

SHOOT THE MESSENGER OR CHANGE THE MESSAGE: WHAT ARE AFRICAN
AMERICAN MEN LEARNING ABOUT CHOOSING COLLEGE?

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This study identified and described the experiences of twelve African American men that influenced the choice to participate in postsecondary education. This qualitative study used a phenomenology framework to determine 1) the formation of predisposition in the college choice process, 2) the messages received about college from influential people, and 3) perception and interpretation of the importance of a college degree.

The overall theme arising from the data is that the college choice process was complicated and inconsistent; however, ten of the twelve participants completed some type of postsecondary training. Deficient messages about postsecondary education manifested as low parental support for college attendance, low academic expectations, withholding of important information from school officials and little or no exposure to postsecondary institution campuses or students.

Influential people for the participants ranged from parents to themselves, and from a combination of characteristics from different people, to peers, to no one. The informants did not consistently identify their role model as the one who influenced them to attend college.

The perception of the value of a college degree varied among the participants. Some described the degree as a requirement for success; others felt that strengthening family and achieving financial independence was more important.

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If I am able to support the education of a future student in the same way my family and friends have supported me, I will truly be an accomplished educator.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory...

Ephesians 3:20-21a

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If current enrollment trends continue, the last African American man to earn a bachelor's degree will graduate in 2097 (Cross & Slater, 2000). The year 2097 is 92 years from now, which seems like a long time from today. This extreme statistic was reported with the hopes of obtaining the reader's attention. Unfortunately, additional statistics about the status of African American men in postsecondary education support this seemingly outrageous projection.

According to the US Census, women have outnumbered men in postsecondary education since 1979 (Cheeseman-Day & Jamieson, 2003). Black women are outpacing African American men in educational attainment and in employment advancement (Cose, 2003; Samuels, 2003). In 1991, 41,000 African American women earned bachelor's degrees, compared to 24,300 bachelor's degrees earned by African American men (NCES, 1995). In 2000, 41,472 African American men earned bachelor's degrees, while 82,769 African American women completed bachelor's degrees (Horne, 2005). The Justice Policy Institute estimates that 791,600 African American males are under the jurisdiction of the federal, state, and local prison systems, compared to 603,032 African American men enrolled in higher education (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2002). In 1997, African American men accounted for only 37% of all African Americans enrolled in higher education (Cross & Slater, 2000). By 2002, the percentage of African American men enrolled in college, out of all African American students, shrank to 35.8% (Horne, 2005). In 2001, African American men accounted for

only 39% of the enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States (Provasnick & Shafer, 2004).

Between 1984 and 1997, a 13-year period, there was a 7.6% decrease in the percentage of African American men enrolled in college (Cross & Slater, 2000). The drastic decrease is more apparent when the data from 1965 show African American men represented 45.9% of African American college enrollments, which is slightly greater than the percentage of African American men enrolled in college in 1984. The percentage of African American men enrolled in college in 1965 was greater than in 1984.

As educational opportunity grows, the number of underrepresented students participating in postsecondary education is increasing. This increase has been painful and slow, and has not been enough to bring African American males to their full academic potential. Various studies have documented the gaps in achievement when comparing African American students to non-Hispanic white and Asian students (Jacobson, Olsen, King Rice, Sweetland & Ralph, 2001; Robelen, 2002). Recent statistics from the Department of Education reported that only 7% of African American male high school graduates complete the New Basics Curriculum (King, 2000), a college preparatory curriculum that includes three years of mathematics, science, and social science, two years of foreign language, and four years of English.

Some of the gains earned toward academic parity during the 1970s and 1980s are actually eroding (Haycock, 2001; Treisman & Surles, 2001; Edmonds & McDonough, 2003; Cross, 1999). The high school completion rates of African American students are closing in on the high school completion rates of white students. However,

between 1975 and 1998, the gap between the college completion rates of African American and white students has actually grown (Jacobson et al., 2001). Increased high school graduation rates have not translated into higher college graduation rates for African Americans when compared to white students.

The authors of the widely used Scholastic Aptitude Test® (SAT), the College Board® (www.collegeboard.com; New York, NY), believe that the growing gap between the SAT® scores of African American students and all other test takers is due to higher numbers of African American test takers (Cross, 1999). Cross does not agree with the College Board's explanation, because it contradicts previous research about standardized test performance. For example, test takers from lower socio-economic status levels are more likely to score lower than test takers from middle to wealthy families. Therefore, if the growing numbers of African American test takers were from lower income families, their poor performance on the SAT® would be justified according to the College Board. However, according to Cross, the new African American test takers are from middle class to wealthy families. In fact, the number of test takers from families with reported incomes of less than \$20,000 decreased by 2% from 1997 to 1999, while the numbers of test-takers with reported incomes greater than \$80,000 increased by 27% during the same period. The largest gap between the test scores of African American and white test takers is in those test takers with reported incomes greater than \$80,000. The SAT® scores of African American students contradict the accepted theories of standardized test performance (Cross, 1999).

Poor academic preparation in high school is the explanation proposed by Cross (1999). Cross states that white students are more likely to attend high schools with a

strong college preparatory focus, enroll in rigorous or honors courses, and spend money on supplementary SAT® exam preparation courses. These advantages work to raise the performance of some students. Many African American students may not be offered these advantages, may not be aware of the benefits, or such programs are not affordable.

The US Department of Education reports that participation in college preparatory curricula and the academic success rates for students from minority groups increases as socioeconomic status increases (King, 2000). An increase in socioeconomic status also increases parity in college enrollment for males and females. This statistic is true for all minority groups, except for African American males. The rate of college completion for African American men is lower than all other racial and gender groups from the lowest socioeconomic status level to the highest (King, 2000). The experiences of African American students, specifically African American male students, contradict the accepted explanations of successful academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

The fact that fewer African American men are participating in postsecondary education (Cross & Slater, 2000) served as the stimulus for this research study. To the family, friends, and teachers of African American men, their struggle for success in education, and in other areas of life, is readily evident. The experiences of these men that inform the decision to attend or not to attend college are foremost in this research study. Increasing the college participation rates of African American males should not

only be important to concerned family, friends, and educational researchers. This issue should be important to all of society.

Increasing the number of African American male college graduates will help keep pace with projected population shifts and changes in the United States' economy and job market. To keep pace with a changing world and economy, the United States must increase the number of citizens with college degrees. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the occupations projected to grow the fastest are in education, healthcare, and professional and business services. The BLS created a list of the ten fastest growing occupations, and nine of the 10 occupations listed are in health or computer-information-technology fields. These fields require specialized training that is becoming more associated with a minimum of an associates degree. Six out of the 10 fastest growing jobs identified by the BLS require an associates or bachelor's degree (BLS, 2002).

The jobs that require only a high school diploma and offer on-the-job training are decreasing rapidly. The economy of the past offered a significant number of jobs that only required a high school diploma, such as manufacturing, postal service jobs, or entry-level office work. Susan Imel (1990) states that there will be future jobs for individuals without college degrees; however, "entry into the better paying jobs will continue to be severely limited for such workers" (¶ 11). Imel describes an "educational shortfall" which means the workers available will not have the necessary postsecondary education to fill open jobs. People of color, especially African American men, are over-represented in the occupational fields that are projected to have the least growth, and underrepresented in the fields that are slated to grow the most (Imel, 1990). In order to

contribute and benefit from the economy of the future, African American men must be prepared to attend and complete college.

The current graduation rates for all Americans and more so for African American men, will not keep up with future demands for an educated workforce. Twenty-seven percent of non-Hispanic, white Americans has bachelor's degrees (Cross, 2000). In 1999, only 15.5% of African Americans over the age of 25 reported having a college degree. African American men earn only 34% of all bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans. African American men earn 30% of the master's degrees, and 36% of doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans (Cross, 2000). According to 1996 data, only 35% of African American males enrolled at NCAA Division I colleges graduate within six years of beginning their studies (Alexander, 2004).

Table 1

Comparison of Enrollment Growth of African American Men from 1980 to 2000

shows enrollment statistics of African American men compared to all college students and African American students from 1980 to 2000. In 1980, there were 11,928,890 students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States. African American students represented 9.29% or 1,108,348 of the total number of students enrolled. To place this number in perspective, the proportion of African American men in the entire US college student population was calculated. In 1980, African American males accounted for 41% of the total number of African American students. Out of all college students of all races and ethnicities and genders enrolled in 1980, African American men represented only 3.81% of college students in the United States (NCES, 2003).

After a twenty-year period, there was tremendous growth in college enrollment. In 2000, there were 15,312,300 students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States (Horne, 2005). African American students represented 11.3% of the total, or 1,730,300 African American students. There were 635,300 African American males enrolled in college in 2000. This represents 4% of the total college student population, and is a .3% increase from 1980. The number of college students of all races and genders grew by 28.3% or 3,383,410 students in twenty years. The growth rate of college enrollments of African American male students, at .3%, is well below national growth trends.

The ethnic make-up of the United States is changing. African Americans represent 12.7% of the population (US Census Bureau, 2004). The 2000 US Census reported that the population of non-Hispanic Black Americans has increased by 16% since 1990. This rate of increase is higher than the growth of the total population. In 2050, 14% of the United States' population is projected to be composed of African Americans. Non-Hispanic Whites will represent 72% of the population. The size of the Hispanic population is projected to increase from 12% to 24% by 2050 (US Census Bureau, 2004).

When examined together, these statistics suggest that the population of eligible workers in the United States will become more diverse and will need more than a high school diploma to benefit from and effectively contribute to the United States' economy. To meet this need, more African American men must enroll in and complete college.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to identify and describe the experiences of African American men that influenced the choice to participate in postsecondary education. This qualitative research study describes the experiences of African American men in terms of 1) the formation of predisposition in the college choice process, 2) the messages received about college from influential people, and 3) the perception and interpretation of the importance of a college degree.

Research Questions

To answer the broad question of why fewer African American men are choosing to participate in postsecondary education, this research study focused on the lived experiences of African American men. Through these lived experiences, African American men receive messages from parents, family members, teachers, peers, the media, strangers on the street, etc. The messages ranged from “get a degree,” “I can’t wait till you turn 18 and get out the house,” to “just get a job,” or “you’ll get a scholarship if you run the 40 yard dash faster.” This research focused on identifying the messages passed on to African American men by influential people such as parents, siblings, teachers, other individuals, or entities.

The specific research questions were:

- 1) How is predisposition to attend college formed in African American men? When, why and how do African American men make the decision to attend college?
- 2) What messages do African American males say they hear about college, and who is primarily passing on the messages?
- 3) How important is a college degree to the success of African American men and what role will the degree play in their future?

Significance of the Study

Higher education practitioners and researchers have supported the need for research on African American males, and their experiences leading up to postsecondary education. Dr. George Boggs, president of the American Association of Community Colleges identified this need during a 2004 lecture at Collin County Community College (S. G. Katsinas, personal communication, April 2004). The past few years have witnessed the establishment of programs with specific focuses on African American males. The University of Georgia's African American Male Initiative program is a research driven, legislatively funded program that seeks to recruit and retain African American males in the University of Georgia System (Roach, 2003).

In January 2004, the Patterson Research Institute of the United Negro College Fund met to create a national research agenda on the educational experiences of African Americans (Chew, 2004). The meeting resulted in calls for more research resulting in "hard data about ourselves (African Americans), and what we are doing" (Chew, 2004, p. 10), and more studies that identify the success and resiliency of African American students. Many research studies on African American men (Garrett, 1998; Harvey, 2002; Smith, 1995; Jacobson et al., 2001; Thoreson, 2003) have defined the characteristics of low-achieving students and their ill-suited learning environments using quantitative methods. There is a need for more in-depth studies to focus on the personal experiences of African Americans from their own point of view, in their own voices (Batey, 1999).

Don Hossler, who has researched college choice for a number of years, believes that “special attention may need to be given to African American males, because the factors that influence their educational aspirations are less certain” (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999, p. 29). Kassie Freeman (2005) states that researchers and practitioners wishing to understand African American gender differences in college choice must design studies differently, specifically, separating genders for study.

The dissertation research reported here is significant because it meets the challenge of providing hard data about the experiences of African American men, by gathering qualitative data directly from those who experience the research issues on a daily basis. This study moved beyond the listing of what is wrong with African American men and looked for explanations and solutions to the problem.

The intended audience for this research is educational policy makers, educators at all levels of education, parents and anyone who interacts with African American men and recognizes the need for improved strategies for supporting their education. Fellow researchers who are seeking to form theories about the characteristics and experiences of African American men related to the college choice process, told from the African American male point of view, should find this research study informative to their work. Organizations with missions to mentor and support African American males to attend college may be able to use the research results to influence their activities.

Delimitations

The population of interest for this study was African American males over the age of eighteen who have earned at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. The

requirement of a high school diploma, or its equivalent, is set in order to limit data collection efforts to those African American males who are qualified to begin college courses. Participants must have been 18 or older to remove any barriers to obtaining consent for participation.

The population sample was also restricted to those African American men born and raised in the United States by parents born and raised in the United States. Foreign-born men of African descent and African American men raised by recent immigrants have different experiences growing up than children born in the United States to native-born parents (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Obiakor, 2002). This study excluded men of African descent who were new to this county, or who were children of recent United States immigrants of African descent, in order to limit the number of confounding factors.

The sample also excluded African American men who joined the military before attending college. Military training could have drastically changed the experiences of the subject, which could have raised issues that surpassed the scope of this study. African American men who completed a bachelor's degree before joining the military were included in the study. Military experience resulted in the disqualification of a significant number of potential participants. The military is one of the first institutions in the United States to desegregate, which created a significant resource for education and economic mobility for African Americans, especially men. The researcher intends to focus on the lived experiences of this population in future research studies.

Limitations

Generalizability is not the primary focus of qualitative research (Silverman, 2005; Berg, 2004). The results of this study do not provide information on the experiences of all African American males. The results do provide in-depth, rich descriptions of the experiences of the participants in this research study that may be useful for speculating or theorizing about the experiences of similar groups of African American men.

The twelve informants who participated in this research study had all attended college at some point. One of the twelve has recently returned to school to complete a bachelor's degree. A second informant had fewer than 12 college credits and desires to return one day, but has no current plans to do so. There were four potential participants with no college experience. Interestingly, none of the four followed through with his scheduled interview. The lack of participants who had no college experience is a definite limitation of the results of this study. In future research, there is a need for a different approach for recruiting participants with no college experience.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research study, the following terms were defined:

African American man – over the age of 18, male, of African descent, non-Hispanic, born and raised in the United States, raised by parents who were born and raised in the United States.

College – any public or private, postsecondary education institute in the United States accredited to award the associates degree or higher

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The research literature reviewed for this study covered a broad range of topics. The literature on the high school experience, college choice, influential people, and educational attainment in general is rich. However, narrowing the focus to the African American man's experience as it relates to reaching higher education disappointingly narrowed the available field of research studies. With that said, research on African American males is presently forming a vibrant and informative branch in educational research.

The search for studies on African American men proved to be interesting, if not frustrating at times. Initial searches for related literature involved the creation of a key term list. The variety and ever-changing list of terms used to identify African American men resulted in inconsistent results from online search engines. For example, searching the ProQuest Digital Dissertation index with the keyword terms *African American, men, and higher education*, resulted in just fifteen hits. Changing the keywords to *Black, male, and higher education*, resulted in a list with only forty-two different hits resulted. Under the assumption that some studies were not being included in the search results, the researcher tried a different search method.

The search string used was *African American Black men* or *African American Black male* and the search engine was set to search in the text of the dissertation abstract instead of just in the established keyword list. This method resulted in 406 dissertations. To limit this number to only the dissertations which focused on education issues related to African American men, the search engine was asked to exclude the

following terms if found in the abstract: *women, females, healthcare, health, music, entertainment, gay, homosexual and HIV / AIDS*. This method resulted in 93 dissertations. The researcher examined the abstracts of these studies to determine if the dissertations related to this research study.

Research has more than adequately documented the presence of the Black – White gap in educational achievement, low academic achievement and low college completion rates of African American students (Garrett, 1998; Harvey, 2002; Jacobson et al., 2001; Smith, 1995; Thoreson, 2003). Research studies that specifically narrow the population of interest to African American males have grown in the last ten years. These studies are adept at identifying what is wrong with the educational and environmental circumstances of African American men.

The high school completion rates, which directly affect the college completion rates of African American men, decreased to less than 63% in 1998 (Harvey, 2002). Only Hispanic males have a lower high school graduation rate than African American males (Harvey, 2002). For the 2000-2001 academic year, the average SAT® score for African American students was 859, compared to a national average of 1020 (College Entrance Examination Board, 2001). African American men continue to be overrepresented in special education programs, low or non-academic track programs in high school, and underrepresented in math and science majors in college (Sharp, Johnson, Kurotsuchi & Waltman, 1996; Smith 1995).

Unfortunately, the majority of these research studies do not move beyond the negative aspects of the African American male experience in the education system to provide explanations for or suggestions to rectify their situation. The studies that do

move beyond the listing of negatives overwhelmingly focus on describing the experiences of African American men as college students, especially as college athletes, or as postgraduates.

Gaps in the Research on African American men

A gap in the literature is evident when it comes to research on how African American men navigate their way to college. In other words, given the characteristics of African American learners and their primary and secondary learning environments, how do African American men make the decision to attend college? The reviewed research on African Americans and postsecondary education did not reveal any studies that focused on how African American males learn about college, how the concept is presented to them, and how African American males interpret and act on these messages. The research of Kassie Freeman (2005) focuses on the college choice process for African Americans in general. Freeman's *African Americans and College Choice*, published in the spring of 2005, is the most complete resource on the college choice process of African Americans published to date.

African Americans and Predisposition

To influence students to attend college, teachers, parents and other concerned individuals must know when African American males make the decision to attend college and what influences this decision. The decision to attend college, or college choice has been researched by, Jackson (1982), Chapman (1981), Hanson and Litten (1982), Hossler and Gallagher (1987), Hossler and Stage (1992), Hossler, Schmit and

Vesper (1999), and Freeman (2005) and others. Efforts to explain why students attend college range from economic models to sociological to marketing and advertising models (Hossler et al., 1999). Hossler et al. analyzed the various college choice models and synthesized a model that took into consideration the point of view of the student, and not just the institution. The point of view of the student is the micro-level of college choice research. Michael Paulsen (1990) says “the study of college choice behavior of individual students (micro-level) indicates the ways in which environmental, institutional, and student characteristics affect a student’s choices about whether or not to attend college and which college to attend” (p. 2).

The three-phase model synthesized by Hossler et al. (1999), describes college choice as 1) the predisposition to choose to attend college or to explore other options, such as work or military service; 2) the search for a college to attend; and 3) the selection of an institution to apply to and enroll in. The proposed research questions of this study, primarily focused on the first phase of the college choice process: predisposition

A student can exit the predisposition phase with one of three mindsets. The “whiches” are students who always knew they were going to attend college. The “whethers” are students who apply to one or two colleges; however, they may not attend at all. The final group, are the “nots”. This group of students never truly considered college attendance as a realistic option and instead seek to begin employment immediately after high school or join the military. The “whiches” and “whethers” are the most likely to move into the next phase of the college choice model: the search phase, followed by the choice phase. Students enter the second phase of college choice

sometime during the freshman and sophomore high school years (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

According to Hossler et al (1999), students typically choose to attend college sometime between the eighth and tenth grades. Of course, these plans can change during the high school years; however, a formal decision is difficult to alter.

Freeman (2005) identified African American students who reported always knowing that they would attend college; in other words, the decision occurred long before middle school. This type of student does not completely contradict the research of Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Instead, these students are similar to the “whiches”, the students who have never considered *not* going to college. In this phase, students are not actively searching for a college to attend, or completing applications, however they are waiting for the time to come for the application process to start.

