy to assume that the system of higher education "would inherently provide both access and broad institutional choice to students; however, the availability of options, and postsecondary education in general, is not equitable" (Koricich, Chen & Hughes, 2018, p.285). By uncovering the perceptions of rural college students, this study will be used as a mechanism to help decrease the inequities in higher education as it relates to college counseling.

Social Justice

Social justice involves fostering teaching and learning communities inclusive of students across multiple diversity dimensions (Whipp & Scanlan, 2009). There is an increased commitment to and understanding social justice across various education levels (Hoyle, 2017). Beyond the isolation involved in rurality, rural students face "issues associated with poverty including physical and mental health concerns, student homelessness and transience, and parents

requiring assistance locating and obtaining community, state, and federal resources" (Bright, 2018, p. 12).

Using this study to improve college participation rates and college choice outcomes for marginalized populations is a matter of social justice. People of color make up large percentages of rural communities (Kozhimannil & Henning-Smith, 2018). Rural students face adversity because they grow up in poverty (Zuckerman, 2016). Because of rural communities' sociocultural elements, students may not receive good college counseling in high school. The journey to high education is impeded because rural students are traditionally unaware of the higher education opportunities and the process it takes to get there. The diverse perspectives and unique challenges of rural college students are essential to the social justice conversation.

Ethics

As a scholar-practitioner, I have a personal and ethical obligation to advocate for rural college students. I can never deny my rural roots and continually work to bring awareness to the issues plaguing this population of students in higher education. Throughout my professional career, my positions have allowed me to practice ethics through actionable strategies. Because of the recognized and documented disparities in rural college students' resources, this dissertation in practice offers an opportunity to shift the higher education agenda forward. This study will provide a qualitative perspective from rural students who have dealt with college counseling and are now dealing with the college choices they made.

Literature Review

A synthesized review of relevant literature is provided in this section to give context around critical elements related to college choice decisions for rural students. Four topics are addressed. The first is the general context of higher education. Next, historical trends in higher

education related to policies for specific populations are discussed. The third section highlights related literature on counseling, including high school guidance counseling, college counseling practices, and current models of practice. In the final section, college choice models, defined by note-worthy scholars, are reviewed.

General Context of Higher Education

When Harvard College was founded in 1636, higher education was established to produce intellectual clergy members and workers to improve society's conditions (Chan, 2016). Higher education was administered through the liberal arts college to maintain Christian culture's primary civilizational function (Ford, 2017). By the middle of the 19th century, land-grant colleges and research universities were established to advance industries, political goals, and research for cultural benefit (Ford, 2017). The purpose of higher education evolved over the years to a means for sustaining the American way of life by fostering our democracy (Dewey, 2008). Labaree (1997) summarizes higher education's purpose into three broad categories: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility.

Higher Education Policy

Over time, the United States' higher education extended to a broader cross-section of society, expanding the academic focus and research to align with society's relevant needs (Fitzgerald & Simon, 2012). The evolution of academic focus and those seeking higher education "forever changed higher education and the nation's use of knowledge to impact life...for the majority of the population" (Fitzgerald & Simon, 2012, p.39). Through the Morrill Act of 1862, students were taught agriculture, military tactics, and mechanics along with classical studies (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008).

"This act provided 30,000 acres of public land for each congressman with proceeds being devoted to the establishment of land-grant colleges" (Evans, 1991, p.5).

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill of 1944, was also established to support increasing interest in higher education (Palmadessa, 2016). The G.I. Bill provided service members with tuition, subsistence, books and supplies, and counseling services post World War II (Evans, 1991). Developing veterans to their full potential and providing a quality workforce added to the college setting's evolution (Evans, 1991). The presence of veterans on college campuses also made it socially acceptable to enter college late in life (Evans, 1991).

From as far back as 1947, the cost of college was a barrier to many students depriving the nation of a vast pool of future leaders and competent citizens (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). Political and social elements impacted higher education policy changes in the 1960s with the establishment of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 (Palmadessa, 2016). Through Title IV of the HEA, postsecondary student aid became widely available through grants and federally insured loans (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). In 1972, the Basic Grant Program, commonly known as the Pell Grant, "allowed millions of previously disenfranchised students access to higher education" (Evans, 1991, p. 6). The establishment of such programs indicated that our nation saw a need to make our citizenry better through financial investments (Evans, 1991). Since its inception, the HEA has been reauthorized in 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1986, 1992, 1998, and 2008 (Hegji, 2018). One important by-product of the HEA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) which serves as the gateway for many federally funded financial aid programs (Kofoed, 2016). Despite the large amounts of funds available, many students do not complete FAFSA because the form is complex (Kofoed, 2016).

Higher Education Trends

In this section, I will review trends in higher education related to college enrollment, access, and success. It is essential to note the data systems commonly used for research around these topics. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a data collection system of all postsecondary institutions that participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs (Hudson, 2017). Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) collects, analyzes, and reports data related to education in the United States and other nations (Ginder, Kelly-Reid & Mann, 2019).

College Enrollment. IPEDS data indicates that 4,918,985 new students entered college nationally in the fall of 2016 (Weber, 2018). In 2016, the change in the percentage of students entering college as first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates had decreased by less than 5% since 2001 (Weber, 2018). In spring 2019, overall postsecondary enrollments fell 1.7 percent from 2018 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019). In Mississippi, 2019 enrollment was down 2.6% compared to the previous year (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019). Among all students who started college in Fall 2017, 73.8 percent persisted at any college in fall 2018, noting that some students may have transferred to another institution (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019). Specifically, 3.5 million students enrolled in college for the first time in Fall 2017, and 2.6 million students persisted in Fall 2018 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019). "The overall first-year persistence rate improved slightly, with a 2.2 percentage point gain between 2009 and 2017" (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019, p.1).

College Access. Projected demographic trends suggest that the demand for college-educated workers will steadily increase as educated and experienced baby boomers retire from the labor force (Perna, 2006). Although educational attainment opportunities have increased and

policies are in place to improve college access, enrollment and attainment gaps have widened over time (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Some theories suggest students and families assume the costs of undertaking higher education outweigh the expected benefits (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). "While upper-income students may be able to rely upon parental savings, lower-income students may face significant financial barriers when trying to access college" (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016, p.5). Under-represented and non-college-educated families may not have information about college costs and benefits nor understand the process of preparing for, applying to, and selecting a college (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Because there are so many options in college sector types, academic majors, financing options, job market demands, and job placement projections, informational failures are common for under-represented communities (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). The financial, informational and behavioral, and academic barriers to college access are not mutually exclusive (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). For low-income, minority, first-generation, and rural college students who often attend under-resourced high schools, these barriers can intersect (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). "Market imperfections and behavioral realities motivate policy efforts to improve college access" (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016, p.5).

College Success. College success can be defined as a student's completion of a post-secondary credential. For some students, college success can be measured in smaller increments: one class at a time (Tinto, 2012). While college access has more than doubled over the years, college success rates have only increased slightly (Tinto, 2012). Nearly 63% of students attending four-year colleges will earn a bachelor's degree and 40% of community college students will gain a certificate or associate's degree (Tinto, 2012).

The first year is a crucial point of emphasis because more students leave during this year than others (Coleman, Skidmore, & Weller, 2018). Some students withdraw within the first year because of financial or personal problems (Lumen Learning, 2019). Most students fail to succeed in college due to their academic performance (Lumen Learning, 2019). In studies that have examined the relationship between positive affect and college-success variables, the two most commonly assessed college-success variables are intellectual ability or intelligence and grades (Nickerson et al., 2010). Tinto suggested that student integration and the quality of faculty-student interaction impact student success in college (Coleman et al., 2018). Tinto (2012) challenges institutions to take student success seriously and look beyond investments in retention programs. Institutions are further challenged to pay attention to college success gaps between high and low-income students (Tinto, 2012). Colleges of all types can focus on the classroom because student success is rooted there (Tinto, 2012). Student success is further supported when institutions focus on the knowledge and skills needed for life after college (Tinto, 2012).

High School Counseling

In this section, I will review the roles and responsibilities of the high school guidance counselor and the implications counseling has for college choice. College guidance and advising will be further discussed and the varying ways in which the practice can occur. I will explore literature related to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model and the College Advising Corps (CAC)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) supports school counselors at all levels through advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2019). They aim to provide empowerment by acquiring knowledge, skills, linkages, and resources to promote student

success in the school and abroad (ASCA, 2019). In the preamble of the Ethical Standards for School Counselors, ASCA (2016) states, "school counselors are advocates, leaders, collaborators, and consultants who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success" (p.1). By advocating for an education system that provides an environment for all students to gain a quality education, school counselors tangibly demonstrate their commitment to student learning (ASCA, 2016).

The ASCA National Model was first introduced in 2003 and provided a comprehensive and results-focused framework for practice within school counseling programs (Fye, Miller, and Rainey, 2018). The model provides counselors with the opportunity to positively impact student achievement, attendance, and discipline (ASCA, 2020). ASCA also developed a group of standards in 2014 that replaced the ASCA Student Standards. (ASCA, 2019). "The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career Readiness for Every Student model describes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness, and social/emotional development" (ASCA, 2014, p.1). These standards are research-based and provide a base for action planning and activities within a school counseling program (ASCA, 2019).

While the ASCA National Model provides a comprehensive school counseling program model, research shows that counselors struggle to implement their programs (Fye et al., 2018). Recent studies have shown that the "barriers to more widely available and effective counseling are rooted in school finances, counselor training programs, and competing demands for counselors' time" (Avery et al., 2014, p.3). Because counselors have to focus on state testing, large student to counselor ratios, and other non-counseling duties, the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs is negatively impacted (Dixon Rayle & Adams,

2007). To achieve better counseling outcomes for students, counselors can shift their focus to self-advocacy (Fye et al., 2018). By providing research-based outcomes and data-driven evidence, counselors can justify the need to remove non-counseling duties (Fye et al., 2018). In the latest version of the national model, counselors are encouraged to implement their counseling programs under four main tenants: (a) define, (b) manage, (c) deliver, and (d) assess (ASCA, 2019).

National College Advising Corps. Although research shows the benefits of going to college and standards are in place to sufficiently counsel students on the steps to college entry, there are still gaps in access and significant "disparities in participation by race and income" (Morris, 2009, p.1). Aside from high school counselors, teachers, and parents, improving college participation rates will require the participation of multiple stakeholders (Morris, 2009). The National College Advising Corps (NCAC) has been established to increase the number of students attending college (Morris, 2009). NCAC works to remove the barriers school counselors face because of their large cohort numbers by deploying peer advisors to assist with advising services and college applications (Morris, 2009).

The NCAC advisors are current college students who receive training about financial aid, college fit, college entrance exams, college choice, college applications, mentorship, and more (Morris, 2009). During the spring semester, these advisors are recruited then deployed during the following fall semester (Morris, 2009). Understanding that college advising is one of many responsibilities a high school counselor has to consider, the NCAC advisors work to supplement their efforts through tangible action on-site (Morris, 2009). Beyond establishing a program that looks good on paper, the NCAC is developing standards for growth and development "while establishing a common set of data elements for accountability" (Morris, 2009, p. 2)

College Choice Models

College choice models have "increased the knowledge and understanding of the process of choosing to pursue post-secondary education" (Messer, 2016, p. 12). College choice must continue to be addressed in research, policy, and practice because college access and college choice gaps continue to exist (Perna, 2006). By addressing college access and choice gaps, students are given more opportunities to maximize "the private and public benefits that result from higher education" (Perna, 2006, p.105). While reviewing the literature on college choice, several models were identified in key research. "Numerous models have been developed and proposed as ways to understand the process of choosing a college" (Iloh, 2018, p.229). In this section, I will discuss the following models and their various components: (a) the Chapman Model, (b) the Jackson Model, (c) the Hanson and Little Model, and (d) the Hossler and Gallagher Model.

Chapman Model

The Chapman Model was established in 1981 and notes that students' college choices are influenced by internal and external factors (Barr, 2018). The Chapman Model is institution-based and separates the college choice into two stages: (a) pre-search and (b) search (Vrontis et al., 2007). Factors such as race, sex, and socioeconomic status are defined as internal influences (Barr, 2018). External influencers include parent preference, school counselor guidance, and the level of communication with colleges (Barr, 2018).

Jackson Model

The student-based Jackson Model was established in 1982 and includes three distinct college choice phases (Barr, 2018). The first phase is "preference" and involves the student collecting information about their college options (Barr, 2018). Academic achievement, family

background, and the student's social context influence these aspirations (Vrontis et al., 2007). The "exclusion" phase involves eliminating college options based on the student's wants and needs (Barr, 2018). Factors related to the cost of attendance, location, or academic quality play into the exclusion phase (Vronti et al., 2007). The last phase, "evaluation," consists of the student making a final decision to attend a specific college (Barr, 2018).

Hanson and Litten Model

The Hanson and Litten model is a hybrid model of the Jackson and Chapman models (Vrontis et al., 2007). This model was established in 1982 and provides significant contributions to college choice literature (Vronti et al., 2007). The Hanson and Litten model consists of a multi-step process for making college choices (Barr, 2018). The first step begins with a student realizing they want to attend college (Barr, 2018). Students then transition to searching for suitable college choices by collecting as much information as possible (Barr, 2018). After the information review, students apply to colleges and eventually make their final college choice (Barr, 2018). This simple model appears to incorporate the necessary steps for making a college choice but fails to contextualize the factors influencing college choice beyond the information collection phase (Barr, 2018).

Hossler and Gallagher Model

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) took college choice models designed by Larry Litten and Gregory Jackson and developed their own model. This model is widely recognized and accepted in college choice literature (Iloh, 2018). Hossler and Gallagher's three phases of college choice are (a) predisposition, (b) search, and (c) choice. Students engage in deciding if they want to pursue college: predisposition. They then investigate the potential college options they have:

search. Lastly, they make a decision, apply for admissions, and proceed with the enrollment process: choice.

Internal and external factors influence a student's matriculation cycle through the three phases of college choice. Socio-economic status is cumulative and positively correlates with college attendance (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Factors such as involvement in student clubs, parental encouragement, peer influence, and exposure to pre-college curricula were also noted to impact the pre-disposition phase of the college choice model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The search phase varies by student ability. Students with higher ACT and SAT scores tend to focus attention on more selective colleges. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) recommend that policymakers assist students and parents in exploring more diverse post-secondary options. Due to inaccurate information transfer and misinformed decisions, some students end up making college decisions that lead to dissatisfaction and non-persistence (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The interactive nature of the choice phase is impacted by college courtship and financial aid awards. The student's perceptions of the institution's quality influence how far the school moves up the college choice set (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). As a result of an interaction between students and their attributes and increasingly specific information about institutional quality, net price, and academic programs, students finally arrive at an enrollment decision (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Contemporary Perspectives

Modern college choice models challenge Hossler and Gallagher's model because it focuses on college as a one-time event (Iloh, 2018). In today's society, choosing a college may occur on more than one campus and does not happen on a traditional timeline (Iloh, 2018). With the changes in college choice behavior, college choice models like the Perna Model argue that

students make their choices from a sociological perspective (Barr, 2018). The Perna Model will be discussed later in my conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework which informed my study of the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice has four elements: (a) the Perna College Choice Model, (b) Bourdieu's Theory of Capital, (c) the Concept of Rurality, and (d) College Board's Eight Components of College and Career Counseling. The elements were selected because of their comprehensive overlapping components. In the following paragraphs, I will describe each of those four elements and their implications for my study.

Perna Model

Perna (2006) argues that past college choice models fail to understand college choice across different groups sufficiently. More recent research on college choice models calls for linkage of the economics of human capital models and sociological notions of cultural and social capital (Perna, 2006). A model that connects economic and sociological perspectives is more comprehensive in examining students' college choices (Perna, 2006). In the Perna model, college decisions are made holistically based on their "situated context" (Perna, 2006). The four contextual layers include the individual's habitus, school and community context, the higher education context, and the broader social, economic, and policy context (Perna, 2006).

A student's habitus includes gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural capital, and social capital (Perna, 2006). The context of school and community incorporates the social influences school counselors and teachers have on the students' college choices (Perna, 2006). The higher education context recognizes the important influences colleges have on college choice because of their recruitment efforts, regional or national reputations, and enrollment

decisions (Perna, 2006). Finally, the social, economic, and policy context recognizes the connections between policy and college choice (Perna, 2006). Research has shown that policies associated with education, at any level, are related to college enrollment patterns (Perna, 2006).

Bourdieu's Theory of Capital

Capital can be presented as economic, cultural, or social (Bourdieu, 1986). Research shows that educational achievements are connected to these various forms of capital (Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016). If students have more access to capital, they are more likely to achieve in education (Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016). Economic capital can be converted into money easily and quickly (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital and may be presented as educational qualifications that undergird students' pursuits of higher education credentials (Bourdieu, 1986). Higher education provides students with a competitive advantage in their quest to acquire social positions (Labaree, 1997). Lastly, social capital is made up of social connections that can be converted into economic capital and presented as nobility titles (Bourdieu, 1986). For this paper, I focused on cultural and social capital as they connect to my conceptual framework.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's theory focuses more on cultural capital than social capital (Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016). Cultural capital is the most advantageous form of capital in the educational system, and its symbolic power can be, via education, transformed into economic capital (Košutic, 2017). Cultural capital can exist in three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986). Long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body are cultural capital in the embodied state (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural goods such as pictures, books, and instruments are forms of cultural capital in the objectified state. In the

institutionalized state, a form of objectification must be set apart because it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu, 1986). "By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, academic qualification makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.51).

