

**AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES:
THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THEM TO
PURSUE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

THESIS

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this collective, multi-site case study is to identify factors that influence African American students, with specific attention to African American males, to choose the path of higher education, particularly a two or four year college or university, over other options. Such options included are the armed forces, technical/vocational institutions, the work force, or no further education or training.

This study addressed the question of who helps African American males with their college choice process; what college characteristics are most important to African American males; what life goals motivate African American males to pursue post-secondary education; and, for those African American males who choose options other than college, what factors are influencing them to avoid the college classroom?

The study surveyed African American males, high school seniors, from Dallas and Houston high schools. From the surveyed population, a select number of African American males participated in focus groups. The data collection took place during the fall and spring semesters.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the best ways to obtain a high quality education is to have a good economic, social, and educational background. A high quality education or excellence in education has been linked to various reports to a longer school day, pay increases for teachers, more rigorous teacher training, a “core” curriculum, less federal and/or state control, increased attention to the traditional academic subjects, and increased attention to science and technology (Weis, 1985, p. 217). The U.S. Department of Education shows that African American children are at an educational disadvantage, as a whole, relative to their Hispanic and White counterparts. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1995) study, *The Educational Progress of Black Students*, lists some disadvantages that many African American children are faced with. Those include lower average levels of parental education, living with only one parent, fewer resources in their communities as a result of lower income, and a greater chance of experiencing poverty. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1998) reports that certain family characteristics such as family structure and poverty level are associated with increased risk for dropping out of high school or not attending college immediately following the completion of high school.

While these conditions may not be generalizeable to the overall population of African Americans in the state of Texas, the disadvantages are nonetheless accurate for many. The state of Texas population is 11.9% African American (NCES, 1995). The majority of those students are living in large cities, in single parent homes, and in low-income neighborhoods. The proportion of African American students who live in motherled homes is 66% as compared to 15.8% of white students who live in motherled homes (Patterson, 1998). Given that women head 70% or more of urban households, African American boys do not generally encounter positive African American male role models; consequently, they grow up repeating many of the negative behaviors they see on the streets (Hopkins, 1997). While certain aspects of African American children's family environments related to educational success have improved in recent years, African American children are still generally at a disadvantage for educational success compared to white children based on family socioeconomic status (NCES, 1998).

Currently, there are 98,255 (10.1%) African American students attending college in Texas. This number is low compared to their counterparts; the White student population leads with 582,361 (60.1%) and the Hispanic student population is second with 209,984 (21.7%) attending Texas colleges and universities (NCES, 1999). The number of African American, White, and Hispanic students has increased since 1990. Although the numbers have increased, there is still a large gap between the number of African American males enrolling and attending college and the enrollment of other ethnic/gender groups.

In recruiting for a regional Texas university, experience confirmed what the literature indicates, a decline in African American male participation in the college

process. From personal experience as a university admission officer and recruiter, it is difficult to capture the attention of some African American males. Most of their attention is not focused on preparing for college, and their presence in post-secondary education is decreasing.

During recruitment trips in the fall and spring of every school year, college admission officers and recruiters from 179 colleges and universities travel to visit high schools in the state of Texas. The main purpose is to recruit the brightest students to attend their institutions. During this time, high school seniors are faced with the decision of which universities they will seek admission information from. During the college night programs, the initial contact involves all students who are interested in receiving information on specific institutions. African American males attend these college night programs in smaller numbers than do males of other ethnicities. Statistics completed during the 1996-1997 school year by Southwest Texas State University show that the majority of the students attending the college programs are White male and female students and African American females. It is difficult to recruit African American males, difficult to predict the outcome of their choice of post-secondary options, and difficult to keep them interested in the universities.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This research focuses on the declining participation of African American males in higher education (Davis, 1994). There are many who continue into post-secondary education as well as those who do not pursue post-secondary education. Those African American males who do not choose to pursue a four-year degree may take other routes

such as gaining a job promotion, raising a family, enrolling in a technical or vocational institution, or achieving high rank in the military. The purpose of this collective, multi-site case study is to identify the factors that influence African American male participants to pursue college or consider other educational or career routes. Having this information will:

1. Enable College Admission officers to better understand what recruitment tactics to use in recruiting African American males;
2. Enable high school counselors, teachers, and coaches to better understand how to address the career and educational needs of African American males;
3. Assist school districts and taxpayers in being confident that their dollars are being used in a productive manner by providing African American males with educational and career counseling;
4. Enable Southwest Texas State University to reach its goal to promote ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity in the SWT community by successfully recruiting and retaining African American males;
5. Assist parents and single-parent households in how to mentor African American males in their educational or career choices;
6. Assist community and church leaders to better identify and assist African American males in their educational or career choices.

The outcome of this study enables high school counselors to better understand their African American male students and guide them in the appropriate directions. The outcome of this study also allows Southwest Texas and other colleges and universities to have sufficient knowledge about this population, to reach goals of increasing the minority

population, particularly African American males, and to have better recruitment strategies when recruiting this population.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Lack of adequate education has often been viewed as a cause of the problems of African American males (Gordon, 1995). From experiences as a recruiter, seeing the difficulty in attracting African American males to higher education and based on a review of the literature, there are major questions surrounding African American males and their decision making strategies regarding post-secondary education and career that needs answering. From this research, the questions addressed in this study are:

1. Who helps African American students, particularly African American males in their college choice process? This can refer to people or sources of information.
2. What college characteristics are most important to African American students, particularly African American males, in selecting a post-secondary institution?
3. What life goals motivate African American students, particularly African American males, to pursue post-secondary education?
4. For those who choose options other than college, what factors influence African American males to avoid the college classroom?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

ACT (ACT assessment): a program that measures educational development and readiness to pursue college-level coursework in English, mathematics, natural science, and social studies (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1998).

Admission Recruiter and Officer: a person who works for a university or college to recruit new students to their institution by visiting high schools and meeting with the high school guidance counselor and parents.

African American: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (except those of Hispanic origin). It is used interchangeably with Black in cited sources (College Board Online, 1999).

Bachelor's Degree: an award that requires at least four years but not more than five years of fulltime equivalent college-level work (College Board Online, 1999).

College program: a program held during the week at an area high school in the fall or spring semester of the school year. Colleges and universities participate and provide institutional information for parents, students and high school counselors.

College/career center: source of information ranging from computer software to references on colleges, financial aid, occupations, career trends, internships and school visits from college representatives (Ekeler, 1997, p. 15).

Community College: an institution of higher learning that includes training programs in technical areas as well as purely academic areas.

Doctoral Degree: the highest award a student can earn for graduate study (College Board Online, 1999).

Grade point average (GPA): the sum of grade points a student has earned in secondary school divided by the number of courses taken. The most common system of assigning numbers to grades counts four points for an A, three points for a B, two points for a C, one point for a D and no points for an F (College Board Online, 1999).

High School Guidance Counselor: a person who assists high school students from 9th grade to the 12th grade with college preparation, scheduling classes, advising students and making recommendations.

Hispanic: a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South America, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (College Board Online, 1999).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): schools that were established to provide higher education for African Americans who by law and custom were barred from attending white private and public colleges and universities before 1954 (Ekeler, 1997, p. 108).

Master's Degree: an award that requires the successful completion of a program of study of at least the full-time equivalent of one but not more than two academic years of work beyond the bachelor's degree (College Board Online, 1999).

Population: all members of a specific group.

Recruitment: informing prospective students about your university or college by providing information and answering questions.

Recruitment strategies: methods college recruitment offices use to attract students to their campus. Such strategies may involve phone calls, personal letters and personal visits (Johnson, 1997).

SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test): a test that measures verbal and mathematical abilities administered by the Educational Testing Service and used to predict the facility with which an individual will progress in learning college level academic subjects. It is required or recommended by colleges as part of the admission process (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1998).

Undergraduate: a student enrolled in a four-or five-year bachelor's degree program, an associate's degree program, or a vocational or technical program below the baccalaureate (College Board Online, 1999).

ASSUMPTIONS

This research is based on the following assumptions;

1. Eighteen-year-old high school seniors may or may not know their potential college academic level of performance in postsecondary education and may or may not be well prepared academically.
2. The high school students who make the initial contact with a college representative may or may not continue that contact.
3. Most high school seniors have several choices of institutions and have not chosen or committed to one specific college or university.
4. High school seniors may or may not have taken their college entrance exams (the ACT and the SAT).

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to understand an underrepresented population in college and explore what influences them to make the choices they do regarding college attendance. This study addressed why this group of African American males chooses to attend college instead of not to attend college. “ This has been an issue since the 1980s with the number of African American males declining numbers in the social, economic and educational environment, but are increasing in numbers in the prison system and armed forces” (Patterson, 1998). The results of this study provide information to educational institutions to assist them in selecting and implementing recruitment strategies for this specific population.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the state of Texas, there are approximately 203,658 students graduating from high school in 1998. Out of that total, approximately 12.1% are African Americans (College Board Online, 1999). Many colleges and universities face various challenges in recruiting this population, since African American students tend to have lower high school graduation rates and lower college enrollment rates. Among public high schools with no African American students, 93.4% of seniors graduated on time compared to 87.0% of those seniors in high schools where African Americans are the majority (Patterson, 1998). In all-White schools, 60.1% applied to college compared to 51.6% where African Americans made up 50% or more of the student body. In 1990, studies showed that African American males appear to have greater difficulty finishing high school on schedule than do African American females. In 1994, a smaller share of African American males, 45.8%, enrolled in and entered post-secondary education immediately after high school compared to African American females at 59.7% (Patterson, 1998).