The description of predisposition offered by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), and Freeman (2005) does not describe a distinct decision or event. The decision to attend college does not happen during one precise moment in time. The predisposition phase involves the cumulative influence of 1) parent encouragement and support, 2) parent education level, 3) student grade point average, 4) influence of peers, and 5) involvement in high school activities (Hossler et al., 1999). Urbanski (2000) explains these various influences in more detail. She lists the following ten factors that influence predisposition:

- 1) General understanding or awareness of college attendance
- 2) Self awareness of academic ability (high GPA, class rank and test scores)
- 3) Close proximity to a higher education institution
- 4) Academic or college preparatory curriculum at the high school level
- 5) Involvement in high school activities

- 6) Knowledge of financial aid
- 7) Friends attending college
- 8) Influence of parents (encouragement)
- 9) Influence of others (school officials, family members)
- 10) Influence of friends (peer pressure) (p. 21)

Predisposition also develops through “positive attitudes toward education and early exposure to information on financial aid, as well as institutional costs” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). There are several correlations between college choice and certain experiences and exposures; however, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) state that “the events which shape the predisposition phase are not well understood” (p. 212). Predisposition is the result of years of experiences and exposures that cause a student to attend or not to attend college.

The research on predisposition related to African Americans states that there is not much difference in the educational aspirations of African Americans compared to white students (Hossler et al., 1999); meaning African American students are just as likely to say they want to attend college as their white, Asian, and Hispanic counterparts. Differences were uncovered in the factors that influence students of color and women to attend college. According to Hossler et al., (1999) female students are more likely to speak to their parents about their educational plans than male students are. Male students are more likely to speak with their friends and school officials about their college plans.

Hossler et al.’s (1999) research also found that African American men were the most distinct group in the multivariate analysis, meaning the variables used to identify what influences the college choice process for African American men were not

successful predictors. Overall, the results suggested that parental encouragement, student achievement, and parent education levels are the variables with the greatest influence on a student's plans to attend college. Therefore, efforts to influence students to attend college should begin by focusing on the parents, followed by focusing on improving student academic performance. Unfortunately, Hossler's research reports that this approach is not highly effective for influencing African American males to attend college.

Hamrick and Stage (1995) conducted a study on predisposition using quantitative data from the National Education Longitudinal Study: 1988 (NELS:88). The purpose of their study was "to examine variables related to predisposition to college for eighth-grade students attending schools with a high percentage of minority students and a high percentage of students receiving free or subsidized lunch" (Hamrick & Stage, 1995, p. 3). The authors believed that national studies with aggregated data by ethnicity and gender, while important for analyzing national trends, mask the actual experiences of students of color and female students. The authors addressed this issue by disaggregating the data by race. Any hidden variations in the data would then be apparent. The entire NELS:88 database was not used in this study. Instead, the authors created randomly selected sub-samples of 300 students each. The results show that for student attending all types of schools, the significant factors that predict college predisposition were 1) family socio-economic status, 2) ethnicity, 3) parental expectations, 4) GPA, and 5) participation in school activities. When the authors limited the data to include only those eighth graders attending schools with high minority populations and high numbers of students on free or reduced lunch, the significant

predictors changed slightly. Family socio-economic status, parental expectations and GPA were the significant predictors for college predisposition.

The authors then limited the data set to only African American students enrolled in high schools with high minority populations and high reduced lunch program participation, and found that “family socio-economic status did not have a significant direct effect on African American students’ college predisposition” (Hamrick & Stage, 1995, p. 12), instead family SES influenced parental expectations and GPA, which directly influenced predisposition to college. Hamrick and Stage did not disaggregate the data by gender. Therefore, there are no separate conclusions about the African American male students in their study. The results of Hamrick & Stage’s (1995) study do support the speculation that African American male students have unique experiences during the predisposition phase which are not adequately explained by the current accepted models of college choice, particularly the type of variables which influence the predisposition to attend college.

Freeman’s (2005) qualitative study of African Americans and college choice included 70 participants in tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade. The sample was balanced in terms of gender. Freeman conducted group interviews in major United States cities with significantly large African American populations, such as Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC. The purpose of Freeman’s (2005) study was to learn about how young African American students plan their postsecondary future, primarily during the predisposition phase. The results state the college choice model developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) should be expanded to take into consideration the experiences of African American students.

Freeman (2005) discusses the presence of a paradox when it comes to the predisposition phase for African American students. African American students are just as likely or more likely to report the aspiration to attend college; however, the paradox appears in the actual numbers of students who take action to attend college. Freeman seeks to improve explanation of the predisposition phase by offering an expanded description of this phase, which she titled predetermination. Predetermination builds on the definition of predisposition by including environmental circumstances in the model. Freeman (2005) believes that “environmental circumstances often have much to do with whether students will choose higher education” (p. 110). Therefore, external circumstances, “outside of the control of the student” (p.111), can predetermine college choice.

Freeman’s (2005) model of college choice further expands Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model by considering the role of the family and school characteristics in influencing student cultural characteristics. Freeman argues that if family and school play an important role in college choice, then to understand the choice to attend or not to attend college, the college choice model must consider the diverse cultures and school environments the student experiences. Freeman’s argument is supported by responses from participants in her study who reported that their “elementary and secondary school impacted their choice to attend college positively and negatively” (p. 109), depending upon how the student was perceived and treated in response to their individual ethnicity or culture, in this case being African American. Freeman believes the paradox of high aspiration for college and low

enrollment for African American students can be addressed by connecting the college choice process to the family and school environment.

Freeman's (2005) model filters family and school characteristics through student cultural characteristics which then lead to college predetermination. Depending upon the experiences of the student, predetermination leads to three different options. The three options posited by Freeman correspond to those developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987); however, Freeman's (2005) three options consider the unique experiences of African American students.

According to Freeman (2005), first, a student may leave the predetermination phase as a knower. This student has always known that they will attend college. One of Freeman's participants described going to college to be as natural as breathing. The students in this category cannot pinpoint when they decided to attend college because their environment influenced them from day one to strive for college. Research referenced by Sharp, Johnson, Kurotsuchi & Waltman (1996) states "the longer postsecondary education has been taken for granted in the home, the more likely the students are to enter college" (p. 4). This finding supports Freeman's (2005) knower category.

An important characteristic of the students in the knower category is that they begin the college process from a position of strength, because they view college as necessary and doable. Students in this category also have more time to prepare for college by taking college preparatory courses, and to learn about college options, which lead into the next phase of the college choice process (Freeman, 2005).

Secondly, the student could leave Freeman's (2005) predetermination phase as a seeker. One who believes "I can do this" and takes steps to learn about and prepare for college. Participants in Freeman's study reported knowing that they could go to college around grades one through five. This is much earlier than the grade level proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Seekers in Freeman's (2005) study were able to describe people, events, and even television shows that influenced them to consider attending college. Freeman believes that this category of students is the most important in the college choice process, and key to the goal of increasing the number of African American students who attend college. She writes:

This age and grade period is critical because during this time educators have the best opportunity to influence students who do not know, either by birthright or by environmental circumstances that higher education is an option (p. 26). The seekers' decision process stands the greatest chance of being influenced because these students, when caught young enough, believe that they can do this and can be influenced early enough in school to begin the preparation process (p. 28).

The final category in Freeman's (2005) predetermination phase is the dreamers. This student believes that higher education is not an option, however, they "dream of doing something better with their lives" (p. 29). The grade of awareness corresponding to this category of student is seventh to twelfth grade. This student may dream of going to college, however, the student sadly has not been exposed to parents, extended family, teachers, or peers who provided support, encouragement, discipline, et cetera, to get them on track for college. This student does not have information and direction, and thus has no hope for attending college.

Interestingly, the dreamers identify goals that require college attendance, and even discuss starting part of the college search process, such as taking the SAT® or

attending college fairs. The difference between the dreamers and seekers is the age at which higher education is considered and then locked in as an attainable option. According to Freeman (2005), the participants in her study who were in the dreamer category ran out of time to choose college as a realistic option after high school graduation. The student who begins to consider college after the ninth grade year may feel overwhelmed by what is needed to prepare for college. The student may disconnect from the school environment, shun extracurricular activities, and avoid college preparatory courses.

The first phase of the college choice process, predisposition or predetermination, is very important to understanding the African American man's decisions regarding college. The research reviewed here suggests there is a lot to be learned about how the home and school environment impacts educational aspirations that manifest during the college choice process. This study will address this issue by investigating what parents and school officials expect of African American men, and if those expectations include college attendance or some other goal.

Role Models, Structural Hypocrisy, Chaos Theory & Resiliency

As stated in Freeman's (2005) college choice model, family background and school characteristics filter through the student's cultural characteristics to influence the predisposition phase. The family, home, and school environment are composed of adults and peers who may influence African American males to attend or not to attend college. Therefore, it is important to know who African American males consider influential, and what these influential people or entities are saying about college.

The work of Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) addressed the topic of influential messages from role models. The purpose of their study was to “gain a better understanding of whom urban African American adolescents look up to, and how the presence or absence of these role models may be associated with problem behavior, psychological well-being, and academic engagement” (p. 37). Bryant and Zimmerman believe that influential voices, in the form of role models, provide adolescents with someone to imitate. The role model provides examples of attitudes, values, and behaviors that the adolescent wishes to make their own. In addition, the role model should be someone who is in close proximity to the adolescent, and who has a vested interest in the young person’s development.

The authors admit the research literature is lacking when it comes to the impact of role models on the experiences of African American adolescents. Bryant and Zimmerman’s (2003) study was composed of 679 African American ninth graders. The sample was approximately equal in terms of gender, with 51% female and 49% male subjects. The results of the study report that African American students who identify a role model are more successful in terms of academic engagement and psychological well-being. The study also supports the idea that African American males experience positive benefits when their parent or another adult member of their extended family is their role model. For African American males, the identification of an older male sibling as a role model was just as effective in supporting development, as the instances in which the parent was the role model. African American male participants in Bryant & Zimmerman’s study who reported not having male role models were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward school and to engage in negative behaviors.

Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) interpret the results of their study to mean that African American males are more likely to accept the social capital resources provided by a family member, if that family member is the role model. Social capital is “the institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002, p. 2). In terms of education, social capital, among other things, can involve advice on succeeding in school, employment and attending college. According to Sandra Kerka (2003), “individuals who can draw on these tangible and intangible resources and relationships will have enhanced life opportunities, and communities in which trust, reciprocity and social networks are strong and will benefit from collective action and cooperation” (p. 2). In other words, students with high social capital are more likely to succeed in the school system as it is currently organized.

Bryant and Zimmerman’s (2003) study leads to the research questions of this study. If parents should be the one to pass on social capital, or specifically, information about college, do African American males identify their parents as role models? If the parent is the role model, what kind of information from this role model influences the college choice process? If the parent is not the role model, then who is influencing African American males; and does their influence lead to college attendance?

The studies by Freeman (2005), Hossler et al. (1999), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) on college choice found parents to be significantly influential in the college choice process. However, these studies did not isolate analysis by gender for African Americans. Research samples using nationally representative samples have resulted in the identification of the parents as most influential in the college choice process (Sharp

et al., 1996). In 1989, Stage and Hossler reported, “parents’ education and income did not have any influence on the predisposition of African American males to attend college” (Sharp et al., 1996). African American males do not find conversations with parents particularly useful in the predisposition phase of the college choice process (Sharp et al., 1996).

A research study performed by Sharp and colleagues (1996) used quantitative data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 to determine how tracking high school students by academic ability effect the student’s predisposition to attend college. Sharp et al. (1996) believe the necessary insider information, which contributes to college attendance, is available only to specific students who enroll in the academic or college bound tracks.

Jeannie Oakes (1985) identified specialized knowledge, or insider information, that potential college students must have access to in order to successfully apply and enroll in college. This specialized knowledge includes knowledge of what courses to take in high school, how to prepare for and take placement and admissions exams, such as the SAT® (www.sat.org, New York, NY) or ACT (American College Testing, www.act.org, Iowa City, IA) and how to complete college and financial aid applications. Teachers and counselors provide this insider knowledge to students identified as college bound or in the academic track.

The findings of Sharp et al. (1996) report that for male high school students of all races and ethnicities, the following variables were statistically significant: 1) socio-economic status, 2) self-reported ability, 3) discussions with parents and parental desire for a child to attend college, 4) teacher support and 5) plans to take the SAT®/ACT®.

Statistical significance indicates the variables were positive predictors of a male student's predisposition to attend college. For African American students, the results report no significant connection found between predisposition to attend college and plans to take the SAT®/ ACT®. The authors believe that African American students are interested in pursuing higher education, however, "African American students may not know how exactly to achieve this end" (p. 22).

African American men are not isolated as a unit of analysis in Sharp et al. (1996). Therefore, the connection between the variables mentioned above and the predisposition of African American men to attend college cannot be determined based on findings separated into two distinct categories of males of all races and ethnicities, and African Americans of both genders. For the African Americans included in the study, being female and reporting a high concept of ability was statistically significant and positively affected high school track placement. This finding suggests that African American males in the study were not in the college-bound or academic tracks, which may mean exposure to the insider knowledge is not likely for African American males. Jacqueline King's (2000) research on male students in higher education supports the interpretation that African American males in high school do not enroll in college-bound or academic tracks at representative rates.

Sharp et al. (1996) also reports that support from teachers is important in the predisposition phase for both males and females. As the student progresses into the search and choice phases of the college choice model, teacher influence lessens, and the influence of parents and peers becomes more important. Unfortunately, the influence of parents was not found to be strong enough to affect the track placement of

African American students. The authors believe that even though “African American parents know it is important to encourage their children to aspire to college, they may not know how important it is to be actively involved in the school lives of their children, advocating for placement in an “academic” track” (p. 22). In other words, discussions with parents about college and parental desire for children to attend college, may not translate into actions that positively influence college attendance of African American students. Sharp’s finding can be connected to Hamrick & Stage’s (1995) result that African American socio-economic status is connected to parental expectations and GPA which influences predisposition to college.

During the 10th grade year, Sharp et al. (1996), found teacher influence positively influences African American’s college attendance at four-year institutions, however, by the 12th grade year teacher influence changes to encourage African American attendance at a two-year college instead of a four-year college. The authors interpret this peculiar finding to mean, “teachers may be playing a deliberate or unconscious role in supporting a stratification of access to higher education for this population of students” (p. 22).

The Sharp et al. (1996) study raises questions about the messages conveyed to African American students, specifically male students. Why was there a connection between predisposition for college and plans to take the SAT® / ACT® for all groups of students included in this study, except African American students? Are African American students advised to take the SAT®/ ACT® to carry out their plans to attend college? Predisposition for college and taking the SAT® / ACT® are not innate needs such as eating and sleeping; these desires are learned. What happens between the

10th and 12th grade years for African American students to change from desiring to attend a four-year university to preferring a two-year college? The role of the two-year college is important to the higher education process; however, students should be prepared to attend either type of institution, and not be limited to a two-year college due to lack of preparation. Perhaps, teachers react to the lack of SAT® / ACT® scores of 12th grade African American students and inform the students that the two-year college does not require such scores. This message is true in of itself; however, it may not serve the needs of African American students who desire to attend a four-year university.

If the theory presented by Sharp and colleagues (1996) is valid, then African American men, who are less likely enrolled in academic or college bound tracks, are not exposed to the insider knowledge that contributes to college attendance. Limits on parental support, contradictory messages from teachers and distracted guidance counselors exacerbate the situation. Sharp et al.'s (1996) results support the goals of this research study to ask African American men to describe the messages conveyed to them by their teachers, counselors and parents in regards to attending college.

Donna Towns (1996) conducted a qualitative research study on the in-school experiences of third and sixth grade African American male students. Towns (1996) collected data through interviews, observations, and student essays. The purpose of the study was to determine “reasons for disproportionate failure rates of young black males in the school system” (p. 3). According to Towns, the issues facing young African American men are systematic problems, and she identifies “the school as a significant part of that system” (p. 3). She believes that the cultural factors in the school could be

negatively affecting the school performance of young African American men stating, “Many of the problems experienced by children in school, and particularly by minority children, are a function of the disparity between the ideology authorities profess and the realities students experience” (1996, p. 4). Towns describes this disparity as a conflict between mainstream, accepted culture and the unique African American culture the students in her study brought to school with them. This disparity creates a need for a mask on reality. The mask is hypocrisy that is “so pervasive and deeply entrenched in the system that those who participate in it are not always aware of its existence” (p. 5). Towns refers to this hypocrisy as structural hypocrisy. The following examples from her research report demonstrate how the school environment, school officials, and culture of the students all interact to form and pass on messages to the young African American men in the study.

The results of Towns’ (1996) study provide examples of structural hypocrisy in the physical appearance of the school. The school in the study had solid metal doors and windows with bars over them, more like a prison than a school. The federal and local claim of “having equal concern for all citizens” (p. 5) conflicts with the reality of Towns’ participants. She describes the physical school building as being located on a pothole-lined street, and in a grossly dilapidated building, while the beautifully maintained schools are schools across town. The school officials reprimanded the students who attended the poorly kept school for expressing their displeasure of attending school in a building that looked more like a prison. Teachers and staff warned the students to take pride in their surroundings, yet the students witnessed their school

falling down around them. Towns says that the older students in the study were very aware of this contradiction and often spoke up to ask for better facilities.

The principal in Towns' (1996) study spoke of the goal to educate the "whole" child, indicating the spoken importance of physical activity. Yet, the older students in the school could not use the playground equipment and the adjacent basketball courts were locked and not available to students.

Another example of structural hypocrisy is the claim of administrators that it is important for students to learn acceptable social habits, such as table dining, and positive nutritional habits. However, students were forced "to gulp food down to make way for subsequent groups of students" and the cafeteria served "food that was neither nutritious nor palatable"(Towns, 1996, p. 6). Towns reported that teachers in the building warned her not to eat the cafeteria food.

The instances of structural hypocrisy in Town's (1996) study ranged from subtle undercurrents to blatant negativity. She witnessed students being encouraged to be creative, but then their creativity was shot-down by the teacher who felt their responses were too ordinary. One interviewed teacher stated, "most of these boys are not going to make anything of their lives" (p. 8). This structural hypocrisy is evident to young African American men. Towns reported one statement from a sixth grader who said "why should I respect them when they don't respect me" (p. 9)? The students used words like "meanness" and "unfairness" to describe their hypocritical situation. The young boys in the study also recognized that the teachers were "more mean" or more unfair" to them than to the girls. In the essays collected by Towns, the sixth grade boys used more negative metaphors to describe their school experiences; such as "school is like

slavery” or “school is hell” (p. 10). Towns believes the differences in male and female reactions to structural hypocrisy can be explained by the ways in which African American men are socialized to be aware of differences in treatment. Meaning African American boys are more likely to expect mistreatment or racism.

As young African American men move up in grade-level, the apparent structural hypocrisy is rejected as normal; “this rejection results in passive or active resistance, both of which lead to their ultimate failure in the school system” (Towns, 1996, p. 5). Towns’ results support her position that the hypocritical structure of the school environment contributed to the underachievement of African American male students. The findings of the study also suggest that African American men are very aware of the messages conveyed to them in their school environment. Towns’ study shows how school officials can say something positive, and yet the young African American men in the study were very aware of the discrepancies between what was said and what was done.

Vernon Polite (1994) examined the impact of school structure and social forces on the academic success of African American men. One hundred and fifteen African American males participated in this study. Polite observed the students for three years, to the time they were scheduled to graduate from high school. The purpose of Polite’s study was to “show how actions, policies, and procedures, viewed at the time as innocuous and insignificant, resulted in poor academic preparation and an overall chaotic school environment that adversely affected African American males” (p. 588). The study took place in a suburban high school that experienced a drastic change in its student population, from a Jewish middle-class to black working class. Over a twenty-

year period, the school changed from one of the best in the state, to the lowest ranked in the state. The African American males participating in the study were “the least likely to complete school, enroll in college or secure adequate employment” (p. 592).

Polite’s (1994) study supports the importance of the parental role in supporting African American male students. He found that the parents of African American men desire for their sons to attend college. However, there was no direct action taken by the parents in his study. The parents in the study appeared to remain distant and blame the school for their son’s lack of academic success. Polite believes that the parents acted as passive participants in the miseducation of African American men.