Social Capital

"Social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structures, which can be mobilized when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action" (Lin, 2001, p. 24). At its rarest form, social capital constitutes an investment in relationships with expected outcomes (Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016). An individual can use relationships with other individuals to achieve their goals (Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016). "Social capital encompasses the totality of resources that stem from belonging to groups beyond the family, enabling all members to use the collective capital" (Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016, p.90). A student's access to social networks that provide information about and assistance applying to college are forms of social capital in the college choice context (Lin, 2001). Participating in the college entrance process, attending college, and obtaining a college degree provide students with more economic mobility and capital gains (Lin, 2001).

The value placed on gaining higher education and the social relationships that a student possesses has implications for that student's college enrollment and success. Through the cultural capital lens of Bourdieu's theory of capital, I contextualized how students attach value to college credentials, influencing their college choice. I assessed how much access rural college students had to information and assistance from their social networks when navigating the college choice process through the social capital lens.

The Concept of Rurality

From 1910 to 2010, the urban landscape structure changed to the diffusion of urban and suburban-style development across the landscape (Ratcliffe, 2015). Formerly, there were closer boundaries and relationships between urban and rural areas (Ratcliffe, 2015). The rural regions' gradual isolation came to be because of newly developed population definitions and urban development (Ratcliffe, 2015). Hawley et al. (2016) argue that "researchers and policy-makers may determine that existing standardized definitions do not adequately preserve and measure the unique contexts of individual rural places" (p.9). Despite the ambiguity of the definitions, population classes represent geographical locations by units such as school districts, zip codes, or census tracts (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). According to Ratcliffe et al. (2016), the rural designation is given to areas of the United States with 2,500 residents or less.

The rural portion of the United States encompasses a wide variety of settlements, from densely settled small towns and "large-lot" housing subdivisions on the fringes of urban areas, to more sparsely populated and remote areas (p.1). Koricich et al. (2018) note:

"Rural communities represent the backbone of American agriculture and other natural resource industries, such as timber, fossil fuels, and clean energy. Despite their undeniable importance to our national prosperity and the idyllic visions conjured by the term "rural," these communities and their residents often experience greater levels of poverty than urban areas, and such gaps are only likely to increase as rural communities become more racially diverse" (p.283).

Policymakers often overlook rural America because they may not be familiar with these communities or the issues they face (Showalter et al., 2017). While racial, ethnic, gender groups are often discussed around diversity in higher education, social class is rarely mentioned

(Salomon-Fernández, 2018). If we fail to listen to the rural community's voices, we ignore our commitment to provide a high-quality education to every student (Lavalley, 2016). The demands of the job market have shifted, so it is important to reconsider what it means to prepare rural students for higher education (Showalter et al., 2017).

Race

Nearly 80 percent of the rural populations are white. (United States Department of Agriculture, 2018). Substantial growth has occurred for people of color in rural communities in the last few decades (Kozhimannil & Henning-Smith, 2018). Hispanic citizens make up nine percent of the population but are the fastest-growing segment (United States Department of Agriculture, 2018). American Indians make up two percent of the population (United States Department of Agriculture, 2018). Of the people of color and American Indians in rural communities, less than 10% have a college degree due to centuries of systemic oppression (Kozhimannil & Henning-Smith, 2016).

Socioeconomic Status

Compared to urban areas, rural communities are experiencing increasingly more significant poverty levels (Koricich, Chen & Hughes, 2018). Low-wage service and seasonal employment are the root causes of the persistence of poverty in rural places (Zuckerman, 2016). Also, declining local economies, population loss, and the potential demise of rural communities are associated with those adverse outcomes (Zuckerman, 2016). A rural student is more likely to earn a bachelor's degree if their family income is \$50,000 or more than a student whose family income is \$25,000 or less (Means, 2018).

Education Deserts

Education deserts are communities where postsecondary education opportunities are minimal (Hillman & Weichman, 2016). Because rural students live in these education deserts, gaps in higher education access continue to grow (Hillman & Weichman, 2016). Policymakers and educational leaders often view the decisions students make about higher education as though it were independent of location, which is an incorrect assessment (Hillman & Weichman, 2016). Poverty, geographic isolation, cultural isolation, and the lack of school and community resources impact college access for rural students living in education deserts (Bright, 2018).

Rural College Access

Higher education advocates fight for equity and argue that rural students deserve educational opportunities (Showalter et al., 2017). Rural students should also be exposed to a wide range of postsecondary opportunities to better understand their economic opportunities (Koricich et al., 2018). Guidance counselors, college admissions officials, and community-based organizations usually lead conversations about rural college-going (Tieken, 2016). The conversation continues further regarding salaries, debt, academic majors, and college credentials (Tieken, 2016). Professionals working in rural schools have an opportunity to combine resources to improve support for college access and success for these students (Means, 2018). The National College Access Network (NCAN) offers governing principles for college access and has a mission to build, strengthen, and empower communities committed to college access and success (NCAN, n.d.). NCAN is a reputable source for professionals working in rural schools and provided its members with professional development, networking, benchmarking, tools, and advocacy

Rural College Recruitment

Rural students approach the postsecondary transition with significant concerns about their ability to enter and succeed in college due to the lack of resources and information (Morton et al., 2018). The geographic isolation or economic hardships heighten concerns around academic preparation, college admissions, and scholarships (Morton et al., 2018). Students will not have a complete awareness of what a college requires or what it offers if the institution is not reaching out to students (Baker et al., 2013). Admissions officers have recently begun to create new strategies that focus on recruiting rural high school students (Anderson, 2017).

College Enrollment, Retention, and Degree Attainment

In past years, a college degree was unnecessary for individuals living in rural areas to get a job, so fewer people in those communities are convinced that enrolling in college is worth the money and effort (Higher Ed Direct, 2017). When it comes to degree attainment, rural students lag because of their lower socioeconomic background (Byun et al., 2012). Bachelor's degree recipients from cities and suburbs exceed rural recipients by more than ten percentage points (United States Department of Education, 2018).

Since the social and financial barriers rural students face when entering college still exist while attending, colleges are challenged to support rural students (Schaidle, 2018). Rural students who choose to enroll in college are more likely than urban students to withdraw between their freshmen and sophomore years (Schaidle, 2018). Rural students are more hesitant to ask for assistance and are often suspicious of student support services (Schaidle, 2018). Although the barriers are evident, rural students can still be successful at postsecondary attainment because they have substantial social capital through familial support systems (Nelson, 2016). Recreating the familial structures through intentional parental engagement is a

recommended practice of support because it allows families to understand the college experience better and provide context to the parental expectations (Schaidle, 2018).

Brain Drain

Participation in the labor force has dropped considerably due to the rural population growing older, leading to a reduction in rural employment (United States Department of Agriculture, 2018). Also, rural youth flee their communities searching for economic and geographic mobility through higher education (Carr & Kefalas, 2011). This flight from the countryside is known as "brain drain" (Carr & Kefalas, 2011). After degree attainment, rural students are compelled to move to big cities for jobs (Housing Assistance Council, 2012). The survival of rural communities will be grounded in attracting and maintaining educated and skilled workers (Housing Assistance Council, 2012).

The intellectual capital of rural towns is ripped away due to brain drain (Kumar, 2018). The farming, logging, and mining industries have undergone modern upgrades in technology, explaining a large part of the migration (Kumar, 2018). These economic changes tend to harm rural populations because the governments in rural towns lose their local tax base (Kumar, 2018). States who lose their talented and educated students and fail to attract new residents are likely to continue to see declines in their economic bases (United States Congress, 2019). Subsequently, local governments must cut spending which hurts infrastructure. (Kumar, 2018). As the population drops, schools close, and local businesses suffer, driving more people to cities (Kumar, 2018).

Substantial economic benefits come to states who can attract and retain educated adults (United States Congress, 2019). Southeastern states such as West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana are doing a poor job attracting and

retaining highly educated individuals (United States Congress, 2019). Additionally, civil discord is building as struggling communities deteriorate (United States Congress, 2019). The civil conflict can be seen in "today's polarized political environment" (United States Congress, 2019, p. 21). The increased social segregation of brain drain limits disparate groups' opportunities (United States Congress, 2019). When the privileged and resourceful citizens flee rural areas, the remaining citizens are left to struggle with the general operations of their small towns and communities (United States Congress, 2019).

Political Policy

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in 2015 requiring annual testing and reporting on the achievement of subpopulations of students in the United States (Brenner, 2016). The Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) specifically addresses issues rural students may face (Brenner, 2016). ESSA also authorizes grant programs that focus on rural populations (Brenner, 2016, p. 25). Policies like ESSA bring tangible awareness and action to education barriers in rural America by taking steps to ensure the geographic distribution of competitive grants when state development plans are being made (Brenner, 2016, p. 26). Because of ESSA, valuable data is provided to inform policymakers about the sufficiency of provisions for rural students and families (Brenner, 2016).

College Board College and Career Counseling Model

Students are considered college and career ready when they have acquired skills necessary to succeed in entry-level college courses and have the knowledge and skills needed to pursue a career pathway (Conley, 2010). Research supports the notion that school counselors play a key role in developing equitable student college and career readiness skills (Perusse et al., 2015). College Board's eight components of college and career readiness counseling chart a

“comprehensive, systemic approach to inspiring all students to, and prepare them for, college success and opportunity — especially students from underrepresented populations” (College Board, 2010, p.2). The components are: (a) college aspirations, (b) academic planning for college and career readiness, (c) enrichment and extracurricular engagement, (d) college and career exploration and selection processes, (e) college and career assessments, (f) college affordability planning, (g) college and career admission processes, and (h) transition from high school graduation to college enrollment (College Board, 2010).

The first component, college aspirations, involves building a college-going culture and providing early awareness and motivation to pursue college (Perusse et al., 2015). The second component, academic planning for college and career readiness, involves making sure students are taking the required high school courses to prepare them for college coursework (Perusse et al., 2015). The enrichment and extracurricular engagement component involves giving students “enrichment opportunities that build leadership, nurture talents and interests, and increase engagement with school” (Perusse et al., 2015, p.32). The fourth component involves connecting academic preparation to career aspirations through ongoing exposure to information to make an informed college choice (Perusse et al., 2015). College and career assessments are used in component five to guide students toward a career that fits (Perusse et al., 2015). College affordability planning involves providing students and families with information about the cost of college, financial aid and scholarships, and the requirements for qualification so they can create a financial plan of action (Perusse et al., 2015). Component seven includes the college and career applications process, ensuring students understand their options to find the best fit (Perusse et al., 2015). The last and final component involves getting students connected to school

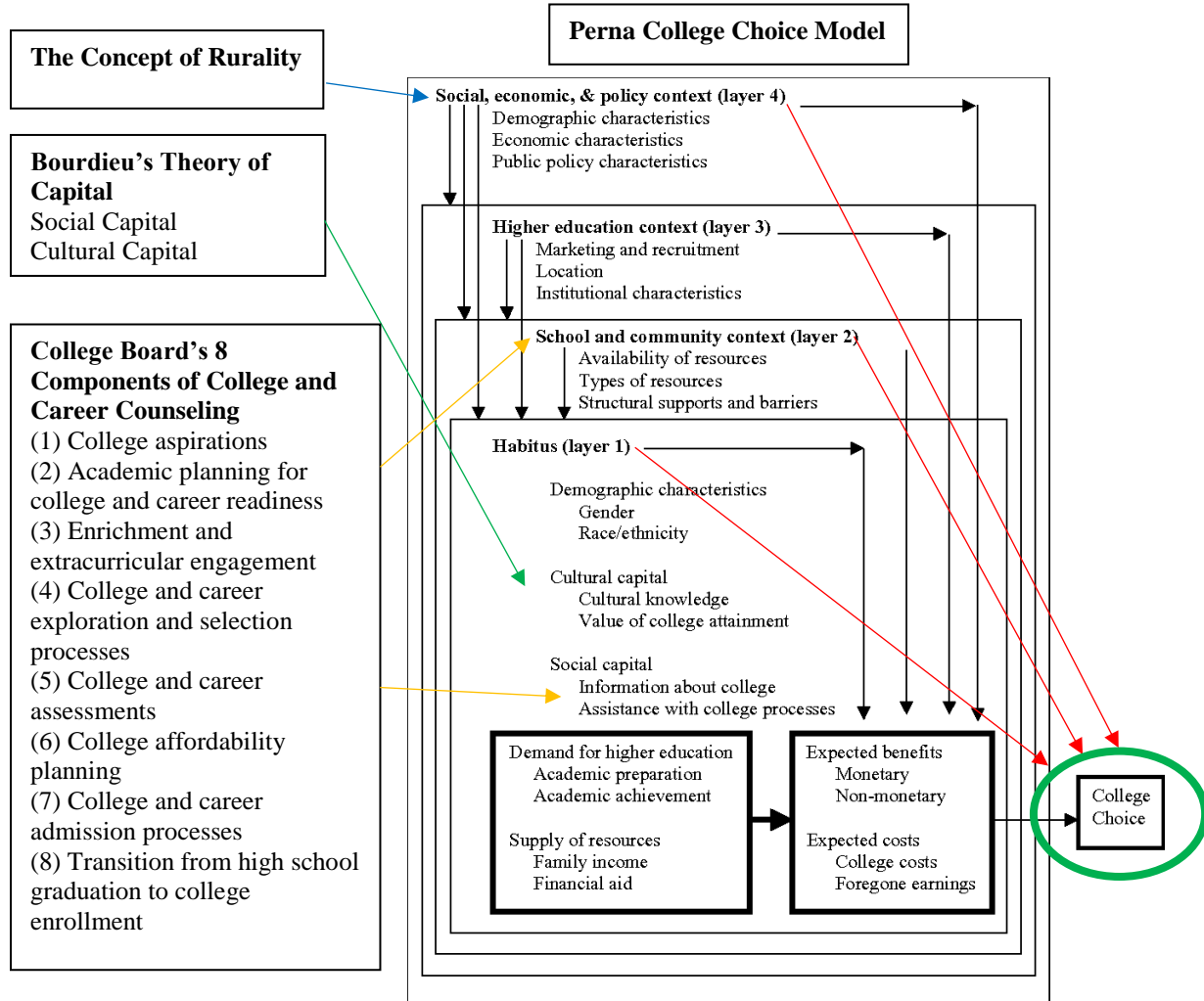
and community resources to seamlessly transition from high school to college (Perusse et al., 2015).

The College Board's eight college and career readiness counseling components outline recommendations for tangible actions students should take as they make their college choices. Within my conceptual framework, this element intersects with components of Bourdieu's theory of capital. It also highlights the importance and value of the people and resources within the students' school and community. The action steps outlined in this model were important for the research design and the execution of the qualitative research data collection.

Conceptual Framework Summary

The four elements were intentionally selected because they provide the platform for holistic analysis of students' lived experiences in my study. The Perna Model served as the core element of my conceptual framework. The concept of rurality intersects with the Perna model within the social, economic, and policy context. Rural communities battle social, economic, and policy challenges consistently. The availability of information and social influence within the habitus directly connect to the concepts of Bourdieu's Theory of Capital. Board's Eight Components of College and Career Counseling model intersects with the Perna model at the habitus and the social and community context. The relationships within habitus have an influential impact on the college and career exploration and selection processes. The types of information and resources available in communities are also associated with College Board's model components. The four framework elements informed my study as I investigated the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice. A visual representation of my conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study



Methodology

Because I studied the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of college counseling on college choice, I used qualitative analysis. “Qualitative research design is concerned with understanding the phenomena from the participants’ perspectives” (Ngozwana, 2018, p.20). Becker (1996) opines that merely guessing and making assumptions about meaning-making is risky for those interested in understanding a phenomenon. “If we don't find out from

people what meanings they are actually giving to things...we will invent them” (Becker, 1996, p. 58).

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context of a setting by gathering personal information and making an interpretation shaped by the researchers' own experiences and background (Cresswell, 2002). Within the tradition of qualitative methods, I used the phenomenological research method. I was able to identify the essence of the perceptions of the participants through discussions about their lived experiences (Cresswell, 2002). Using the phenomenological research method allowed me to highlight specific participant experiences subjectively (Qutoshi, 2018). Personal knowledge aided in interpreting the phenomena (Qutoshi, 2018). I bracketed my own experiences while collecting data to understand those of my study participants (Cresswell, 2002).

Research Design

I studied rural students from three different institutions. These institutions have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The institutions are named State University, State Community College, and Faith-Based HBCU. These three institutions provide diversity in culture and climate representing some of the types of institutions rural college students may attend. State University is a four-year, public institution. State Community College is a rural, two-year institution. Faith-Based HBCU is a faith-based, historically black college (HBCU)

Research Participants

The participants in this study were first-time college freshmen who enrolled in college directly after high school graduation and are between 18 and 19. These students are Mississippi residents from zip codes that fall into the rural category, as described earlier in this body of

work. For my study, rural areas were defined as communities with populations of 2,500 or less (See Appendix A).