Several studies provide data regarding reasons why African American males are or are not pursuing post-secondary education and what factors are influencing their decision.

Lack of Assistance in the College Choice Process

The 1994 Stamats Communications study, Recruiting African American Undergraduates: A National Survey of the Factors that Affect Institutional Choice, was designed to learn more about the African American high school student. A questionnaire was distributed to 3,325 college-bound African American high school juniors. The study revealed the process by which the students' explored their search for colleges and the sources of help they relied on in their decision-making process. It was found that African American students' primary information source in finding a college came from recruitment publications (20 %). Others sources included the high school guidance counselors (15.8 %), college guidebooks (14.2 %), parents (10.0 %), college fair/informational meeting (5.8 %) and college admissions representative (8.3 %). African American students described the role of their parents(s) in the college choice process as offering general guidance and support but leaving most of the decision up to the student. The Stamats study found that African American students also reported having the most interactions of any of their counterparts with their high school guidance counselor. More than one in four African American students say their guidance counselor actively helped them narrow the field.

According to Studentpoll (1997), surveys done by the Arts and Sciences consulting group revealed that more students have access to the Internet now than ever before. A recent study completed by Strauss (1998) sheds light on the extent to which students are ready to use the Internet. Strauss, in a study of 389 freshman students at Ohio State University, found that students at both the search and choice stages of the college decision-making process looked at brochures more than on the Internet for

information on colleges and universities. He found this to be true despite the fact that the majority of the students he studied have access to the Internet at home and/or at their high school. Students tend to rely more on parents, friends, teachers and brochures than the Internet for information, although, the Internet has the potential to provide quicker service to students during the admission process as well as the college admission search. He found that during the college decision-making process, high school students are not interested in learning detailed information about individual institutions. The Internet is increasingly becoming a way for prospective students to view a college, search for specific characteristics, and take virtual tours without physically visiting the campus.

Johnson (1997) found that socialization; family circumstances, peers, and high school environments influenced African American students. The students' background (family, peers and high school social and academic atmosphere) more or less assists the student in decisions about their future education. This study concluded that college recruiters are significantly more important to African Americans than to Whites.

In a 1992 study of middle-income students from mixed ethnic backgrounds, most students stated that the guidance counselor provided satisfactory assistance in their college search activities. The most helpful resource indicated was the visit to the college campus. Information and conferences with classroom teachers were the least helpful (Ray, 1992). It was also found that the accuracy and quality of college information provided by the school counselor "can make the selection process easier, enable more appropriate choices, and instill more confidence in the students to help insure a more successful transition to postsecondary education" (Ray, 1992, p. 2). Galotti and Mark (1994) state that African American students found the most important sources of

information in making the college choice decision were parents/guardians, friends, materials in the guidance center, counselors and college brochures. College educated parents served as a significant source of information to their children, while students without college-educated parents relied more on employers and supervisors. Males relied more on the advice of their coaches. Mortenson (1993) found that African American males whose father had four or more years of college are more than three times more likely to attend college than a male whose father did not graduate from high school.

Paulsen (1990) found that African American students appeared to consult a greater variety of information sources than do white students. African American students prioritized by campus visits, admission officers, writing for college information, other college students and college catalogs. Tuttle (1980), whose findings contradicted with Ray (1992), noted that African American students acquire more information directly from the colleges through campus visits or admission officers. They received less information from high school counselors and parents. Paulsen (1990) saw that parental encouragement, more than socioeconomic status or academic aptitude has the greatest impact on a students' choice of a post secondary institution. Another impact on students' choice is the contact. Witty (1986) recommended telephone, personal contact with interested applicants, and follow-up contact is the most effective. Hossler and Vesper (1991) found that students with access to more sources of information about colleges were more likely to successfully fulfill their postsecondary educational plans. Orfield and Paul (1994) found that access to accurate and timely information was critical when helping students achieve their post-high school educational and/or career goals.

College Characteristics

According to Stamats (1994), some of the institutional characteristics that African American students look at when choosing a college are the financial aid available, total costs, academic major, and living arrangements. Also, African American students are more interested in athletic programs than are their White and Hispanic counterparts. The Stamats study found that African American students look at a variety of ethnicity-related factors, such as the number of African American students on campus, counselors and peer tutors from similar ethnic backgrounds, faculty and administrators of same ethnic background, social activities geared toward African Americans, and organizations geared for the African American population, as crucial when deciding on a college.

A study with a population of mixed ethnic makeup focused on high school seniors from 21 high schools in a district in Mississippi (Johnson 1997). From that population of 1,732 seniors, 412 seniors were issued a survey. The respondents were from schools in the urban, suburban and rural areas with significant minority populations. College cost was seen as an important factor much more so than location of the college. The study also found that African American students valued the same institutional characteristics as White and Hispanic students. It found that athletic prestige was not an important factor to African American students in the college decision-making process and was not a top characteristic. Of the eleven factors in this study, athletics ranked last for African American males and next to last for African American females. According to Johnson, where friends attend college was an important factor in the college decision-making process for males as a whole, but not African American students specifically. Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) found that more students are interested in admission

requirements, majors offered, and unique characteristics of the campuses. Another characteristic that African American students consider when choosing a college is the institution's historical background. The Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute Study (1998) was compiled from various databases of national education data and information in the United States, including the United States Department of Education's National Center of Education Statistics, the National Science Foundation, and the U.S. Bureau of the Census, The College Board, the Educational Testing Service, and the American College Testing Company. This study found that African American high school students appear to be interested in attending historically black colleges and universities (HBU). In Texas, there are 8 HBU's where the enrollment is majority African American students. The Chronicle of Higher Education (1997) identifies these colleges as Huston-Tillotson (81.4% black), Jarvis Christian College (97.9% black), Paul Quinn (93.1% black), Southwestern Christian College (86.6% black), Prairie View A&M (86.0% black), Texas College (96.9% black), Texas Southern University (80.8% black), and Wiley College (90.5% black).

Motivating Life Goals

Life goals of African Americans are mainly focused on working hard to get where they want to be and being successful, helping others and helping to make the world better, and enjoying doing things with the family. Wynn (1992) stated that classrooms, schools, homes, and communities should consciously affirm that young men are capable of not only striving for excellence but of achieving excellence.... When a young [Black] man sets a goal, ...we must communicate in everything that we say and do: "You have the power to do that!" (p.61).

Clark and Plotkin (1964) discovered that success in college is dependent upon the motivation and goals of African American students regardless of their precollegiate performance or entrance examination. Dunn says that the most important factor in determining whether or not a Black student attends college is the level of personal motivation. He found that some African American males lacked motivation to further their education. Many African American students in Dunn's study assumed that Black males have low morale because of unpleasant experiences in high school. According to Lang (1986), many Black students lack self-responsibility, self-discipline in work and study habits, and in time management skills. Many do not fathom goal setting, self-motivation, goal achievement, and the importance of setting "life priorities." Thus, when confronted with the rigors of demanding college or university curricula, they may fold under the pressure. According to Stamats (1994), some African American males come from homes that are not complete, in that there was either not a father or mother role model in the household. Many homes are functioning with just one parent. The percentage of African American children living in two-parent households was thirty-eight percent, in 1993, compared to seventy-nine percent of white children (Hayes, 1993). This statistic is important because there are not enough parental role models for African American students, and single parent households are more likely to experience poverty, an important socioeconomic variable impacting admission, test scores and college choice. Role models help students align themselves with positive, goal-orientated individuals to whom they may look for guidance or for an example of success (Lyons, 1989). Too many students see drug dealers and thieves with lots of money and doing very little to earn it as role models. This creates problems for parents, counselors, and administrators

in relating the importance of college to students. Many individuals they see everyday in their neighborhoods are not attending college and yet have experienced apparent great success. They drive big cars, have expensive clothes, and are revered by some community members. These influences deter many African American students from continuing their post-secondary academic career (Griggs, 1992).

Avoiding the College Classroom

In the study by Dunn (1988), one hundred twenty-seven male and female African American students enrolled in biology classes at Mississippi Valley State University were asked to respond to a questionnaire. That questionnaire asked, “Why do you think fewer African American males enroll in college than African American females?” The responses were divided into four categories that included immediate financial gratification, lack of motivation, entrance into the armed forces, and dropping out of high school or the scarcity of African American male students in the college classroom.

One of the reasons African American males avoid college is to achieve financial independence immediately after high school. Lang (1986) stated that many Blacks have not been prepared for college at a level equivalent to their White counterparts. African American students may be reluctant to plunge into an academic environment in which they may not be able to compete. Students need early intervention, enrichment, and summer programs that can enhance their chances of increasing their college entrance test scores. Test scores are a major barrier to educational access and, therefore, limit the students’ choice of colleges. In one study, more than half of the African American high school seniors reported they are going to attend college, yet, very few are properly

prepared (Higgins, Cook, Ekeler, Sawyer & Prichard, 1993). African American students who do not do well academically need ethnic, racial and same sex role models in their instructional materials, work settings, and other learning experiences (Thallemer, 1998). Most African American students are not being exposed to enough college preparatory academic programs in high school in order to be successful at getting into college (Hawkins, 1993). Conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support are among the factors that may hinder their success (Hsiao, 1992). Dunn (1988) claimed that since there are not many Black scholars for young males to look up to as role models, many Black males perceive education beyond high school as a waste of time. Perhaps discouraging some African American students is that they do not believe the system of higher education is doing enough to create an atmosphere where diverse cultures can exist and where relevant issues concerning African Americans are addressed (Saleem, 1993). Also, many of Dunn's respondents felt that Black males are impatient and did not want to spend four years in college while they could be working at a job that required little or no education.