Polite’s (1994) study also examined the role of teachers and counselors in the success of African American men. The students in the study choose their own courses. Polite describes this approach to advising students as a hands-off policy. Teachers interviewed for the study reported that parents and students are solely responsible for selecting courses. The African American men interviewed for the study admitted taking the easy courses, over the harder or college preparatory classes. The following excerpt from Polite’s study shows student thinking.

- Polite: How did you select your courses in high school?
- Shahid: Just basically by the requirements that they [school officials] had and the electives. Whatever was the easiest, where I didn’t have to go through so much trouble, that’s the electives that I picked.
- Polite: Do you think a lot of students did that?
- Shahid: Of course. We all did.
- Polite: So they avoided the harder sciences and math courses?
- Shahid: Yeah.

Polite: What were some of the class you took [in high school] that were just a waste of your time?

Shahid: They were basically home economics, a little child development, gym. The swimming requirement, that was fine. I think I took gym almost every year. Nobody told me "Why don't you take this or that?" So, I took that (p. 592).

This hands off approach to student advising and class selection, combined with parent desire for their child to attend college, but at the same time believing that "the counselors are supposed to help the kids" (Polite, 1994, p. 594), creates a contradictory environment for African American male students. There is no clear message communicated to the African American male students participating in this study that would result in successful college attendance. Polite believes student control in selecting courses, lack of involvement from parents, boring and unnecessary courses and lack of teacher interest contributed to a chaotic school environment where African American males were more likely to disrupt class, fight, roam hallways and participate in other non-academic and harmful behaviors. Polite refers to the quantum physics concept of chaos theory to explain the chaotic events that occur in an educational setting. The policies of the school, parent distance, and poor student preparation and motivation create a chaotic pattern of avoidance schooling that contributes to under-preparation in African American men for college and life after high school.

The findings of Polite's (1994) research indicate how important it is to know if African American men attribute their knowledge or lack of knowledge of college to people, groups or entities, besides parents, teachers, or school counselors. Based on Polite's results, the African American male participants would need someone other than the school officials and parents to influence them to make better academic decisions. If parents, teachers, and school counselors are the traditional messengers of information

on college (Freeman, 1999; Sharp et al., 1996), how do students who find themselves in a chaotic school environment, similar to what Polite outlines, make it to college? The influence of the media, athletes or entertainers, and individuals African American men meet in their neighborhoods and extended families may be just as or more influential than parents and school officials.

A research study by Beverly Bennett (1991) examined the influence of television on African American men. Bennett interviewed twelve African American men from a variety of educational backgrounds, between the ages of eighteen and thirty. The purpose of the study was to determine which television shows affected the perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs of African American men, and influenced their goals and aspirations. An important theme to arise in Bennett's results is "television programs have reinforced some existing values and attitudes as expressed by African American males" (p. 134). The participants described instances in which certain television shows have caused negative values to absorb, such as reluctance to trust white people. An African American man who has internalized the belief that white people cannot be trusted will have a difficult time accepting assistance from school officials who are white.

Around eighty-percent of the participants reported feeling angry toward white people who expected them to act as the African American characters portrayed on television, specifically the comedians. "The respondents felt they had to prove in their behavior that they were not comedians" (Bennett, 1991, p. 140). The messages from white people, intentional or not, gleaned from television shows, affect the behavior and perception of African American males.

Bennett (1991) uses the themes from her research to suggest that “more informational and educational programs featuring sports heroes, music stars and national leaders” are needed, “because these are the individuals that African American youth admiration and respect” (p. 147). Bennett’s study supports the belief that television is influential and does affect behaviors and aspirations. However, sports heroes, music stars and even national leaders may not be the best role models for college success. Even if these individuals were interested in being an educational role model, according to Bryant & Zimmerman (2003), this group is too far removed to actively influence the day-to-day activities of potential college students. However, if sports heroes and music stars are influential role models as Bennett’s results suggest what type of messages are they sending about college attendance to African American men?

Self-esteem, Success and the College Degree

The high self-esteem of African Americans does not appear to correspond with academic achievement. Studies performed by Porter and Washington (1979), Kovach and Hillman (2002), and Graham (1994) concluded that the low academic achievement of African Americans does not prevent the development of a positive self-concept and high self-esteem. This outcome contradicts research findings that report the self-esteems of White student’s increases as academic achievement increases (van Laar & Weiner, 1998). Van Laar and Weiner conducted a study on African American college students and the causal explanations they provide for their success or failure in college. The researchers hypothesized that African American students either “internalize the

negative stigma placed on them by the social system, and blame themselves for their lower outcomes (p. 4), or “African American college students become aware of the structural barriers to their performance, and begin to make external attributions for their relative failure” (p. 5). Van Laar and Weiner believe that the later hypothesis explains why African American students are able to maintain high levels of self-esteem in spite of academic struggles. Why should an African American student bother going to college if they believe factors out of their control are working against them, and they do not perceive the college degree as a requirement for success?

Van Laar and Weiner’s research results suggest that attempting to improve self-esteem will not help in increasing the academic achievement of African American men. However, van Laar and Weiner did not focus on the experience of African American male students. The study consisted of 529 undergraduate students at the University of California, Los Angeles. Only 25% of the participants were African American. A larger sample of African American students may result in a different outcome. Also, the authors did not describe factors that do contribute to self-esteem in African Americans.

The research of van Laar and Weiner leads to the following questions: does seeking the college degree impact self-esteem and definitions of success? How do African American men define success? Is a college degree needed to be successful? If a college degree is not necessary to improve status or to be viewed as successful why should African American men go to college?

Research of the literature did not reveal any studies that specifically focused on the self-perception or self-esteem of African American men and their decision to attend or not to attend college. The majorities of self-perception and self-esteem studies are in

the sociology field and utilize large population samples, which are typically majority White, and include both genders.

In 1994, Sandra Graham, conducted a meta-analysis of the research literature on motivation of African Americans. The research study evaluated 140 different research studies related to motivation in African American students. The purpose of the research was to determine if the widely held assumptions about African American motivation were supported by past research. Graham's work is included here because the study of motivation is connected to self-esteem, self-perception and locus of control. These issues are important to understanding how African American men perceive their situation as it relates to pursuing higher education.

The results of Graham's study report that:

- 1) African Americans do not lack personality traits associated with motivation,
- 2) African Americans are no more likely than whites to attribute academic success, or lack of academic success, to external or uncontrollable causes,
- 3) African Americans who do attribute lack of academic success to external causes are not less motivated to succeed than others are
- 4) African Americans do maintain high expectations of future success along with a high self-concept of ability even when academic success has not been achieved.

Van Laar and Weiner (1998) results, reported four years after Graham's (1994), contradict the results of Graham's meta-analysis. Both studies agree on the importance of connecting self-perception to academic achievement.

Summary

The research literature reviewed in this section provides a glimpse into the growing research field on African American men and higher education. However, analyzing these studies, with the goal of increasing the numbers of African American men who attend college in mind, presented a great challenge for connecting the specific studies to each other to create a connected research foundation.

In Freeman's model of college choice (2005), students who are knowers and seekers had the highest probability of attending college. However, Freeman believes that even the dreamers can reach college with proper guidance. Freeman's model of college choice was developed through research on male and female African American high school students around the United States. Components of Freeman's college choice model informed this investigation to examine how African American males proceed through the college choice process. In other words, this study attempted to identify the home, school and environmental messages that influence African American men to attend or not to attend college. African American men experience unique circumstances in the home and school environment simply because they are African American men. Therefore, the college choice process for African American men may be unique compared to how others experience college choice.

The field of college choice is one of the major avenues for examining and explaining how and why students attend college. This facet of higher education research must be connected to research on African American men. There are many factors affecting the college choice of African American men. This review of the literature shows how much more information is needed to understand the predisposition

phase of the college choice process for all students, but especially for African American males. For African American men, their unique social and cultural experiences in the home, community and school environment create an experience that informs the college choice process for African American male students and these unique experiences should not be ignored.

Understanding the home and school environment of any student is difficult. Focusing on the African American male experience at home and in school is challenging. The imbalance in research studies that focus on the negative circumstances and achievement rates of African American males can be discouraging and offer little direction as to how to fix the problem. The reviewed research shows that the home and school environment can be positive and can contribute to the development of strong resilient African American male students who reach college successfully. Or the home and school environment can be characterized by structural hypocrisy and chaos that presents unclear messages to African American male students about their academic abilities, future as college students, and as productive citizens.

The home and school environment is inescapable, therefore, researchers must find ways to improve the home and school environment so that it supports the aspirations of African American men, and translates these aspirations into college attendance and success. According to Kerckhoff (1976):

Significant others are seen as having an influence on the goals of the young person and these goals are viewed as instrumental in the attainment process... the encouragement of significant others will vary according to the social position and demonstrated ability of the child, and ... this encouragement will affect the level to which he aspires. The family and the school are seen as the institutional

settings of this socialization process, and the significant others include parents, teachers and peers” (p. 369).

Support may come from role models who provide goals and values worthy of imitation. However, the uniqueness of African American males carries over into their selection of role models. The literature shows that traditional parent and teacher role models might not influence African American men. It is important to determine how those who are influential people support and mentor African American males.

African American male adolescents, see limited and unfair employment opportunities for college educated African American men and weigh these against the seemingly unlimited opportunities for success as an athlete, entertainer or hustler. African American men evaluate their family needs for survival, meaning immediate income from a job or hustle, and compare that to a questionable job four to six years into the future after college graduation. Therefore, parents who encourage their sons to obtain gainful employment may be acting more realistically when the family’s circumstances are evaluated. Doubt of the benefits of a college education cannot be ignored, nor be separated from the unique experiences of African American men in their homes, school and community environment. Understanding how African American men perceive their situation and navigate their way through it is invaluable for supporting future college students.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theoretical framework that drove this research study. The theoretical framework focused the researcher's philosophy about how knowledge and reality are formed (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). The realities of African American men are socially constructed. This means that their entire environment, including individuals, entities such as the media, values and customs, et cetera, that African American men come in contact with on a daily basis impact the way they define and perceive their environment. These complex interactions create unique experiences that contribute to the decisions African American men make on a daily basis (Schram, 2003; Glesne, 1999).

This research study focused on the messages African American men receive about college that influence the choice they make to attend or not to attend college. To understand these decisions, the researcher examined constructed realities of African American men to determine how they experience the phenomenon of choosing to attend or not to attend college. The complex interaction of cultural factors is considered; (Schram, 2003) meaning the researcher could not ignore or separate the social, political, economic and racial factors that contribute to the messages African American males receive and in turn influence the construction of *their* reality. A phenomenological methodology fit this perspective and led to the use of qualitative methods that aligned with this perspective.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that allows the researcher to focus on identifying meaning in the voices of those who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Schram, 2003). Creswell (1998) described a phenomenological study as one that “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51). Phenomenology allows the researcher to focus on what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

The research begins with silence, which means the researcher does not assume to know anything about the people being studied (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). This beginning phase is also described as epoche or bracketing. The researcher consciously separates from their own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to focus on the voices of the informants (Creswell, 1998). The researcher’s goal is to gain entry into the conceptual world of the subjects in order to understand how their lives’ are lived, and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). The goal of phenomenology is to attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations (Creswell, 1998; Schram, 2003).

The assumptions of phenomenological research (Schram, 2003) are:

- 1) Human behavior is understandable through the context of relationships to things, people, the event and situations.
- 2) Understanding the everyday life of a group of people is a matter of understanding how those people perceive and act upon objects of experience, perceptions present us with evidence of the world, not as the world is thought to be, but as it is lived.

- 3) You cannot understand a phenomenon, apart from understanding people's experience of or with that phenomenon.
- 4) Language is the central medium through which meaning is constructed and conveyed therefore the meaning of a particular aspect of experience can be revealed through dialogue and reflection.
- 5) It is possible to understand and convey the assets of a central underlying meaning of a particular concept or phenomenon as experienced by a number of individuals.

To determine if the researcher's point of view, the methodology, and chosen research methods and procedures aligned with the purposes and goals of this research, the researcher compared the five assumptions of phenomenological research to the rationale and description of this research study.

The concept behind phenomenological research is that the dialogue from the participants will reveal the essential structure or central underlying meaning of the shared experience (Schram, 2003). In this study, the phenomenon examined is twelve African American men contemplating and choosing college attendance. A reader of this study should come away with a deeper understanding of how our society pushes African American males toward or away from a college degree.

The researcher's point of view, selected research methods and procedures for this study aligned with the definitions and assumptions of phenomenological methodology. The individuals who participated in this study and the questions asked fit the phenomenological approach. The following chapter will present details of the specific data collection and analysis procedures used in the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Quantitative analysis would not have adequately answered the research questions of this study. The idea of a quantitative survey was tempting to obtain “hard core data” as suggested by the Patterson Research Institute (Chew, 2004). The questions in this study did not have short, neat answers that could have been marked off on a survey. Creswell (1998) believes that qualitative methods are effective when a topic is in the exploration phase, when there are no readily available and accepted theories, and when a detailed view of the topic is required. Instead of a survey or questionnaire method, the researcher used an “open-ended” interview approach. Qualitative research requires the utilization of participants who can answer from a personal frame of reference, so that firsthand data is obtained, allowing the research subject to be examined within the context of their specific community (Creswell, 1998). These components work to provide a voice to the points of view of people traditionally marginalized in society (Bodgen & Biklin, 2003).

Pilot Study

The pilot study was developed to provide pertinent information about how the study should proceed. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the interview questions and procedures. The study was conducted in Dallas in June 2005. The group was composed of six African American men, ranging in age from 22 to 36. All participants read and signed the consent form and completed a demographic survey. One participant had never attended college, one had completed a two-year degree,

three completed four-year degrees and one participant had a master's degree. None of the six participants' parents completed a two-year or four-year degree. The participants attended grade school in four different states, which indicates diversity in experience in primary and secondary school. The complete demographic make-up of the pilot study group is reported in Table 2

Pilot Study Demographic Details

A serious limitation to this study was the lack of participation by African American men who had never attended college. The pilot study transcripts was used to determine how similar the experiences of the twelve participants with college experience were to the one pilot study participant who had not gone to college. Simon was 21 at the time of the pilot study and had never attended college. Comparison of Simon's responses to the twelve participants showed very similar responses. Therefore, it was determined that there was enough information to move ahead with the study using the sample of twelve African American men with college experience. However, African American men without college experience must populate any follow up study to substantiate that determination.

The planned questions were effective for stimulating conversation and resulted in rich descriptions. However, the questions also stimulated the participants to purge, for some, years and years of frustration with the educational system and their lack of influence or knowledge to address their frustration. The resulting conversation, while compelling, was at times hard to follow in terms of the planned research study. The pilot study resulted in 3 hours of video and audio tape, and well over fifty pages of typed transcripts. The results of the pilot study are not presented in the final analysis.

The pilot study results led to the decision to shorten the interview protocol to include only those questions that stimulated focused conversation and provided the richest descriptions. This revision did not change the quality of responses in any way, only shortened the number of planned questions. In addition, subsequent focus groups were limited to no more than four participants.

Variable Interaction

Qualitative methods suggest that the researcher be mindful of variable interaction when the variables of race, class, and/or gender of the interviewer and interviewees are not matched (Arendell, 1997; Silverman, 2005). There were gender and educational background differences between the informants and the researcher. The pilot study did not reveal any problems in terms of variable mismatch. No changes occurred to match the gender and educational background of the informants to the interviewer. Data collection continued with the focus groups and interviews as planned.

The Informants

The population of interest for this study was African American males over the age of eighteen who have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent. The population sample was restricted to those African American men born and raised in the United States by parents born and raised in the United States. Foreign-born men of African descent and African American men raised by recent immigrants have different experiences growing up than children born in the United States to native-born parents (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Obiakor, 2002). To limit the number of possible

confounding factors, the researcher excluded from the study African American men who were new to the United States or were children of recent immigrants.

The sample also excluded African American men who joined the military before attending college. Military training may drastically change the experiences of the subject, which could have raised issues that surpassed the scope of this study. The experiences of African American men who served in the military are a compelling area of college choice research. This college choice process of African American men with military experiences is a possible follow up to this study. African American men who completed a bachelor's degree before joining the military were included in this study.

The sample of nineteen African American men invited to participate in this research project were residents of the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex, and Seattle, Washington. The first round of sampling was on a group of African American men who were all members of a men's group at a church in south Dallas. This particular church was selected because the senior pastor has identified issues facing African American men as important to the overall health and success of the church members and surrounding community. A series of sermons and activities have taken place throughout 2005 to honor, support and challenge the African American man, as a member of this church or community, to step-up and improve their personal, family and community lives. The researcher approached the pastor and the leader of the men's group to obtain permission to recruit research participants (see APPENDIX). Sampling the men's group resulted in six African American men who fit the study requirements and who agreed to participate in the interviews.

In order to reduce possible bias and to support validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990), it was necessary to include participants not connected with the church. The addition of more participants broadened the sample of African American men included in the study. Bias in the sample was a concern because the church in the African American community is such an influential force (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995; Misap, 1994; Wheeler, 1986). The role of the African American church was not central to this investigation, and was beyond the scope of this research study. To expand the sample, key informants identified participants who fit the requirements of the study.

The key informants were males and females of various ethnicities who encounter a wide variety of African American men. The key informants may have been outside of the study's limitations, could not participate, or had already interviewed however; they were able to recommend African American men for participation who did fit the study requirements. The researcher contacted colleagues in Seattle and in the Dallas-Fort Worth area for assistance in identifying participants. The key informant in Seattle identified six African American men who fit the parameters of the study. Four of these completed the interview process in July. In Dallas, the key informant identified seven potential participants, including him. Only one did not follow through on the scheduled interview. The researcher attempted to contact the principal of a charter school for African American boys in Fort Worth. School was in recess for the summer and the principal was unable to provide information on students over the age of 18 who could have participated. A second attempt to identify a large sample of recent high school graduates for participation was not successful. The researcher contacted a local school district official for access to a mentoring program designed for African American male

graduates of the district. This mentoring program is still in development stages, and no information on mentees was available during the data collection phase.

Potential participants, members of the men's church group and those identified by key informants, completed a demographic survey. A survey was administered to identify African American men who fit the limitations of the survey (see APPENDIX for survey), and to collect basic demographic data on the participants. The survey included questions about socio-economic background, parental education level and experiences with the college choice process.

Utilizing the key informants, as well as sampling the church's men group, resulted in 19 eligible participants; attrition left twelve informants who participated in the individual or small group interviews. The twelve informants who followed through with the study had all attended college at some point in time.

The informants represent a diverse cross section of African American life (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Seven of the participants ranged in age from 29 to 30. The remaining five participants ranged in age from 33 to 44. Nine of the participants were born and completed their secondary education in Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee or Virginia. Three were born and raised in California or Washington. Brief descriptions of three of the participants are included here to provide the reader with an idea of how unique, yet similar, the life stories of the participants are.

Damon is 29 years old. His is married with two children, and recently purchased a home. Damon was born in Fort Worth, Texas, and raised by his father and stepmother. He graduated from high school in 1994 and immediately enrolled in a local community college. Damon has worked since he was legally able to do so, sometimes

two jobs at once. His need to contribute to the family income did not allow time and energy to focus on college. After less than one semester, Damon stopped attending classes. Two years later, Damon attempted to return to college, but again could not afford to spend more time in class and on homework, than working. Damon's father did not attend college, and did not push him to do so either. He did encourage him to work hard. As with many of the participants, working hard meant physically working hard. Damon is a prime candidate to benefit from financial aid that would provide income replacement, and not just tuition assistance. He says he would go back to school the next day if he won the lottery or found a sack full of money. Damon is very aware of the things that he should have done as a primary and secondary student that would have improved his success in higher education, such as reading more and seeking out his guidance counselor earlier. He has already begun to pass on this information to his young son.

Kelly was 37 at the time of the interview. He was born and raised in Temple, Texas. Kelly played football in high school and college. His mother did not attend college and learned about the process while Kelly was going through it. Whatever Kelly learned about college he would come home and tell his mother. His extended family and church community exposed him to college and all of its possibilities at a young age. Kelly was an academically talented athlete who found himself at odds with the high school coach when he would not go along with certain requests of the coach. The coach would recruit football players to do favors for teachers in return for inflated grades. Kelly did not need this type of help and the coach removed him from the

starting line up for voicing his objections. Kelly has two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree and works as a security analyst for an internet technology company.