Data Collection And Analysis

Institutional research departments for State University, State Community College, and Faith-Based HBCU were solicited for permission and assistance in contacting prospective research participants. I contacted the institutional research departments via email requesting access to the target research pool. To prevent potential concerns with safety and malicious solicitation, I provided institutional research departments with an explanation of the proposed study, including the dissertation topic, methodology, and research design (See Appendix B). Sample email drafts were provided as well. The institutional research departments were asked to share recruitment emails with students in the target research pool (See Appendix C).

Prospective participants were asked to complete a consent form (See Appendix D). Once participants were selected, I conducted 60 to 90- minute, semi-structured interviews (See Appendix E). Using semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have flexibility with interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A list of questions guided the interviews, but neither the exact wording nor order of the questions were pre-determined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following this interview format created an opportunity for reaction and response to emerging ideas and viewpoints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As it relates to sample size, “it is assumed that studies with large samples will provide more than enough data” (Roy et al., 2015, p. 253). Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. Data saturation occurred when responses could be anticipated (Sandelowski, 1992).

Because I was an instrument during data collection and analysis, my personal, professional, and future positionalities were acknowledged and considered. It is common

practice for researchers who use the phenomenological research method to recognize their own experiences of the phenomenon to bracket those experiences before conducting interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During interviews, I recorded conversations and took hand-written field notes for transcription. Additionally, I visually observed the research participants. Observation offered a first-hand account of the situation providing a more holistic view of the participant responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

During data analysis, I identified data points or themes that were responsive to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These themes were “as small as a word used to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.203). Once themes were determined, I utilized *member checking* to share the themes with participants to see if they agreed and accepted them.

Member checking is a qualitative data collection technique that involves cross-checking and reflection to solidify understanding of the interview questions and responses (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Member checking can also be referred to as informant feedback (Varpio et al., 2017). During this process, the researcher presents elements of data transcripts and themes to all or some participants for feedback (Varpio et al., 2017). The researcher connects with one or more participants, in writing or an interview, to check if the data is complete, realistic, fair, and representative (Creswell, 2005). This technique also allows the researcher to ensure that their understanding aligns with the participants’ (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Member checking promotes an understanding of how mindful and reflective a researcher plans to be with the data (Naidu & Prose, 2018). For my study, member checking took place in focus group meetings that lasted between 30 to 45 minutes (See Appendix F).

IRB Review

The researcher has an ethical obligation to the research participants. One way to fulfill this obligation is by seeking peer review. I solicited approval from the Institutional Review Board of “State University.” Additional approvals were sought by other host institutions (See Appendices G, H, and I).

Research Questions

The research questions I wanted to answer regarding the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice were:

1. What are the lived experiences of rural college students regarding the high school college counseling they received?
2. What are the perceptions of rural college students regarding the impact of high school college counseling on their college choice?

Conclusion

In manuscript one, I identified high school college counseling as a current problem of practice in higher education. I selected the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice as my specific dimension of the problem of practice. My personal, professional, and future positions were also shared. I identified four elements that make up my conceptual framework: (a) Bourdieu’s Theory of Capital, (b) the concept of Rurality, (c) College Board’s Eight Components of College and Career Counseling, and (d) the Perna College Choice Model. Current literature surrounding the problem of practice was provided to add context to this study's overall purpose.

This manuscript is the first of three manuscripts. In manuscript two, I presented the qualitative data and associated themes. In manuscript three, I made meaning of the data and offered recommendations for practice and research.

CHAPTER II

DATA

Post-secondary education is highly valued and makes entering the evolving job market more attainable (Morris, 2009), but the process of accessing college can be complex, preventing students from obtaining credentials. College counseling equips students with the necessary knowledge and information to ease the transition from high school to college. College counseling for high school students can be examined with a broad segment of individuals in mind. Attention can be given to guidance counselors, teachers, and any adults who assist students in the traditional high school setting. These adults greatly influence college choice due to direct and indirect interactions in school and the community.

In Manuscript One, I identified high school college counseling as a current problem of practice in higher education. This problem has a more profound impact on rural students' lives because without enrolling in college and obtaining a college degree, they will not have equitable economic mobility opportunities (Lin, 2001). Personally and professionally, I have witnessed the complexities rural students face when choosing to enroll in college—issues impacting rural communities influence student behaviors around college choice.

Higher education researchers have not deeply studied the impact of growing up in a rural community on college access and success (Koricich, 2013). This project adds to the body of research by exploring the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school

college counseling on college choice. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of rural college students regarding the high school college counseling they received?
2. What are the perceptions of rural college students regarding the impact of high school college counseling on their college choice?

This manuscript provides an overview of the research design. Data gathered during the study are also presented before moving to a brief concluding statement.

Research Design

To address the research questions, I used qualitative research to understand the context of the participants' experiences along with using interpretation shaped by my own experiences (Cressell, 2002). Specifically, I used the phenomenological research method to identify the essence of the participants' perceptions (Qutoshi, 2018). Participants were Mississippi residents from rural communities with populations of 2,500 or fewer and first-time college freshmen who enrolled in one of three Mississippi higher education institutions directly after high school graduation. It was important to select students who could recollect actions related to college counseling while in high school. The three sites, each of which was assigned a pseudonym, were chosen to collectively represent the types of institutions rural college students attend in Mississippi. State Community College represents the state's community colleges, Faith-Based HBCU the state's private colleges and HBCUs, and State University the state's four-year public institutions. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to use a list of questions while having the freedom to deviate as emerging ideas and viewpoints arose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were conducted until responses and themes became redundant and saturation was reached (Sandelowski, 1992).

Participant Recruitment

Institutional research applications were completed and approval was granted by the institutional research departments for State University, State Community College, and Faith-Based HBCU (See Appendices G, H, and I). For State University, the research department played a very active role in distributing the participant recruitment email. Using Qualtrics XM, 382 students were recruited in the original distribution. The research department also granted permission for the recruitment email to be shared with colleagues for distribution. Sixteen students consented to participate in the study with eight students from State University completing participation.

For State Community College, the research department had a more hands-off approach. I was given the freedom to connect with students through professional colleagues. Staff members from the Office of Student Recruitment and Financial Aid assisted in distributing the recruitment email. Eighty-seven students were reached with the distribution email. One student consented and one student participated in the study.

The institutional research department at Faith-Based HBCU offered assistance with the recruitment distribution. Also, a member of the Office of Admissions and Recruitment assisted with the distribution. Eighty-nine students were invited to participate in the study. Four students consented. One student participated in the study.

Covid-19

Data collection was deeply impacted by the onslaught of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). This emerging respiratory disease rapidly changed from an epidemic outbreak to a global pandemic infecting millions (Terpos et al., 2020). This disease impacted the world through social distancing measures and the drops in socioeconomics (Terpos et al., 2020). In the

Spring semester of 2020, social distancing and safety guidelines forced schools and businesses to close or function at a lower capacity. “The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) currently recommended the use of face coverings in public and continued social distancing” (Mills & Allen, 2020, p. 4). Higher education institutions shifted to offering virtual and hybrid learning environments to protect students from the disease.

Because of these shifts, research participant recruitment, engagement, and data collection efforts had to be revised. To maintain safe social distancing, I proceeded with using cloud-based video conferencing software and audio phone calls. Although nonverbal cues and body language were difficult to observe and record, I collected meaningful data. It is also important to note that COVID-19 may have impacted participants’ responses to interview questions. Current research participants view the pandemic as a severe threat, reported hesitancy to participate, and demonstrated moderate/severe symptoms of anxiety, depression, and severe distress (Cardel et al., 2020).

Data Presentation

This section includes an overview of the interview process, acknowledgment of my role as the researcher, participant biographies, and a detailed presentation of the qualitative data. The data is presented in the order of the interview protocol. The themes that were gleaned from each interview question are shared.

Interview Process/Role Of The Researcher

The interviews were guided by a list of predetermined questions supplemented by follow-up questions and probes based on participant responses. Each interview began with an unstructured conversation about the participants’ hometowns and high schools followed by the interview protocol. As a qualitative researcher, my presence as the research instrument is noted.

Because interviews were conducted using video conferencing software, participant responses were not richly impacted by my physical presence as the instrument. Interviews were audio-recorded and field notes were taken. Audio transcription was used following each interview. As a qualitative researcher following the phenomenological research method, it was vital for me to remain aware of my own experiences while bracketing those experiences before and during interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participant Biographies

Ten students participated in the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions and responses revealed demographic data that could reveal their identities. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. A brief biographical description of each participant is provided below. To add texture and character to the biographies, I shared quotes from each participant's response to the ice-breaker prompt inviting participants to share about their hometown.

Beth

Beth is a Caucasian female who attends State University. Her major is Philosophy with a Religion emphasis. She wants to attend grad school for religious studies and spend a few years as a missionary before teaching at the college level. Her favorite hobbies are ballroom dancing and hand-embroidery.

At home, Beth lived with her mother and father. She grew up in a town in Mississippi's northeastern region with an estimated population of about 200. The video conference interview was interrupted because their broadband internet service was inadequate. We finished the interview over the phone. Beth noted that a Dollar General recently opened in her town, which is

a big deal for the community. When speaking about her community, she noted that it is common to see the same people at schools, grocery stores, and churches.

Destiny

Destiny is an African American female who attends State University. Her major is Biology, and she plans to attend medical school. Her career goal is to become a pediatrician. In her free time, she enjoys binge-watching the show “Criminal Minds.” At home, she lived with her mother and sister. Her hometown has a little over 1,100 residents. She noted that her town is “really small” and they “have no traffic lights at all.” In her town, “everyone pretty much knows each other and they have a well-known bakery.” She attended high school in her hometown for two years then transferred to a high school specifically designed for academically gifted students.

Carter

Carter is an African American female who attends State University. She is a Chemistry major with an emphasis in Biochemistry. She is on the Pre-Medicine track and hopes to become a neonatologist. Her interesting fact is she learned to sew, knit, and crochet during the COVID-19 quarantine period.

Before leaving for college, Carter lived at home with her mom. Her hometown is in the “middle of nowhere” with a little under 600 residents. When noting that I knew where the town was, she responded with, “You know where it is?” She also said, “it is really, really small with nothing to do, and you know everybody.” Her high school consolidated with another school in the county. Like Destiny, Carter transferred to a high school specifically designed for academically gifted students.

Kamper

Kamper is a Caucasian male who attends State University. His hometown has a little less than 2,100 residents. When speaking about his hometown, he said, "it's a small town." There was never really any expansion as far as new businesses." He lit up when speaking about sporting events at the school since that was "the only social thing." He jokingly added, "there would always be a gift shop or something to open up in that town. I always thought, Why would you want to open a gift shop here? There's four of us here."

Beverly

Beverly is an African American female who attends State University. Her major is elementary education and she plans to teach in a rural area elementary school in Mississippi for a few years after she graduates. She hopes to later advance to teaching at the high school level once she is more experienced.

Before going to college, she lived with her mom, dad, and older brother. Beverly grew up reading maps and exploring cultures because her dad was in the military. She can speak four languages and would love to share those experiences with her students in the future. Beverly describes her hometown as a "cute little town that is predominantly Black in the center." She lives away from town, towards the country. She noted, "There's not much there. We have a Dollar General and three gas stations and a courthouse. That's it," She also commented, "I had to go to school in the next town over. It's about 30 minutes away from my house." There was an elementary and high school in town, but they closed down in the 1990s. She suspects the school closures were due to an effort to consolidate the predominantly Black and predominantly White schools.

Jamesa

Jamesa is an African American female who attends Faith-Based HBCU. She is from an area in Mississippi known as the Delta. The population of her hometown is around 1,800. When speaking about her hometown, she noted, “You have to go out of town to get our food...You have to leave to like, get a job, get better housing and stuff like that.” When probed to share positive statements about her hometown, she said, “My family's here. I mean, that's probably it. I liked my high school, but yeah, my family.”

Annie

Annie is a Caucasian female who attends State Community College. Her hometown is also in the Delta region of Mississippi. The town has a little over 1,400 residents. Throughout her high school career, she changed schools a few times. During her freshman year, she attended school in a town 30 miles from her hometown. During her sophomore year, she attended a private school 45 miles away from her hometown. She finished her high school career at the local private school in her hometown. She reported, “I think I graduated with 17 people.” When speaking about her hometown, Annie noted, “most of the people had gone to school there their whole lives. So, they all act the same and hadn't really been out anywhere much.”

Dakota

Dakota is an African American female who attends State University. Her hometown's population is just under 500. She noted that “a lot of people travel outside of town for jobs because we have a really high unemployment rate. A lot of people who live there travel outside of the county to work.” Like others in the study, Dakota left her hometown to find a better high school because of a “lack of resources. Students who wanted to do more couldn't.” It was

common for leaders at her high school to show favoritism to students who excelled academically. For students who did not perform well academically, they “just got left behind.”

Jacob

Jacob is an African American male who attends State University. He is a mild-mannered student from a town with around 500 residents. When asked about his hometown, he stated, “I mean, it's a good place. I'm not going to lie about that. And I'm proud of it, but I just feel like there's more to be done too, to help it improve more.” In contrast, he noted that the community is supportive and there are “people who motivate you and inspire you at the same time. If you're more athletically gifted then they'll tell you good job also.”

Jane

Jane is an African American female who attends State University. She brought a unique perspective to the study. Her home country is Senegal. At the age of four, her family moved to the United States. They initially moved to Texas then her family found a home right on the outskirts of a larger city in the Mississippi Delta. “It’s kind of in the country,” she noted. She added that her mailing address is listed as a large city, but they don’t technically live in the city. She additionally noted that they lived on the “West side of town, instead of the East side of town...in a white neighborhood.” Due to an education zoning policy, her mom wanted them to have access to better schools in the area.

Data by Interview Question

The data are presented in the order of the interview protocol. Following each interview question is a summary of themes and additional quotes. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, emerging conversations occurred, providing essential data for the study. The emerging conversations are shared in the appropriate positions as they occurred during the

interviews. Following the design of phenomenological research, I integrated participant responses into paragraphs to make meaning of their perceptions. In some instances, verbatim quotes are presented. In other instances, a summarized interpretation of the responses was given. The goal was to provide an honest representation of the participants' lived experiences.

Tell Me About Your Hometown

This prompt was presented to allow participants to freely speak about their hometowns without being coerced into sharing assumed responses. The following themes came from the participant's responses: (a) population size, (b) socioeconomics, (c) relationships, (d) location, and (e) race.

Population Size. Because the participants all lived in rural towns, it was understood that the populations were small. It was interesting to note that although not asked about the size, every participant mentioned their hometown's population size. Some students gave an actual mathematical number while others simply provided descriptors about the town's size. The participants were cognitively aware of the size of their hometowns and the perceptions that come with them.

In some cases, the participants seemed to offer explanations about their hometowns regarding the challenges they face. Destiny said, "I think we have like a thousand people, at least." Beverly noted, "it has a population of about 400, as of recent." Carter added, "it's really, really small, and 600 or something people." "The population is around roughly 1800 people...not even that many", according to Jamesa.

Before the interviews began, I explained to each student the purpose and title of my study. They entered the virtual interview space knowing my research was focused on rural college students. These responses reveal how aware students are about the size of their

hometowns. It appeared both comfortable and normal for them to lead off by noting how small their towns were. For some, the anecdotes were given with a tone of pride, while others spoke with a tone of shame. The shameful responses were provided apologetically as if they had to explain why their towns were small.

Socioeconomics. Kamper commented, “There's not much there as far as economic opportunity.” Kamper later noted that he needed to leave for college to “have a good life, get a good job and whatnot.” “It was very poverty-stricken. The welfare system here is a big thing because nothing is really here”, according to Jamesa. Dakota reported that her hometown “doesn’t have a lot of jobs. We don't have enough jobs for people who are living within the county.” In a member-checking focus group meeting, Dakota added that there is a “disparity between income. They live in different places. It's kind of like white people live here, and black people live here.” Beth added, “My family is very middle class.”

This theme emerged when participants spoke about their hometowns and high schools collectively. The apologetic tone remained in play when given this prompt. The responses were given from a deficit perspective. These towns appear to struggle with economic resources. There are limited employment opportunities. The towns lack social and recreational opportunities as well. Through their explanations of their lived experiences, participants presented terms that can be interpreted to mean that they understand their towns' socioeconomic barriers. The quotes that help shape this interpretation are provided in the following paragraph.

Relationships. Although size and socioeconomics were presented with a deficit slant, relationships were presented as an asset. The students shifted to a more positive tone as they reflected on the relationships that they have in their towns. It was noted that, in some cases, the family was one of the primary reasons why students feared leaving their hometowns for college.

The familial structure was presented as a richly valued asset to the majority of participants in this study. Kamper noted how people are closely connected and remain connected throughout their entire life. Destiny pointed out how friendly people are and that they genuinely care. Like Kamper, Beth noted that “everyone is related and closely-knit.”

In contrast, familial and community relationships were also presented as a negative aspect for some students. It is within these responses we find influences related to behaviors around college choice. There appears to be a connection to the negativity associated with these relationships and the perspectives students have on thinking about college, searching for colleges, pursuing colleges, participating in college planning activities, and finally picking a college. These negative relationship interactions will be shared in a later section.