The Stamats study found that African American students have a fear of going to an unfamiliar place and not knowing what to expect. Some students may have never visited a college campus and expect to see what the media and television has portrayed. Their biggest fears, according to Stamats (1994), are getting good grades, paying for college, and stress. Other researchers emphasized the importance of counseling and other types of support in the process; "seniors want a safe space to be able to talk through their fears and anxieties about making their first important decision" (McDonough, 1994, pp.432-433).

African American males are visible figures on the scene and are members of a group that is least understood and least studied of all groups in the United States (Blake & Darling, 1994). Perceptions of African American males are distorted by stereotypes. In most cases, Black males are characterized as unlearned, uneducated, criminal, and aggressive (Weis, 1998). They are frequently labeled as immoral, lazy, violent, and mentally deficient, along with being sexual superstars, and athletes (Hare & Hare, 1984). This is how they are perceived in the public consciousness and how they come to see and internalize their role (Blake & Darling, 1994).

The Blake and Darling study also found that many African American males join a branch of the Armed Forces to learn a skill and begin to earn a wage, rather than attend college right away. Dunn (1988) found that Black males want to make “quick money” without having to continue their education. Many African American students he polled felt that African American males often resort to illegal activities that sometimes lead to imprisonment.

Dunn also noted that African American males join the armed forces to learn a skill and earn a wage. Likewise, Patterson (1998) reports that 19.3 %, African Americans are overrepresented among the nation’s armed services. In 1996, nearly 300,000 of the nation’s 1.5 million active duty military personnel were African American. In 1996 African Americans represented 27.0 % personnel in the army, 17.0 % in the navy, 15.7 % in the marines, 14.7 % in the air force, and 6.7 % in the coast guard. Since 1981, African Americans have consistently represented 20 % of the armed forces and currently comprised approximately 15.4 % of the total population in the armed forces.

Although African Americans are represented in a disproportionately large percentage in the military, they receive benefits such as the Montgomery GI Bill, which provides an education for much of this generation of the African American middle class (Roach, 1997). The GI Bill expanded the opportunities for this population of African Americans to attend college and graduate school. African American males seem to use the military as an avenue to continue their education. They are joining the military and possibly deferring their attendance into a college or university until they have matured, decided their field of study, or for other reasons (Patterson, 1998).

Summary

Gose stated in *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Academe Today* (1996) that the Black college enrollment in the United States rose 2.5% in 1994. In all racial groups, more women than men are attending college. The enrollment of African American women rose 3.4 % in 1994, but the enrollment of African American men edged up only 1 %. Despite the increase in enrollment of African American students, they remain underrepresented on college campuses.

Hopkins (1997) declared that “ most Black males come home, and momma ain’t been home for a week, daddy ain’t been home in two days, if he’s there at all. The food stamp money and the welfare money are gone and the kid has to work to bring home additional funds” (p. 97). On the other hand, Wynn (1992) asserted that teachers must be aware that Black males represent a “complete spectrum of American life” (p.7). He reminded teachers that Black males come from different communities, family backgrounds, economic statuses and social strata, as well as single parent and two-parent households.

African American males need to be aware of all their choices and pursue them. There are opportunities in postsecondary education for the African American male, and the factors that influence them to choose that particular path are important for educational institutions and high schools to understand if college recruiters and high school counselors are going to assist them in making appropriate choices regarding postsecondary education and careers.

Wynn (1992) states, we must raise our expectations of our young men to greater levels of achievement in all...areas.... We must consistently communicate our expectations of excellence; that we not only believe that they are capable, but we expect them to excel. We must establish and reinforce their personal responsibilities, character, and behavior in a manner consistent with our expectations of exceptional goal achievement. We must begin to look at, speak to, and encourage our young men in a way that communicates that we believe that they are capable of owning businesses and rebuilding their communities; that we expect them to take responsibility for, and ownership of their lives and their communities (p.61).

Educating African American males are tasks and goals that should be a common factor for all institutions of higher learning. If the factors that influence African American males to pursue post-secondary education can be determined, then each institution and high school can assist them in making decisions they need to succeed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The post secondary education of African American males is a task to be shared by all institutions of higher learning, both predominantly White and historically Black institutions. The research reviewed in the previous chapter focused on who assists African American males, or lack there of, in choosing a college, what their motivating goals are, or lack of goals, college characteristics that African American males look at when selecting a college, and why African American males are avoiding the college classroom. Various studies and their findings were discussed and compared. This chapter will focus on the methods used and the use of instruments in the current study.

Research has also shown that African American males come from a background that includes lower than average levels of parent education, increased chance of children living with only one parent, fewer resources in their communities as a result of income, and a greater chance of experiencing poverty (NCES, 1998). National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), also reports that certain family characteristics such as family structure and poverty level are associated with increased risk for dropping out of high school or not attending college.

In the methodology, the subjects, high school demographics, instruments used and the procedure are discussed. The study was conducted in two Texas cities, Dallas and Houston, during fall 1998 and spring 1999 school year.

Subjects

The population consisted of African American males who were seniors in high schools in the Dallas and Houston area. As an admission officer for a major university, I was able to get access to students and their high school counselors in the Dallas and Houston areas by calling the counselors and explaining the current study. I also accessed the students by college fairs held in the areas.

For the initial questionnaire, the students selected for the sample represented a collection of 25 high schools. The subjects for the questionnaire were 108 African American males from the Houston and Dallas area. The boundaries for the sample were high school seniors who, by their participation in college recruitment activities, expressed the goal of continuing their education in a postsecondary institution.

The focus group subjects were African American male high school seniors who expressed the intention of attending college after graduation. The focus group participants were chosen from the group who filled out the questionnaire. There were 10 participants from Dallas and 12 participants from Houston. The subjects came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, parental backgrounds, different home environments, and different high schools.

The counselors interviewed were from Houston and Dallas, and they were chosen because of their involvement with African American male high school seniors. The

counselors were both male and female, and had several years of experience in counseling various populations.

High School Representation

The students came from high schools located in large cities and suburban communities, where the African American population ranged from 11% African American to 97% African American. The percentage of graduates entering college ranged from 25% to 85%. The total number of high school students enrolled ranged from 1000 students to 3,840 students. The overall number of students taking the SAT college entrance exam ranged from 38 students to 528 students (Enrollment Planning Services, 1999).

Instrumentation

The approaches to collecting data in this study included a questionnaire, two student focus groups, and individual interviews. The questions for the questionnaire and focus groups were modified from those used by the Stamats Communication, Inc. (1994) study survey, and student interview questions were modified from those used by Hopkins (1997). Except for several demographic questions, the questions for the questionnaire and focus groups are related to the research questions. For example, research question one, which asks who helps with college choice, is reflected in questionnaire question two which asks about student's intention to make college visits. The student who visits a college will meet and interact with an admissions representative who will be in a position to help with college choice. Research question one is asked directly in focus group question one. The relation of the research and questionnaire questions follows.

| Research Questions | Questionnaire Questions | Focus Group Questions |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Who helps African American students, particularly African American males with their college choice process? | 2,8,10,11,12,13 | 1,2,3,4 |
| 2. What college characteristics are most important to African American students, particularly African American males in selecting a post-secondary institution? | 1,6,7,20 | 11 |
| 3. What life goals motivate African American students, particularly African American males to pursue post-secondary education? | 6,17,19 | 7,8 |
| 4. From those who choose options other than college, what factors are influencing African American males to avoid the college classroom? | 3,4,5,15,16 | 2,3,5,6,11, |

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire consisted of the following information: current high school attending, information on parents' educational background, G.P.A., and other information on the student's academic background and high school status (see Appendix A). It also sought to get information on what characteristics are important when deciding on a college, number of siblings and the family/ household income. The questionnaire also asked demographic questions that were not used for data purposes, but to understand the population being studied, such as the age of the participants. When relating the focus group questions and the questionnaire questions to the research questions, there are several that are used as indicators such as questionnaire question twenty. This is an indicator for the research question on characteristics because it lists various characteristics such as extracurricular activities, athletics, academic reputation, and friends attending.

Pilot of Questionnaire and Focus Group Questions

To make sure the questionnaire would yield clear and usable data, a pilot study was conducted with African American freshman males on the Southwest Texas State University campus. The pilot subjects were chosen from participants in the African American Leadership Conference that is held every September at SWT. This conference is for incoming freshman and transfer students to help them become better acquainted with the university and its services. The male subjects in the pilot were approached at random and asked to fill out the questionnaire and include any suggestions. The pilot focus group consisted of 10 African American freshmen from several different SWT African American organizations. The focus group was held on the Southwest Texas campus. The participants were chosen from the [pilot] questionnaire. They were asked the questions from the interview guide (Appendix B). This group of participants was video and audio taped. The questions were asked to determine the sequencing and time required for each question. From the recommendations of the questionnaire and focus group pilot participants, adjustments were made to the questionnaire and focus group questions. On the questionnaire, directions were added at the top to explain the purpose of the questionnaire. On the SAT and ACT questions, the question asked for the score, if known. For the focus group questions, due to time constraints, several questions were removed. One question omitted asked the participants to describe the types of teachers they had. Another omitted question asked about the population size of the town, city, or suburb in which the participants live. The last omitted question asked the highest academic degree that the participants expect to earn in their lifetime. The tapes were

used to determine any deficiencies in the interview guide. A formal pilot was not conducted on the counselor interview questions.