Saul is 29 years old. He is 6 feet, 7 inches tall. He is not a basketball player and addresses this issue very early during his interview. Saul was born in Louisiana and moved to Fort Worth, TX when he was three years old. Until 8th grade, Saul attended a school for talented and gifted students. He decided to remove himself from that environment and enrolled in the general education program of a local Fort Worth High School, Dunbar High. This school did have a math and science magnet, but he opted for the general education part. In the 10th grade, Saul began playing organized basketball and quickly rose to be a stand out player for his high school. Saul's mother, who did not attend college, encouraged him to go. He always knew that he would attend college. Since high school graduation, Saul has attended two different post secondary education institutions on basketball scholarships. He became very disappointed with the low academic expectations and the overall treatment he received as a student athlete. He walked away from his athletic scholarships, and even walked away from a chance to play in the NBA® (www.nba.com, New York, NY). Saul is very philosophical about his journey to become educated. His experience encapsulates all that is wonderful about the education system, as well as all that can go wrong for African American men. Saul is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in business, focusing on real estate development, with a minor in Spanish.

Data Collection

Data collection did not begin until each potential informant read and signed the consent form and completed the demographic survey. All focus groups and interviews were in Dallas or Fort Worth, Texas, except for one focus group of four informants that met in Seattle, Washington. On the scheduled day of the second focus group, only two participants showed up. The third informant experienced car trouble on the way to the interview, and the fourth participant did not call to communicate his absence. The focus group of two participants was very successful. The participants were able to provide rich detail of their experiences. Follow-up questions were asked as needed. The small size of the group also helped to keep the informants focused on the questions and encouraged the participants to listen to each other's responses, which helped to spark their own memories. This experience with a small focus group led the researcher to concentrate on conducting one-on-one interviews, or on forming small focus groups of two or three participants.

All interviews were audio and video recorded, and transcribed. Transcription began immediately in order to analyze collected data for emerging patterns or problems.

The research literature reviewed in chapter 2 guided the creation of the interview questions. The three different categories of interview questions (see Appendix) corresponded to the three research questions. The first set of questions asked the participants to describe their first experience or exposure to a college or university campus, the job or career they wanted when they grew up, the goals and aspirations their close friends had in grade school and the typical reaction they received from peers and family when they talked about going to college. The purpose of these questions

was to determine if the influences considered important to the development of predisposition are part of the experiences of the African American men in this study.

The next set of questions dealt with messages from influential people. It was important to ask the participants to name the person or entity that influenced their decisions to connect the influential people or entities in their lives to the messages they received about college. To explore how African American men interact with these influential factors, questions asked about the messages transmitted by parents, school officials and entities such as the media. The purpose of this line of questioning was to determine what the informants say they were specifically told about college that influenced their choice to attend or not to attend college.

The final set of research questions were designed to determine how African American men perceived success and what is needed to be successful in the future compared to now. The questions asked included what does it mean to be a successful African American man, is a college degree required for success now and in the future workforce, and what are the top three challenges facing African American men?

The participants were encouraged to provide their reactions to the interview questions or to raise questions of their own at the end of the interview. The formal interview questions were slightly modified according to the background of the participant.

Data collection began once the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (see APPENDIX), and ended once the researcher perceived data saturation had occurred. Saturation means no new information or no new data is collected (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Two small focus groups and six individual interviews with twelve

participants were conducted during the data collection phase. Data collection resulted in over 10 hours of video and audio tape, which produced hundreds of pages of typed transcripts.

Data Analysis

The researcher assumed the important responsibility of typing the transcripts. This allowed data analysis to begin immediately, and for the underlying themes to become apparent very quickly. After the first three interviews, the researcher viewed the sessions repeatedly to search for similar descriptions and emerging themes. Responses related to a specific theme from all of the informants were transcribed. All of the answers were attached to a poster board labeled with that specific theme. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), data analysis in qualitative research “is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations”. By placing the responses next to each other, the researcher was able to see the themes emerging. The similarity in responses was shockingly evident; some informants used the same phrases and descriptions. The themes that arose from the informants’ descriptions were the basis for the conclusions drawn from the raw data.

Besides this method of comparing themes from the typed transcripts, the data analysis process followed that proposed by Creswell (1998, p. 148). Table 4

Data Analysis & Representation in Phenomenology

depicts the data analysis process for phenomenology studies. Creswell’s process is a synthesis of the work of Moustakas (1994) and Denzin (1989). The process shown in Table 4

Data Analysis & Representation in Phenomenology

best fits the needs of this study.

Triangulation

The goal of triangulation was addressed in this study through member checks and use of a peer reviewer. Triangulation is the use of “multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories” by qualitative researchers to “provide corroborating evidence” of a theme or perspective (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). There are various suggestions for how to approach triangulation in qualitative work (Berg, 2005, Creswell, 1998, Glesne, 1999). In this study, a peer reviewer process and member checks (Creswell, 1998) served to corroborate the data. The peer reviewer, a colleague and mentor of the researcher, is an experienced qualitative researcher who is also familiar with research on African Americans in higher education. The peer reviewer assumed the role of asking tough questions and listening to the researcher’s reactions and feelings about the study (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, she pointed out issues in the literature review, writing style and asked poignant questions to help focus the development of the interview questions.

Four African American men who were eligible for participation in the study but were never interviewed, did the member checks. They read the researcher’s summaries of the data, interpretations and reflected on the shared narrative written to summarize the experiences of the participants. The member checkers agreed that the responses of the informants represented their experiences on different levels.

Bracketing

Phenomenology requires the researcher to separate or bracket any biases or expectations about the informants and their experiences. Robin E. Gearing (2004) provides the following definition: bracketing or phenomenological reduction is the scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon.

The researcher began this study with the impression that African American men have had negative experiences with the educational system, which result in their disdain and lack of continued and effective participation and by-in into this system. The teaching experience of the researcher has exposed her to some of the high school experiences an African American male student may contend with while in school. These negative experiences cause the researcher to be concerned about the readiness of informants to speak openly about their educational experience to someone who is a part of the educational system. The researcher began this study with the belief that African American men are neither expected nor encouraged to enroll in postsecondary education at an early age. If there is any support for attending college, it comes late when athletic prowess develops or when the student himself puts forth the effort to make it to college. The researcher also believes that low academic performance does not mean low academic intelligence or low academic potential. In addition, she believes there is no acceptable explanation for the decreasing postsecondary enrollment rates of African American men.

The researcher worked to place these beliefs aside in the planning and conducting of the research study. These beliefs were central to the selection of this research topic and are difficult to disconnect from the study, however the researcher made all attempts to acknowledge any beliefs or experiences that may affect the results.

Presentation of Results

The results of this study are presented in the following three chapters. The responses from the participants are organized according to three overall themes: 1) the predisposition experiences, 2) messages from influential people and entities, and 3) success of the African American man. Direct quotes and scripted segments from the interviews and focus groups are used to highlight the themes, and connect the reviewed studies with the results of this study.

The names of all participants were changed to protect their identities. The names of schools, cities and other proper names were used only in instances where the personal identification of the informants could not be determined.

CHAPTER 5

PREDISPOSITION: I'LL GO IF YOU GO

Anyone who has spent time around little boys may have witnessed the early dreams of youngsters to grow up to be doctors, lawyers, teachers, astronauts, fire fighters and the like. These early ambitions set the stage for future goals and dreams. Each of the twelve participants talked about what they wanted to be when they grew up.

Table 5

Childhood Dreams and Current Professions of Participants

lists these early dreams, along with their current occupation and highest degree earned. The table shows that six of the twelve participants dreamed of being professional athletes when they grew up. None of the participants have worked as professional athletes; however, eight were high school athletes and six of the twelve earned athletic scholarships to college. The five participants who identified a career that traditionally requires a bachelor's degree, all went to college and completed a bachelor's degree. This connection between what was dreamed and what actually occurred must be considered as part of the college choice process.

Early Exposure to College

The transcripts provide information on how early experiences affect predisposition to college. Of the twelve participants, five talked about their exposure to a college or university campus before middle school. The following dialogue from Thomas describes his very early exposure to Langston University in Oklahoma:

My grandmother's family owned a café right across the street from it. That was a hang out for the college kids. We would go there for every holiday during the summer, every homecoming. I was exposed to that three or four times a year from 3 or 4 years old.

Similar to Thomas' experience, James's mother was a college professor, so his first exposure was also at a young age. James's experience allowed him to see the academic and the social aspects of college life. He said:

For me, the first time was probably as early as 4th or 5th grade. I remember instinctively my mother taught vocal jazz at City College in New York. And she would have concerts that her students would perform at. I was a little kid and I'd be there at City College. It was the cleanest thing I ever saw – a college campus. And meeting the college students and their sensibilities didn't seem that much older than mine and yet I knew that they could leave that concert and do whatever they wanted, they didn't have their parents around them. So, that was the college life not necessarily the studying part.

It is important to note that all five of the participants exposed to a college or university *before* middle school have at least a bachelor's degree.

The other seven participants experienced a college or university for the first time after middle school. Saul, whose experience with higher education was the most unique out of all the participants said the following:

It had to be when I was in 10th grade. I had a cousin who graduated from Grambling State University in Louisiana. They had some type of basketball game. I went to Grambling State with him for the weekend. It was a great experience. I had ever seen nothing like it before in my life. A lot of Black people. A lot of beautiful people. That was my first experience with college.

Only three of the seven participants, Saul, Damon and Richard, who all experienced a college or university after middle school, do *not* have a bachelor's degree. All three of these participants without bachelor's degrees, attended college and stopped before graduating. However, Richard completed specialized training at a two-

year institution and is now the owner of two businesses. Saul has recently returned to college to complete the bachelor's degree.

Role of Family Members in Early Exposure to College

The responses from the informants reveal information about the power of parental and family influence in the predisposition phase. Hossler et al. (1999) determined that parental influence is one of the most important factors in the college choice process. Eight of the twelve informants described the involvement of their parents, siblings, grandparents, or aunts and uncles in their first exposure to a college or university. Thomas and James' descriptions recounted in the previous section, demonstrates a close family connection to their first college exposure. Damon's description involves his aunt taking him to his first step show:

First time I went to a university was my aunt's step show. She went to East Texas State University. It was 1990 or 1991. She graduated in 1987 from high school, and she started in 1988. Yeah, a Greek show. I loved it. First time ever. I had said before that I wanted to go to college, a little bit in between middle and high school. I wanted to go. She was going. I knew she was getting her education. And I just liked the idea and wanted to go to college.

Randy refers to his sister's college attendance as his first exposure to a college:

The first experience that had any bearing on me going to college was when my sister was in school. She went to Prairie View A & M University. We always grew up in military bases, integrated schools, mostly white. I say integrated, cause there were a couple of sprinkles of color. Just being around that many black people focused on education and bettering themselves it was ... that made me think that is where I wanted to be.

Billy, at the age of 6 or 7, recalled a trip to visit his older sister at a university in Seattle, Washington:

My oldest sister went to the University of Washington. I was probably in Kindergarten and I went to stay with her. I was probably six or seven. That was my first exposure to college.

The presence of close family members in these descriptions is important in understanding who is influential in the lives of African American men, even if they do not identify them as their personal role model. Billy did not consider his sister his role model; however, she is the reason why he was exposed to a university at such an early age.

I Want to Go to College

The school environment was influential in the types of conversations these men had about their future aspirations. Those participants who were involved in athletics discussed college in terms of being a college athlete. Those who attended predominately-white schools described hearing their white classmates list careers and jobs they wanted to go into to follow the footsteps of their parents. Overall, the discussions that the participants had with their friends, in regards to college as a goal, were not memorable or necessarily helpful.

Damon did not remember college being a typical discussion amongst his middle school friends. Damon's schooling experience was primarily in an all African American, inner city environment. He said:

No not really. There were a few that talked about it. As far as middle school – everyone was just having fun. Nobody was thinking college prep. Nothing. Not for the school I went to. Offhand I can't remember anybody thinking anything about college at that age.

In elementary school, Saul attended a magnet program that was diverse but primarily composed of white students, while his home neighborhood was primarily African American. Below is an excerpt from his interview where he explained the two

worlds he learned to navigate as a gifted and talented, African American male student who lived in the projects:

- Gayden Would you say that the goals and aspirations of your close friends were geared toward college when you were in elementary school?
- Saul In elementary school yes, definitely. That was when I was in the magnet. College was a given. Everyone wanted to be doctors, lawyers, etc.
- Gayden You remember sitting around with friends talking about college, Even at that young age?
- Saul Yes, what you wanted to be...that's paradoxical though, keep in mind that in the magnet program, there were kids from different backgrounds. Now, when I go home to housing projects, there was a totally different story. They wanted to sell drugs, be cool, get some Jordans.
- Gayden So, there was a distinct difference in the conversations?
- Saul Yes, and I was always conflicted. Always. On one level, I wanted to participate with my friends, be cool, and on another level, I wanted to be an intellectual. I always struggled with that. I use to be real nerdy, loved to read. It was a paradox because at school I would read, play the violin or whatever. If I did skip class, I would go to the library or something like that. When I went home, it was trying to survive, try to fit in, try to be cool.

Thomas, a high school and college athlete, described an experience that was centered on sports. His high school was all African American and located in Oklahoma City, OK. When asked if his friends' aspirations and goals included college attendance, Thomas said:

None that I knew of. You had those who wanted to go to the NFL, NBA. We didn't talk about that stuff – going to college.

The experiences shared by Frank and Randy spoke of more positive and useful conversations between peers. Frank, who attended mixed but predominantly white

schools in Texas, remembers conversations he had with his peers centered on playing sports in college. He said:

From my mindset, there were like three of us that hung from third grade all the way up, even to our college years. We always wanted to go to college to play football.

Frank's conversation with his peers about going to college to play football is different from Thomas' description of his peers talking about playing in the NFL® (www.nfl.com, New York, NY) or in the NBA®, without mentioning college. This distinction could mean the difference in using an athletic scholarship to complete a degree, as opposed to focusing on athletics as a way to reach the NFL® or the NBA®. Either person could end up being a professional athlete, however only one has a back-up plan in mind.

Randy attended high school in the suburbs of Dallas. The school was ethnically diverse. The conversations he had with friends did include talking about going to college, and were even specific enough to identify colleges they wanted to attend in the future.

Randy All my friends that I ever hung around were academically motivated. I also did athletics, but academics always came first. Most of them come from households of two parents, even the ones that were raised by single mothers, the parents always emphasized education over athletics.

Gayden Would you say that college was apart of their future, your close friends?

Randy Definitely.

Gayden Would you all sit around and talk about which school you were going to go to?

Randy We did, yea we did talk about it.

Gayden What grade was that?

Randy That started like, probably in sixth grade. We were going to the State Fair Classic, you know we were like - I want to go to a black school. We talked about different black schools.

I am Going to College

There is a difference in the respondent's descriptions of conversations based on dreams of wanting to go to college, compared to conversations after the choice had been made to attend. Talking about wanting to go to college elicited different experiences compared to talking about or demonstrating behavior related to planning to attend college. This is evident in Saul's description of negative reactions from his peers when he decided to return to college. These negative reactions came from peers who were college graduates themselves.

Gayden Who did you talk to about your decision to go to college, or in your case to return to college?

Saul My peers. I talked to my peers. Even with that I didn't talk to them much about it, because I would get into these debates.

Gayden So, what was the typical reaction? Was it positive or negative?

Saul I did get some negative reactions. You know, it was from some of my peers who had graduated from college. It's amazing. They would graduate and be like college ain't important, don't worry about that. Hearing that, I'm thinking, why are you trying to deter me from college? I think it's because as African Americans we have been trained to believe that college is synonymous with freedom or superiority. And then, once we, especially if you are the first Black person in the family to graduate, it's like I'M THE MAN NOW! I don't know... the negativity came from people who have degrees and not from those who don't. I find that interesting.

Thomas and a former high school classmate attended the same college. He describes their conversations as not very in-depth.

Gayden Do you remember talking about going to college with your classmate who was planning to go to the same school?

Thomas Yes, we talked about it. It wasn't a very in-depth conversation.

Gayden So, you weren't talking about the first day of class?

Thomas No, no. It was more of – You gonna go? I'll go if you go.

This informal conversation between Thomas and his high school friend may be more important than the two of them realized in making the difference between wanting to go to college and actually enrolling and attending class. Urbanski (2000) lists this important influence as number 7 on the list of what is influential in predisposition. This result, while only seen in Thomas' experience, should be focused on in further investigation of the role of peers in the college choice process of African American men.

Thomas further describes how people react to an African American man who has decided to attend college.

Gayden What is the typical reaction when an African American man talks about college?

Thomas Just going just to go? Not on an athletic scholarship?

Gayden Yes

Thomas I won't say it's negative, but it's not encouraging. It's not like you should go.

Gayden So, the response is just Oh, that's nice.

Thomas Yes, just... it's not really any initiative behind it.

Gayden What's the reaction if an African American man is going on an athletic scholarship?

Thomas Congratulations! What school you going too? What position you going to play? More support.

- Gayden Did you experience any incidents where you were or you witnessed another African American man being made fun of or belittled for their commitment to attend college?
- Thomas A particular incident? No, nothing really stands out. I just remember it being ... say you are part of honors classes, you are always talked about as different or separated. Ya'll too good for us. Ya'll too smart. The dilemma is...I really don't think now that it's just within the African American schools or groups, I think it's pretty much world wide now, well at least in America, that being educated and trying to seek further education is not cool. And it's shunned upon. It's not looked at positively.

For the African American men participating in this study, early exposure to a college or university combined with college related conversations amongst peer groups does not appear to be important in choosing to attend college. There were participants who successfully made it to college without either one of these experiences. Thomas is the one informant who experienced a university campus from preschool age; however, he did not recall significant conversations with his peers about attending college. Randy did have significant conversations with his peers around the sixth grade; however, he recalls his first visit to a college campus as occurring after middle school. However, going to the State Fair Classic football game throughout his grade school years could be considered as his first exposure to a college or university.

The State Fair Classic© is an annual football game in Dallas, Texas between Grambling State University (www.bigtex.com) and Prairie View A & M University (PV). This game is played the second weekend of the Texas State Fair. GSU and PV are historical black universities. Randy refers to this football game when describing the conversations he and his peers had about college around the sixth grade. Randy earned a bachelors degree in business management from Grambling State and currently works as project officer for a government agency.

Conversations with peers about wanting to go to college are slightly different from conversations with peers once the decision to attend college has been made. The change in tone of these conversations may signal the divergence in the predisposition phase of those who will move on to the search phase of the college choice process, from those who will choose work, military or neither. Zeroing in on when this change in conversation occurs may assist in increasing the efficiency of the predisposition phase.

Conversations with Family about Going to College

Kelly and Frank both said they spoke with their families about their decision to go to college. Neither one of them experienced any negative reactions to their choice. Frank's mother did not attend college, but she was supportive of his decision. Kelly's mother did not attend either. He remembers his mother asking him questions about applying to college. Kelly would come home and tell his mother everything he learned about going to college. Kelly was not impressed with the reaction he received from his football coach, and remembers talking with his external family more than school officials. Kelly's Godparents played a major role in helping him to prepare for and enroll in college.

Kelly	I mainly talked with family about college stuff, and I talked to the coach also. How good that talk was with the coach (shaking his head and rolling his eyes)... I think I talked to my family more.
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The role of the high school coach will be explored more in the following sections.

Reaction from family was positive for Thomas, Kelly and Frank, and the majority of the participants. Damon's father did not push him to attend school, and his reaction was not outwardly positive when Damon started attending the local community college.

The following is Damon's description of his father's reaction when he started taking classes at Tarrant County Community College:

He said - you're going to work. He really didn't have a response. I didn't ask for anything... It seemed like it was a burden any time I asked. I know it wasn't, he was just tight and cheap. Like me – I'm the same way right now. But, I never asked him for stuff.