Location. The geographical location of the hometowns was mentioned during the interviews. Participants made notes of people in their communities having to travel away to find work, food, and recreation. While they did not all verbally state that their towns were isolated, the responses regarding leaving town let me know there is geographical isolation. Carter did state that her hometown was “in the middle of nowhere.” From personal experience, this statement is commonly used by members of the rural community.

When Beth noted that she did not want to go “too far from home,” it was interpreted that being close to home was valued. The sense of community was valued. Other participants added notes about location when speaking about their college plans. Although college planning prompts were presented later in the interviews, I find value in these early comments about location and college choice. These comments add a layer of data regarding the location of the participants’ hometowns.

Race. Comments about race were scattered throughout the participant's responses. Although they were fairly rare, I found them useful as I began to shape my interpretation of the students' lived experiences. They were provided in tandem when students talked about their hometowns and high schools. All of the comments about race came from African American students. It is within these comments that I began to notice the prevalence of the concept of rural intersectionality. Beverly said,

It was a pretty diverse school, we had both...it wasn't inherently separate or anything. We had both white, Black, Hispanic... an even population, majority Black of course. So there wasn't too much of a racist environment or covert or overt racism. There was just kind of like goofy, cliquey type.

In this statement, Beverly notes that racial issues probably existed, but she softened the response by stating that it was simply students being goofy. Beverly further stated that she felt that school closures happened because the predominantly Black and predominantly White schools were going to be consolidated.

Jane mentioned race when she talked about her neighborhood. She noted that she lived on the east side of town in a "white neighborhood." It is common in rural towns to let people know on which side of town you live. By presenting this locale, those you interact with will learn more about your status. Jane also added, "I grew up in a white neighborhood which was just kind of polarizing because...we were the only black family for a minute." At her high school, there was a "big emphasis on sports, if not sports then band...honestly there was a lot more black people." There are stereotypes associated with black people and sports culture. Having a rich sports culture shows how deep an African American saturation is present in her hometown and school.

Dakota mentioned race during our focus group interview stating that there were disparities in income and that “white people live here, black people live there.” This statement tells me that from her experience, white people and black people live in different sections of the town. Furthermore, the note about disparities leads me to believe that citizens in one area of town are likely to have more income than citizens in the other.

Tell Me About Your High School

As previously noted, some responses about high schools were presented in conjunction with comments about the participants’ hometowns. Furthermore, there were distinct responses focused on the physical school buildings, people within the schools, and overall perceptions about the school. The following themes came from the participant’s responses: (a) academic rigor, (b) administrative challenges, (c) climate and culture, (d) desire for better education, and (e) transitions to new schools.

Academic Rigor. Participants struggled to find many positive words about the academic rigor of their high schools. The comments presented were specific to school rankings, Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, ACT prep classes and scores, and college choices made by students older than them. Destiny reported, “Our test scores were really low a lot. It was sad.” It is my understanding that she was referring to the school's average ACT scores. According to Beth, there were no AP classes offered at her high school, and most students who graduate from her high school attend community college. Although attending a community college is not viewed as a negative choice, Beth’s tone led me to believe that students chose the community college option because they were not academically prepared to attend a large, four-year institution.

Carter noted that her former high school was “horrible” and classes were “just basic level.” There were no advanced placement (AP) classes. Carter would just go to class, sleep, and somehow pass. Jamesa’s high school had an F ranking that was raised to C during her junior year. Kamper expressed his experience by providing an academic timeline. He commented, “I feel like the quality in just the school itself has been decreasing over the years. I remember in seventh grade; we were one of the larger 2A schools. There's a national ranking thing and we always got A+.” He further noted that a lot of students from his high school “just failed and moved away,” meaning students from his high school would fail high school and completely give up on their education. Beverly said, “We didn't get the same ACT prep. We didn't have access to AP classes, and, you know, we moved teachers a lot, so we didn't have stability in certain subject areas.”

Participants seemed to push past these negative experiences. They were able to find their way to college despite having limited access to AP classes and ACT prep. Based on their accounts, they ended up being at the top of their classes, which yielded access to their schools' best academic support. Many of them decided to leave their high schools to find better educational opportunities.

Administrative Challenges. Participants shared reflections about administrators and school staff. They were aware of the structural and organizational challenges their schools faced. Each student’s response spoke to a specific incident, person, or group of persons. Jamesa noted, “the teachers are fresh out of college, so it's kind of...they're learning and we're learning and it's not really helpful...it's kind of hard on both sides.” Jamesa also revealed that her high school had undergone struggles with online learning and activities. Additionally, she stated,

We have a shortage of teachers and we're going to online learning. You can easily cheat online and you really don't understand what they're saying.” The condition of the school is very bad. We didn't really have a gym. Recently, a tree fell and we had to close another building. We can't renovate without going through a lot of paperwork...so that building is useless.

Destiny noted that they didn't have certified teachers. Jane noted, “I really hated school because especially after consolidation, people who did like better than average were neglected because there was a lack of teachers. Honestly, schools in the Delta are severely underfunded.” Jane’s comment speaks to a deeper awareness of the challenges faced by rural students from her home region. These structural and organizational challenges lead to other challenges related to behavior and discipline, noted in the next paragraph.

Climate And Culture. Participants painted a grim picture of their experiences as it relates to the high schools' climate and culture. The responses were focused on behavior as well as non-academic activities. These two elements were shown to have an impact on students’ perceptions. Their experiences also helped me understand why almost all of the participants chose to transfer to different high schools. While unplanned, it is very notable that these students sought out better educational outlets that would eventually lead to better-informed decisions during the college choice process. The transitions to new schools and the experiences connected to the transitions will be shared in a later paragraph.

Destiny reported that there were lots of bomb threats, fights, and they were on the news for pranks. “They were destroying property.” Dakota commented, “It would be a fight every other week. We had security guards who would mace us or chase us down the hallway. She also mentioned several bomb threats that caused them to miss school, which prevented them from

learning. “The culture was big emphasis on sports, if not sports then the band,” she added. At Beth’s high school, it was very common for students to attend community college because “that’s just something that’s expected of students.” In summary, students who expressed disdain for their schools’ climate and culture were academically and socially distracted. They found it difficult to find safety and value in the education they were receiving.

Desire For Better Education. Beth, Destiny, Jamesa, Dakota, Jane, Annie, and Carter, at some point in their high school career, changed high schools. Although it was not exclusively stated, this phenomenon appeared to be centered around the desire for better education. The reflections shared speak to the notion that their high schools were not providing the desired level of academic and social preparedness.

Since she wanted “more of an academic challenge,” Beth decided to move away from home to have that adult moment to take care of herself and make decisions for herself. Destiny stated that her reason for transferring high schools was to get a “better education.” Jamesa is self-aware and knew she wanted to get away from her hometown because she doesn’t want to raise her children in the same conditions in which she was raised. Dakota noted as she attempted to transfer to a better high school, the former school’s staff created barriers as she attempted to leave. She said,

They made it the hardest experience possible.” “You have to go see your counselor to get the transcripts, counselor recommendations, and SAT scores. I remember my counselor didn’t send off any of my transcripts. My mom had to get them and send them herself.

Transitions To New Schools. In their quest for better high school education, the participants who transferred faced challenges. When speaking about her transition to the new school, Carter noted, “that was the first time in my life where I had to study and I had no clue

how to study. And it was rough, but it got me to college.” Destiny shared a positive perspective on her transition. She reported,

We had a lot of after-school tutoring and one-on-one help from the teachers. We had student tutors too, for peer learning. I had to stay in the residence hall, so I had to get used to like RAs and stuff like that, and more rules. I had to become responsible. I was on my own. My parents were no longer there to tell me when to do things.

After Dakota settled into her new school, she spoke in great detail about the difficulty of the transition based on her background at the former school. She later revealed how valuable the transition was as she prepared for college. “I think it was one of the hardest transitions I had to make, from going from a school district that struggled like mine to a school that had so many resources and presented so many different challenges. “I thought I was doing kind of well until I got into these classes and I decided my eyes were a little too big for my brain to handle.”

Dakota also noted,

My first year there, I had eight classes and they would be split over five days. And I remember my junior year, we had got a new cell biology teacher. His name was Dr. Greer and he had never taught high school students before. He was actually a college professor.

Carter shared that she had a better experience at her new school. She commented, Even though it was a lot more people, I was closer to them than I were my classmates at my old high school. Because all of us were on the same level mentally, and plus we lived together, so you had to get used to them. When a class from [high school] graduated, I was looking at past people on Facebook, because I didn't know who they were.

Carter shared even more sentiments about her transition to the new school. She said,

I actually had to learn how to study, that was a big moment for me. I had several breakdowns, because I did not know how to study and I had to, and I didn't understand things for the first time. And I lived away from home, so I lived on campus, so they got me ready for college. And all of my teachers had their Masters, so they taught us like we were college students and it worked out in my favor.

Deciding To Go To College

Participants were asked, “At what point did you know that you wanted to go to college, and how did you make that decision? This interview question was presented to create the opportunity for participants to share specific experiences about when and how they started taking steps towards their college choice. The open-ended nature of the question gives students the freedom to share openly without being bound by specifics. The following themes came from the participant’s responses: (a) early college thoughts and (b) high school and community impact.

Early College Thoughts. The experiences shared in this paragraph speak to the notion that the participants started thinking about college early in life. Some were able to pinpoint moments when they started thinking about college; others could not define a specific time when they started thinking about it. They innately knew that college was in the plan for their life. Even with that notion in mind, the awareness of it still began at some point. The experiences shared will showcase the phenomena related to the prompt.

Beth noted, in the “fifth or sixth grade, I wanted to be an engineer.” I realized I wanted to go to college because I was like, "I'm going to be a doctor when I grow up." And I was like, "I guess I got to go to college for that.”

Beverly presented a detailed expression. She stated,

I've always wanted to go to college since I was younger. I just knew that I had to get away from my tiny, little town in the woods and that I wanted to teach. So I had to have a degree. I would go to JSU events so I began wanting to go to JSU and then I got older and I started looking at different colleges. When I first entered high school, I started looking at different degree programs, geared towards like, who has the best school of education and, you know, who I enjoyed... or what environment I enjoyed being the most.

Jacob always knew he wanted to go to college and credits the encouragement of his parents. Annie noted, "It's never been a question. I don't know why. I've just always known I was going to go somewhere." Destiny reported, "I think I always knew I wanted to go to college and become a pediatrician. I always knew my major, already had everything planned out for myself. According to Kamper, "It was never not an option to not go to college." He further commented, "I was grown up on the assumption that I'm going to college." Jamesa said, "It was kind of like always a given for me...everybody always dreamed about going to college and being doctors. Kind of like the cliché...because I knew I wanted to leave here."

High School and Community Impact. For some of the students, the thoughts about college began as they became aware of the access and opportunities, or lack thereof, during their high school years. Dakota stated, "My high school didn't prepare me for Higher Ed, probably less than what I would normally think. A lot of people aren't exposed to college until their career fairs or college fairs. I think college fairs is one for my high school from what I remember."

Dakota also shared these reflective notes. She noted,

I think throughout all my years, nobody ever made us understand what a value or an asset it was to pursue higher education or to be a person who was immersed in that way, who could tap into that and still work hard.

In contrast, Destiny shared an experience with a gifted program that led her to explore better education in high school which eventually led to her college choice. The high school experience played a vital role in impacting her thoughts about college. She was able to pinpoint the moment in time that the experience occurred, noting when she began thinking about her college choices.

From a different angle, Jacob shared how his awareness of the disparities in his hometown set him on the path to choosing a college. He reported, “What I plan to do in the future is to come back and give to them too and like help you be better than them. There is a lot of room for improvement.”

The List Of Colleges

Participants were asked to share how they went about developing the list of colleges and how they selected the one college they currently attend. These interview prompts allowed participants to share tangible actions they took while making college choices. Associated with these action steps are individuals who played vital roles in the process. Before sharing responses to this prompt, participants were able to help me contextualize and understand internal and external factors related to their college choice ideas and behaviors. These internal and external components helped shape their perspectives and experiences.

The words shared in response to this current prompt begin to reveal the experiences related to college counseling in high school. These responses speak to the behaviors that most people would view as traditional college counseling. In the section on data interpretation, I will

share a more holistic analysis. The following themes came from the participant's responses: (a) college planning activities, (b) guidance and support, (c) financial aid, and (d) proximity.

College Planning Activities. In this section, participants shared experiences they had while attempting to explore their college options. Beth states,

We had college fairs every year. Actually, I think every semester in high school. I got to meet the admissions counselors from a lot of those colleges, and I knew them pretty well because I would see them every semester. So, I already had a knowledge of who they were, and they provided me with lots of information about those campuses, as well.

Beth also shared with me that she had visited my job to participate in a college planning workshop and an ACT prep workshop. She commented, "I've been to Get2College events.

At her new school, Carter noted that students were required to do a senior portfolio. She said,

They give you topics and you have to write all 12 of them or something. And you turn them in as, if not, they won't release any of your grades. So it's all basic college prompts. So you have all your essays already ready when it's time to apply for college.

Jamesa reveals how she began to gain awareness about college options and the correlation between her ACT score and college options. She stated,

I think it was really real taking the ACT for the first time and, out of all of my classmates, I scored the highest. So then, that's when...You know you've got to put the colleges and stuff on the ACT to take it, or whatever. And then, when I took it I made a decent score. At the time I was a sophomore and I made a 19. That was pretty good to me, and apparently to some of the community colleges that I had put on my form. So then that's

when they started contacting me, offering me all this money, and then it was like, "we'll pay you to come to school." Then, that's when I was just like, "okay, I've got to go."

Beverly began her exploration early in high school. She reveals how she took steps to define her college list and ultimately decide on a college. She noted,

When I first entered high school, I started looking at different degree programs, geared towards like, who has the best school of education and, you know, who I enjoyed... or what environment I enjoyed being the most... being in the most. I came across State University because my dad is... had previously gone to State University and I toured there with him. And then when I got to campus, I was like, this is where I want to be. This is where I want to be, this is home... It felt like.

Guidance and Support. It is within this section that we begin to find expressions about tangible college counseling activities. Participants shared experiences about how they were helped and supported. These expressions provided a seamless transition into the follow-up interview prompt where I specifically asked them to name people who helped them. In this paragraph, students' expressions will overlap with expressions shared in a later section.

In her reflection, Beth spoke about how the guidance she received helped her with her list. She reported, "them giving you that information was how you were able to determine that, "I can't afford these schools because someone told me. They told me." I got you." Beverly reflected on how State University graduates reached out to help her once they discovered she planned to attend college there. She commented, "like when you tell people, "Oh, I'm going to State University," they're so willing to help you and I got so many resources just from me going to college...and they're more willing to help you." Beth provided a specific list of those who guided here along the way. She said,

I talked to some of the teachers about their experiences at colleges, because I knew that some of them went to Rival University or State University... like my science teacher, Mr. Rogers, and my math teacher. I got my information from a lot of people like the State University admissions counselor for my area. I knew her very well.

Annie noted that her guidance counselor played a major role in guiding her to her college decision. She noted that other students need a counselor like hers. She stated that students should “make sure they have somebody like Ms. Gist who can help them through the application process.”

Jane reflected on an experience that seems to have been very influential. She noted, I got into this program and they basically flew you out, and they get you into a bunch of schools in the Northeast and it was basically high-achieving low-income students. So after that experience, I was kind of unsure about where I wanted to go, what the next step would be, so I ended up applying to like 17 schools.

Teachers were mentioned in several of the interviews. Annie spoke highly of her high school guidance counselor. She also mentioned a teacher. She reported, “her name was Ms. Melissa, and she helped me a lot too.” Destiny commented, “My teacher wrote my rec letters. I just feel like if I didn't have these people in my life, I don't know where I'd be right now.

Like Annie and Destiny, Jacob provided a detailed narrative about a senior teacher who provided lots of guidance and support. He said,

Ms. Childs, I got to say, she is a teacher who cares most about a student than anybody else. And my reason for saying that is because she pushes everybody to a point where she wants them to do better. I mean, she stayed hard on them too. I mean, even when they're filling out FAFSA, she's like, "There's your FAFSA, fill it out." I mean she's on

everybody's case. Plus, even on a non-academic level, she was still there. I mean, my dad, he had cancer and she was there the whole time while he had it, still checking up on him, calling me and everything. I really do appreciate that. And even when we didn't get to go to Jackson for the Star Student, Star Teacher stuff, she still made a celebration for it. I mean, she even put it on Facebook. It almost went viral!

Financial Aid. Jacob's comments about how handy his teacher was with FAFSA completion aligns with other students' sentiments. For many of them, creating their college list and making their college choice was based on finances. Beth stated, "a lot of it came from affordability, just knowing that I could afford it. My family is very middle class, and I didn't want to have to take out a ton of loans to get my undergraduate education.