Procedures

Questionnaire

The data collection took place in fall 1998 at citywide college and scholarship fairs hosted by National Scholarship Services (NSSFNS). Representatives from approximately 80 or more colleges and universities out of state and across the state of Texas attended the college fair. At this fair, students from various high schools go to college tables and obtain information on that particular college or university. Prior to visiting with the colleges and universities, the students go through an orientation session to equip them with questions to ask the recruiters. During recruitment at college fairs in Houston and Dallas, the researcher conducted the questionnaire research with African American males who attended a large citywide college fair. The students completed the questionnaire while waiting to enter the browse area where colleges were presenting. The students were asked to return the questionnaire to the researcher upon leaving for the browse area. Once the college fairs were over, the completed questionnaires were grouped by high schools the students attended. From the population responding to questionnaires, 12 African American males were selected from Houston and 10 African American males were selected from Dallas to participate in in-depth focus groups. The students were identified by their names and addresses on the questionnaire. They were chosen for focus groups based on their high school G.P.A. (a 2.5 or above was needed); the parent(s) educational background (the target was a broad spectrum from never graduating high school to obtaining a professional degree); and the student's high school

activities (if they participated or did not participate actively). The subjects chosen to continue to the focus group phase received letters of thanks, an invitation to continue to participate in the study, and consent forms (Appendix C). The population who was not chosen also received letters thanking them for participating in the initial questionnaire (Appendix C). Once the consent forms had been returned, the data from the questionnaire were compiled and focus group times were set up through the high schools counselors.

Focus Groups

The one-hour focus groups took place on Saturday mornings at an institution in Houston and an institution in the Dallas area. The two locations were chosen based on weekend availability and the proximity of the location to the students. The focus group questions were asked by the researcher to 10 participants from Dallas and 12 participants from Houston and were recorded by hand on paper and by audio taping the sessions.

During the focus group sessions, the subjects were asked to elaborate on the focus group questions. After the focus groups, individual telephone interviews were attempted for follow-up to questions, but the students were not reachable. Once all of the data collection was complete from the focus groups, one last letter was sent to the subjects thanking them for their time and participation (Appendix C).

Counselor Interviews

The counselors were either reached by telephone or by email following the questionnaire and focus group data collection. A brief description of the study was provided for them, and they were asked for permission to be interviewed on the subject of African American males. The counselors were asked to respond to the four research

questions. The comments to the four questions were compiled and grouped by question. After the counselors responded, a thank you letter via email was sent to the counselors (Appendix D).

These instruments: the questionnaire, focus group questions, and counselor interviews questions, provided information that answered these questions:

1. Who helps African American students, particularly African American males with their college choice process?
2. What college characteristics are most important to African American students, particularly African American males in selecting a post-secondary institution?
3. What life goals motivate African American students, particularly African American males to pursue post-secondary education?
4. For those who choose options other than college, what factors are influencing African American males to avoid the college classroom?

Analysis

Questionnaire

The data from the questionnaire were tallied by hand and placed in a DOS computer program. The data were saved to a disk and analyzed by the testing center at the SWT campus. The data was run using an SPSS package for descriptive statistics. The findings were then placed into tables.

Focus Groups

Analysis of the focus groups included transcript and tape analysis. The transcript included listening to the audiotape and transcribing the comments and taking field notes during the focus group session. The field notes involved watching and interpreting the

reactions of the participant's non-verbal communications. From the audiotape, transcripts were typed and compared to the field notes soon after the focus group to avoid any misinterpretation. In the analysis of the focus group data, the analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its settings (Creswell, 1998). Data analysis and interpretation consisted of four forms. In categorical aggregation, a collection of instances with relevant meanings emerged. The data was pulled apart and then put back together in meaningful ways. Patterns were also established. Last, naturalistic generalizations were developed from analyzing the data so that people can learn from this case for themselves by applying the information in other ways (Creswell, pp153-154).

Counselor Interviews

Counselor interviews were collected by email and phone calls. Their comments were analyzed according to the questions and patterns were established from the data.

Summary

This collective, multi site case study reveals the challenges the African American male high school senior is faced with when choosing to attend a post-secondary education. The population for the questionnaire and focus group consisted of African American males who were seniors in high school in Dallas and Houston during the 1998-1999 school year. Counselors were also interviewed to get a different point of view on what African American males are faced with when choosing a college or university. The data collection strategies used to identify these challenges and factors are included through a questionnaire, focus groups and counselor interviews. These data collection strategies were used to collect the data, analyze the data and group the data into patterns.

The information found in this study can be used so people can learn for themselves or the information can be used in other ways.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

In this study, which was designed to identify factors that influence African American male students to choose higher education over other post graduation opportunities, a questionnaire instrument composed of twenty questions was distributed to a total of 108 African American males in Dallas and Houston. Seventy-seven of the 108 responded. This chapter analyzes the data from the questionnaires, data from ten questions asked in two focus groups of 12 male participants from Houston and 10 male participants from Dallas, and data from interview questions corresponding to the four major research questions that were asked of high school counselors. Data analysis for each research question is provided. The data were taken from the questionnaire, focus groups and counselor interviews.

Factors Influencing African American Males to Choose College

African American males are faced with several different factors when choosing a college or university. The first research question asked who helps these males with evaluating these factors.

Questionnaire

One of the questions on the questionnaire instrument was intended to discover whether the African American males in this study were planning to visit or not visit colleges that they were interested in before making a decision; the majority indicated that they intended to participate in college visits. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Visiting Colleges

| <u>Respondent</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Plan to visit colleges | 69 | 92 |
| No plan to visit | 6 | 8 |
| <u>n</u> =75 | 75 | 100% |

Note: Two respondents did not answer this question.

The students who do live in single parent homes predominantly had females as heads of household. This information was taken from the questionnaire and is summarized in Table 2 and Table 3. The three respondents missing in Table 3 did not respond to whether they live with the male parent or the female parent.

Table 2

Single Parent Home

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Single parent home | 40 | 53 |
| Non-Single parent home | 36 | 47 |
| <u>n</u> =76 | 76 | 100% |

Note: One respondent left the question blank.

Table 3

Living within Single Parent Home

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Living with male parent | 7 | 19 |
| Living with female parent | 30 | 81 |
| <u>n</u> =37 | 37 | 100% |

Note: Forty respondents did not answer this question.

One questionnaire question asked if family/household income plays a part in the

process of the student's choice to attend college. The majority of the responses on the question of family/household income level responses fall in the \$20,000 - \$35,000 range and the \$50,000 - \$75,000 range. Only 56 respondents answered this particular question on the questionnaire. The other 20 respondents left it blank. A summary of the income range is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Family/Household Income Levels

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Less than \$10,000 | 6 | 11 |
| \$10,000 - \$20,000 | 7 | 12 |
| \$20,000 - \$35,000 | 15 | 27 |
| \$35,000 - \$50,000 | 8 | 14 |
| \$50,000 - \$75,000 | 11 | 20 |
| \$75,000 - \$100,000 | 8 | 14 |
| \$100,000 or more | 1 | 2 |
| <u>n=56</u> | <u>56</u> | <u>100%</u> |

Note: Twenty-one students did not respond to this question.

The questionnaire asked if respondents had siblings. Responses to the questionnaire instrument indicated that more than half of the African American males have brothers or sisters. The majority, about 87% of the population, have siblings in the household. Fourteen percent of the population was an only child. The questionnaire asked detailed questions about the number of siblings of each sex in the respondent's household. Approximately 92% of the respondents have one or two brothers. The remaining 8% have three or more brothers. Eighty-two percent of the males who have

one or two sisters and the remaining 18% have three or more (Table 6 and Table 7). The questionnaire instrument asked if those siblings attend college and how that has influenced the respondent's college choice. About half of the African American males said their brothers and sisters attend or attended college. The other half had younger brothers and sisters who didn't or don't attend a post-secondary institution. The summations of all categories are found in Table 8.

Table 5

Have Siblings in Household

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Yes, siblings | 66 | 86 |
| No, only child | 10 | 14 |
| <u>n=76</u> | 76 | 100% |

Note: One respondent left the question blank.

Table 6

Brothers in the Household

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Brother | 34 | 68 |
| 2 Brothers | 12 | 24 |
| 3 Brothers | 3 | 6 |
| 4 Brothers | 1 | 2 |
| <u>n=50</u> | 50 | 100% |

Note: Twenty-seven respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 7

Sisters in the Household

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Sister | 28 | 57 |
| 2 Sisters | 12 | 24 |
| 3 Sisters | 8 | 16 |
| 4 Sisters | 2 | 3 |
| <u>n</u> =50 | 50 | 100% |

Note: Twenty-seven respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 8

College Attendance of Brothers and Sisters

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Yes, attend college | 28 | 51 |
| No, did not attend college | 27 | 49 |
| <u>n</u> =55 | 55 | 100% |

Note: Twenty-two respondents did not respond to this question.

The questionnaire instrument also asked about types of high school classes the students were taking to see if that related to the college choice process. The results showed that 32 of the respondents took honors classes and 30 of the respondents took the Advanced Placement classes. The remainder of the respondents did not respond to this question.

Focus Groups

In two focus groups of ten African American males from the Dallas area and 12 from the Houston area, students were asked ten open-ended questions pertaining to life goals, college choice process, and the roles of parents, guidance counselors and other family members. The respondents had similar answers in the two focus groups. The first question asked African American males who they sought advice from when deciding on a

particular college and why that advice is important to them. The respondents from both focus groups said that they get advice from their parents. At least 50% of the students seek advice from their high school guidance counselor because they have access to information on colleges. Examples of student responses follow:

Respondent: Counselors because they bring in recruiters and have information about colleges.