The response from Damon's father did not deter him from school; however, his father's emphasis on working did not help Damon's conflict between work and school. Whether his father directly told him not to ask for help with school or not, the message sent was that working was what was required, and school responsibilities would be solely on him. When he chose between work and school, his father did not step in to offer support or financial assistance. Damon reflects on this as a fact of life, and does not blame his father for his dropping out of school.

I pretty much decided everything on my own. Pops and I didn't talk. We stayed together, had a good relationship. But, we didn't really talk about things like that, going to school, or nothing like that... As far as influencing me to go to college ...it was pretty much decisions on my own. It was up to me.

Comparison to the Hossler and Freeman College Choice Models

The experiences of these twelve men do not follow Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model. The influences that were significant in their study do not seem to behave the same for this group of African American men. Hossler et al. (1999) and Freeman (2005) have proposed models of the college choice process that divide the possible outcomes of the predisposition phase into three categories. Freeman (2005) refers to the predisposition phase as predetermination. The specific features of these categories were identified in chapter 2. To demonstrate how the experiences of

the African American men in this study did not necessarily conform to the predisposition or predetermination models of explaining the college choice process, each participant was assigned to a category which reflected their educational experiences. Placement in a category was determined according to when they were first exposed to college, the age they chose to attend college, and the highest degree they had earned at the time of interview (see

Table 6

Classification in Freeman's Predetermination Model based on Time of Exposure to College

).

Freeman says that students who fall into the seeker category of her model decide to attend college by the fifth grade or by the age of 11 or 12. Using this as a guideline, Robert, Damon, James and Richard were classified as seekers. This leaves Billy, Derrick, Frank, Simon and Saul as the dreamers. Freeman defines the dreamer category of students as those who decide too late to attend college due to lack of information and lack of support from significant figures. None of the participants who fall in the dreamer category really fit in this category. All of them have bachelor's degrees, except for Saul, who is currently enrolled. Damon the one participant who has not completed any form of postsecondary education is classified as a seeker – which would be beneficial to him. This classification for a similar student may lead to exposure to college choice information that would facilitate choosing to attend college. It is better to classify a student too high and provide them with too much information, than to classify them too low and assume they do not need the information. Freeman's model is framed in such a way where none of the categories excludes the participants

from the chance of attending college. However, the knowers and seekers are most likely to proceed to the next level of the college choice process.

Hossler's model says that students in the whethers category choose to attend college around the ninth or tenth grade, which corresponds to the age of 15 or 16 (see

Table 7

Classification in Hossler & Gallagher's Predisposition Model based on Time of Exposure to College

). Using Hossler's model Frank and Sean are classified as nots. The nots are defined as the group of students who do not intend to go to college, but plan to explore military and work options. Frank was not encouraged by his mother to go to college, but once he made the decision to attend college she supported his decision. Sean knew that his parents expected him to work after high school, and his father suggested the military. However, both of these participants have college degrees; Frank has a masters degree. As with Freeman's model, it is more detrimental to a student to assume they are not going to college, than to assume they are going and then to treat them accordingly.

The educational outcomes of the participants in this research suggest that all of them should be classified as whiches and whethers, or knowers and seekers because all of them attended college at some point in their life. The question is how did Frank and Sean, who by the Hossler model were probably not going to college, still make it to college and successfully complete? The same question applies to Billy, Frank, Sean, and Derrick, all college graduates who were classified in the Freeman model as

dreamers. These informants probably should not have attended college based on the parameters of the Freeman predetermination model.

Summary

The informants who dreamed of careers that required a college degree did ultimately complete a college degree. Those who were exposed to a college or university before middle school completed a bachelor's degree; however, four of the seven who were exposed to a college or university after middle school also completed a college degree. The involvement of parents, siblings, grandparents, et cetera in early exposure to college is evident in the experiences of these informants, however, this same group of people may not be considered role models.

Conversations about college varied among the informants. For the most part conversations with peers and family members did not leave major impressions or were not overtly positive toward college attendance as in Saul and Damon's case. The results indicate a difference between the tone of the conversation when the informants were dreaming of their future possibilities compared to conversations about plans to attend college and specific actions. This change in conversation may indicate the shift from the first college choice phase – predisposition, to the second phase - searching.

Early exposure to a college or university combined with college related conversations does not appear to be connected to choosing to attend college for the twelve informants. Some of the informants made it to college without either one of these experiences. Based on the experiences of the informants, one cannot conclude

that exposure to college before middle school makes a greater impression on the predisposition phase for African American men, than exposure after middle school.

The participants in this study did choose to attend college. The influences that occurred during the predisposition phase, that led to the decision to attend college were not distinctive and were not easily discernible when comparing the informant's experiences with the Freeman (2005) and Hossler et al. (1999) models of the college choice process.

CHAPTER 6

THE MESSAGES: WHO SAID WHAT?

Parental Messages

Influential people, such as parents, siblings, peers, role models, et cetera, pass on messages to the African American men around them. These messages could be about school, work, faith, or life in general. This chapter reports on the messages the 12 participants received from parents, school officials and entities such as the media, on what was expected of them.

Sean shared his experiences growing up in an all African American, working class community. He remembers coming home from school with his older brother and following instructions left by his mother on how to warm dinner. His father returned from work three hours after school was out, and his mother worked the evening shift and returned home when Sean was preparing to go to bed. Below Sean describes his perception of what his parents expected of him.

Sean	Stay alive, be healthy. That's a good question, but it's kind of a really wide question. It depends on where you are. I think if you were to ask my mother what she thought about me back in high school and middle school, Momma and Dad would say – we just want him to be alive or just stay out of trouble. If you were to ask my cousin Andre's mother and father, they'll say we just want him to go to college. Because they grew up different. They traveled, they were in the service. His dad was in the service, he was an officer. Being an officer is almost like being in college I think. But, it's different. My parents just wanted me to be alive.
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Sean attended college at Grambling State University, enrolling immediately after high school, and graduating in four and a half years with a bachelor's degree in finance and economics. His decision to attend college was finalized two days before fall registration started.

Randy Most parents of African American men just want their sons to not be a statistic. Not be one of those more African American men in jail, than in college. Not be a statistic, not end up dead before you are twenty-five.

Randy enrolled in college immediately after high school at Grambling State University, and completed a bachelor's degree in business management. Both of Randy's parents have college degrees. The goal of attending college was instilled in Randy from day one. Randy's response indicates his awareness of the general expectations placed on African American men even though his personal experience was different.

Thomas Damn, that's tough. Live till 30. My thought is even as preparing, and all the preparing that was done there is always the thought in the back of your parents' mind, it may not be communicated, especially in an inner city situation. Any time that person leaves the home you just never know. Especially as a male. So, living to 30 is a pinnacle. If you can get to that it can be down hill from there. My thought right now... I coach some high school kids, just seeing them interact with whatever parental support they have, it's like just get this baby through high school and get him to manhood. Let life take care of the rest. I don't think, maybe be successful at 30, but I think its more of just life at 30.

Thomas was groomed since day one to attend college. He credits his mother with getting him to college at the University of Arizona, and says she did most of the work as far as researching programs and financial aid. He believes that he accepted his mother's plan at 15, and finally decided to go along with what she had in mind. Thomas completed a bachelor's degree in marketing.

Richard Graduate high school.

Gayden Why is that the first thing that comes to mind?

Richard Just from what I've been around, know what I mean. Boy, when you get of school. It ain't never said boy when you get

out of college, it's boy when you get out of school, when you turn 18. 18 is associated with graduation. Hopefully

Gayden What did they want you to do when you graduated from high school?

Richard Just get out the house. Be on your own. Be self-sufficient. Make it happen.

Richard attended Grambling State University for three years and then enrolled in a barber program at a two-year institution. He currently owns a barbershop and beauty salon outside of Chattanooga, TN. Richard has unique circumstances when it comes to the education of African American men. Richard and his wife have three sons; and are expecting twin boys by the end of the year. He says that he believes starting early with the importance of college, along with keeping up with the progress of your children in school is important to successful educational outcomes.

James My parents didn't really say much about college. Just stories about dorm life

Derrick Finish school.

Damon Graduate high school. Some of them, most of them. Get a job and get out. Get out of the house.

Damon is the participant who has not yet returned to college. He enrolled immediately after high school. His statement supports his earlier comments on the importance of working over going to college. Now that Damon has a family, it will be harder to choose school over working. Perhaps a different message from his parents would have meant he could have focused on college and delayed being out on his own.

Saul Get a job. Can I make a comment on that? I think it's sad. You said a key word earlier – trained. There's a difference between trained and education. We are continuing to be inculcated with thoughts of finding a job versus creating jobs. See what I'm saying. You can take one brother and he can go look for a job for 40 days and 40 nights. But, within that

40 days and 40 nights, he possibly could have created five jobs. One for himself as well as his four other peers, easily... Everybody else is doing that. You can sell penny candy and get rich if that is what you really want to do. I think it is causing us to be backwards. We are missing out on great opportunities.

Saul started out in college immediately after high school at Northwestern State University in Louisiana, and believes that college was a personal goal for him since day one. However, he believes that he changed from wanting to go to college for the sake of learning to wanting to play basketball, and now he has returned to wanting to go to college for the sake of learning and growing his business. He is currently enrolled in a bachelor's program in business at the University of Texas, Arlington.

Kelly Make it, survive. Stay out of jail. Have a good job. Make it.

Kelly enrolled in college immediately after high school and has completed two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree. College was a goal for him since day one; however, he did not know he was going to college for sure until his senior year when he was offered a scholarship to play football. He believes his mother, Godparents and church family made sure he went to college. Frank believes that his mother would have supported any decision he made, but she did not push him to attend college.

Frank My mom wasn't educated her self, but she knew that was the best thing for me. She just wanted me to make it.

Only one participant clearly stated that he was expected to earn a college degree. Robert's answer is even more unexpected because his mother did not complete school pass the sixth grade. Other participants with parents who have degrees reported expectations of staying out of jail and off drugs. None of these messages from parents, while they can be viewed as positive, provides specific encouragement for attending college.

The experiences described here are intriguing and even frightening; especially since these African American men are educated, for the most part, employed and the majority of them are homeowners. By most definitions of success in America, these men are successful. The message, directly or indirectly, from parents does not suggest college attendance is important.

One of the member checkers, a pastor of a large African American church in Dallas, agreed with the descriptions of the informants. He said:

Well, I've heard, do well. And, that is vague and general because it varies with the family. But, it's about doing well. For some doing well means staying out of jail. For some doing well means exceeding the prior generation's achievements. For some doing well means to be the best that he can possibly be. Again, that do well, "just want my son to do well." That's something I heard my sisters say, members of the church say, and it's just do well. Do well may be stay off drugs. So, it just depends.

The pastor's response and the descriptions from the informants are not a very positive sentiment or one characterized by specific expectations. Since all but three of the participants had a bachelor's degree, some type of difference in the parental message was expected from those African American men who did attend college. This was not the case. Only one participant responded that African American sons are expected to earn a degree. In some way, the participants in this study interpreted the parental messages they heard to include college attendance. These responses could explain why the role of the parent in the college choice process does not seem to be of primary significance for African American men (Hossler et al., 1999). The message from the parents does not directly express the expectation of college. However, the same participants who said the parents of African American men just wanted them to get a job, and could even provide examples of how their parents conveyed this

message to them, also reported that they always knew they would go to college. It is not clear how these contradictory characteristics form.

Messages from Role Models

The African American men in this study did not limit themselves to one role model, or even to a role model in the traditional sense of the word. Sean spoke of using different aspects of different people to build a unique role model that fits his goals.

Most people say their father or whatever. For my role model, I really take different parts from a lot of people. There is not one person that I want to be like. There is no one person on earth that I like everything about. There's different parts of everybody I like. I would like to come up to their level. But, there's not one person that I would want to be like. Being around people who are where I want to be or are going where I want to be. I just believe that whatever you hang around, or whatever you do they'll pull you up or down.

Damon did not identify a role model. He credits his own personal drive for influencing his decision. He explains:

I pretty much decided everything on my own. Pops and I didn't talk. We stayed together, had a good relationship. But, we didn't really talk about things like that, going to school, or nothing like that. He told me how to do things outside, cut the yard, fix on cars. As far as influencing me to go to college – my aunt said a few things about it. Two uncles that went. But, they never really pressed the issue. It was pretty much decisions on my own. Yes, I do want to go to college. Or I'm not going. It was up to me.

Randy quickly identifies his parents as his role models. His mother was a third grade teacher, and his father retired from the military after 30 years. Randy's description of his role model conforms to the suggestions of Bryant & Zimmerman (2003) who stated that African American men are more likely to be successful if a parent is identified as the role model. Randy said:

I'd say my parents. I'd say they were ideal role models. For me I think they were ideal role models. They gave me enough rope to go out and hang myself if that's what I wanted to do. They kept a close eye on me to make sure that I didn't.

As a youngster, a role model was not important to Richard because he did not look that far ahead. He said:

I'd say my parents had a whole lot to do with it. I wouldn't call them my role models. They were my disciplinarians. I didn't really have a lot of role models growing up because I didn't look that far ahead growing up.

For Derrick, other athletes who were one-step ahead of him in the recruitment process, were considered role models and influenced his decisions. He said:

With the athletes...if Billy was going down to Long Beach on a recruiting trip, we might exchange notes about what you did down there. Maybe I'm going down there next week. What did they do for you, where did they take you? What are you going to do when you get there? More so than the parents. I wish my parents would have said more to me about it. But, they didn't know.

Only Randy and Thomas identified their mothers or both parents as role models and as the persons who influenced their college attendance. Saul credits the writings of Booker T. Washington (1901) in *Up from Slavery* as motivating and encouraging him to complete his education. Sean, Damon and Frank credit their own inner drive and commitment for getting to college.

Messages from School Officials

Several of the informants believed that for the most part, school officials wanted them to do well in school and move on to college, however others explained that outward behavior of school officials tends to suggest be quiet and don't give me any trouble.

Billy said that he felt like most of the school officials he met wanted him to succeed. Billy completed primary and secondary school in Oak Harbor, Washington outside of Seattle. Billy remembers a strong military influence from school officials and his neighbors while growing up. Randy grew up in a family situation very similar to Billy's. He said:

I don't know. I don't want to be stereotypical and say play sports, because that's not the message that I received. But, I went to school in the suburbs. But, I have seen that in the inner city schools, the schools we played against. Get us a title, get us in the newspaper, get us more money – the district. I don't feel like my message was different from anybody else. Garland was a progressive school district back then, I didn't experience racism from any of my teachers or other students.

Randy's response was unique in that he spoke of the difference in treatment he experienced at a suburban school compared to how he saw inner city students treated. Within his own school, he did not feel treated differently than any other student.

It was no different from anybody else. You go talk to the counselor that is what you do. When you are a junior, you go start talking to the counselor about college, and they give you a book with addresses and phone numbers. You start putting in applications and take the SAT and take prep. courses. It was standard procedure. No big deal, that's what we all did.

James, who believed that the majority of his teachers did want to help him succeed, described the work his eighth grade teacher did in teaching the class how to take notes like a college student. James pointed out that the teacher did not separate students for this lesson based on college plans. Everyone was taught the information. He said:

A teacher in the 8th grade took like three days to teach us how to take notes in outline form because that's what you'll have to do in college. When I got to college, it was just like a reflex being able to organize it and take notes. The fact that the lesson was focused right at college, no matter who was in the class, that whole thing of not having a barrier, not having a barrier to it...

Kelly and Frank explained their view of the school officials as follows:

Frank Behave. Don't create any problems. Be one of the good ole boys. Fit in.

Kelly In general, I say behave. Do what you got to do so I can get that check. You can sit over there and cut up all day just don't bother these lighter shade people – they're trying to learn. You can do what you want to over there.

Frank and Kelly completed high school in Texas; Kelly in Temple and Frank in Killeen. The integrated schools were composed of mostly Caucasian students and teachers. Derrick from Oxnard, California had the most to say about the expectations of school officials.

Derrick The counselors try to push you, if you're an athlete, to get a 700 or plus on the SAT and that's pretty much it. Leave them alone. Most teachers, especially in the inner cities, just want to get through the day without being beat-up, accosted, groped, most of them. There is always a handful who also want to be that Coach Carter that's going to get you out of the ghetto, out of poverty. Get you in that good direction. But, most teachers probably feel like they don't make enough to put up with being cursed out, cursed at and they tell the parent and the parent comes down there, twelve years older than the kid giving you grief. I would say most teachers fall into that category.

Damon made a distinction between the desire of his school officials to see him do well versus the school officials taking the initiative to make sure he had the information and tools needed to do well. Damon said:

I think most teachers want their students to go to college. If they want them to, I don't know how much they want to help get them there. I do think they want them to go.

Damon recalled going to the counselor with questions about the local community college during his senior year. Prior to that, he had no contact with the counselor. By the time Damon sought out the counselor, he had already decided to attend college; he

was seeking to fill in the details. The counselor in Damon's case would not be considered a person of influence in the predisposition phase, and was not identified as an important factor until after the decision to attend college had been made.

Thomas' description is similar to Damon's. He did not have a clear memory of a school official voicing their expectation that he go to college. He said:

- Thomas Graduate and survive (in a questioning tone)? When I was going through, I just don't remember a strong emphasis on college, or any of them saying you need to go to college. I just don't remember that. I think it was more of let's make sure you get through high school, and we'll pray for you once you get out.
- Gayden Do you remember your counselor calling you in about the SAT, to ask have you taken it? Did the counselor get into any of that with you? Asking you what are your plans after high school?
- Thomas (Slowly shakes his head no while thinking back). No, not that I remember. I don't remember any intimate conversations. I was a counselor's aid for awhile.
- Gayden You worked in the counselor's office and you still didn't get any information?
- Thomas Naw. It was one of those things that I remember vividly now, that you had to seek out the counselor's help. But, the only people seeking out the counselor's help were the females. It was 99% black. Only the girls would go into the counselor's office to ask questions about college. I wouldn't see no brothers coming through.

Thomas' response conflicts with Hossler's (1999) finding that male students are more likely to seek out school officials and friends for help with college plans, compared to female students.

Derrick described being called out of class to see his counselor, and finding out that he was there to take the SAT®. This was the first time he ever heard about the SAT®.

Derrick

I never even knew what the SAT was, until they were taking us in there. They took us in there and they said, all right you guys, no SAT prep, nothing. They just took us in there and said, you guys have to get a 700 on the SAT. We all looked at each other and said what's the SAT? You got to have this to get into college. They said this the day of the test. We just found out that you gotta have this to get into college. You can go to junior college without it, but if you want to go to university, those of you guys that have aspirations of going to the university you gotta take this test. And you get 400 for putting your name on it. So, make sure you spell your name right. That as the only prep that I had for the SAT. Never even heard of it.

Frank did not recall any contact with his high school counselor and he believes that he knows why:

I don't remember one counselor talking to me about anything to be honest with you. Maybe because I was one of the good ole boys and they didn't have to talk to me. Because I fit in. So, I can't remember. Gosh, I don't even remember what the counselor looked like.

By fitting in, Frank means that he did not cause any disruption, and he went along with the program. Frank's comment suggests that he did not expect the counselor to approach him about college, nor did he approach the counselor on his own.

Saul's response to this question describes how low expectations, once rewarded become the norm for many African American men in the classroom. He said:

Be quiet, don't disrupt the class. It think it's a blatant message – be quiet, or I'm going to write you an infraction. But then, have you heard the statement that any behavior that is rewarded it is often repeated. So when little Tyrone sees his report card, and he remembers that he was quiet for a week and got himself together, he got an A for just being quiet and not disturbing the class. That's the new lick. All I got to do is come to class and just be quiet. I just get the paper and be quiet and I get A's. I don't have to do anything and you just slide me through. It happens all the time.

Messages From the Coach

The high school athletics coach is included in the examination of the expectations of school officials. Many of the participants were high school athletes. Damon described an incident with his football coach that is in direct opposition to the college choice process. The following excerpt from Damon's interview describes one incident that contributed to his resigning from the team during his junior year.