Jamesa spoke boldly about making the college choice based on financial aid. Her reflection was presented as an encouragement to prospective college students. She noted, "Do what fits you, what feels like home, what you know can get you what you want without coming out of money because college is expensive. If you can... Like on the scholarship, like multiple different small scholarships can add up to one of the total amount that you want, do that. Every, I mean, college is not for everybody. Some people that I know are struggling really, really bad because they were forced to come to college and it's just not helpful to them, at all.

Jacob reported, "State University offered a whole lot more because they did, and plus everything you're paying for. Like I said, accounting, that one got me right there because they have like a better job placement." "They gave me a full-ride, so I was like, I'm going to stay there, according to Destiny. "I had no intention of going to State University. It was kind of like a mixture of like Corona and nice scholarships that led me here", Jane added. Dakota commented,

The reason I ended going to State University was actually because my mom, because they gave me a full ride. When they gave me a full ride, I was actually pretty shocked because I didn't understand my value until... I understood my hard work ethic and my intelligence, but I didn't understand the value of that until I came to college.

Annie noted that her college selection process was fairly simple and financial aid based. She said, "I didn't have a method. I got a really good scholarship here, so that's why." Kamper posited,

I come here for free, or almost free. And that was just a deal that I didn't really think could be beat. Where I live, we have a grant where we can go to the State University med school. I think it's for free. If not, it's very cheap. But then they give more money for going to State University, so that was one reason. And I looked at all the ... I just didn't want to graduate with debt.

Carter shared a transparent narrative about her challenges with financial aid and scholarships. She said,

I had to appeal my financial aid, all my scholarships. I had to put in an application, because I was missing ... I was going to be out of pocket \$10,000. So I had to appeal my financial aid package, they ended up giving me a little bit of money and a little need-based scholarships. And then the rest of it, I had to cry over for a while, that's how I realized I get my sub and unsub loans. I got those and they ended up paying for school, but I still have to pay 2000 out of pocket every semester. But technically I don't qualify for anything need-based, because my mom makes too much. You know, we're poor, but we're not government poor.

Beverly described how she developed her list with financial aid and college costs in mind. She stated,

I really wanted to go to a university first so that was what I ruled out. And then I started to look at how much college was going to cost and what I needed to do to get higher test scores so I can get into the college that I wanted to. So I compiled a list of schools that I was considering.

Proximity. Students mentioned the location of their hometowns in relation to their college choices early in the interviews. When asked to share basic information about their towns, many of them spoke about isolation. They spoke about having to travel long distances to shop, work, and find entertainment. These underlying realities of their life experience overflowed into their perspectives on college choice. Beth spoke about her reality by stating,

I didn't want to be eight-plus hours away, as opposed to, maybe, one to two hours away from home. So that I could come back if I needed to, and have that moment, but still have the freedom of being away. I wanted to get away from home, but I didn't want to be too far away from home.

While Beth's response is the only one shared in this section, it speaks to many of the participants' sentiments. They are at play in their decisions on the college the students chose. They all decided to attend colleges that are in their state and relatively close to home. Like Beth, students wanted to get away but remain closely connected with their home communities. For many of them, going "away" to a college town is an advanced move that many rural students choose not to make.

People Who Helped

In this section, I will highlight individuals who played a role in influencing participants' college choices. They were asked to reflect on people who helped them in any way with deciding to go to college, developing the list of colleges they might have wanted to attend, and/or choosing exactly the college they currently attend. These prompts were given to allow students to reflect on people and activities associated with those who influenced them. These people and their realms of influence play a vital part in the students' perceptions of the college counseling they received. The following themes came from the participant's responses: (a) positive influencers and (b) negative influencers.

Positive Influencers. The following statements are reflections students shared that were on the positive side of influence. When given the prompt, students began to think and share detailed experiences. Verbatim quotes are shared to keep the responses honest without the risk of losing the essence of their experiences. In some cases, students reveal a timeline of events connected to a person or persons. Others share a specific moment that an individual played a role in impacting their choices.

As noted in the section about students compiling their college lists and making their college choice, guidance counselors and teachers were mentioned. It is important to note that those individuals were previously mentioned as having a positive influence on college choice. Annie spoke highly of her high school guidance counselor and teachers. Jacob spoke highly about his teacher who was the senior sponsor. Additionally, Destiny spoke about how her teacher helped her by writing recommendation letters. Jane finally noted how she was involved in a program that gave her exposure to many colleges throughout the United States.

In addition to school staff members and special programs, participants mentioned other positive influencers. Jacob spoke positively about his parents and their influence. He noted, “A long time ago. Like way, way back. I knew my parents were talking about it and they said, "you're going to college." They're my reason why.” In this statement, he is influenced by his parents and chose to pursue college as a result. While his parents may not have provided formal college counseling, their words and parental influence were rooted in Jacob’s outlook on college.

Dakota started by reflecting on her internal thoughts about college planning. She reported, “It was no set track. It was no like, "Oh, you have to get a degree. She further revealed how those thoughts were rooted. Her mom was influential early in her life. She shared a moment when her mom spoke to her and her siblings about higher education. Dakota commented, “She was like, "You can get a technical job. You can do this. You can do that." But everybody in my house has to go.” Dakota ended her reflection with an enlightening moment of awareness about college choices and the process in which students make them. She said, “The way we picked our colleges has a lot to do with the relationship we had with the people who had to help us pick them.” Beverly spoke positively about her dad’s influence. She stated,

My dad is a military dad. You know, he's done a lot of traveling and I'm a world traveler person myself. So he'd always make sure that I've seen what was outside of my hometown. And so now that I've seen that and I know what that's like. A lot of people never get to see the outside of like Mississippi or even their small town and it's really unfortunate.

Aside from parents, other family members had an impact on students’ choices. Destiny mentioned her grandmother. She noted, “I talked to my grandma. She always talked about my

plans and what I want to do in the future and what I want to do when I get older. We always had those discussions.” Participants also mentioned their peers as influencers. Beth reported,

I have two friends who graduated high school with me, who were also going to State University. Well, one of them didn't know at the time, but the other one did. And so, knowing that she was going to be going made me lean towards State University, a little bit. I would at least know one person.

Beth further mentioned other associates that influenced her. She added,

I knew people on the campus. I knew some people in various organizations. I had been to this campus multiple times, to field trips, or going to an athletic game, or just visiting. I was on an academic competition team, and we went to State University for competitions. So, it was something that I was a little more familiar with.

Beth also shared how helpful college recruiters were. She mentioned recruiters from three institutions in Mississippi. She expressed how they collectively helped her navigate the college choice process. She commented,

The State University admissions counselor for my area, I knew her very well. And also, the admissions counselor from Rival University. I don't know their name off the top of my head, but them. And also, Mountain College, that's pretty close by. I knew their admissions counselor, at the time. He not only talked to me about Mountain College, but he also did talk to me about both State University and Rival University. And so, he was a great help to me.

Lastly, Beth spoke about her religious influence. Although the influencer is not a human, the impact is worth noting. She said, “I'm a very spiritual person, and so I prayed a lot about it,

and I just felt State University was where I belonged, and where God wanted me to go.” Her spiritual beliefs seemed to be attached to the influence of her parents.

As previously mentioned, seven of the ten participants transferred to new high schools. Students who transferred to the high school for academically talented students mentioned how that experience impacted their college choice behaviors. The academic rigor, college planning resources, college counseling, peer influence, and alumni support are mentioned. Carter stated,

The new school got me to a lot of colleges. I got into schools seven states over, that I would of never applied to. I knew anywhere that I would go, I would know somebody there, because the network is so big. The class from '89, which is the first class, if you post on Facebook, "Oh, I'm going to this college," they were going to support you and try to help you in any way possible. So I knew wherever I went, I was going to have some type of support. Even if they didn't go to the school, they were somewhere around. All of my classmates, we fully supported everybody and their college decisions. If you got an acceptance letter, you hung it up outside your dorm door. And people would write little congratulation notes around it.

The narrative shared by Carter highlights a school culture focused on academic excellence, community support and guidance, and college-going expectations. College counseling became a holistic experience versus being a one-time event. The others who attended this same high school shared similar sentiments.

Negative Influencers. In contrast to the positive interactions connected to participants' college choices, negative influencers were shared. In some cases, students rebelled against the counsel provided by people they trusted. For example, Beth noted that her mom's heavy push to attend a particular college drove her to pick State University. She noted, “my mother was very

adamant that I go to Rival University.” Her counselor was also very excited that Rival University was an option. She reported, “I think that he wanted me to lean towards that option.”

Jamesa recounts an incident she witnessed with her mom and sister. Her sister attempted college and had a bad experience academically. Instead of supporting her sister, her mom encouraged her to drop out of college. Jamesa commented,

My mom was basically telling her [Jamesa’s sister] to "Hang it up, it's not working for you. You're so far away from home. You're not getting any better" and she actually listened, and she's here now with three kids, so... I know it's bad.

According to Jamesa’s tone, this interaction was not favorable. She seemed disappointed that her mom was not supportive. She also seemed disappointed that her sister forfeited her opportunity to gain access to a better life. Her sister ended up being a single mom with little to no education to financially support her three kids.

One would assume that the high school guidance counselor would be students’ most positive support system when making college decisions. For Dakota, the experience was quite the opposite. She reflected on a counseling meeting she had with the guidance counselor about college options. She noted, “He looked at me and he made an assumption that I couldn't do it.” His assumptions about her abilities accompanied by her fear of failure led her to choose a college that seemed safer.

Lastly, students shared experiences related to older students who graduated from their high schools. These students had unfavorable college experiences and ended up dropping out for a variety of reasons. Participants were aware of this common trend. It was noted that the participants were fueled by defying the stereotype. Kamper shared a detailed reflection of this aspect of negative influence. He said,

The people that went straight to a four-year university, there wasn't a lot of us, there was probably ... There was about five out of the 50, and only two of us or three of us are still in the university. And then I'd say about 10 to 15 went to community college. A few of them went to play sports, sports has a big impact on where you go to college, if you're good enough to play.

Emergent Interview Questions

After the interview protocol questions were finished, two additional questions emerged. I was compelled by the participants' self-awareness and their drive to seek out better educational opportunities. Every student expressed a sense of determination to create a better life for themselves and their families. Besides sharing their experiences with a deep tone of determination, some participants offered advice to rural high school students. These participants were aware of my research topic and wanted to leave notes of encouragement to students and other researchers who read this dissertation in practice. The emergent questions will be shared in the next section.

Rural College Students Are Self-Driven and Assertive

Participants were asked to share their opinions regarding a trend I noted during the interviews. I stated, "Like you, many of my research participants expressed themselves as self-driven and assertive. From where does that come?" There were three themes derived from the responses. They are (a) rural resilience, (b) the desire for more, and (c) self-awareness.

Rural Resilience. After each interview, I was left in amazement at participants' earnest desire to seek out education. It was apparent that they valued education and viewed it as a mechanism to lead them to a better life. These students dealt with problematic educational backgrounds. They lived in isolated towns. They navigated through the challenges associated

with limited college planning resources. They sifted through the negative counsel and bad advice. They had to find ways to choose a college that was the best financial fit. Through all the perceived deficits, some of them were still able to reflect on the assets they had within their hometowns and schools. They expressed value in familial connections. They tapped into their social networks. They used their desire for a better life to find the necessary resources to access better secondary education and higher education.

After combing through all of their quotes and reflections, the word resilience came to mind. I researched the term *rural resilience* and found literature that resonates with my research participants' experiences. It is defined as the capacity of a rural region to adapt to changing external circumstances to develop a satisfactory standard of living (Heijman, Hagelaar, & Van der Heide, 2019). Additionally, rural resilience is the ability to cope with economic, ecological, and cultural vulnerability (Heijman, Hagelaar, & Van der Heide, 2019). It was important for me to capture and present these thoughts in this section of the dissertation in practice. More analysis of this concept will be expressed in Manuscript Three.

The Desire For More. The self-driven approach to college choice was focused on experiences during their time at home and school. I found it valuable to extract this element from the over-arching concept of being resilient. Participants' expressions were specifically geared towards those experiences. Beth noted,

I wanted more of an academic challenge. I wanted to go to make friends with people who I didn't go to high school with, people who are different than me, and came from different backgrounds than me. And I wanted to have more opportunities for student organizations, and just that I want to get a broader scope.

Kamper spoke about his clear disdain for living in his hometown. Being home during the COVID-19 pandemic caused him to solidify his sentiments about being at home. He reported, “I don't really like living here. I'm here right now because of quarantine and the summertime. So I really want to get out of here. And I just feel like I got to learn how to be an adult.”

Jamesa took the conversation on a detailed journey through her thoughts about her childhood and its impact on her perspective. She spoke specifically about the lack of resources and the discoveries she made on the internet. She realized that her childhood experiences were a lot different from others who lived in more resourceful areas in the country. She commented,

You know how growing up, for me personally, growing up watching movies and stuff, like people go ice skating and skydiving and they try different foods. When you go out and you see your own environment here, it's like "Where is that stuff?" Like as a kid. Then it's like, "I want that. Where can I go to get that?" Then you find out what Google is and then that's when Google tells you "Hey, this is an FSL trip" and you start to figure out, "Okay, well now I need to know, because these people are in and out living this life, they've got all this money and all this stuff. I need to have it. I feel like I deserve that." That's when I started pushing me to go harder in everything I do. And then, on top of that, it's like the people here, they doubt you so bad to where if you start to believe it, you become just like them. So you've got to push yourself to rise above that. "Now, I've got to go." It's basically like you see the opportunity you take it and run, don't look back.

Self-Awareness. Participants gave their responses with statements directly focused on their internal awareness of self. The responses were filled with “I” statements. The following responses show how in-tune students were with their thoughts and how those thoughts shaped how they made college choices. Carter said,

I probably would have been either [inaudible] because me and this one girl went back and forth every year over grades. I'll probably end up at Rival University because this is 30 minutes from my house. I will probably have a mental breakdown my first year at State because I would've never learned how to study. I would have never learned how to do anything for myself basically because my mom was staying 30 minutes up the road, I could just go home whenever I need anything. I feel like I just will be there, in college just because everybody else is going to college, as the move after graduation.

Carter's narrative reveals how she processed her decisions. Other participants shared her sentiments. Kamper stated, "I just, I'd like to have a good life. And as growing up in a small, sheltered town." Similarly, Beth shared how she made her decisions based on her own devices. She noted, "I wasn't hugely impacted by other people's influences." Lastly, Beverly shared a similar expression that shows how aware she was of herself and her home community. She reported, "I just knew that I had to get away from my tiny, little town in the woods."

Kamper also gave another account. This statement shows how understanding he was about college options and others' behaviors around college choice. He confidently commented, "I mean, you go to college to, for example, get an engineering degree or a business degree. There's not really any of that here, but you can learn a trade at community college and you can use that in a lot of other places. We have a lot of people wanting to be welders and stuff, and you don't really go to a four-year university to be a welder."

Advice For Rural High School Students

In this final section, participants were asked about the advice they would give high school students in their hometowns related to college planning and counseling. There were themes that I gleaned from responses. The themes are presented as verbatim excerpts from the interview. The

themes are: (a) Go where you want to go, (b) accept change, (c) remove home obligations, and (d) feel free to go and return. Unlike the previous sections, this section will be presented as a summary of the participants' thoughts and perspectives.

Go Where You Want To Go. This is a call to action for rural high school students to choose a college that they want to go to without harnessing those ambitions because of the influences of others. In a sense, this statement supplements the self-driven tone presented in the previous paragraph. Participants are on record mentioning how there were positive and negative influencers involved in their college choice process. They noted that, in some cases, they chose a college that was the best fit for the family or a college that felt safe. For some, they refrained from reaching for a school that may have been more of a challenge.

Accept Change. Rural high school students were encouraged to enter college with an open mind. Changes will occur as they transition to a new phase in life. Their lives will change academically, socially, emotionally, and financially. For students who leave the comforts of their small towns, change may be scary. Change may cause them to hold off on making ambitious moves while attending college. Accepting change could be the springboard for these students to access the better life they aspire to acquire.

Remove Home Obligations. This theme initially had a harsh tone to it. After much reflection, participants were charging rural high school students to choose college and focus on college. Many of the participants were the first in their families to attend college. Many of them worked part-time jobs to support their families back home. One participant would travel back home on occasion to assist with a sick parent. These home obligations compounded with the pressure of attending college can be overwhelming. While I don't think the statement means students should completely disown their home obligations, I believe it encourages students to try

to focus on the task at hand. It charges them to see the big picture of the college investment. If they can invest time away from home and their obligations, they may obtain the credentials that will allow them to better support their families in the future.

Feel Free To Go and Return. This is a charge for students who want to come back to work in their hometowns. Several of the participants aspire to gain their higher education credentials and provide professional services to their towns. It was noted that some people question the choice of leaving and returning. Some people view that option as a negative choice. Participants who want to go back home after college want to be a part of the change they hope to see. They want to be advocates and models for empowerment. They want students who grow up in their towns to see the possibilities they have. These participants also want students to know that although their hometowns offer little to no resources, they can find success in them. If their passions are centered around giving back and building up their communities, it is acceptable to embrace them.

Theme Clusters

Once themes were defined, I used axial coding to identify clusters of themes. Axial coding is the process of relating codes to each other (Creswell & Miller, 2000). These clusters help define a bigger picture related to the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice. These clusters also provide the gateway for examining the themes through the lenses of my conceptual framework. The theme clusters are: (a) education, (b) connections, (c) life factors, and (d) individuality. Each cluster's relevance will be explained in the next paragraphs.