Respondent: I seek advice from my grandfather because he has been through it all.

Respondent: I get advice from my teacher.

Respondent: My aunt...She is a guidance counselor at a high school. She provides all the information about different schools.

The second focus group question asked how they would describe the role their guidance counselor played or is playing in their college choice process. Some African American males said their guidance counselor did nothing, but other African American males disagreed. Those students' responses follow:

Respondent: I get information about schools from my guidance counselor.

Respondent: They [guidance counselors] give you information on colleges of interest.

The third focus group question asked how the students would describe the role their parents played or are playing in their college choice process. The majority of the respondents stated that their parent's involvement consists of paying for tuition and support in choosing a college. Examples of student responses follow.

Respondent: My parents support me in everything.

Respondent: [They paid for] A flight to the out-of-state college I plan to attend.

Respondent: Giving me a lecture before I go off to college.

The next focus group question asked what knowledge the students expect to gain from college. Some of the students didn't respond. It was assumed that they expect to gain something, but are unaware of what it could be at this time.

Respondent: Life experiences...experience things you haven't seen or done yet.

Respondent: I want to know more about my chosen career.

Respondent: I want to meet new people and make friendships.

Respondent: Get rid of stereotypes and see other cultures.

Counselor Interviews

The interview question, “Who helps African American males, with their college choice process?” was asked of counselors to get input from them. Examples of their responses follow:

Respondent: Most choices regarding college seem to be made between mother and son or other females in the family.

Respondent: Summer opportunities such as college tours, internships, and seminars can assist in students’ college choice.

Respondent: A large percentage of black males are guided by either a coach or a family member. In some cases their church and or community organizations also assist in the decision process.

Summary: Factors Influencing African American Males to Choose College

From the analysis of the questionnaire instrument, focus group responses and the counselor responses, it can be seen that African American males participating in this study say that visiting a college before making a decision is something they would do. The students who seek advice get advice from their parents. Others said high school counselors or other relatives like an aunt, uncle or grandfather help them. The siblings experience with college indicates potential influence on the student. Those respondents with brothers or sisters who attend or attended college show an interest in attending college. Many of the focus group respondents commented on the institution their brother or sister attended or attends and made a point of either showing an interest in attending the same school or of just being aware of what that particular school has to offer. Having

an older brother or sister who had gone or is going through the college choice process may have helped them in their college choice process. The responses show that the family plays a big part in the students' college choice process. The students expect their parents to play a major role in helping finance their education and provide overall support. An example follows:

Respondent: My parents support me in everything.

College Characteristics

The second research question asked what college characteristics are most important to the African American male respondents in selecting a post-secondary institution.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire found that most of the respondents choose to attend a four-year college or university. The remainder choose a technical or vocational institution or a junior or community college. The results are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

Type of College

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Numbers</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 4-year college | 68 | 88 |
| Junior/Community college | 4 | 5 |
| Technical/ Vocational | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 4 | 5 |
| <u>N=77</u> | <u>77</u> | <u>100%</u> |

The questionnaire also asked about the types of majors that the respondents were looking for in a college. This seemed to be somewhat important in choosing a college. The largest group, 18 (23%), is undecided on a major. The two most popular majors with this population are computer science (16%) and accounting (10%). Others, at 4% each, are interested in management, marketing, biology, mathematics, technology, criminal justice, and the athletic training program. The breakdown on choice of majors is diverse in interest and is shown in Table 10.

Table 10

College Majors of Interest

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Numbers</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Undecided/ General Studies | 18 | 23 |
| Computer Science | 12 | 16 |
| Business-Accounting | 8 | 10 |
| Physics/ Pre-Engineering | 7 | 9 |
| Technology | 5 | 7 |
| Criminal Justice | 3 | 4 |
| Exercise & Sports Science | 3 | 4 |
| Athletic Training | 3 | 4 |
| Biology | 2 | 3 |
| Business-Management | 2 | 3 |
| Communication Design | 2 | 3 |
| Theatre | 2 | 3 |
| Music | 2 | 3 |
| Health & Fitness Management | 1 | 1 |
| History | 1 | 1 |
| Psychology | 1 | 1 |
| Chemistry | 1 | 1 |
| Mathematics | 1 | 1 |
| Business-Marketing | 1 | 1 |
| Business-Computer Information Systems | 1 | 1 |
| Speech Communication | 1 | 1 |
| <u>N=77</u> | <u>77</u> | <u>100%</u> |

Another major characteristic in selecting an institution is the distance the students

would have to travel. Thirty-two respondents (43%) prefer institutions that are 1-3 hours away from home. Twenty-three respondents (31%) prefer to attend college out of state and a small number prefer four or more hours away from home or less than an hour away. The African American students from this study who want to travel out of state prefer to attend Historically Black Universities such as Florida A&M, Morehouse, Howard University, Tuskege, and Grambling. Table 11 shows the response on the distance the students would travel to attend college.

Table 11

Distance Participants are Willing to Travel to College

| Respondents | Number | % |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------|
| Less than 1 hour away | 7 | 10 |
| 1-3 hours away | 32 | 43 |
| 4 or more hours away | 12 | 16 |
| Out of state | 23 | 31 |
| <u>n=74</u> | 74 | 100% |

Note: Three respondents did not respond to this question.

The last questionnaire question had several components. The question asked respondents to rank the most important to the least important characteristics that the students would consider when selecting an institution. Characteristic choices 1-5 are reported in the data tables. The majority of the participants ranked the following factors consistently in the top five: financial aid/ scholarships (84%), total cost (69%), and college living arrangements (60%). The results show that 25 (37%) respondents say financial aid and scholarships is most important. Seventeen (25%) respondents selected it as the second most important characteristics. Although financial aid and scholarships are separate benefits, they act as one to equate the financial issue. The total cost of college drew very similar results. Eight (12%) respondents said total cost is their top

concern, and 20 (30%) respondents said it is their second concern when choosing a college. Table 12 and Table 13 show the data and the responses of the students who selected it in the top five for each characteristic.

Table 12

Financial Aid/ Scholarships

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 st choice | 25 | 37 |
| 2 nd choice | 17 | 25 |
| 3 rd choice | -- | -- |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 4 |
| 5 th choice | 12 | 18 |
| <u>n=68</u> | <u>57</u> | <u>84%</u> |

Note: Nine respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 13

Total Cost

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 st choice | 8 | 12 |
| 2 nd choice | 20 | 30 |
| 3 rd choice | 3 | 4 |
| 4 th choice | 6 | 9 |
| 5 th choice | 9 | 13 |
| <u>n=67</u> | <u>46</u> | <u>69%</u> |

Note: Ten respondents did not respond to this question.

College living arrangements also appear to be high on the respondents list of characteristics. Fifteen (22%) selected it as their 5th characteristic. Seven (10%)

respondents chose it as their first choice characteristic in selecting the right college.

Twelve (18%) students have it as their 3rd choice. The size of the school also appeared to be high on the list of characteristics for African American males in this study; nine (14%) respondents chose it as 2nd in importance. Table 14 summarizes the data on living arrangements and Table 15 summarizes school size.

Table 14

College Living Arrangements

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 st choice | 7 | 10 |
| 2 nd choice | 4 | 6 |
| 3 rd choice | 12 | 18 |
| 4 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| 5 th choice | 15 | 22 |
| <u>n=67</u> | 40 | 60% |
| <u>Note:</u> Ten respondents did not respond to this question. | | |

Table 15

School Size

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 st choice | 8 | 12 |
| 2 nd choice | 9 | 14 |
| 3 rd choice | 2 | 3 |
| 4 th choice | 5 | 7 |
| 5 th choice | 8 | 12 |
| <u>n=66</u> | 32 | 48% |
| <u>Note:</u> Eleven respondents did not respond to this question. | | |

The questionnaire found that the college having the students' major field of study is not an important characteristic. Only four (6%) respondents ranked it as their 1st major priority and four (6%) respondents ranked it as their second priority. The students ranked the faculty-to-student ratio as 3rd. Table 16 shows the breakdown of the major interest and Table 17 shows the faculty-to-student ratio in percentages.

Table 16

Program in Major

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1 st choice | 4 | 6 |
| 2 nd choice | 4 | 6 |
| 3 rd choice | 5 | 8 |
| 4 th choice | 5 | 8 |
| 5 th choice | 7 | 11 |
| <u>n=65</u> | 25 | 38% |

Note: Twelve respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 17

Faculty-to-Student Ratio

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1 st choice | 4 | 6 |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 2 |
| 3 rd choice | 7 | 11 |
| 4 th choice | 6 | 10 |
| 5 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| <u>n=61</u> | 20 | 32% |

Note: Sixteen respondents did not respond to this question.

The low ranking of extracurricular activities, campus clubs and organizations, social activities, attractive campus, reputation, high school counselor preference, surroundings, region of the country, faculty of the same ethnic background, academic reputation, college faculty, ethnic makeup of student body, friends attending, and athletic program is shown in the questionnaire results. The respondents' rankings were widespread as shown in Table 18 through Table 31. Table 18 shows how African American males ranked the importance of extracurricular activities played in their college selection.

Table 18

Extracurricular Activities

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1 st choice | 1 | 2 |
| 2 nd choice | 2 | 3 |
| 3 rd choice | 8 | 13 |
| 4 th choice | 6 | 10 |
| 5 th choice | 1 | 2 |
| <u>n=61</u> | 18 | 30% |

Note: Sixteen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 19 denotes how their high school counselors influence African American males and how the counselors' college preference influences the males in their college selection. No respondents selected this influence as their 2nd choice.