- Gayden Would you say the football coach had anymore to say about college than the teachers?
- Damon Not really. We had practice on career day or college day. It was held at Will Rogers, all the different colleges were there. And we had practice the same day. Some of the guys just wanted to get out of going to practice. Some of us were serious and wanted to get information. He was upset about us trying to go to college day. I really didn't understand that. We were in high school, when you finish you go to college. Why would you not want us to go to college day? Why would you be mad so we have to go over your head so we can go over to college day. I really didn't understand that. Our whole squad, everybody could have went somewhere. But, he didn't really push the issue. My junior year, I didn't want to play football. I was tired of the coaches and how they were treating us. I was one of the better players, so he came looking me. I made up a lie. I told him that I had wrecked my grandmother's car so I had to work. So, I couldn't play football. I told him that. But, I didn't like how they were treating us.

When Damon did return to the team his senior year the coach made an effort to put Damon in contact with a junior college scout. Damon felt that it was too late for him to be viewed by scouts at this point. He believes the conflicts he had with the coach led to him missing athletic scholarship opportunities.

Richard also relayed a disturbing experience with his high school football coach.

Gayden What did the football coach do in terms of helping to get you to college? Did you coach pull you aside and talk to you about college?

Richard No, actually my coach damn near held me back. Cause I was receiving letters and stuff, well before I knew I was receiving them. You know, I wasn't getting them, and they were sending them. When I finally went into the office and asked, because someone told me that I had a letter, hell, I had a stack knee high....the letters were coming to the school and he wasn't informing me at all that I was receiving them. I knew I should have been. Maybe it was to keep me focused. I don't know.

Gayden When did you find out about the letters?

Richard I was in the 11th grade.

Gayden Was that the practice for all the players?

Richard I really can't say.

Gayden Would you say that your coach was helping to get you to college to play football?

Richard No, he wasn't. He had those that he would help. But, I had to make my own highlight tapes to send to colleges. He gave me the tapes or film to send, but it was of the whole game, not just me. I asked for a highlight reel and was informed that I couldn't have one. You gotta do that for yourself...he wasn't helpful at all.

Gayden Isn't it true that the more players from a high school that play sports at the college level the better the coach looks?

Richard Yea, I don't know. Maybe he felt that I couldn't play at another level.

Gayden Did you ever ask why?

Richard Well, once I got the letters, it wasn't a big deal. But, I was always curious to why. You know, why you trying to hold me back? I was one of those who didn't ask questions....

Thomas explained that the coach usually had eligibility concerns to keep them busy and that college was just not on their radar.

- Gayden What was your coach's take on you going to college, did that come up with him?
- Thomas No, not really. The sad part is, once... especially with the better athletes, the focus was on getting them to pass on a week to week basis, to make sure they were eligible. The focus is not on – son you need to be preparing for college.
- Gayden What do you think the coach could have done to help get you to college?
- Thomas As his role, I didn't see him as seeing in that direction. If any scholarship offers came through, he'd let us know. But, no.
- Gayden Who do you think would have had more influence if they had come at you with college, the counselor, teacher or coach?
- Thomas Well, now you're asking Oprah questions. Probably more than likely the coach. But, I just haven't seen anything. My father is a football coach. There are too many... too much detailed work involved to think that those men would be able to lead that good.
- Gayden So they are coaching high school football, and they don't go outside of that?
- Thomas No. Honestly they don't. It's sad to say, but they don't.

Randy's experiences with his football coach were more positive and academic oriented. The coach was really concerned about the academic well-being of the players, The fact that the team was not very successful may have contributed to the coach having more time to monitor academic progress. Randy said:

My friends and I all did well in high school. We played sports but grades always came first. ...our team was terrible, we were like 1 and 9. He still got us scholarship offers. He called other coaches, he'd say, I got this kid here. He'd send out our tapes. I don't know where he got the footage from because we were awful. But, we did end up with offers. Academics always came first with the coach. If you didn't have your grades in order, or if the teacher had called and said you were talking in class, you had to stay after practice, you got to run, go to study hall. You might not play in the game. Chances were you probably did not play.

Saul, who was tall enough to gain the attention of most high school and college coaches by the time he was in the eighth grade, did not play organized basketball until he was in tenth grade. This is possibly due to the magnet school he attended. The school focused more on his academic talents and did not push the issue of sports, since he was not interested. Once he joined the team his 10th grade year, he got the impression that the coaches did not expect him to attempt to do well or even complete minimal academic work as a basketball player. He said:

I always knew that I wanted to go to college. Once I started playing basketball, it kind of changed my mind a little bit. I started looking at college as a way to the NBA, and not necessarily a way to become educated. So, actually basketball kind of threw my off. I started playing basketball in the tenth grade, but I came up fast. I became one of the top ten players in the nation by the time I was a junior. But, the academic expectations were so low that I found myself just getting dumb.

The responses reported here substantiate the need for greater scrutiny of the relationship between school officials and African American men to gather more information on what is occurring and what could be done to improve student access and support. The descriptions provided here suggest that school officials are not offering positive messages, high expectations and academic support in the classroom, the counseling office, nor the athletic field with hopes of influencing college choice.

Below Richard summarizes what the typical message was to these participants.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Gayden | Fill in this blank: school officials who work with African American men just want them to _____. |
| Richard | Do well. Just want them to do well. And when I say do well, that really just means stay out of trouble. While you spend your time there, do well. |
| Gayden | That's a positive thing right, do well? Stay out of trouble? |

- Richard Sort of it, it ain't really prepping them for the future. It's just hoping they don't get in trouble right now. Don't cause any problems, don't make me have to act a fool. Pretty much.
- Gayden Is that a direct message?
- Richard It is more shown. That message is more shown than I'm trying to help you to get to college. They'll show you, you gotta go by the rules, once you get out of here you can do what you wanna do. And they'll tell you that.

The informants who did seek college information from school officials had already made a conscious decision to attend college. Those who requested information did find someone willing to help. However, this appears to be after the participant had made a personal decision to attend college, which means they are no longer part of the predisposition phase.

Direct Messages About College

The majority of the informants did not recall specific conversations with parents, school officials or their role models that provide a direct and specific message about college.

- Damon I was not directly told anything about going to college. I think it is more read in between the lines. If you aren't trying to learn about college than it's not even an option. I think you have to be looking for the information to know about it.
- Richard No, nope. I never had the college talk. I've never been put to the crossroad – you going to college or you going to work. That was never put to me like that.
- Derrick If you are an athlete, you are told if they [the college coaches] have your tape, they like you, you're fast, your big, you're strong, sounds like slavery, but anyway, then you'll go to college. If you aren't an athlete you better look at going to school close to home because you can't afford the out of state fees.

The informants described various situations in which people treated them a certain way based on an assumption.

- Saul Well, of course I've been mistaken for a basketball player. No one ever asks me if I like basketball, or even if I am any good. They'll say what position do you play or tell me that I should play basketball. I like to change things on them and say, no I don't play basketball, but I would like to own a team one day. The question I ask all the time is what did tall Black people do prior to the creation of basketball. If I had been born in 1850, I wouldn't have been... there would have been problems.
- Damon Thug, deadbeat dad. Right now, I see society seeing African American men as deadbeat dads. Baby daddy, got kids, child support. I work with so many guys, every time we get paid, they looking at their check shaking their head. I feel sorry for you brother. Some of the choices that you made... it may not have been all on them, but...they're feeling it in their paycheck. The money I make, it ain't all that but then when I see how they look at their check and say this child support is killing me man. Cheaper to keep her. You should have stayed with her.
- Sean Just stay out of trouble, work hard, you'll be all right. That's if you want to be just OK. Working hard is OK. Having something that you love to do working hard at it, you're passionate about it, is a whole nother ball game. So, I think the phrase work hard and stay out of trouble is different for a black male because we think about work as not working at something like we like. So, it's a big difference. ...I think until you are exposed to doing something that you love, and very few parents, black or white, do something that they like to do, they are just working to pay bills, just to live everyday. Now I'm really looking forward to going to work. So working hard is an untruth to most African American men. We just understand work as just working physically hard, not working at what you like to do, or love to do. And, what you like to do a lot of times, a dancer or firefighter, a lot of people laugh at it. People laugh at it and they don't know what they like to do. They don't know what their passion is. That's the biggest lie told to the Black man: work hard. If you work in a warehouse breaking your back everyday, that's a very respectable thing because you're working hard. I hear, hard work working 60 or 70 hours a week. Then they say you don't know what hard work is. I tell someone I work 20

hours a week, they tell me – you ain't working hard, you just sitting at a desk. So, sitting at a desk is not working hard. Me using my mind, taking clients out to eat ain't working hard. But, you getting your knuckles scraped up and working long hours, you're working hard. With most African American men if you worked 50 hours a week you worked hard, but if you worked 10 hours a week you ain't working hard.

Derrick The other day I was at the car dealership leaning up against a car. This guy waves me over and says can you come show me this right here. I kind of turned to look behind me to see who he was talking to. He said, Oh you don't work here? He apologizes and turns red in the face. I've been asked to clean up messes in stores and restaurants too.

Thomas Lazy, ignorant, strong, physically strong and mentally strong, abrasive, just a threat – physically or mentally, just because of the overall strength. The more you build the African American man up the more dangerous they can be. Because ...there's a raw talent that is there, whether it be physical or mental, that even growing up in the situations that we did and what we saw... if it is molded [raw talent] correctly it can be turned into something great. The thing is there is so much work that needs to be done with that raw talent that people would rather push that raw talent through than to work to mold it...The raw talent is there, there just aren't enough teachers or administrators...to work with the raw talent. Especially as parental support goes south there is just more work that needs to be done. From what I see, nobody really wants to do that work. There's more work to be done. The value of an education is decreasing. That along with decreasing parental support means things are not coming out well.

Saul turns the question around and says:

What is not a contradictory message is the question to ask. From college will make you successful to college will make you dangerous because you know too much. If you graduate from college you're a good person, but college will make you a square and you won't be accepted into the hood. That's that anti-intellectualism. A contradictory message is that Black men are aggressive, but then we are docile we don't do anything, we're too weak. We didn't do anything throughout chattel slavery. Whatever. ...I challenge you to name something that is not contradictory about Black men.

Messages from the Media

The media is a powerful influence in society. The way African American men are portrayed in the media was an issue raised in the informant's responses. In regards to attending college, Damon recognizes the marketing power of the media as a powerful messenger. He said:

In this day in age, right now, with the war situation, everything is you go to the army and we'll pay for the college. It's more military right now. Really no commercials about college, everything is military right about now. There's even a Black commercial. They show the US army, with a black man, than a marine, it's military. I pretty much see the military.

Damon is referring to a US Army recruitment commercial that shows a young African American man discussing with his mother, his decision to join the service. Damon went on to say that the only time television commercials include college is during major basketball or football games.

Frank stated that he purposely does not watch television so he can avoid the negativity. Thomas explained that the media does not portray anything that would influence someone to attend college, including the college sporting events. He said:

Nothing. Not that I can think of that I watch. The only major college things that you see are college basketball or football. Even there, there's no message being driven about attending college.

Thomas' explanation about how the impact of the media and the focus on athletes and entertainers affects a young African American man's choice to attend college, is more philosophical. He says:

I think prior to that [the decision to go to college] we become ingrained with the belief of instant gratification. So, what we see, or what the kids see are things that can be deemed as instant and gratifying, whether it be through athletics or through entertainment. And, so even with that thought there is work that is involved, but the kids just aren't seeing that. To become an athlete at that level I'd say maybe 5 or 10% are just...they are physically innately born with athletic

talent. The rest of us have to work. Hell, I worked hard to get a basketball scholarship. The same thing with entertainers. There's a lot of work involved. But, kids would rather do that type of work. They'd rather play basketball all day or write sorry lyrics all day long because it's fun to them and makes them more of that inner circle than it would be to go off and work in the library or go read. Which is another thing we don't read. By inner circle I mean, what every one else is doing. So, it's just easier to do that. No one else is working toward a goal of college, or making money other ways. So if you don't see it around you, you are going to do what everybody else is doing.

Randy takes a different viewpoint of the media and entertainers. He believes that young people should be given realistic information about their chances of making it to the NBA® or the NFL®.

I think it's a negative impact. I think more statistics need to be displayed and put out in the media about how many athletes who attempt to go, compared to how many actually go. We need to see percentages. We see all these high schoolers on draft day you know getting this money getting these multi-million dollar contracts not going to college, going straight to the NBA.

Randy further explained his answer, describing whether or not the media is telling society what is important or if society is telling the media what is important.

That's like a chicken or the egg situation. That's tough. Entertainment is glorified, but the entertained are the ones who we should emulate. I want to be the cat in the front row watching this dude who may be making \$60,000. If I'm in the front row then you know I'm making money, and if I get hurt or bust my ankle or anything, I'm still making money. Or, if the NBA has a lock out, or if the fans don't like the NBA anymore, athletes and entertainers don't get any money.

All twelve participants believed that there is too much attention on professional sports and entertainment. Often they are portrayed as the top career options for young African American men. James, Derrick, Billy and Robert participated in the same focus group. Their twenty-minute discussion on the subject of professional sports and high school athletes was very intriguing. Now that all of them are college graduates, it was hard for them to advocate for high school athletes to skip college and go straight to a professional level. As college graduates, they realize that much of the maturing they

did, such as learning to pay bills, learning time management, building trustworthy friendships, happened while in college. The high school athlete does not have this level of maturity.

Robert I'm against kids going to the pros right out of high school. Let them go to college. If they do that then all the other kids think they can do the same thing. I have a little cousin who is 16 years old, he's 6'2". No way he's going pro. He's good in basketball, but he's dumb as a stump. Love him to death, but it's not going to happen. He thinks other guys in front of him did it, so he thinks I can do it also. It's almost like a sickness

James I think it's parents.

Derrick It's parents and economics. You can't tell a kid like Martel Webster or LeBron James who clearly has the skills to be a professional athlete; you can't make \$100 million dollars for four years because you should go to college because people underneath you are going to see it. College is supposed to prepare you to make a living for yourself and your family. And if someone is ready to give you \$100 million right out of high school...then they should go for it.

One of the most recent high school players to enter the NBA® is LeBron James. The participants spoke at length about what benefit college would have been to James if the intent of college is preparation for a career. James was offered a multi-million dollar Nike spokesperson contract before he even played his first professional game. The participants could not justify delaying someone like James from earning millions of dollars in the NBA® to earn a college degree.

James It's cool that college is during a time when you learn, you grow up a lot and you get a lot of the experiences that help you grow. But, it's still paying for an education for a specific field or we can call them all vocations. So, if you can already make a living at a sport better than most CEO's in the county, then why go to college?

Billy There should be some type of alternative. Like a LeBron James, he should be going through something to prepare

him . I didn't know how to do bills when I got to college... I think we all would agree that we learned how to live on our own and we didn't have people coming at us trying to get our money.

Derrick It's an issue of maturity. But, only a certain percentage of Americans or people get to go to college, but everyone has to learn at some point – I've got to pay this bill, I've got to pay....

Billy But, I've got to learn how to manage my money no matter how much I've got.

Derrick Even if they've gone to college, they just don't get that, because they were coddled or spoiled all their lives... Black athletes mainly...that are making that leap from high school to pros, need the other brothers in that profession that have been there to take those guys under their wing. When you have everybody coming at you for pieces of your money, who is prepared to deal with that at 18?

Billy I think we'd all agree that everybody needs what we are talking about. And college right now seems to be the best way to prepare you. It may not be, but right now that's the best thing we have. It's a structured environment. There are adults around who can at least mold you and they've seen it ...we think it's new because we're new in that position.. but they see it over and over.

Derrick It makes it easier to for them to be able to say, it is up to you, this is what you should do, just like the dorm monitor. The dorm monitor is always older because they've been through that before. They can say - I know it's like the end of the world right now, but you're going to be all right, we'll get some money on your food card.

This conversation is loaded with justifications for both sides of the argument: go to college to mature, and learn a skill or profession, or hone your athletic skill and seek a professional contract. As Derrick said, the economic reason can easily outweigh any academic explanation. Thomas explained earlier that working on your basketball skills is more acceptable and normal than spending time in the library reading. Either way the

message from the media, about sports and entertainment to African American men who may or may not be potential professional athletes or entertainers is very seductive.

Summary

The responses that dealt with messages from influential people were very informative in terms of identifying what African American men are told about college. For the twelve participants in this study various messages were passed on to them about college. Some of these messages were vague and general in terms of their connection to college. Others, such as the behavior of the high school coach, appear to be mean-spirited and counter productive. As stated earlier there is no clear explanation why these twelve African American men went to college given the messages they received about college. The twelve respondents do not agree on an answer as to what African American men are told about college and who is primarily passing on the message.

Randy was programmed to seek college by his parents from day one. While Damon got the impression from his father that he was to work and graduate from high school. Thomas' mother, who he credits with doing everything to get him to college, had to compete for his attention on college with his friends, basketball and the school officials he came in contact with. Thomas' friends were not talking about college amongst themselves, and Thomas' school officials were not talking to him about college either.

The overall theme to arise through the messages these African American men received from parents, school officials and entities such as the media, is one thing if you

are an athlete and something else if you are not. Professional sports, and entertainment, to a lesser extent, placed a unique parameter in the college choice process for these twelve participants. The only consistent factor about the various responses is that athletics seems to be the one option that everyone has either considered themselves, or have had thrust upon them as their best option for success.

The participants' comments are more meaningful when they are considered with their childhood goals of professional sports in mind. Six out of the twelve participants wanted to be professional athletes, and eight of the twelve pursued high school athletics with varying hopes of playing on the college level. The power of athletics to garner the attention of these African American men was only tempered by an emphasis on academics by parents or school officials. When that did not happen, the informants admitted to nursing unrealistic dreams of playing sports at the professional level.

Responses from these participants show that there is shaky support for college for the African American male student athlete at the high school level. Randy is the only participant who did not have to choose between being an academic student or an athlete; however, one could argue that he did choose academics by not transferring to a school with a better football team.

The African American men in this study began playing sports at a very young age and many identified dreams of playing professional sports. Their college choice process seems to need another outcome category in the predisposition phase. The African American males in this study could have left the predisposition phase as 1) wanting to go to college, 2) wanting to go to work, 3) wanting to join the military or 4) wanting to pursue professional athletics. For professional basketball, college is not a

required route. Professional football only requires two years of college, not a degree or even a certain number of credits. Professional baseball does not require college either. Should a fourth option be recognized as part of the college choice process to account for the mindset of the African American in this study, as well as what could be a significant number of young African American men? Even if the aspiration is unrealistic, it gives parents, school officials and higher education practitioners a starting point for developing predisposition for college. The responses reported here suggest that college is important, but there are other issues during the predisposition phase, such as the desire to be a professional athlete and the desire to join the workforce as soon as possible, paired with inattention from parents and school officials, that caught the attention of the African American men in this study, and steered them away from choosing college.

CHAPTER 7

COLLEGE IS IMPORTANT, BUT...

The responses reported in this chapter focus on what the twelve participants believe to be important. Instead of focusing on what their parents and school official said or did, the focus is now on them. These African American men are now the adults who father, teach, coach, and mentor the next generation of African American men. The descriptions provided by the informants for what they expect or wish for African American men include varying definitions of success, wishes of financial independence and goals for strengthening the family unit.

Success

The informants have different definitions of success. Damon described it as being different for each person. It could mean making ends meet or being rich. He said:

You can make a living and survive and not be as successful as the next person. You don't have to be rich. You can be well off. Not have the creditors calling you. Everything taken care of. College money put aside for your kids. Mortgage paid up or whatever the case may be. You don't have to be rich to be successful.

Sean described success as being able to do what you love to make a living. He explained:

A successful man has a job he loves. He looks forward to working and providing for his family. Also, he can afford to sit back and enjoy life and not have to work all the time. Success is also having family and friends around to spend time with.