Education

Six of the themes were focused on education in some way. The themes are linked together by their connections to secondary and postsecondary education. Responses that led to creating these themes were centered around school buildings, leaders in the schools, and curricular and co-curricular elements. The themes are academic rigor, administrative challenges, climate and culture, desire for better education, transitions to new schools, and financial aid.

Participants spoke about the low levels of academic rigor in their high schools. They also talked about how they desired to have better education while in high school. They seemed to understand that experiencing competitive secondary education could lead to better opportunities in postsecondary education. The participants who transitioned to new schools found a way to get the secondary education they desired, although the transitions were complex and overwhelming. The climate and culture students experienced in their secondary education had an impact on their postsecondary outlook. For many, it fueled their desires to get away. For many of them, the schools were plagued with behavioral challenges. Challenges within the administrative structures supplemented those behavioral struggles. On their quest to leave their secondary education sites and access post-secondary education institutions, participants shared how impactful financial aid was on their decisions. While given in response to different prompts, these six themes are centered around secondary and postsecondary educational systems.

Connections

Six themes were focused on human connections. These themes were gleaned from responses centered around people, activities, shared spaces, conversations, and intangible power. The themes related to connections are relationships, positive influencers, negative influencers, guidance and support, college planning activities, and high school and community impact.

Participants provided specific names of individuals who played roles in impacting their behaviors. For some of these individuals, they left the participants with a positive outlook. These positive influencers were supportive, encouraging, and resourceful. Other individuals presented a negative outlook that still made an impact on their college choice. The participants spoke about college planning activities and events that involved interactions with people that eventually impacted their college choice. Lastly, they shared lived experiences from living in their communities and going to their high schools. These connections shaped the participants' overall life experiences and their behavior related to college choice.

Life Factors

Six themes were clustered around life factors. These factors are elements that impact the participants' perceptions but are completely out of their human control. They are size, socioeconomics, location, race, proximity, and the desire for more.

Beyond the direct impact of connections, these life factors were and are still at play in the participants' lives. They cannot dictate the size of their hometown but growing up in that town shaped their perceptions. They cannot determine the town's specific location or its proximity to colleges, but those elements are meaningful and have power. The participants also have no control over their race. Like the other themes, race played a role in their perceptions and behaviors. For some students, race was mentioned as they spoke about the layout of their towns. Others spoke about it concerning the culture of their high school. Additionally, some spoke about race as an issue they wanted to improve. They wanted to go to college to learn about other people and appreciate their perspectives. Lastly, they spoke about their desire for more and the influences of life factors that fuel this desire.

Socioeconomic status was mentioned for most students when speaking about the challenges of their hometowns or their families. This theme is closely connected to childhood experiences because, for many, this status determined what types of experiences these students had growing up. For some, their socioeconomic status was low, which forced them to attend high schools with behavioral problems. Those behavioral challenges impacted their learning. Their learning and academic performance impacted their view of self, which eventually shaped how they dealt with the college choice process. Additionally, the socioeconomic status of some students allowed them to find better educational options. Their parents understood these challenges and invested the little money they had into better educational avenues. On the whole socioeconomic status and childhood experiences deeply impacted the students' perceptions of the impact of high school college counseling on their college choice. Since they had to deal with the many barriers related to these themes, it is possible to understand how high school college counseling was impacted and how it impacted their choices.

Individuality

Seven themes were clustered around individuality. These themes directly focus on the participants' sense of self. The themes gleaned from interview responses are focused on how they viewed their lives in the past, present, and future. Lastly, the themes showcase how the participants set themselves apart from other classifications of students. Their rural identity is proudly shown as they speak about their lives and offer words of encouragement to others in their communities. The themes are early college thoughts, rural resilience, self-awareness, go where you want to go, accept change, remove home obligations, feel free to go and return.

Although the participants' perceptions of the impact of high school college counseling on college choice were deeply shaped by the many external factors shared in the other theme

clusters, the individuality cluster showcases the strength and will of these students. Some of these students faced deficits in their communities and schools yet still found the drive to think about college early in life. They were resilient and found ways to view their situations and the people around them as assets. They utilized these assets to sift through the college choice process and find their way to college. This resilience caused them to develop confidence. It caused them to want to empower and encourage other students like them. The final themes in this cluster were derived from the emergent interview questions. They show how these students wanted to use their experiences to advise others. This perspective is commendable and impressive. Using their individual abilities along with the support of others, they were able to make their college choices and the desire to reach back to support future rural college students.

Conclusion

In Manuscript Two, I presented qualitative data based on my semi-structured interviews to address my research questions. Themes were extracted from the interviews and the data was presented in the form of verbatim quotes. Quotes were supplemented with explanations to make meaning of the experiences shared. Following the design of phenomenological research analysis, I identified the essence of the perceptions of the participants through discussions about their lived experiences. In presenting the data, themes, and theme clusters, I highlighted specific participant experiences to identify the phenomena surrounding the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice. Using my knowledge and experiences, I represented the phenomena related to the participant's experiences. During interviews, my experiences were bracketed to allow students to share experiences openly without being ushered into giving responses that feed my assumptions.

The following interview questions/prompts addressed Research Question One:

- “Tell me about your hometown.”
- “Tell me about your high school.”
- “At what point did you know that you wanted to go to college, and how did you reach that decision?”
- “Please share how you went about developing the list of colleges you might want to attend.”
- “How did you select the one college that you wanted to attend?”
- “Like you, many of my research participants expressed themselves as self-driven and assertive. From where does that come?”

These prompts allowed participants to reflect on their personal lives. Those internal and external factors connected to their hometowns, high schools, and early thoughts about college help to explain their lived experiences. It was important to allow participants to reflect on elements outside of the realm of high school college counseling. There are indirect elements that impact their lived experiences and perceptions.

The next set of interview protocol prompts directly addressed high school college counseling in its traditional sense. Those prompts are:

- “Were there people who helped you in any way with deciding to go to college, developing the list of colleges you might want to attend, and/or choosing exactly which college you would attend?”
- “What advice would you give high school students in your hometown as it relates to college planning and counseling?”

The data presented for these prompts are focused on Research Question Two. It is important to note that it was discovered that high school college counseling is not a one-time event. High school college counseling, for some students, occurred over several years. High school college counseling involved family members, high school staff members, peers, and others in the community.

In Manuscript Three, I analyzed the data through the lenses of the four elements that make up my conceptual framework. The four elements of my conceptual framework are: (a) Bourdieu's Theory of Capital, (b) the concept of Rurality, (c) College Board's Eight Components of College and Career Counseling, and (d) the Perna College Choice Model. After the analysis, I presented recommendations for practice and research.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People with college degrees earn more money, experience better working conditions, and have better job benefits than people with only a high school diploma (Burke et al., 2016). The evolving job market requires post-secondary education, so higher education improves social mobility opportunities (Morris, 2009; Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Social, economic, cultural, and political factors associated with rurality influence college choice. Rural communities are isolated areas making it difficult for students to understand the benefits of college. They also tend to have influential family members who rarely leave their hometowns for college. Rural students struggle to make their college choices because they must decide between staying in their communities or leaving for postsecondary education (Means, 2018). In addition to struggling to decide to leave for college, rural students struggle to find adequate college counseling (Scott et al., 2015). College counseling that occurs while students are in high school can be vital as students make their college choices.

This dissertation in practice explores the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice. High school college counseling is defined as counseling administered by guidance counselors, college coaches, teachers, and other adults who are paid or volunteer in the traditional high school setting. The term “college choice” is used here to refer to students’ decisions to go to college and their selection of a specific institution.

In the first manuscript, information was presented about the history of higher education, college enrollment trends for rural students, and college counseling practices. I also presented my personal, professional, and future positionalities. A detailed review of literature was also given to undergird the research topic and provide layers of context related to the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice. The second manuscript included the presentation of data that answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of rural college students regarding the high school college counseling they received?
2. What are the perceptions of rural college students regarding the impact of high school college counseling on their college choice?

The lived experiences of ten rural college students from three higher education institutions in Mississippi were presented. The data were listed in the order of the interview questions, which allows readers to follow the sequence of questions as participants experienced them. A large number of themes were extracted and placed into clusters using axial coding. The four theme clusters are listed below with their accompanying themes. The theme clusters are:

- Education - academic rigor, administrative challenges, climate and culture, desire for better education, transitions to new schools, and financial aid
- Connections - relationships, positive influencers, negative influencers, guidance and support, college planning activities, and high school and community impact
- Life factors - population size, socioeconomics, location, race, proximity, and the desire for more

- Individuality - early college thoughts, rural resilience, self-awareness, go where you want to go, accept change, remove home obligations, feel free to go and return

In the final manuscript, I present an interpretation of the findings using the elements of my conceptual framework for analysis. The elements are: (a) the Perna College Choice Model, (b) Bourdieu's Theory of Capital, (c) the Concept of Rurality, and (d) College Board's Eight Components of College and Career Counseling. As previously noted in Manuscript One, my conceptual framework's visual representation is shown in Figure 1 (see p. 34). In the latter sections of this manuscript, I presented recommendations for practice and research, limitations, and a conclusive reflection.

Data Interpretation

This section presents an interpretation of the data using the elements of the conceptual framework. The data themes and theme clusters are highlighted under each element. Based on the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice, the goal was to make meaning of the data and define recommendations for practice and future research.

The Perna College Choice Model

The Perna College Choice Model connects economic and sociological perspectives (Perna, 2006). In this model, the situated context surrounding students' lives impacts their college choice (Perna, 2006). The individual's habitus, school and community context, the higher education context, and the social, economic, and policy context are layers of the model (Perna, 2006). This model was chosen because it includes components that I have deemed essential to college choice behavior. It presents the most comprehensive design for exploring a student's

college choice. The habitus, school and community context, and social, economic, and policy context were the focal points in my study.

Themes related to *connections* were associated with the habitus and influence behaviors around college choice. *Guidance and support* and *college planning activities* deeply influence their outlook on college. The cultural knowledge and awareness of the value of a college education were revealed as impactful components within the habitus as well. The *positive and negative relationships* in the home, *school and community* were also noted. Individuals who are the gatekeepers to the information, assistance, cultural knowledge, and awareness possess the power to lead rural students to colleges that match their needs. The same can be said for individuals who offer incorrect or misleading information. The latter could lead students to choose pathways that do not fit their academic and career goals.

Within the theme cluster, *life factors*, themes are associated with the school and community context and are revealed to impact the availability of college counseling resources for rural students. Resources are rarely varied, and the support systems are inadequate. This means that rural college students may end up choosing colleges that do not fit socially, academically, and financially. These misguided decisions could lead to students dropping out of college. If they drop out, they will leave college with no higher education credential to gain meaningful employment. This trend could lead to continuing the cycles that already plague rural communities.

Administrative challenges and adverse *school cultures* were two themes that are also connected to the school and community context. The data revealed that teacher shortages, limited course offerings, and crumbling school buildings are a few of the impactful elements within this context. These factors cause rural students to be distracted while they were in high school.

Additionally, issues spill over from the community impacting student behavior and academic performance. These battles affect rural students who want to go to college because they are susceptible to falling into disruptive behavioral traps that could prevent them from going to college. Since the structural barriers exist, students' desires to explore and attend college could be derailed or completely blocked.

From the social, economic, and policy context, rural students are motivated to get away from the socio-economic issues they face in their hometowns. The data reveals that there is a *desire for more* along with a sense of exhaustion among rural students. They are exhausted with the economic challenges their families have to balance. They are also aware and eager to push through the policies related to employment and recreation in their towns. Under the theme cluster *individuality*, the data shows that rural students exhibit situational consciousness that fuels their desire to obtain higher education. This sense of awareness and motivation can be harnessed and cultivated by community leaders for improvement and advancement. By embracing this group of students who want more and are willing to take the necessary steps to get it, community leaders will give them a more profound sense of purpose beyond what they already feel. These leaders can look to these students to be the change-makers for their towns because they possess the drive and ambition to combat the issues within the social, economic, and policy context.

Bourdieu's Theory of Capital

Achievement in education is connected to various forms of capital and a student is more likely to achieve in education if they have more access to it (Rogošić & Baranovic, 2016).

Cultural capital can show up in educational qualifications that lead to the pursuit of a college education (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is made up of social connections that can be converted

into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Higher education provides students with a competitive advantage in their quest to acquire social and economic mobility (Labaree, 1997).

It was revealed that choosing a college, enrolling in college, and being successful in college are highly influenced by the positive perceptions associated with gaining higher education and the social relationships in which rural students are involved. Through the cultural capital lens, rural college students value obtaining college credentials. Through the social capital lens, having access to accurate information and assistance through social networks is essential.

The data shows that rural students pay attention to information about college at various periods in their life. These notions are centered around *relationships*. Information is presented early for some and later for others. This means that rural students start to place value on college when they know what it is and understand its benefits. They also value college when they witness parents and other family members obtaining credentials. They additionally feel that going to college is attainable when they receive support and assistance from their families.

Since familial relationships are meaningful, they can be utilized to better equip rural students with the resources and information needed about college. Rural students hesitate to choose to explore and enroll in college when they fear their familial and community relationships will be damaged. These close relationships deeply influence their desire to choose college and the decisions about the exact college they choose. Capital that exists in the form of knowledge, behaviors, and skills passed from family and community members are tangible elements that can be embraced and used as tools to guide and support rural students.

The Concept of Rurality

Past higher education research focuses on issues associated with diverse groups of students but rarely mentions population and social class (Salomon-Fernández, 2018). Higher

education institutions are committed to providing high-quality education to all students, so students' voices from rural areas need to be heard. It was important for me to focus on this subsection of the population and uplift their voices because they are often overlooked.

Population size, socioeconomics, race, location, and proximity were themes presented in the data. Analysis of these themes reveals that rural students are very aware of the stigmas associated with rurality. Those stigmas fuel their desires to pursue a better life through education. Hometown experiences influence their decisions about their academic majors and post-graduation plans. These students choose colleges that are close enough to keep them connected to the family structures. Also, rural students have to occasionally deal with family members fearing abandonment as they will gain new lifestyles and worldviews in college.

It is interpreted that the concept of rurality is viewed negatively by those who may be from non-rural areas. The data shows that rural college students go through life at a deficit compared to students in other communities. They are faced with the intersectionality of being rural, first-generation, low-income, and minority, often associated with negative social stereotypes. Personal, professional, and research experiences have shown that these students do not view themselves as students with deficiencies. They possess individual passions that give them a positive outlook on their situations. They find ways to focus on their assets and build on the closely-knit communities they have. Their desire for more drives their pursuits. *Rural resilience* is exhibited as they navigate life and access the tools they need to be successful. Since they “really want to get out of there and learn how to be an adult,” they find motivation from positive influencers within their homes, community, and even the media.

The concept of rurality shows up in the eagerness of rural college students to give back. It is common practice for citizens of rural communities to combine resources to meet all people's

needs. Rural college students recognize that citizens of their communities attend college at lower rates so they find ways to champion the next generation of prospective college students. They work to help high school students from their hometowns by sharing pieces of advice and offering encouragement. The desire to pay it forward tells me that rural college students want more out of life and desire to help others achieve more through education. This willingness to offer educational support, guidance, and advocacy shows that they want to ensure that others have a more seamless college choice process.

The resilient culture of survival is exhibited in an interesting phenomenon related to secondary education. Rural college students' will transfer high schools to move beyond the barriers in their communities. They are willing to forfeit peer relationships and community connections to find better education. Their parents understand the obstacles and make the financial sacrifices needed to access better high schools. Parents see the value in the sacrifices and aim to reap the benefits of their child leaving to pursue their educational dreams. The decision to allow rural students to transfer high schools is an investment of time and money that leads to favorable outcomes with college choice.

Rural high schools miss an opportunity to cultivate the talent in their schools when their students transfer. The cycle of talent loss and other documented barriers associated with rural areas could remain if attention is not given to the phenomenon. The data has shown that rural students view education as a gateway to a better life. *Transitions to new high schools* show that rural students have a *desire for better education* and want early access to it before they leave for college. By attending high schools that mimic the culture and rigor of colleges, rural students gain better preparation. They gain the tools and training needed to enroll in college and to be successful while in college. Educational leaders across sectors have an opportunity to explore

their motivations for transferring high schools. By allowing these students to have a meaningful voice, valuable data could be gleaned that will enable leaders to reassess and reevaluate programming.

College Board's Eight Components of College and Career Counseling

The eight components of the College Board's college and career readiness counseling are: (a) college aspirations, (b) academic planning for college and career readiness, (c) enrichment and extracurricular engagement, (d) college and career exploration and selection processes, (e) college and career assessments, (f) college affordability planning, (g) college and career admission processes, and (h) transition from high school graduation to college enrollment. This model provides a holistic approach to inspiring and preparing students for college. The model was designed with underrepresented populations in mind (College Board, 2010, p.2).