Table 19

High School Counselor Preference

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1 st choice | 3 | 5 |
| 2 nd choice | -- | -- |
| 3 rd choice | 6 | 10 |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 5 |
| 5 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| <u>n</u> =61 | 14 | 23% |

Note: Sixteen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 20 denotes that African American males ranked the importance of the environment or location of the campus and the effect it has on their college selection low as an influence.

Table 20

Surroundings (Town/ City)

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1 st choice | 1 | 1 |
| 2 nd choice | 2 | 3 |
| 3 rd choice | 4 | 7 |
| 4 th choice | 4 | 7 |
| 5 th choice | 4 | 7 |
| <u>n</u> =60 | 15 | 25% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 21 denotes how African American males ranked the importance of an attractive campus and the role it plays on their college selection. No respondents selected this

characteristic as their 1st or 2nd choice.

Table 21

Attractive Campus

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | -- | -- |
| 3 rd choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| 4 th choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| 5 th choice | -- | -- |
| <u>n=60</u> | 2 | 3% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 22 denotes that African American males ranked the overall reputation of the college low in importance to college selection.

Table 22

Overall Reputation

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | -- | -- |
| 3 rd choice | 1 | 2 |
| 4 th choice | -- | -- |
| 5 th choice | -- | -- |
| <u>n=60</u> | 1 | 2% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 23 denotes how African American males ranked the importance of campus clubs and organizations and the role they play on their college selection.

Table 23

Campus Clubs/Organizations

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 st choice | 1 | 1.6 |
| 2 nd choice | -- | -- |
| 3 rd choice | 2 | 3.3 |
| 4 th choice | 1 | 1.6 |
| 5 th choice | 1 | 1.6 |
| <u>n=60</u> | 10 | 8% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 24 shows how African American males ranked the importance of social activities on a university campus and the role they play in their college selection. No respondents selected social activities as their first choice.

Table 24

Social Activities

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 1.6 |
| 3 rd choice | 1 | 1.6 |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 5.0 |
| 5 th choice | -- | -- |
| <u>n=60</u> | 5 | 8% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 25 denotes that African American males ranked the importance of the region of the country where the campus is located low in how that reflects on their college selection.

Table 25

Region of the Country

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| 3 rd choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 5.0 |
| 5 th choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| <u>n=60</u> | 6 | 10% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 26 denotes that African American males ranked the importance of the faculty being of the same ethnic background low in how that would affect their college selection.

Table 26

Faculty of Same Ethnic Background

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | -- | -- |
| 3 rd choice | 3 | 5 |
| 4 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| 5 th choice | -- | -- |
| <u>n=60</u> | 5 | 8% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 27 denotes that African American males ranked the importance of the schools' academic reputation low in the role it plays on their college selection.

Table 27

Academic Reputation

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 2 |
| 3 rd choice | 2 | 3 |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 5 |
| 5 th choice | -- | -- |
| <u>n=60</u> | 6 | 10% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 28 denotes that African American males ranked the importance of the college faculty low in the role that characteristic plays in the college selection.

Table 28

Interaction with College Faculty

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 st choice | 1 | 2 |
| 2 nd choice | -- | -- |
| 3 rd choice | -- | -- |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 5 |
| 5 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| <u>n=60</u> | 6 | 10% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 29 denotes that African American males ranked the importance of having a specific ethnic makeup on campus low in how important it is in choosing a college. No respondents selected this characteristic as their 1st choice.

Table 29

Ethnic Makeup of Student Body

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 2 |
| 3 rd choice | 3 | 5 |
| 4 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| 5 th choice | 1 | 2 |
| n=60 | 7 | 12% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 30 denotes that African American males view the importance of choosing a college based on whether their friends were going to attend or not attend low in choosing a college.

Table 30

Friends Attending

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 st choice | -- | -- |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 2 |
| 3 rd choice | 2 | 3 |
| 4 th choice | 2 | 3 |
| 5 th choice | 1 | 2 |
| n=60 | 6 | 10% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 31 denotes that African American males ranked as low the importance of attending a college based on the athletic program on campus.

Table 31

Athletic Program

| Respondents | Number | % |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 st choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| 2 nd choice | 1 | 1.7 |
| 3 rd choice | -- | -- |
| 4 th choice | 3 | 5.0 |
| 5 th choice | -- | -- |
| <u>n=60</u> | 5 | 8% |

Note: Seventeen respondents did not respond to this question.

Focus Group

A focus group question asked the African American males about their primary source of getting information on colleges and universities. Examples of some of the students' responses follow:

Respondent: My primary source is the Internet.

Respondent: My source is the Internet also.

Respondent: I have not looked for information on the Internet yet, but plan on doing a search.

Most of the male respondents from both focus groups said that their primary source of finding characteristics about colleges and universities is from books, college guides and the library.

Respondent: I get all my information on colleges during college fairs at my high school.

Respondent: I get information in the mail.

Although some of the respondents have individual ways of getting information, all of them agree that they get information from their guidance counselor and from visiting the colleges.

Another focus group question asked if this sample of African American males want similar characteristics to or different characteristics from those their high school possesses when searching for a college. The question mainly sought to find what the students like most and least about their school. Since all of the respondents were from different high schools, they all had different answers. Some of the respondents didn't answer, while others did. One student didn't like that sports were not available, and he wants to attend a college that does have some type of extra curricular or athletic activities but that does not have a dress code. Other responses were:

Respondent: Having small classes and getting to know the instructor.

Respondent: I like that I can learn a lot at my school.

Respondent: My school is diverse and has different cultures.

Respondent: I like everything about my high school except the counselors because they do not help me.

At least two respondents said they have no freedom to leave campus in high school [for lunch] or do anything, and they want to have freedom while in college where there is not a set time for everything. The majority of the students in this study want to have freedom to do as they choose and want assistance from professors and teachers when they need it. Although the questionnaire data suggests that faculty-to-student ratio and interaction with college faculty is not high on the respondents list of characteristics when choosing a college, the response from the focus groups indicates that it is an important factor because of the need for the extra attention in academics.

Counselor Interviews

Counselors were asked questions related to the research questions about what college characteristics are most important to African American males in selecting an institution. Examples of counselor responses follow:

Respondent: There are many African American males that want to attend Historically Black Universities. The population or size of the school is not as important

as the ethnic and historical aspect.

Respondent: The majority of the students look for athletics programs and athletics scholarships as well as academic scholarships.

Respondent: Location, athletics, major and in some cases their parent's alma mater.

Counselors said that most African American males want to attend Historically Black Universities because someone they know or someone in their family went to a HBU or simply because the school is widely known.

Summary: College Characteristics

From the analysis of the questionnaire instrument, focus group responses and the counselor responses, it appears that African American males in this study look for colleges that are a short to moderate distance from home, or within three hours from home. A number of students want to attend school out of state. Those students, who want to go out of state, indicate an interest in HBU's.

Responses to the last questionnaire question show that a large number of the students look for an affordable school as well as a large financial aid and scholarship package mainly because of financial need. Some of the typical desirable college characteristics noted in the literature, such as athletics, friends attending and a large minority population, have very low ranking of importance in their college choice among the African American male participants. The data show that the male participants look for certain living arrangements and the size of the school. According to the questionnaire instrument, faculty-to-student ratio is not an important characteristic, but in the focus groups, several respondents said they want a smaller learning environment where they can have more personal contact with the professors.

This population's source for finding information on colleges and universities comes from books, college guides and the library. Although most of the students from the present study said that they are more likely to search in books, college guides and

their library, African American male participants also acquire their information from college fairs that are held at their high schools.

The counselors' response was very similar to the students' response. Although the counselors' response was somewhat broad, they found that African American males look for athletics and want to attend HBU's. They said that the population and school size is not as important to the male student as the financial aid availability.

Overall, African American male participants look for characteristics such as a strong financial aid plan and scholarship package, and their main concern when looking at other characteristics is the college distance from home and the Historical Black College environment.

Sibling Influences

Questionnaire

According to the questionnaire questions, respondents reported that they have older brothers and sisters who attend college. Most responded that they have siblings who attend college within 3 hours of home. Others stated they have brothers and sisters who attend school out of state or who attend a technical school. Table 32 summarizes the data on the number of siblings who attend college. Table 33 lists the colleges and universities that they attend. The questionnaire determined only whether their brothers or sisters attended a 4-year post-secondary institution rather than other educational paths such as the 2-year colleges and technical schools.

Table 32

Brother/ Sister Attend College

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Yes, attends college | 28 | 51 |
| No, does not attend college | 27 | 49 |
| <u>n=55</u> | 55 | 100% |

Note: Twenty-two respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 33

Specific Colleges Attended by Siblings

| Respondents | Number | % |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Jarvis Christian College | 1 | 3.6 |
| Wiley College | 1 | 3.6 |
| Texas A&M University | 1 | 3.6 |
| Houston Community College | 2 | 7.1 |
| University of Houston-Downtown | 6 | 21.4 |
| Cedar Valley College | 1 | 3.6 |
| Paul Quinn | 1 | 3.6 |
| Sam Houston University | 2 | 7.1 |
| Southwest Texas State University | 1 | 3.6 |
| Stephen F. Austin | 2 | 7.1 |
| Texas Southern University | 1 | 3.6 |
| Tyler Junior College | 1 | 3.6 |
| University of Texas-Arlington | 1 | 3.6 |
| University of Texas-Austin | 5 | 17.9 |
| Victoria College | 1 | 3.6 |
| Huston-Tillotson | 1 | 3.6 |
| <u>n=28</u> | <u>28</u> | <u>100%</u> |

Note: Forty-nine respondents did not respond to this question.