These twelve African American men are working and contributing to their families and communities. Based on the expectations placed on them by their parents and

school officials, they are successful. None of them is in jail and each is doing well or making it by working a steady job. The descriptions they offer for what they wish to see in the future suggest they recognize that society is changing and more is expected of African American men.

Kelly, Thomas, Billy, Robert and Frank focused their responses on what is needed to be prepared educationally for the coming economy. This preparation will allow African American men to participate in the new economy and as a result be successful. Kelly identified the areas of study in which African American men will need to be proficient. He works in computer technology and is very aware of the skills needed to work in that industry. He said:

I think they [future generation of African American men] are going to have to be twice as good in the math and science. The world is getting more technical, more complicated. And, we know those are the subjects we don't like and some of the ones that we struggle with. I really believe that... technology is the way we are going in. The labor force is going out, there's more technology. They have to be a student in those areas – computer, media, be creative. Anything in terms of creativity. I think that's where the African American man has to be – creative.

Thomas carried this line of thinking further when he spoke of the value of a high school diploma. Thomas explained:

It's already here [the college degree replacing the high school diploma]. Unless you have some entrepreneur spirit and financial savvy to make your own money, to me it's already here.

Billy and Robert also believe that a high school diploma is just not enough anymore.

Billy I think more than a college degree will be necessary. It almost seems like a college degree is becoming what a high school diploma used to be... I think it will be necessary and even more necessary by 2015.

Robert A college degree, a BA or BS is just a starting point...

Frank believes that a college degree along with experience will be needed in order to get your foot in the door. Kelly agreed with him and added that high school students are being allowed to work in co-op internship programs to earn experience and to take certified programming examinations, all before graduating from high school.

Robert, Kelly, Frank, Billy and Thomas each enrolled in college immediately after high school and completed the bachelor's degree. That experience has influenced their perception of the value of a college degree. Damon, who attended college, but did not graduate, believes that the college degree is important, but there will always be a need for people with just a high school diploma. Those with a high school diploma can still be successful. He said:

It's going to be up there [the college degree]. I don't think someone will get out of high school and be told that no you have to have a college degree, before we even let you come in the warehouse. I can't see that. It's people who get jobs right now that don't have a GED or diploma. You can still make it. You may have to squeeze through a few cracks. But, I don't think it will take the place of high school. Maybe it will be a little bit harder, but not impossible. Saul, who has just returned to college, believes that college is not for everyone.

He believes that postponing his undergraduate education was the best decision he made. He said:

I didn't know what I was doing the first time I went to college. Everything was focused on playing ball. I didn't go to class, I didn't have to go to class. I still read books and soaked up the curriculum, but I didn't go to class. College is not for everyone. And schools should do better at recognizing what a kid's talents are. And, college may not be in their future. Someone, like me should never go to college right after high school. I was one that should have waited. Now this time around I know exactly what I need to get out of the college experience.

The perception of the importance of a college degree is vital to understanding how these informants may encourage or discourage future college students to attend.

The informants are aware of the changing economy. Those who attended college and

graduated seem to have a heightened awareness of the changing market when it comes to having a college degree. Damon, who believes there will be jobs in the future for workers without college degrees, even admits that finding such a job will become more difficult. Saul's comments centers around his belief that education can come in formal and informal settings and be just as important and effective. He believes that what makes the difference is if the individual knows their self and has set goals.

Since Saul and Damon have been able reach levels of success, finding employment, purchasing a home, car, etc, the lack of a college degree has not been detrimental to their standard of living. Saul even mentioned that he would have more money in the bank if he had not decided to return to college.

Financial Independence

The need for financial independence for the next generation was a prominent theme. Thomas said:

Be financially successful in anyway other than the drug game. That doesn't have to include college as long as they can find ways to make money and build strong families...

Thomas identifies financial education as key to addressing many issues faced by African American men. As a financial advisor, he has first hand experience with working with families who have that financial education, and those who do not.

The comments of Robert, James and Saul agree on the need for financial independence.

Robert	To prosper, to do better than what's before them right now.
James	I want Black men to own a share of this country.

Saul

We have to corner some type of industry, technology or whatever. We have to use some real skills, whatever that is, technology is the way to go, high-end technology. That's going to have to be the new hustle. Whether we are software engineers or whatever. All the levels, product development, logistics etc. Imagine an operating system from an African American perspective. That would be awesome.

The focus of these African American men on financial independence and entrepreneurship as the way to achieve success in the future must be connected to all types of postsecondary education. The traditional model of the four-year degree may not fit the needs of future entrepreneurs as well as the short-term certificate, two-year degree or continuing education courses provided by the community college could. The statistics presented in chapter two on future labor needs suggest that these African American men are on the right track in their thinking.

Strengthening the African American Family

Along with goals for success, obtaining financial independence, the informants spoke of the need for the next generation of African American men to strengthen the family. Saul spoke of parental responsibility when it comes to a child's education.

I would say, take responsibility for the kid, and don't feel like the powers that be are supposed to teach their kids to be civilized black males. Why would you expect that? Like everybody else, we just have to be civilized. At the end of the day, when it comes down to it, you should not send your kids to pre-K expecting the teacher to teach them their ABCs. Your kid doesn't know their ABCs from you, or how to read from you, why would they respect learning from anybody else. We will have to be responsible for supplementing our kid's education, whether that's history, or whatever.

Randy believes that building strong families with African American men visibly present should be the top priority. He said:

The next generation of men must be present in their community. There are lots of female headed households, lack of discipline in children today because they don't have positive male role models. I think be present in the community and be a positive influence.

Frank's response is similar to Randy's. His answer really affected him while speaking. He fought back tears as he explained what he wanted to see the next generation do. He said:

I'm a pastor, I'm a preacher, but I'm just going to be real. I want them to give a damn. I really want them to care about who they are, what they are, and whose they are. I don't think they care about nothing. I really don't. As I see the younger generation, there's no inside, that's what got me, because I wanted it, I had desire for something on the inside. They don't want nothing. You can see it how they talk, walk, even what they wear.

My mother always taught me that what is on the inside of you will show on the outside. There's no light, just darkness, no vision. In terms of single mothers and the father – mother role in our young African American men's lives, I think that it is most detrimental because they don't see a strong figure that will give them that catapult to yes they can. My desire for your study is that it will empower some young man to say yea, stick in there with your family, make it work. ...it hurts my heart because so many of our young brothers don't have that father and they've got to do it you know, because that dad's not there. It burns me up, because it becomes a perpetual, backwards spin. I get so angry at these young brothers that just dog out these sisters for the sake of what they want to do. My dad stuck through, even though he was out, he still supported. And that's what we miss. So, through your study I pray that some brother will hook onto that. Excuse my tears, that really hits me hard.

Saul's response can be tied to Frank's plea. He said:

Loneliness or alienation is a big problem from young brothas. I think it's interesting that black people within the ages of 20 – 35 are pretty much single, living alone. I don't understand that. I think that's unprecedented. I think that's a problem because they don't have balance.

The structure of the African American family is indeed impacted by the decreasing percentages of African American men who attend and graduate from college. What this impact is and how African American women confront the situation is

beyond the scope of this study, yet there is important research to be done on that subject.

Summary

The participant's responses suggest that there is an awareness that times are changing. Going to college and earning a degree is important, but there are other ways to be successful, and other issues facing the African American family that may need to take precedence. Success can come through a strong work ethic, through spending time with loved ones. Success can come through financial education and independence. In addition, success can come through formal and informal education.

Saul summarizes these statements succinctly when he says:

...I realized that, if you make up your mind to do anything, regardless of whatever color you are, usually people will give you the lane. Because a lot of people don't even try to fulfill their dreams, and when people see you are serious about what you want, they'll give you the space to do it...

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, INTERPRETATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The first part of this dissertation title asks the question: Shoot the messenger, or change the message? In this research study, shoot the messenger or change the message referred to the uncertainty about what messages African American men are told about choosing to attend postsecondary education, and who is passing on that information. The overall theme that arises from the analyzed data is that the college choice process for the informants was complicated, inconsistent, but somehow led to successful college completion for ten of the twelve participants. The African American men who participated in this study received deficient messages about postsecondary education. These messages manifested as low parental support, specifically for college attendance, low academic expectations from home, school and community, the withholding of important information from school officials, little or no early exposure to postsecondary institution campuses or students. These deficient messages were present in the predisposition phase, and carried over into the experiences of participants once they made conscious decisions to attend college and were in the search phase.

The influential messengers for the participants ranged from parents, their self, and a combination of characteristics from different people, peers, to no one. The informants did not consistently identify their role model as the one who influenced them to attend college. Yet, the majority of the participants still choose to attend college, enrolled and succeeded in higher education.

The perception of a college degree varied among the participants. The descriptions provided by the informants for what they expect or wish for African American men include varying definitions of success, wishes of financial independence and goals for strengthening the family unit. The perception of the importance of a college degree is important for understanding how these African American men will approach the subject of college attendance with the next generation, specifically their sons, younger brothers, students, co-workers, et cetera.

The African American men who participated in this research provide examples of the unique experiences they face. The results support the statements of researchers who have found it difficult to determine a college choice model to describe the experiences of African American men. However, the myriad of experiences detailed during the interview process do form clusters of meaning or reoccurring themes.

Interpretations

Parental Expectations & Parental Action

Two of the participants who knew they would go to college from day one, had parents who instilled that expectation in them from day one and supported that expectation with action. Thomas' mother spoke of him going to college very early. To support that statement, she enrolled him in summer enrichment programs that provided college preparation. She made sure he took college preparatory courses in school. When it was time to fill out college and financial aid applications, she completed most of them for Thomas. Thomas believes that he would not have gone to college without his mother's hard work.

Randy's mother required him to complete schoolwork in the summer before going out to play. She also kept in contact with his teachers and visited the school. Both of Randy's parents spoke of their college days and kept college paraphernalia visible around the house. They made it clear that Randy and his siblings were going to college somewhere; Randy described this as programming.

The difference in what Randy and Thomas experienced during predisposition is that there was action by the parents to back up the expectation that they attend college. This is important for two reasons. The parent's actions counterbalanced negativity from school officials that Thomas experienced at school. The actions of Randy's parents were supplemented by the positive actions of his football coach and other school officials. In other words, Randy received the message that he was going to college from home *and* school.

Secondly, the actions of Randy and Thomas' parents can be connected to Vernon Polite's (1994) study where he reported that parents did not take specific action to support their son's education. Sean and Damon were never told they could not go to college, however their parent's actions did not show specific supportive actions similar to Thomas' and Randy's parents. Sean and Damon's parents did not attend college; any supportive actions on their part would be limited by their lack of college experience.

Randy, James, Billy, and Thomas' parents attended college; Damon, Sean, Derrick, Richard, Robert, Saul, Frank and Kelly's parents did not attend college. Kelly's mother did ensure that he spent time around people who were college educated, specifically his Godparents. She also expected Kelly to come home and tell her everything he found out about college. Derrick, Richard, Robert, Damon, Sean, Saul

and Frank were very much on their own in the predisposition process. This could explain why the decision to attend college came late for Frank, Sean and Derrick. Their parents were not able to draw on their experience to support an expectation of college.

How can African American parents who did not attend college instill the predisposition for college in their sons? Can parents who did not attend college be educated on specific things to do to expose their sons to important experiences that foster predisposition for college? Thomas believes that it would be very difficult for a parent without college experience to do what is needed to get their child in college; he is not sure if it is possible. He said:

Today, you have to do it for them. Because, as ill prepared as I was, mentally, this new generation is even further behind. Just no clue of the steps that need to be taken. I'd advise them [parents], that they [their child] have to take the necessary tests, but you have to do it for them. Sad to say. Either the counselor in the school needs to take initiative or the parent has to do it for them. The dilemma sometime is that the parents didn't go through it themselves. So, without that experience they are starting just as fresh as the children. That makes it difficult... when they haven't seen it happen.... Unless the child has great athletic talent where there's no work to be done, other than picking the scholarship or the NBA deal. Or, the child has great academic talent, which is a rarity, especially with Black men, that's the only way. As far as those that are in between, like myself. I was an OK athlete, was not a genius student. My mother picked up the weight. I don't see how that can happen for parents who haven't gone to school themselves.

As stated in the literature review, Hossler et al. (1999) reported that efforts to influence students to attend college should begin by focusing on the parents, except in instances where the students are African American men. Hossler et al. found that the same factors of influence are not effective for influencing African American males to attend college. The experiences of the informants in the study include parents who did not attend college. They did not deter their sons from attending college. However, the lack of a direct college experience on the part of the parent may have limited their ability

to influence their sons to attend college. Derrick acknowledges that his parents were not able to tell him about going to college, because they did not attend. Therefore, other than telling them I want you to go to college, his parents were not able to back up this statement with action. Derrick said, "I wish my parents would have said more to me about it. But, they didn't know."

The lack of parental college experience may explain why some parents of African American males in this study were not considered influential factors for college attendance.

Five of the twelve participants suggest information on college should be geared toward African American parents. Typical recruitment brochures and SAT® information is not what is needed. The researcher is thinking of specific stages of action that are similar to the timeline given for children's immunizations. For example, by the age of 5, a young African American man should be exposed to a college or university, by way of visiting the campus, going to a college athletic event, or even wearing a university t-shirt. By the age of 6, parents and other adults should start asking the child what they want to be when they grow up, and encourage them to talk about their dreams and goals. A timeline such as this is the type of information parents may need to translate expectations to action to college enrollment. A timeline would also assist parents without college experience.

The role of the parent is vital to the predisposition phase. The negative messages from coaches and school officials were counterbalanced by positive messages and specific actions by Randy and Thomas' parents. A strong parental

influence for college, on its own or coupled with positive influence from school officials, is more important than positive influence from school officials alone.

School Officials

Historically, school officials have been able to justify segregating students according to academic and vocational tracks. If the economic and employment predictions of the Bureau of Labor Statistics come to pass, a vocational track will mean more than basic knowledge of math, science, reading and writing. A technological society requires a higher level of literacy, which means basic knowledge levels, must adjust to meet the need for understanding increasingly complex information.

Billy believes that the preparation for college is more important than the actual decision. He explained:

It's not the decision to go to college, it's the preparing. You can prepare to buy a house, and decide you don't want to buy it, but if you decide to buy a house and you're not prepared you are still going to be screwed. So, I think it's more about preparing rather than deciding at an early age.

Billy's response supports the efforts of educators to make college preparatory curriculum available to all students, not just those in the high tracks. The researcher believes that preparation for college is important, however there must be a goal attached to that preparation so that students understand the purpose of their preparation. Offering college preparation for students who do not understand the need for college is the same as giving out pizza to people who just ate a five-course meal; there is no recognized need. The predisposition for college is different from the preparation for college. The two phases can happen simultaneously. Can preparation for college happen without the predisposition to attend college already in place? This

important question should be investigated. African American men currently in grade school would be the ideal sample to address this issue.

The College Choice Model

The predisposition phase of the College Choice Model is divided into three possible outcomes. A student can leave the predisposition phase knowing they will attend college, unsure if college is an option, or resigned to working or joining the military. The informants considered a fourth option that is separate from the established options. Pursuing professional sports is an option that most of these informants identified as a goal at a young age. Sean made a point that if a young man sets a goal to play professional sports, even if college level play is required, as in the case of the NFL, academic preparation is not part of that goal.

If I have my eye on the NFL I not thinking about school work to get to college. I know that if I'm good enough I won't have to read or write anything – so why spend time on school work when I just need to practice more.

This finding is similar to the description of the dreamer in Freeman's predetermine phase. The dreamer may have goals of improving themselves and doing something with their life, however they have not had guidance and direction that would lead to college. The option of professional sports could fit in the dreamer category, except for the majority of professional athletes still play college athletics, even if only for one year. The participants identified the goal of being a professional athlete at a very young age. When they begin planning for a professional sports career, they often remove themselves from the academic and college preparatory path.

When it becomes apparent that the NFL® or NBA® is not a realistic option, usually when high school athletics come into play, the student is now late to the traditional college choice process. The student who is extremely behind in academics and does not have any guidance may become disheartened over their prospects to complete high school, let alone reach college.

This student desires to achieve and do something with their life; however, they have put their hopes in something that will not pan out. They have run out of time to view college as a viable option, but more importantly, they have run out of time to prepare. Frank spoke about trying to improve his grades during his senior year in high school so he could obtain a college football scholarship. He admits that grades were not much of an issue for him because he was not connecting grades to a college scholarship to play football. When that connection became apparent to him grades became an issue. Interestingly, Frank knew that playing a professional sport was not an option for him by the 10th grade. However, college did not replace that option until the middle of his 12th grade year when he was introduced to a football recruiter from a junior college

Professional sports and entertainment may place a unique parameter in the college choice process that is not there for other groups of students. Responses from these participants show that there is shaky support for college for the African American male student athlete at the high school level. Randy is the only participant who did not have to choose between being an academic student or an athlete; however, one could argue that he did choose academics by not transferring to a school with a better football team.

The young African American men in this study began playing sports at such a young age, and many identified dreams of playing professional sports, their college choice process seemed to include another outcome category in the predisposition phase. Professional football only requires two years of college, not a degree or even a certain number of credits. Professional baseball does not require college either. A fourth option in the predisposition phase could be recognized as part of the college choice process to account for the mindset of the informants, as well as what could be a significant number of young African American men. Even if the aspiration is unrealistic, it gives parents, school officials and higher education practitioners a starting point for developing a predisposition for college.

Awareness in African American men

The participants in this study may not be fully aware of the situation African American men are in related to educational attainment. Detailed statistics could have been presented to the participants to spark conversation about the requirement of a college degree; however, the participants' answers would not have been based on their experiences, but on their opinion of the statistics. The introduction of statistics and research results would change the experiences of the informants.

James, Robert, Billy and Derrick were asked to comment on the research of Cross and Slater (2000) that predicts if current enrollment trends continue the last African American men to graduate from college will finish in 2097. All four of them laughed at this statement and called it a case of funny math or some researcher manipulating numbers to obtain a desired result. Discrediting this possibility suggests that the

informants are not fully aware of the situation African American men find themselves in concerning college enrollment. The participants would not usually be exposed to educational statistics, so it is reasonable for them to reject Cross and Slater's speculation.

For the most part the participants do not believe obtaining a college degree is the most challenging issue for African American men. Education was identified, but not at the top of the list. The researcher is not sure how to interpret this finding. African American men with college degrees will be key to increasing college enrollments of African American men. It will be very hard to increase the number of African American men with college degrees if the ones who have earned degrees, do not believe that the degree is necessary for success.

Conclusions

The experiences of the 12 participants lead the researcher to conclude the following:

- 1) The experiences of the 12 participants are different from what has been described in the college choice literature. These unique experiences make it difficult to describe the predisposition process for African American men in general terms.
- 2) The college choice process for the 12 participants is affected by a desire to play professional sports, parental expectations for immediate independence after high school graduation via work, and low expectations from parents, school officials, peers, media, et cetera that African American males will attend college. These expectations impact predisposition and may work to push African American men away from choosing college.
- 3) The 12 participants did not identify role models out of their reach, such as celebrities; however, they were not quick to identify their parents as their personal role model either. The influence of role models to these

participants is not clear, and may not be as important to predisposition for African American males as for females and other racial and ethnic groups.

- 4) The participants who identified themselves as their own role model, or who looked to their internal drive to reach their goals would probably have benefited from college choice information directed to them instead of to a parent.
- 5) A change in the tone of conversation amongst peers about wanting to go to college, to making specific plans to reach that goal, may have indicated a switch in the college choice phase from predisposition to the search phase.
- 6) The predisposition to attend college must be in place before preparation for college can begin. Once the informants in the study decided to attend college, they became aware of their preparation or lack of preparation for college.