The data interpretation through this model reveals that rural college students experience high school college counseling in unique ways. The data shows that high school college counseling occurs over several years and involves various types of connections. The counseling is administered intentionally by guidance counselors, teachers, parents, high school and college alumni, and community leaders. In contrast, the counseling occurs unintentionally for others based on negative conversations with a parent or witnessing peers fail at matriculating through college.

According to the data, college aspirations begin in elementary school because of exposure to college sporting events and field trips to college campuses. As expressed by a participant, some rural students will "always know" while the lack of resources and information will fuel others. For others, the college aspirations are grounded in family members' words and actions who offer support, empowerment, inspiration, and guidance. This means that rural

students are constantly absorbing information about college at all ages. When they are presented with information or conversations connected to college, it impacts their outlook on college. When they travel with their families, the activities they engage in shape their perceptions. Collectively, these actions offer a form of counseling that dictates the students' behaviors around college choice.

Rural students make their academic plans with limited options because many high schools do not offer advanced placement classes limiting the students' exposure to college academic preparedness. *Academic rigor* was a highlighted theme showing that when rural college students have access to the academic courses needed for college entrance, they are more likely to pursue the process. College planning activities was a theme that reveals that rural students are inspired to consider college when they find out their ACT scores meet the admissions requirements. They explore college and career options through events like college fairs, field trips, and school organizations. As noted in the *financial aid* theme, affordability planning is more understandable after applying for admissions, taking entrance exams, and completing the FAFSA. When they are exposed to college recruiters and college events, they are fueled to continue the admissions process and enroll. When they receive their financial aid package and understand the cost of attendance, they are even more likely to enroll. Financial aid packages and admissions acceptance letters cause rural students to realize that college is truly attainable. If these moments do not occur or if they occur later in the timeline, rural students run the risk of withdrawing from the college choice process.

Leaders in K12 education and higher education have an opportunity to pinpoint areas of focus to ensure their students are successful with their transitions from high school to college. Concerns come to mind as colleges shift to a test-optional admissions policy. It is even more

concerning as conversations about colleges altogether remove the entrance exam requirement are occurring. If these admissions standards change, it would be helpful to understand which elements of the college and career planning process will replace the inspiration students receive when they reach ACT benchmarks, admissions standards, and financial aid eligibility.

The data shows that the transition from high school graduation to college enrollment is monumental for rural students. They are finally able to “get away” and start on their journey to feed their *desire for more*. As noted in the section on the concept of rurality, some rural students transfer to new high schools in search of better educational opportunities. Students who transfer to these better high schools have a better transition to college because they have access to college professors, competitive peers, premier college counseling and are better equipped to pursue the competitive college process.

Summary

The four elements of the conceptual framework provided the platform for contextual analysis. The three layers of the Perna College Choice Model contain concepts that are highlighted within Bourdieu’s Theory of Capital, the Concept of Rurality and the College Board’s College and Career Counseling model. The holistic nature of the overlapping elements allowed me to explore the participants' lived experiences with attention to detail. Following the design of phenomenological research, I identified the essence of the participants' perceptions and subjectively highlighted specific lived experiences (Cresswell, 2002; Qutoshi, 2018).

The perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice are influenced by education, personal connections, life factors, and individuality. High school college counseling is a complex practice that involves a combination of people and processes. As rural students connect with peers, counselors, teachers, family

members, and community members within their habitus, they gain knowledge and assistance with college choice. Their social and cultural capital is impacted as they pursue the idea of going to college and engage in the admissions and financial aid processes. Rurality creates real and perceived barriers, but rural students resiliently find creative ways to access resources and information. The creative search for information comes with pitfalls but they ignite internal motivations to make the best of their situations.

The meaning derived from the data leads me to make recommendations for exploring how college counseling priorities can be reshaped. Since it was revealed that college counseling is not a singular event and occurs over time, recommendations will focus on embracing college conversations as students progress through their K-12 education. Recommendations will also focus on how high school college counseling can be administered by adults inside and outside of the school since rural college students absorb college information from multiple people within their homes, schools, and communities. Recommendations for research will be geared towards exploring rural intersections that influence perceptions, the phenomenon of students transferring high schools, and the inspiration of college entrance exams.

Recommendations For Practice

The following recommendations are based on the data gleaned from participants' sharing their lived experiences. These recommendations are centered around individuals who engage with rural students in educational, familial and community settings.

Recommendation One: Family Toolkit

The first recommendation is based on data that shows that the parental relationships within familial structures are highly valued and remain a priority for major decisions. There were instances where family members had discussions with the participants about college that led to

them exploring college options. There were other instances where the data revealed how students were exposed to college options as they traveled with their parents. Other family members with parental influence were also highlighted. It was noted that these family members also regularly spoke with the participants about their future plans. Participants expressed how influential these family members were if these members went to college or not. Parents and other family members have the opportunity to provide rural students with college counseling. Rural students follow their parents' instructions whether the parents have correct or incorrect information. They tend to trust their family members and make decisions based on their opinions.

I recommend that practitioners work to design a program that takes advantage of family influence. Since family members have the time, influence, and desire to advise their relatives, we should equip them with college counseling tools. My recommendation is to design a Family Toolkit instructing family members on how to counsel students at any grade level from elementary school to high school. My data showed that rural students had early thoughts in elementary school based on experiences with field trips and sporting events. If families are given the tools to counsel, they will be able to supplement these fun events with information about college admissions, entrance exams, college rankings, financial aid, and more.

This toolkit can be self-guided and accessible online, in print media, or in a DVD series. Let's call the program the "College and Career Counseling: Family Toolkit". The toolkit can have a series of units covering the various aspects related to college choice. It will also need to have units focused on instructing, guiding, encouraging, and empowering families to use the toolkit.

The Woodward Hines Education Foundation's Get2College program can offer expert guidance in the development of the toolkit. This foundation and program are trusted resources

for college planning, preparation, information, and training services in Mississippi. They believe in educational equity and work diligently to help Mississippians find their way to gaining educational credentials. They have recently created toolkits for counselors and educators in Mississippi. Those toolkits include a FAFSA Toolkit, a Social Media Toolkit, and a Virtual Signing Toolkit.

According to the team at Get2College, the creation of toolkits was built on the community's needs. There were questions about finding resources to assist students with financial aid, promote college on social media, and celebrate students when they make their college choices. The inspiration for the toolkits was to create one centralized, topic-specific, go-to place for information. Instead of having to direct educators to various websites, losing focus, or not getting exactly what they needed, Get2College took all of the information and created a one-click portal. Before making the toolkits, the team took time to define what needed to be shared. They then worked to determine the best way to organize this information. By leaning on counselors' reflections, they were able to develop the best delivery method and adapted the delivery over time as the needs changed. The development, implementation, and assessment of the toolkits have evolved. Today, educators are looking to the toolkits are trusted sources. It has taken about four years for educators to accept and adopt the use of the tool kits.

The College and Career Counseling: Family Toolkit can follow a similar design structure and implementation strategy. The Get2College program has outlined a clear blueprint for this idea. Based on rural students and their families' needs, this toolkit can be a useful resource to ensure that they receive adequate and correct college and career counseling from their families. Additionally, family members are provided with easy-to-follow instructions and support along with the empowerment to assist their relatives.

Recommendation Two: Counselors Corps

My second recommendation is focused on the high school guidance counselors. It was revealed that guidance counselors worked diligently to expose participants to college fairs, college planning workshops, FAFSA completion support, and ACT prep workshops. The data shows that rural college students valued their relationships with the counselor as one participant noted that “other students need a counselor like mine...who can help them through the application process”.

There are currently cohort programs that focus on the development of principals and teachers in Mississippi. Rural guidance counselors could benefit from a “Counselors Corps” that focuses on professional development in high school college counseling. This program can provide training that supplements the programs currently offered by the Mississippi Counseling Association and The American School Counseling Association.

My recommendation is to create this program so rural guidance counselors can join forces with practitioners to learn new techniques and share best practices as it relates to high school college counseling. Guidance and inspiration can be found in similar programs like the University of Mississippi’s Principal Corps, a program designed to allow teachers to become administrators. Participants spend thirteen months in a rigorous curriculum that is supplemented by full-time internships. They are awarded higher education credentials upon completion of the program.

The Counselors Corps could follow a similar design. Counselors could register to participate in this program designed to equip them with the necessary tools to effectively guide students to college and career pathways. Upon completion, they could receive a unique certification credential. They could also participate in internships with veteran counselors in a

high school with a successful college planning program. They can also participate in an internship with a college access organization that follows the National College Access Network's leadership. They could additionally participate in an internship with a college admissions office. These three internships will allow them to gain a holistic perspective on the entire college planning, admissions, and enrollment process.

High school administrators would have to be willing to allow their counselors to participate in the program and uphold the program's standards. Participation in this program provides a great opportunity for research and assessment after a few years of implementation. I would advocate for the Counselors Corps program's financial investment, just like funders have invested in similar programs. The program would lead to rural students in the state of Mississippi receiving adequate high school college counseling that leads to more credential attainment, leading to a more educated citizenry for the state.

Recommendation Three: ASCA Rural Counseling Model

The third recommendation is also focused on the guidance counselors due to nature of their jobs and their access to students. Also, the data shows that rural students most often look to their counselors for college information and guidance. The recommendation's focus is to revamp and amend the Ethical Standards for School Counselors designed by The American School Counselor Association (ASCA).

Many schools across the United States adopt these standards. The standards include fifteen components that force counselors to spend time focusing on tasks unrelated to college counseling. Academic, Career, and Social/Emotional Plans are listed fourth on the list of standards. While the other components of the model are essential, college counseling becomes lower on the priority list. It is considered good practice for high school guidance counselors to

follow these standards. If they fail to follow these standards, their jobs could be in jeopardy. Guidance counselors follow these standards and maintain documentation to demonstrate their adherence. High school administrators use these standards for evaluation and assessment each year.

I recommend that administrators design an amended model of standards for rural guidance counselors that could be called the “ASCA Rural Counseling Model”. Rural guidance counselors need an amended model of standards because they desire to spend more time counseling their students through the college choice process. They simply are unable to do so because priorities and standards are placed elsewhere. They end up looking to other staff members for help or allowing students to fend for themselves. If more time and attention could be devoted to college counseling, rural students would make better-informed decisions about college.

By amending the model, the broad set of standards would be removed allowing rural high school guidance counselors to focus on college and career guidance. Since rural student schools battle issues other high schools may not, this amendment is a step towards equity. Changes can be implemented to meet the students' needs as they embrace the unique perspectives the students bring to the college choice process. My study highlights the needs and challenges these students face and can aid in the amending of the standards.

Recommendation Four: Consider Design Thinking

The final recommendation for practice is to bring stakeholders to the table to determine how to adequately help rural students make decisions about college. This recommendation is based on the culmination of the data collected in the study and my professional experiences. My experiences allow me to view college choice from the vantage points of high school students,

parents, counselors, and higher education practitioners. The shared data shows that there are multiple layers of influence and impact on college counseling. The perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice link elements such as life's circumstances, community issues, school, and family members, and the counseling activities associated with their choice.

I find it necessary for stakeholders to join forces, with a student-centered perspective, to best serve rural students. Focusing on individuals who engage with rural students in and out of the school buildings can create a college and career planning culture that can continue for years to come. For this stakeholder engagement initiative, I recommend using the concept of Design Thinking to reshape the practice of college and career counseling in rural areas. Design Thinking is a methodology for solving problems and exploring opportunities. It is a human-centered mindset and a toolset that propels organizations to the collaborative crafting of innovative solutions (Faster Glass, 2021b).

The stakeholders would include elementary students, middle school students, high school students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, principals, superintendents, college recruiters, financial aid staff, deans, and college presidents. This list of stakeholders is broad, and the perspectives will vary tremendously. Still, their voices and opinions are vital to defining how best to serve this specific population of students.

This innovative effort can follow the lead of companies like Faster Glass, a consulting company that offers a variety of services to help organizations find solutions to problems. They utilize Design Thinking as the framework for their services. Their framework includes the following:

- Discover - Conduct research to develop an understanding of stakeholders' needs and wants.
- (Re)Frame - Clearly articulate the objectives and identify both real and perceived constraints.
- Ideate - Generate a flood of ideas, then filter for desirability, viability, and feasibility.
- Prototype - Create visual representations of concepts, seek feedback, and refine.
- Test - Conduct experiments to test hypotheses and learn what works and what does not.
- Launch - Design launch to address barriers to implementation and sustainable adoption.

Faster Glass aims to “help people see, think, and work differently to spark positive disruption with a focus on empathy, exploration, inclusive co-creation, and experimentation” (Faster Glass, 2021a). They will guide participants through a problem-solving workshop that is both creative and collaborative. The workshop is structured but has room for flexibility, allowing for creative freedom. Since stakeholders may have limited time and availability, this workshop can be delivered in a short amount of time. It can be offered as a single event or multiple, depending on the needs of the group. I would further recommend that if this program is implemented, it should be delivered over multiple sessions allowing stakeholders the opportunity to participate in at least one session if they can’t physically participate in all sessions.

Barriers

These practice recommendations all have financial implications. They also require stakeholder buy-in. It may be difficult for advocates to express to funders the benefit of these practices. They would need to use a data-driven approach to expressing the value of these

programs and practices. Using the influence and notoriety of the programs that are used for inspiration could aid in the proposal.

Recommendations For Research

In this section, I will highlight three recommendations for future research. The lived experiences of the research participants revealed phenomena that would be useful for practitioners to investigate. Stakeholders in education and politics should take an interest in these findings and recommendations.

Recommendation One: Rural Intersectionality

My analysis highlighted the compounding factors associated with rural college students and their lived experiences within their communities. The majority of the rural students in my study are black women who are first-generation college students from low socioeconomic households. Intersectionality was indirectly highlighted as they shared their experiences. These intersections help explain the phenomena around the barriers they faced as they made their college choices. I understand these challenges because of my experiences as a rural, black, first-generation, and low-income college student. An exploration of rural college students and their intersectionality perceptions and its impact on college choice or college enrollment is recommended.

Recommendation Two: Students Leaving

The data revealed that rural students sought out better educational options in high school. Seven out of ten participants transferred high schools at least once. One student transferred multiple times. With those multiple transfers, traveling to high school became a longer distance than the local high school. For some of them, the tuition was steep, yet their parents made it possible. Researchers should investigate the motivations related to rural high school students

transferring to new high schools. It would be interesting to gather the perspectives of rural high school students who are considering the transfer process and students who have already transferred. Higher education researchers can focus further on the behaviors around these transfers and the implications for college enrollment, career outcomes, and job placement.

Recommendation Three: ACT Inspiration

Students in the study expressed how impactful their ACT scores were. Realizing that their ACT score met the standards for admissions and scholarships made the idea of attending college more comfortable. It seems that these moments propelled them to enroll. Researchers should explore what happens to rural students' college choice behavior if colleges change the entrance exam requirements. Recent news has shown that some colleges are moving to a test-optional admissions policy. Some colleges may completely remove the entrance exam requirement and move to a more holistic review of the students' profiles. If these requirements are removed, rural students who are inspired by receiving their test results may lose this pivotal moment of inspiration.

Limitations

The rural college students in my study are enrolled in three institutions in the state of Mississippi. There are thirty public and private institutions in the state. The participants represented the lives and experiences of rural college students, but they may not fully represent all rural college students' experiences. The ten participants represented the high schools they attended. Every rural town and high school in the state of Mississippi is not represented in the study. Students from other rural towns and high schools could have different lived experiences. Furthermore, the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling may vary for students in other states.

Second, the study was limited by the onslaught of the Coronavirus 2019. This global pandemic caused college students to be removed from campuses preventing me from connecting with more students. My physical presence on the three college campuses could have presented me with the opportunity to connect with other participants. The pandemic could have also impacted the thoughts, and reflections participants shared. Since we had to conduct the interviews via video conferencing software, I could not observe body language and non-verbal cues efficiently. The physical nature of expressions could have varied if interviews were conducted in person.

Third, this study engages with students who were freshmen in college. Their perceptions may have varied if they were sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Being so close to their high school experience allowed me to capture their experiences before time caused the memories to fade away. Perceptions could change as rural college students matriculate through college.

Conclusion

Rural students choose to enroll in college to gain access to a better life. They often struggle with their choices because high school college counseling is inadequate. The inadequacies are connected to factors related to the geographical location of their hometowns. Multiple layers of barriers intersect as they take on this daunting task of choosing a college. This study elevates the voices of rural college students that are often overlooked. Their wants and needs as they deal with college counseling are often ignored because high school leaders are consumed with other duties and standards of practice. The findings reveal how the school buildings' physical condition, course and college prep offerings, behavioral challenges, and college guidance practices impact rural students' decisions about college. They also reveal that college counseling goes beyond a simple conversation about college applications and financial

aid. Despite the barriers, rural students persist and find ways to get the information and access they need.

The data revealed the phenomenon of rural students leaving their high schools to seek out better high schools. While it is commendable that they were able to find these schools, I wonder about the students who know they should leave but have no resources and students who have no clue that better educational opportunities exist. It was valuable to learn about the lived experiences of the rural students who left their high schools, but there is more to learn about this phenomenon.