Motivating Life Goals

Focus Group

The third research question sought to discover what life goals motivate African American males to pursue post-secondary education. The focus group was able to get more in-depth responses on motivation and life goals of the African American males. Respondents in both focus groups expressed similar goals and reasons to attend college. All of the respondents have a goal to graduate from high school and go to college.

Examples of their responses follow:

Respondent: My goal is to perform in theater or music.

Respondent: I want to become a General in the Army.

Respondent: I have goals, but do not know what they are.

Respondent: I don't know what my goals are.

The next focus group question asked them to specify their reasons to go to college. They all have very similar reasons.

Respondent: I want to start a career.

Respondent: To further my education.

Respondent: To get a good job.

Respondent: To make more money and live comfortably.

Respondent: I have to get ready for the computer age.

Respondent: My motivation comes from seeing poverty invade and never wishing to experience that for my family or myself.

Counselor Interviews

The research question, what life goals motivate African American students, particularly African American males, to pursue post-secondary education, was then asked of the high school guidance counselors. A sample of responses follows:

Respondent: Independence, income to support a high standard of living and to take care of Mom, change of current lifestyle such as getting away from trouble, drugs, the law and peer pressure.

Respondent: They aspire to reach a higher standard of living than their parents. They want to live comfortably. This is definitely a priority.

Respondent: They want to find other motivated black men who represent the black race in a light different than what the media portrays them to be.

Respondent: The most important for most black males is the benjamins, it's about the dollars. Go to college to get a job and make money.

Summary: Motivating Life Goals

From the analysis of the questionnaire and the interview data, African American male participants' motivation comes from graduating high school and college and knowing that after college they can start a career or get a job and make money to live comfortably. It was also found that money, independence, and reaching a higher standard of living motivate African American males to consider going to college.

Avoiding the College Classroom

Questionnaire

The last research question asked what factors influence African American males to avoid the college classroom. The questionnaire instrument asked African American males participating in the study their high school grade point average. The questionnaire

group had a mean G.P.A. of 3.0. The range of the group was 2.0 to 4.5 G.P.A. on a 5.0 scale. Having a low grade point average can discourage the students and can convince them they can not attend a college or university. Table 34 shows the students grade point average on a 5.0 grading scale.

Table 34

Grade Point Averages

| G.P.A. | Numbers | % |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------|
| 2.0 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 2.2 | 2 | 3.2 |
| 2.3 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 2.5 | 6 | 9.5 |
| 2.6 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 2.7 | 3 | 4.7 |
| 2.8 | 2 | 3.2 |
| 2.9 | 2 | 3.2 |
| 3.0 | 9 | 14.3 |
| 3.1 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 3.2 | 2 | 3.2 |
| 3.3 | 3 | 4.8 |
| 3.4 | 5 | 7.9 |
| 3.5 | 10 | 15.9 |
| 3.6 | 3 | 4.8 |
| 3.7 | 2 | 3.2 |
| 3.8 | 3 | 4.7 |
| 3.9 | 2 | 3.2 |
| 4.0 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 4.1 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 4.2 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 4.3 | 1 | 1.6 |
| 4.5 | 1 | 1.6 |
| <u>n=63</u> | 63 | 100% |

Note: Fourteen respondents did not respond to this question.

The questionnaire also asked if African American male participants had taken their ACT or SAT College entrance exams and found that only 34 respondents (45%) had taken the SAT and 12 respondents (18%) had taken the ACT by the fall term. Table 35 and Table 36 summarize this data.

Table 35

College Entrance Exams (SAT)

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Numbers</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Taken SAT | 34 | 45 |
| Not taken SAT | 41 | 55 |
| <u>n</u> =75 | 75 | 100% |

Note: Two respondents did not respond to the question.

Table 36

College Entrance Exams (ACT)

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Numbers</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Taken ACT | 12 | 18 |
| Not taken ACT | 54 | 82 |
| <u>n</u> =66 | 66 | 100% |

Note: Eleven respondents did not respond to the question.

The ACT or SAT are needed for admission to the majority of Texas colleges; therefore, African American males could limit their own access to college by not taking the test, taking the test too late, or not making the required test score to be admitted into a college or university.

The questionnaire instrument also asked for the education level of the students' mother and father to see if there is a relationship between parents' level of education and students' choosing to go to college versus choosing not to attend might be related. The questionnaire found that 12 respondents' (17%) mothers are high school graduates. Twenty-five respondents' (35%) mothers have had some college education and 23 respondents' (32%) mothers are college graduates. The fathers' education level is very similar. Twenty respondents' (28%) fathers are high school graduates. Fifteen respondents (21%) stated that their fathers have some college background and 23

respondents (32%) said their fathers are college graduates. The other categories included law school, GED, and some technical schools. Table 37 summarizes the results.

Table 37

Education Levels

| <u>Education</u> | <u>Responses for Mother</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>Responses for Father</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Elementary | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Some high school | 4 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| High school grad | 12 | 17 | 20 | 28 |
| Some college | 25 | 35 | 15 | 21 |
| College graduate | 23 | 32 | 23 | 32 |
| Other | 4 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| <u>n</u> =72 (Mother) | 72 | 100% | | |
| <u>n</u> =71 (Father) | | | 71 | 100% |

Note: Five respondents for mother's education level did not answer question and six respondents for the father's education level did not answer the question.

Another questionnaire question asked the African American males if they are thinking about joining the military. Forty-two respondents that said they have never thought of joining the military. Twenty-eight respondents said they have considered joining the military. Out of all four armed forces, interest is distributed evenly between army, navy, airforce and marines. Table 38 shows the distribution.

Table 38

Military (Armed Forces)

| <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Numbers</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Army | 7 | 25 |
| Navy | 7 | 25 |
| Air Force | 8 | 29 |
| Marines | 6 | 21 |
| <u>n=28</u> | 28 | 100% |

Note: Forty-nine respondents did not indicate an interest in the military.

Focus Group

In the focus groups, respondents were asked what some of their biggest fears are about attending college. The group cited running out of money, handling independence, and decision making as big fears. A sample of responses follows:

Respondent: Having no money to pay for school would discourage me.

Respondent: Not having money to pay for school.

Respondent: Choosing a major is my fear.

Respondent: I have no fears about going off the college.

Respondent: Managing time between study and playtime.

Respondent: Moving away from home is my biggest fear. (From a student who wanted to go to an out-of-state school)

Respondent: My fears are drugs, being independent and not having enough money.

Respondent: My biggest fear is having a roommate.

Respondent: Not having a place to stay.

Respondent: Being independent is my fear.

The students in the focus group were also asked who or what might discourage

them from attending college. Fear of academic failure and concern about paying for college dominate.

Respondent: The class work would discourage me because I am afraid I would not be able to do the work.

Respondent: Failure to perform and drop out

Another discouragement that the group agreed upon is the challenge of having to continue to learn after high school. Some felt that parents or friends could be a discouragement.

Respondent: My parents would be a discouragement because they don't know what college is really about.

Respondent: Friends could be a discouragement.

Counselor Interviews

An interview question was posed to the counselors regarding avoiding the classroom environment. Counselor responses focused on students' lack of academic preparation and the desire to earn money now. These responses are fully illustrated in the following statements:

Respondent: African American males are not prepared. Many African American students, particularly males, wait until their senior year to apply for scholarships and take the SAT or ACT tests, and they are too late. Many males are just afraid to take the test for fear of not meeting an acceptable standard.

Respondent: Many young men feel they lack the stamina it takes to complete a college education and in many cases their high school experience validates that. Military remains an attractive package because they do encourage students to complete a higher degree, but they also add the money to go with it. Some young men want the "good life" now and not later, thereby passing college.

Respondent: If there is something in the present that appears to be profitable, they go for it. They don't seem to have a vision; living in the present is their answer to a career. Many are willing to live up to their parents' standard. Maybe no one in the family has gone to college; therefore it is not regarded as a viable option. Finally, some young blacks felt that they couldn't fit in with society, especially on the corporate level.

Respondent: Lack of instructors or people, who look like them, lack of self-esteem, outside forces of the streets, the fear of being categorized as being smart.

Respondent: The fear that they can't learn or be educated.

Summary: Avoiding the College Classroom

The males in this study seem to be avoiding the college classroom because they fear they are not academically well prepared. If their parent or parents have a high school education, they may not know as much about making appropriate school choices as a parent who has had some college or is a college graduate. The students whose parents have had some experience will be more prepared than others. It also is shown that many male participants had not taken the SAT or ACT. This validates one of the assumptions that African American male seniors have not taken the test, therefore delaying their entrance into a college or university. A small number of the respondents plan on joining the military. This would delay entrance into a university or college as opposed to avoiding the classroom. Males and females who join the military are encouraged to continue their education, so this would not be a total avoidance of the college classroom, just deferring entrance into the classroom. Joining the military would be more of a motivation because money is being provided to go to school. One major reason why African American males avoid the classroom is because of their living environment. Some African American males can make money out on the streets in a short time instead of postponing the "good life." Overall there are many factors that keep African American males from the college classroom, but the major factor is lack of preparation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that influence African American male students in choosing the path of higher education. Through three instruments, a significant amount of data was uncovered. The three methods of data collection were the questionnaire, the focus group interview guide, and the high school counselor interview guide. Through these three avenues, factors were discovered about what African American males are searching for when researching a college. The questionnaire instrument asked general questions of the participants and found basic information on their environment and family background. Some of the questionnaire questions were used as indicators for variables, but not measured, such as sibling influence of college choice. The focus group questions asked more depth questions to find what their life goals are, who assists them in deciding on a college and what might discourage them from attending college. These questions, along with several more, were asked to the African American males in this study to see if they are prepared and on the right path to pursuing post secondary education after high school. The counselor interviews were used to get a different view of how the guidance counselors view this population. The interviews also allowed the counselors an opportunity to think about this population and if they are being successful in providing information, providing adequate career and post secondary education counseling.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

What are the factors that influence African American males in their college choices. This discussion will examine these factors by analyzing the factors identified from the questionnaire instrument, focus group and counselor response and compare the responses with research literature. The discussion will also examine suggestions from the respondents and implications for practice and a future study.