Recommendations for Future Study

The responses of the participants suggest to the researcher that the message to go to college reached the participants in different ways. It is as if each participant received different versions of the same message: College is important, but it is not necessarily for you. This conclusion is based on the messages received by the participants: finish high school, get a job, get out of the house, stay out of jail, don't be like your cousins, or just stay out of trouble. These messages came from parents, school officials and even peers. There is no direct message to indicate college as an expectation or requirement. However, these messages are complicated by the fact that all twelve of the participants attended college, and only two have not completed a bachelor's degree, yet. On one hand, their experiences do not seem to indicate that college was on their radar, but their actions speak otherwise. Many more studies are needed to determine how African American men reach college even with such low expectations placed on them by parents, family and school officials. Studies that focus

on the resiliency of African American men (Batey, 1999), in the face of detrimental environments, can be connected to research on predisposition. This type of research, focused on young African American men in grade school, may help to explain how predisposition to college is still formed, even in situations adverse to academic success.

As stated above, research on African American parents, who have never attended college, yet instilled a desire for college in their sons is very necessary to the research on college choice of African American males. This study focused on the point of view of the potential college student. The experiences shared by some of the informants indicate the role of their parent is not as influential compared to the results of studies by Hossler et al. (1999). All of the informants attended college at some point, but only two identified specific actions on the part of their parents that led to their subsequent enrollment in college.

To address a limitation of this study, future research must include African American men who have not attended college. The identification of participants without college experience was difficult with the sampling methods used. Utilizing key informants who interact with African American men at the high school level may prove to be a better method for identifying African American men who have not attended college. These key informants would be able to identify recent high school graduates who have not started college, or have not made plans to attend.

Narrative of the Shared Experience

The final step in phenomenological data analysis is to integrate the shared experiences of the participants into a creative narrative that captures the overall

experience of the group. The descriptions offered by these twelve African American men provide a glimpse into the complicated lives of African American men. The stories are unique, yet there is a shared experience that can be summarized in one voice:

I wanted to be a football player when I grew up. Everybody I knew played little league and wanted to play ball too. I don't remember wanting to be a police officer or a lawyer or anything when I was little. By the time I was in 5th or 6th grade I knew about college, but I didn't know exactly what was involved. I played football and spent a lot of time with my friends. That's really what we talked about the most. There were a few guys who talked about going to college to play ball. But, going just to go wasn't really a hot topic. I knew that I had to play college ball in order to get to the NFL. But, I didn't pay much attention to the academic stuff, until I was in high school.

My parents looked out for me and wanted me to do well. I tried to stay out of trouble. I didn't want to be like those guys my mother was always talking about. My mom had some college credits but didn't finish, and my dad did not attend. I don't remember any special conversations about me going to college. They did expect me to get a job and graduate from high school. Other than that, college would be extra. They supported my decision to go to college, but for the most part I think it was my decision.

At school there wasn't anyone really pushing the idea of me going to college. I had teachers who were nice to me most of the time. I don't think I was expected to do much school wise. They probably just wanted me to stay out of trouble. I don't remember too many conversations with my teachers or counselors. That could have been my fault. I didn't look for them and they didn't look for me. Since I've spent so much time playing football I really haven't worked on any of my other talents. I've been told that I have this raw talent, but people only seem to pay attention to my athletic ability.

I didn't talk too much about going to college. It's not that I heard all negative responses, but no one was really overjoyed that I was going to college; except for my mom and dad and the older people at church. I would get into debates sometime with people who said that I would be wasting my time going to college. At school, some kids would say things about me being in honors courses. My close friends were supportive, but we didn't sit around talking about going to college.

I wish there was less focus on sports and entertainment. On TV you never see a Black man as a college student – just an athlete or a rapper. There are other things out there, now that I'm older I notice how Black men are limited to two or three occupations by the media. What's on TV can be really put some ideas on your mind – some good, others not so good. I'm not knocking the athletes who have moved straight to the NBA, I would have too if I had the chance.

But, I know they need some of the lessons I learned while in college. They only way to learn those things is probably in college. That's usually the first time you are on your own.

College is not for everyone, and I don't think I will tell my kids that they have to go. There are other ways to be successful and make money. I think it's important for them to learn true African American history and that may happen in school or on their own. Being a business owner is more important than having a college degree too. I think it depends on the person's circumstances whether or not they need a degree to be successful. I just want African American men to take responsibility for their children and to be present in the community and their families. Many of the things we are struggling with are just politics and we can overcome that if we focus on education and taking care of our families. College is important but other things may be just as important.

The purpose of this research study was to identify and describe the experiences of African American men that influenced the choice to participate in postsecondary education. The questions asked in this investigation were meant to move research ahead by connecting accepted concepts about the college choice process to African American men and what they learn about college. This qualitative study described the experiences of African American men in terms of predisposition to attend college, the messages received about college from influential people and finally how African American men perceive and interpret the importance of a college degree.

What makes the results of this research so intriguing is that the majority of the participants in this research had completed a bachelor's degree. It is amazing that the experiences of the informants, which do not fit the college choice model, did not deter them from choosing college and successfully following through on that choice.

Table 1

Comparison of Enrollment Growth of African American Men from 1980 to 2000

Year	Total # Coll. Stud.	# AA Coll. Stud.	# AA Male Stud.	% AA Men Among All Coll. Stud.	% AA Men Among All AA Coll. Stud.
1980	11,928,890	1,108,348	454,423	3.81%	41.00%
1982	12,588,520	1,103,517	458,476	3.64%	41.55%
1984	12,400,392	995,809	404,498	3.26%	40.62%
1986	12,670,121	1,066,502	429,705	3.39%	40.29%
1988	13,201,196	1,129,419	442,570	3.35%	39.19%
1990	13,983,255	1,248,988	485,155	3.47%	38.84%
1991	14,527,724	1,337,582	517,553	3.56%	38.69%
1992	14,657,118	1,395,210	537,462	3.67%	38.52%
1993	14,477,792	1,415,214	544,329	3.76%	38.46%
1994	14,449,476	1,451,217	550,398	3.81%	37.93%
1995	14,445,438	1,476,319	556,578	3.85%	37.70%
1996	14,550,056	1,508,092	564,740	3.88%	37.45%
1997	14,680,488	1,553,296	580,367	3.95%	37.36%
1998	14,711,280	1,587,842	585,519	3.98%	36.88%
1999	14,791,200	1,643,200	604,200	4.08%	36.77%
2000	15,312,300	1,730,300	635,300	4.15%	36.72%

Note. "AA" = "African American." Adapted from Fall Enrollment (NCES population of institutions) retrieved on August 31, 2005 from <http://caspar.nsf.gov/ResultController;jsessionid=EFDD097B69B0A1787C96FA09BCBC828F>; Horne, W. W. (2005). Almanac Issue 2005-2006. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52(1), 15.

Table 2

Pilot Study Demographic Details

	Age	City where majority of education was completed	Parental education background	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Paying for College	None of these describe my experience	Expected to go to college	Not sure if college was an option	Did not expect to attend college
Larry	34	Dallas, TX	unsure	BS	Comp. Analyst	Cash from parents, loans, athletic & academic scholarship, work study, pell grant	X			
Daniel	37	St. Louis, MO	none	MS	Educator	Loans, academic scholarship, work study, pell grant		X		
Simon	24	Shreveport, LA	some college	HS Diploma	Cashier	N/A			X	
Justin	28	Saginaw, MI	some college	BS	Env. Eng.	academic scholarship, work study		X		
Paul	28	Dallas, TX	some college	BS	Loan Officer/Sales	Cash from parents, personal savings, academic scholarship, work study, pell grant	X			
John	31	Dallas, TX	none	AA	Real Est. Collections	student loans, athletic scholarships		X		

Table 3

Demographic Details of Participants

	Age	City where majority of education was completed	Parental education background	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Paying for College	Expected to go to college	Not sure if college was an option	Did not expect to attend college
Sean	29	Fort Worth, TX	some college	BS	Financial Advisor	Loans, cash from parents, savings		X	
Damon	29	Fort Worth, TX	no college	HS Diploma	Warehouse Associate	Pell Grant		X	
Richard	30	Chattanooga, TN	no college	Certificate	Barber/Business Owner	Student Loans, Pell Grant		X	
Thomas	29	Oklahoma City, OK	AA or BS completed	BS	Financial Advisor	Cash from parents, cash from personal savings, student loans, athletic scholarship, Academic Scholarship	X		
Randy	29	Garland, TX	AA or BS completed	BS	Project Manager	Cash from parents, student loans, Work Study	X		
Saul	29	Fort Worth, TX	no college	HS Diploma	Assistant, Law Office/Business Owner	Athletic Scholarship, Other	X		
James	34	Seattle, WA	AA or BS completed	BS	Accountant	Student Loans, Athletic Scholarship, work Study Pell Grant		X	

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued).

	Age	City where majority of education was completed	Parental education background	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Paying for College	Expected to go to college	Not sure if college was an option	Did not expect to attend college
Billy	29	Oak Harbor, WA	some college	BS	Multi-Media Coordinator	Cash from parents & personal savings, Academic Scholarship	X		
Derrick	33	Lompoc, CA	AA or BS completed	BS	Financial Analyst	Athletic Scholarship, loans, Work Study, Pell Grant	X		
Robert	35	Richmond, VA	no college	BS	Marketing	Student loans, Work Study, Pell Grant	X		
Frank	44	Killeen, TX	no college	MS	Minister	athletic scholarship	X		
Kelly	38	Temple, TX	no college	MS	IT Security	athletic scholarship, loans, work-study, Pell Grant	X		

Table 4

Data Analysis & Representation in Phenomenology

1. Data Managing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create and organize files for data
2. Reading, memoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes
3. Describing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the meaning of the experience for researcher
4. Classifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find and list statements of meaning for individuals• Group statements into meaning units
5. Interpreting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a textural description, “what happened”• Develop a structural description, “how” the phenomenon was experienced• Develop an overall description of the experience, the “essence”
6. Representing, visualizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present narration of the “essence” of the experience: use tables or figures of statements and meaning units

Table 5

Childhood Dreams and Current Professions of Participants

Alias	Childhood Dream Job	Highest Degree Earned	Current Profession / Job
Robert	NFL	BA	Marketing
Billy	Athlete	BA	Multimedia Coordinator
Damon	None / Real Estate	High School Diploma	Warehouse Associate
Derrick	Athlete / Goldie	BA	Financial Analyst
James	Psychologist / Professional Athlete	BA	Accountant
Frank	Professional Athlete	MS	Pastor
Sean	Biomedical Engineer	BA	Financial Advisor
Kelly	Computer Engineer	MS	IT – Security Analyst
Richard	Professional Athlete	2-year Certificate	Barber / Business Owner
Saul	Writer / Real Estate	High School Diploma	Legal Assistant / Business Owner
Thomas	Engineer	BA	Financial Advisor
Randy	Engineer / Rich	BA	Project Officer

Table 6

Classification in Freeman's Predetermination Model based on Time of Exposure to College

Freeman	Freeman		Alias	Age of first exposure to college / university	Age decision was made to attend college	Highest degree earned	
	Knower	Seeker					Dreamer
		X	Robert	15	11	BS	
			X	Billy	7	14	BS
	X		Damon	15	12	HS	
		X	Derrick	7	14	BS	
	X		James	11	11	BS	
		X	Frank	17	17	MS	
		X	Sean	15	18	BS	
X			Kelly	6	0	MS	
	X		Richard	11	11	CERT.	
X			Saul	16	0*	HS	
X			Thomas	4	15	BS	
X			Randy	12	0	BS	

Table 7

Classification in Hossler & Gallagher's Predisposition Model based on Time of Exposure to College

Hossler & Gallagher			Alias	Age of first exposure to college / university	Age decision was made to attend college	Highest degree earned
Which	Whethers	Notes				
	X		Robert	15	11	BS
	X		Billy	7	14	BS
	X		Damon	15	12	HS
	X		Derrick	7	14	BS
	X		James	11	11	BS
		X	Frank	17	17	MS
		X	Sean	15	18	BS
X			Kelly	6	0	MS
	X		Richard	11	11	CERT.
X			Saul	16	0	HS
X			Thomas	4	15	BS
X			Randy	12	0	BS

APPENDIX
RESEARCH AND CONSENT FORMS

UNIVERSITY^{of} NORTH TEXAS

Office of Research Services

May 26, 2005

Kizuwanda Gayden
Department of Counseling, Development and Higher Education
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 05-055

Dear Ms. Gayden:

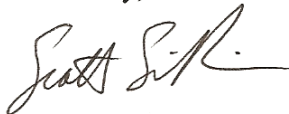
As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Shoot the Messenger or Change the Message? What are African American Males Learning About Postsecondary Education." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol and informed consent form are hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. **Federal policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only.**

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and **use this form only** for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. Please mark your calendar accordingly. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Administrator, or Boyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Scott Simpkins, Ph.D.
Chair



*Making Disciples To Make A Difference
Matthew 28:19-20*

Frederick Douglas Haynes, III
Senior Pastor

May 20, 2005

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Technology Transfer
University of North Texas
Administration Building 206
1501 Chestnut Street
Denton, TX 76203

To Whom It May Concern:

Kizuwanda Gayden has been granted permission to recruit participants for her doctoral research study at the Friendship-West Baptist Church, located in Dallas, TX. As the pastoral leaders of Operation BLACC and the FWBC Pathfinders Singles Ministry, we have agreed to the recruitment methods of this study.

Ms. Gayden will attend the above mentioned groups' meetings to administer a demographic survey. It is our understanding that participants must read and sign a consent form in order to participate. The specific day and time Ms. Gayden will begin recruiting will be set according to the schedules of Operation BLACC and the Pathfinders Singles Ministry.

Please use the below contact information if more information is needed.

Sincerely,

Pastor James Fitzgerald
Operation BLACC
Pastor of Community Services & Development
Friendship-West Baptist Church
214-331-5684 X288

Pastor Marcus King
Pathfinders Singles Community
Pastor of Family Communities
Friendship-West Baptist Church
214-331-5684 X286

12. College major?

13. What is your current job / career / occupation?

14. What is your current household income (circle one option)?
- a. Less than \$25,000
 - b. \$26,000 - \$50,000
 - c. \$51,000 - \$75,000
 - d. \$76,000 - \$99,000
 - e. greater than \$100,000

15. Current Marital Status (circle one option):
- a. Single
 - b. Married
 - c. Separated
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Widowed

16. Do you have any children (biological, adopted or step-children)?

_____ Yes. How many? _____

_____ No

17. Place a check by the statement that best describes your experience while growing up:
- _____ I always knew that I would go to college. I cannot remember a time when college was not a goal. College was expected of me from day one. **There was almost a 100% chance that I would go to college.**
- _____ I wanted to attend college, but I didn't know how to reach that goal. I started thinking about college around middle school or high school. I was interested in jobs/careers that required college, but no one really talked to me about what to do to get to college. **There was about a 50% chance that I would go to college.**
- _____ I did not expect to attend college, and my parents, teachers, friends did not expect me to attend. I was more likely to go straight to work. **There was less than a 25% chance that I would go to college.**
- _____ None of these statements describe my experience.

18. How do / did you pay for your college education (circle all that apply)?

- a. Cash from parents
- b. Cash from personal savings
- c. Student loans
- d. Athletic scholarship
- e. Academic scholarship
- f. Work Study
- g. Pell grant
- h. Other

19. Giving your best guess or estimate, out of all of the **African American students** currently enrolled in college what percentage are male, and what percentage are female?

_____ % male _____ % female

20. Do you believe that a college degree is a requirement to be successful in today's and the future workforce?

_____ Yes _____ No

Briefly explain your answer:

21. In your opinion, what is needed to encourage more African American men to attend and graduate from college (circle 3 choices)?

- a. More scholarships & grants to pay for college
- b. Improved academic preparation in elementary and high school
- c. Better Role Models
- d. Improved employment opportunities for African American men with college degrees
- e. College information geared toward African American parents
- f. Better teachers
- g. More African American male teachers
- h. Less attention on sports & entertainment
- i. Single sex schools for African American males only
- j. Exposure to college earlier (1st grade)
- k. Other (fill in the blank):

Interview Questions		
Dissertation Research Study		
Shoot the Messenger or Change the Message: What are African American Men Learning About Postsecondary Education?		
Research Questions		
What does the college choice process look like for African American men (AAM)?	What do African American men (AAM) say they are told about college, and who is primarily passing on the messages?	How do African American men (AAM) view themselves in light of their status in higher education?
Questions will be slightly modified toward the educational background of the participant.		
Introductory Questions		
As a little boy, what did you want to be when you grew up?	Who or what influenced you decisions while you were growing up?	In 2005, what does it mean to be a successful AAM?
Interview Questions		
What goals and aspirations did your closest friends have in grade school? Was college a part of their future?	Complete this sentence: Most parents of AAM just want their sons to _____. How is this message conveyed?	What/who are the three most important and/or difficult challenges facing AAM in 2005?
Describe your first experience or exposure to a college or university (could be related to athletic events, parents' job, older siblings or relatives, etc.) when did this happen, who was involved?	Describe the parents/guardians and family role in helping to get AAM to college?	US Department of Education Data documents the decreasing college enrollment rates of AAM. Who is responsible for the declining college enrollment rates of AAM? How much responsibility can be assigned to rappers and hip-hop for the declining status of AAM? To BET? To the NBA? Public schools? Parents? AAM?

<p>Around what age did you consider going to college?</p>	<p>What types of things do parents do to ensure that their AA sons attend college? Describe any sacrifices or changes AAM parents may make to support their sons.</p>	
<p>Describe any issues or factors that kept you from pursuing college. (Financial aid, family, location, etc). Did you ever question your ability to succeed in college (academically)?</p>	<p>Complete this sentence: Most teachers of AAM just want them to _____. How is this message conveyed?</p>	<p>What should the parents of AAM of high school age do to help prepare their sons for college success?</p>
<p>Did you make a conscious decision not to attend college, or did it just not happen?</p>	<p>Describe the teachers and counselors role in helping to get AAM to college.</p>	<p>What type of experiences should parents provide for their AA sons in elementary school so that they will be prepared for college?</p>
<p>Is it ever too late to go to college? How important is it to decide to go to college at an early age?</p>	<p>Attending college is an important step in life that may be shared with close family and friends. Who are AAM most likely talk to about their decision to attend college? Explain.</p>	<p>What types of experiences, people, or entities should the parents of AAM keep their sons away from in order to prepare them for college?</p>

<p>What do you think would have happened if you had decided to go to college?</p>	<p>What is the typical reaction from someone when an AAM talks about going to college? How are the reactions different from different groups of people?</p>	<p>What will an AAM need in order to be successful in 2015, ten years from now? Will a college degree be necessary?</p>
<p>In your survey answer, you stated that you were not sure about what to do to get to college...why do you think that happened? Explain your choice. No information from school officials, parental support??</p>	<p>Describe any incidents where you witnessed someone (family/friends/ teachers/neighbors/etc. of AAM) belittling, questioning, or making fun of an AA man's commitment to attend college.</p>	<p>What dreams do AA men have for the next generation of AAM? Fill in this blank: I want AAM to _____</p>
<p>College attendance is expected / encouraged by the majority of AA parents. What are AAM taught to DO in order to make it to college? How is this expectation translated into action?</p>	<p>Describe some of the contradictory messages AAM receive from society – parents, teachers, etc</p>	
	<p>How does the popularity and monetary success of athletes and entertainers influence the behavior and decisions AAM make when it comes to college?</p>	

	<p>How do college-minded AAM cope with the allure of quick money from hustlin' or drug dealing?</p>	
	<p>How are college-minded AAM treated by AAM who hustle or deal drugs? Is there a sense of respect for the college-minded? Belittling? Contempt?</p>	
	<p>What type of assumptions do we (society) make about AAM men? Describe some of the assumptions or mistaken identities that have been assigned to you – athlete, janitor, criminal, drug dealer or addict, rapper, etc. What message do these assumptions send to young AAM in terms of college?</p>	
	<p>What are AAM directly told about college and the importance of attending college?</p>	

	Who or what is primarily responsible for encouraging or discouraging AAM to attend college?	
	What message does the media send to AAM about attending college?	
	Past research studies have documented that AAM perceive sports/entertainment careers as significantly more promising than other careers (traditional, stable, etc). How is this perception formed? What/who contributes to this perception? How is this message conveyed?	
	AAM are more susceptible to the lure of fast money from illegal/unethical means. Describe your reaction to that statement.	

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