As a result of this research study, I have learned valuable lessons that will forever influence my practice. First, rural college students showcased a level of resiliency that is unmatched. I knew about this notion from my own experiences but developed keener insight through this study. Learning about the participants' lived experiences reminded me to remove the stereotypes associated with this class of students. They are often viewed as a group that needs to be fixed. They are treated as students with deep deficits that need special attention while ignoring the great assets they bring to the table. As I interact with rural students in my practice, I will engage them from the same perspective I would a student from an urban area.

Second, I have learned that the process of scholarly inquiry can be challenging but necessary. Decisions and assumptions should not be made about the lives of the students we serve without allowing them to have a voice. Qualitative research provides the platform for a contextual understanding of phenomena. It brings forward the character of the data allowing researchers to make recommendations that are rooted in empathy and equity. These recommendations can then be shared with decision-makers with a holistic explanation allowing them to understand the rationale. As institutions continue to move forward with a student-

centered perspective, it will be valuable to keep the students' voices and lived experiences at the forefront. Qualitative research gives us the vehicle for scholarly inquiry that can continue to elevate those voices.

Finally, I want to extend this work by doing more research and writing about rural high school and college students' lives. In my current practice, there are opportunities for research initiatives on the local and state levels. I hope to be able to extend these efforts even further when future professional opportunities are presented.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Mississippi Zip Codes with 2,500 residents or less according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

Zip Code	2017 Population Size
39561	2,505
39169	2,490
38601	2,461
39176	2,457
38774	2,443
38730	2,440
39140	2,413
38642	2,409
38762	2,392
38641	2,390
39160	2,377
39739	2,362
39337	2,297
39664	2,270
39354	2,222
38629	2,201
39346	2,158
38658	2,119
38864	2,055
39108	2,052
38661	2,010
38643	2,007
38633	2,006
39079	1,980
39096	1,957
39146	1,948
39406	1,943
39756	1,940
39322	1,922
39425	1,917
39057	1,913
38871	1,909
38856	1,876
39039	1,832
39478	1,823
39116	1,812
38862	1,793

38621	1,790
39358	1,783
39320	1,723
38685	1,684
39741	1,662
39772	1,641
39747	1,618
38778	1,563
39427	1,557
38929	1,556
39149 and 39086	1,543
39751 and 38876	1,540
38940	1,524
39743	1,523
39347	1,518
39657	1,508
39481	1,496
39332	1,491
39769	1,486
39572	1,475
38951	1,474
39665	1,450
39323	1,446
39776	1,435
39363	1,433
39067	1,425
38645	1,411
39633	1,405
38954	1,404
38754 and 38923	1,402
39045	1,386
39361	1,379
38927	1,373
39082	1,354
39647	1,344
39366	1,342
39342	1,330
39192	1,315
39179	1,293
38753	1,284
38639	1,255
39643	1,251
39217	1,243
38838	1,201

39336	1,199
39152	1,191
39462	1,111
39662	1,107
38625	1,106
39456	1,058
38631	1,044
38721	1,037
38626	1,010
39745	995
38627	981
38760 and 38759	971
38647	947
39078	928
38725	926
39193	905
38744	891
38670	846
39656	840
38859	816
38966	784
38914	778
39348	764
38924	753
38673	728
39144	722
39630	721
39326	720
38957	697
39113	694
39755	691
38617 and 39174	676
38674 and 39477	672
39767	662
39461	650
38879 and 38622	638
39356	614
38950	593
39668	579
38848	574
38722	561
39062 and 39097	554
39201	548
38726	542

38720	525
38920	523
38944	511
38961	497
38869	471
38736	464
39309	423
38746	405
38953	398
39156	384
39359 and 38952	383
39166	372
38740	368
38913	340
39054	337
38947	335
39352	333
38781	290
38946	287
38623	260
39737	256
38928	246
39736 and 38949	236
38644	230
39635	223
38764	205
38844	201
38731	194
38630	187
38964	176
39177	130
38962	119
38772	113
39771	92
38745	88
38767	79
38765	77
38768	66
39088	58
39162	56
38945	39
38943	32
39115	31
38749	28

38723
39760

18
10

Appendix B

Institutional Research Recruitment Email

Subject Line: Research Study Participation Request- Rural College Students

Greetings (Institutional Research Staff Member),

My name is T.J. Walker, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi. I am conducting a qualitative dissertation study on the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on their college choice. To better understand these student perceptions, I will be studying rural college students from three different institutions. My hope is that the institutions will reflect diversity in culture and climate representing the span of the types of institutions rural college students may attend. These institutions will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

I am seeking out first-time, college freshmen who enrolled in college directly after high school graduation and are between the ages of 18 and 19. These students will be Mississippi residents from zip codes that fall into the rural category which I have defined as communities with populations of 2,500 or less based on current research studies.

I believe rural college students attending (CURRENT INSTITUTION) will add valuable experiences and reflections to the study. My goal is to add to the body of knowledge about students from rural towns and their transition to college. Participation in this study will consist of at least one interview that will last between 60 to 90 minutes. A follow-up focus group meeting may occur to share my findings with participants for clarity and validation.

I would love to meet with you to discuss this matter in more detail. May we meet by phone or the Internet in the very near future to discuss the possibility of your institution helping with this study? Please let me know if this inquiry ought to be directed to someone else at your institution so that I may follow up appropriately.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Best regards,

T.J. Walker

Email: tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu

Cell: 901-598-3596

Work: 662-349-2789

Appendix C

Study Participant Recruitment Email-Interview

Subject Line: Research Study Participation Request- Rural College Students

Hello (Participant Name),

My name is T.J. Walker and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi. I am conducting a qualitative study on the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on their college choice. This study is being done because of my interest in helping rural students in getting to college, and I will write my dissertation based on this work.

I am seeking first-time (never before took a college class as part of a degree program), college freshmen who enrolled in college directly after high school graduation, and are between the ages of 18 and 19. These students will be Mississippi residents from zip codes that fall into the rural category which I have defined as communities with populations of 2,500 or less based on current research studies.

Participation in this study will consist of at least one interview that will last between 60 to 90 minutes. A follow-up focus group meeting may occur to share my findings with you and other participants. If you meet the criteria described above and are willing to partner with me in this study, please complete the Study Participant Consent Form below and return it to me via email.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this message or the study. Thank you.

Best regards,

T.J. Walker

Appendix D

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: THE PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE IMPACT OF HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE COUNSELING ON COLLEGE CHOICE

Investigator:

Tommy (T.J.) Walker
5642 Lexy Lane
Southaven, MS 38671
tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu
901-598-3596

Faculty Sponsor:

Dr. George McClellan
College of Education
103 Guyton Hall
(662) 915-4995
gsmccllel@olemiss.edu

Key Information for You to Consider
<p>Purpose. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of high school college counseling on college choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Duration. It is expected that your participation will last 60-90 minutes.• Activities. You will be asked to answer questions in an interview.• Why you might not want to participate. Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include sharing information about your personal experiences from high school.• Why you might want to participate. Some of the benefits that may be expected include having your experiences shared to better serve students who are from rural areas. Your participation can be viewed as a service to our local and global community.

By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

What you will do for this study

You will participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Due to COVID-19, this interview may occur using video conferencing software. The researcher will ask you to respond to a list of questions. Responses will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.

Possible risks from your participation

There are no possible risks of hurt or harm.

Benefits from your participation

You might experience satisfaction from contributing to the knowledge about rural towns and the experiences of high school students choosing to enroll in college. Participating in the interview might make you more aware of the sociocultural issues rural students face.

Incentives

You will receive a \$10 Wal-Mart gift card for your participation.

Confidentiality

Research team members will have access to the information collected during interviews. We will protect confidentiality by physically separating information that identifies you from your responses (which is a safer strategy than how medical records are stored).

Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) – the committee responsible for reviewing the ethics of, approving, and monitoring all research with humans – have authority to access all records. However, the IRB will request identifiers only when necessary.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, just tell the experimenter. Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the College of Education, or with the University, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

The researcher may terminate your participation in the study without regard to your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety and protecting the integrity of the research data.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, then decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have been given a copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. Furthermore, I also affirm that the experimenter explained the study to me and told me about the study's risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw. By continuing, I consent to participate in the study.

Appendix E

Student Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Are you 18 years or older? Because of legal and ethical reasons, I have to verify your age.

Icebreaker:

- I would like to hear about your hometown. What was it like?
- I would like to know more about your high school. What was it like?

Transparency Statement:

I am studying how college students made their college choice. I wanted to connect with current college students who could share their experiences. I truly believe no one can talk about you better than you.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. I will be audio recording our conversation along with collecting hand-written notes. I may use your words in my written manuscript, but I will not share any personal/identifying information with anyone.

Please let me know if you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions or if you would like to stop participating at any time. Is everything clear? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1. At what point did you know that you wanted to go to college, and how did you reach that decision?
2. Please share how you went about developing the list of colleges you might want to attend.
3. How did you select the one college that you actually wanted to attend?
4. Now I want to circle back to how you decided that you wanted to go to college. Were their people who helped you in any way with that decision?
5. Were their people who helped you in any way in developing the list of colleges you might want to attend?
6. Finally, were their people who helped you in any way in making the choice about exactly which college you would attend?

Appendix F

Study Participant Recruitment Email- Focus Group

Subject Line: Research Study Participation Request- Rural College Students

Hello again!

I am finishing up my study about the perceptions of rural college students on the impact of college counseling on college choice. I believe your experiences and reflections have already added value to the study. My goal is to add to the body of knowledge about students from rural towns and their transition to college. I am requesting your participation because you are an exceptional representative and advocate for rural college students.

Participation will consist of joining a **VIRTUAL focus group meeting** of **multiple participants** that will last between 30 to 45 minutes. From the interview you previously participated in, I have identified common themes that are relevant to the study and will be stimulating to readers. To verify and validate the accuracy of these themes, I am soliciting your participation in the focus group. This process will promote understanding and give honor and respect to your responses. I want to be mindful and reflective with the valuable words you have spoken.

If you would like to participate, please let me know by responding to this email. You have already consented to participate in my study by participating in the interview a few weeks ago. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to working with you again!

Best regards,

T.J. Walker

Appendix G



Tommy Walker <tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu>

IRB Exempt Determination of 20x-186

5 messages

irb@olemiss.edu <irb@olemiss.edu>
To: Tommy Walker <tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu>
Cc: gsmoclel <gsmoclel@olemiss.edu>

Fri, Apr 24, 2020 at 2:53 PM

PI:

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, "PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE IMPACT OF HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE COUNSELING ON COLLEGE CHOICE " (Protocol #20x-186), has been determined as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(#2ii).

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi's human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principles in The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

- You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.
- Any changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating those changes.
- You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.
- If research is to be conducted during class, the PI must email the instructor and ask if they wish to see the protocol materials (surveys, interview questions, etc) prior to research beginning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB at irb@olemiss.edu.

Miranda Core

Research Compliance Specialist

IRB Administrative Office

Research Integrity and Compliance

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix H



RUST COLLEGE

150 Rust Avenue • Holly Springs, MS 38635 • 662-252-8000, Ext. 4050 • FAX: 662-252-8862

Paul Lampley, Ph.D.
Vice President for Academic Affairs
p.lampley@rustcollege.edu

June 2, 2020

**Mr. Tommy Walker
5642 Lexy Lane
Southaven, MS 38671**

Dear Mr. Walker:

The Rust College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the research entitled, "Perception of Rural College Students on High School Counseling on College Choice." This office accepts the recommendation with the stipulation that items 1) and 2) in the following paragraph are addressed and on file. This response may be directed to this office.

Items: (1) make certain to put a beginning and ending date for the project; (2) how will the researcher identify emails and send those out requesting their response? The proposal suggests that the researcher will gather information (or collect data) by emailing the students (of Rust College) and receiving their response. The IRB's concern is how this can be done without violation of FERPA laws?

We wish you the best in your efforts and would like to have a copy of your end results.

Sincerely,

**Paul Lampley, Ph.D.
Vice-President for Academic Affairs**

**Dr. Gemma Beckley
Chair, Institutional Review Board**

PL:ml

cc: Dr. Gemma Beckley, Chair, IRB Board, Professor, Social Work & Chair, Social Work Reaffirmation Process

Appendix I



Tommy Walker <tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu>

FW: NWMCC Research Application - T.J. Walker

1 message

NWCC Research <research@northwestms.edu>
To: "tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu" <tgwalke1@go.olemiss.edu>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 8:26 AM

Mr. Walker,

This was just approved Friday. I will get you out an official letter sometime this week, but you may begin the process of collecting your data.

Thank you,

Dr. Carolyn Wiley

Carolyn W. Wiley, Ed.D.

Associate Vice President of Academic Instruction and Institutional Effectiveness

Northwest Mississippi Community College

4975 Hwy 51 North

Senatobia, MS 38668

662-562-3927 Phone



VITA

TOMMY G. WALKER, JR.

EDUCATION

Master of Science in Leadership

Belhaven University, August 2016

Bachelor of Science in Education

Mississippi State University, May 2008

PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Branch Director, Woodward Hines Education Foundation/North MS Get2College Center

July 2015- Present

- Responsible for the daily oversight, management, and success of the North MS Get2College center
- Participate in hiring staff and provide leadership and training in all facets of the program and related areas
- Participate in strategic planning and goal setting with overall College Planning staff
- Oversee annual budget and expenditures for North MS
- Work closely with the Director of the Get2College program to meet the goals of the Center
- Build relationships with and provide support to high school counselors through involvement and support of their activities
- Manage projects and partnerships
- Work closely with the Director of the Get2College program and Project Directors to ensure that services & projects are coordinated appropriately
- Provide counseling, advice and general information to visitors at the North MS Get2College Center, including students, parents, and educators; assess counseling needs of clients and provide services as needed; direct clients to appropriate internal or external resources
- Provide workshops and activities related to college and career planning to audiences throughout the North MS region
- Keep accurate, detailed records of all services rendered for monthly, quarterly and annual reports

Assistant Director of Outreach and College Advisor, Woodward Hines Education

Foundation/North MS Get2College Center

June 2013 – July 2015.

Provided counseling, advice, and general information to visitors at the North MS Get2College Center, including students, parents, and educators; assess counseling needs of clients and provide services as needed; direct clients to appropriate internal or external resources

- Assisted clients in completing applications for admission and financial aid, serving as the client's advocate to college representatives when necessary
- Provided information and advice by phone and email about colleges, careers, financial aid and other issues related to college planning
- Assisted clients with finding ways to pay for college i.e., scholarship searches, state and federal aid and student loans
- Conducted activities and programs relating to career selection and test preparation, effectively using programs and tools for personality, interest and skills assessment, college choice and financial aid
- Conducted follow-up contact with visitors to determine progress with their plans and provide additional assistance if needed.
- Kept accurate, detailed records of all services rendered
- Provided workshops and activities related to planning and paying for college
- Served as liaison for North MS outreach projects

Coordinator of Recruitment Activities/Admissions Counselor, Office of Admissions and Scholarships, Mississippi State University

July 2008 - June 2013

- Coordinated high school bus tours
- Coordinated weekly group tours and presentations (MSU Bulldog for a Day)
- Served as liaison between MSU Admissions office and MSU Alumni Association in regards to alumni recruiting
- Conducted recruiting activities and follow-up with prospective students
- Participated in high school college fairs, student conferences and provided information to prospective students and their parents
- Worked closely with high school guidance counselors in the recruitment of their students
- Represented Mississippi State University at conferences, meetings, and other official functions
- Held meetings with prospective students and parents to discuss Admissions, Scholarships and all other aspects of MSU as a part of their campus tour

AFFILIATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS

- MCA (Mississippi Counseling Association)
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Step I & II Practitioner
- NCAN (National College Attainment Network)
- NCAN Access Advisor
- NPEA (National Partnership for Educational Access)
- Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society
- SACAC (Southern Association of College Admission Counseling)
- The College Board

PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES

Southern Association of College Admission Counseling (SACAC) Conference

Atlanta, GA - 2019

New Orleans, LA - 2018

Miami, FL - 2016

Birmingham, AL - 2015

Myrtle Beach, SC - 2014

Memphis, TN - 2013

NCAN (National College Attainment Network) Conference

Virtual - 2020

San Diego, CA - 2017

Orlando, FL - 2015

Nashville, TN - 2013

Collegeboard Regional Forum

Orlando, FL - 2018

Atlanta, GA - 2017

Mississippi Counseling Association (MCA) Conference

Biloxi, MS - 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019

Rural College Access and Success Summit

Lexington, KY - 2019

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Dufour, K., Kellog, T., & Walker, T. (2020). *How Mississippi's Get2College Brings College Access to Rural Students*. Presented at the National College Attainment (NCAN) Virtual Conference.

Rogers, J., Thompson, D., & Walker, T. (2019). *Navigating the Path to College Readiness: Federal Financial Aid*. Presented at the Mississippi Counseling Association (MCA) Conference.

Rogers, J., Thompson, D., Trammel, J., & Walker, T. (2018). *Thrive as You Advise for College & Career Readiness*. Presented at the Mississippi Counseling Association (MCA) Conference.

Thompson, D., Trammel, J., & Walker, T. (2017). *Graduation Ready: Federal Financial Aid Updates*. Presented at the Mississippi Counseling Association (MCA) Conference.