Sources of Influence for African American Males in the College Choice

Johnson (1997) found that socialization processes, family circumstances, peers, and high school environments influence African American students. Galotti and Mark (1994) found that the most important sources of information in making the college decision are parents/ guardians, friends, materials in the guidance center, counselors and college brochures.

In the present study, African American students describe the role their parents play in the college choice process as one of offering general guidance and support but leaving most of the decision up to the student. A large number of the students said that their parent's involvement consists of paying for tuition and being supportive in choosing a college. The students also mentioned that they interact with their high school guidance counselor. Although some students said their counselor assists them in selecting a

college, other students reported they did not receive any assistance from their counselor. Ray (1992), found that most students stated that the guidance counselor provides satisfactory assistance in their college search activities.

In the current study, the students were asked where they might seek advice when choosing a college. Respondents from both focus groups stated that they would look for advice from their parents. Other sources of help would come from counselors because they have the information on the colleges and universities. One response that did not surface in the focus groups but did in the literature was that males rely more on the advice of their coaches (Galotti & Mark, 1994).

The focus group question asked African American male participants about their primary source of getting information on colleges and universities. According to research found from Sevier and Stamats Communication (1994), African American high school juniors say that their primary source in finding a college comes from recruitment publications, guidance counselors, college guidebooks, parents, college fairs and college admission representatives. According to the African American males in the current study, one of their sources is the Internet. Other males said that their primary source of finding characteristics about colleges and universities comes from books, guidance counselors, college guides and the library.

In the current study, the African American males were asked what role the guidance counselor plays in their college choice process. Some students said the counselors do not give information and that they do not know anything. In a different phase of the study, males said that their counselors help them in their college choice and assist them in narrowing down their college selection. These responses contradict because

there were some students from both focus groups where their counselors assisted them and others where their counselors provided no assistance.

It seems that research is accurate in stating the majority of African American students see their parent's role in the college process as offering support and guidance during the process of searching for a college, but leaving the decisions up to the student. Overall, the parents play some role in assisting the student, whether the parents attended a post-secondary institution or not. Parents may be there for support and tuition purposes, but the brothers or sisters are the ones experiencing college at present and could influence their brother more. Table 6 and table 7 show that most African American males in the study have a brother or sister, and a number of them have older siblings who have attended or are attending college. Given the data presented in this study, college age siblings have the potential to be influential in assisting African American males with college and the selection process because many of the siblings who are in college have or are going to in state schools that are close to home. It is possible this proximity enables the student to visit the college and be exposed to a college campus, therefore allowing the student experience on which to base a decision to be a part of the college environment after their high school graduation. Based on what Hossler and Vesper (1991) found, students with access to more sources of information about colleges are more likely to successfully fulfill their educational plans.

College Characteristics

Sevier (1994) found that the most important institutional characteristics that African American students look for in selecting a college are the type of financial aid available, total costs, academic major, and living arrangements. In the current study, of

the African American males questioned, 37% chose financial aid and scholarships as their first choice in terms of most important factors, and 25% marked it as their second choice (Table 12). Only 12% selected total cost of going to college as a top priority and 30% selected it as second (Table 13). It appears that what Sevier found and what was found in this study correspond. Johnson (1997) also found similar results, that college cost is seen as an important factor, much more so than location of the college.

According to the Sevier (1994) study, African American students were also interested in living arrangements and the availability of their major. Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1998) found that more students are interested in admissions, majors offered, and unique characteristics of a campus. The results from the current study reveal that characteristics such as college living arrangements are a concern to 10% of the students who chose it as their number one characteristic, to the 6% who selected it as their second choice, and to the 18% who chose it third (Table 14). One characteristic that was not mentioned in Sevier's (1994) study was school size. As shown in Table 15, 12% of the students chose school size as their first choice. Fourteen percent chose it as second. Table 16 shows how the characteristics of the academic major are ranked and Table 17 shows how faculty-to-student ratio is ranked. Six percent chose the academic major as the first and second choice. Only 6% chose student/faculty ratio as their first choice. These two characteristics received a low ranking and seem to not be very important to the African American males participating in the study. Sevier and Stamats Communication (1994) found that African American students look at a variety of ethnic related characteristics, such as the number of African American students on campus, counselors of similar backgrounds, faculty and administrators of the same ethnic

background, and social activities and organizations geared for the African American population. The results from the current study revealed that African American males may not be particularly interested in having faculty from the same ethnic background. Table 26 shows that faculty from the same ethnic background was chosen as third among 5% of those questioned. In the current study only 2% of respondents said the ethnic makeup of the student body was important (Table 29).

The Sevier (1994) and Stamats (1994) studies found that more African American students are more interested in athletic programs than their White and Hispanic counterparts. Although a small percentage of African American males in this study say they look at the athletic program when selecting a college, Johnson (1997) however, focused on high school seniors' claims that athletic prestige is not an important factor in the college decision-making process. Of the eleven characteristics that were addressed in Johnson's (1997) study, athletics ranked last for males as a deciding characteristic. Counselors were asked to respond to: athletics, the size of African American population enrolled, and major seemed to be what they are hearing from their students as characteristics that are looked for when making their institution choice.

The surprising factor in the current study was the low ranking of extracurricular activities, campus clubs and organizations, social activities, attractive campus, institutional reputation, high school counselors school preference, surroundings, region of the country, faculty of the same ethnic background, academic reputation, faculty-to-student ratio, ethnic makeup of the student body, friends attending and the athletic program.

Students were asked about their likes and dislikes about their high school and how those would be reflected in their college choice. Those who like the atmosphere of their high schools want to continue to have access to teachers and counselors, they enjoy cultural diversity, and they want to be able to get help from teachers. Those who do not want college characteristics similar to those they experienced in high school want freedom from uniforms and dress codes and want freedom to control their schedules.

Although the questionnaire data showed that the students did not particularly have a preference or give a high ranking in the faculty-to-student ratio when choosing a college, the response from the focus groups reveals that the students see it as an important factor for them to feel comfortable in their college choice.

Another characteristic that African American male students seem to look for is the historical or ethnic background of the college. According to the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute Study (1998) a large number of African American high school students appear to be interested in attending historically black colleges and universities (HBU's). The current study found that the African American male participants are interested in attending HBU's out of the state of Texas. Guidance counselors are also noticing that many African American male students want to go out of state to attend HBU's. Many want to attend because a family member went to an HBU. Thirty-one percent of the African American male participants chose to travel out of state to attend college (Table 10). The literature research and the student's perspective on attending HBU's seem to correspond to some extent, but not completely.

Motivating Life Goals

According to research by Dunn (1988), a number of factors reduce the motivation of African American males to attend college. In order to be successful at following through with their education, African American males must have someone who motivates them or empowers them. Although Dunn stated that there are a number of factors that reduce motivation of African American males, Dunn also discovered that African American males want to get an education in order to escape from poverty and other problems in their environment. Clark and Plotkin (1964) discovered that success in college is dependent upon the motivation and goals of the students regardless of their high school performance or test scores. This is shown in the focus group data in the current study where the participants who have a brother or sister attending college find that to be a motivating experience. When students were asked specifically about their goals in the focus group, many express goals that are achievable such as graduating from high school and college. Others have goals that would be more of a challenge to achieve such as becoming a general in the army or performing in theater in New York. A third category of students are still seeking life goals or struggling to articulate their goals.

The research literature says that many African American males do not fathom goal setting, self-motivation, and goal achievement. The research and the data found in this study do not correspond. It appears that many African American male participants in this study who answered in the focus group, are motivated internally and do not need someone to motivate them or have already had some outside motivating experience that prompted them to begin setting goals.

Avoiding the College Classroom

The research focused on various reasons why African American males avoid the college classroom. Dunn (1988) found that the males want to achieve financial independence and that the males are impatient and do not want to spend four years in college. Dunn also discovered that there are not many African American scholars for African American males to look up to. Lang (1986) found that many are not prepared academically to compete. Hawkins (1993) suggested that students need early intervention, enrichment, and summer programs that can enhance their chances of increasing their college entrance test scores. He also revealed that test scores are a major barrier to African American males because it limits their choice of colleges.

In the current study, the males who participated in the questionnaire and focus group samples have a grade point average from a 2.0 GPA to a 4.5 GPA [on a 5.0 GPA scale](Table 34). Many had not taken the ACT or SAT college entrance exams at the time of the data collection, which was in late September and early October. This is considered late for seniors who are looking at applying to colleges. At the time, 55% of the students had not taken the SAT (Table 35) and 82% had not taken the ACT (Table 36). Another reason that discourages many African American males is the prospect of more school after high school.

Another reason for avoiding college could be an interest in joining the military services. Dunn mentioned in his study that African American males join the armed forces to learn a skill and earn a wage. Patterson (1998) mentioned that African Americans are currently over-represented in the armed services. The literature revealed that the Montgomery GI Bill has expanded the opportunities for African Americans to

attend college after they have matured and decided their field of study (Patterson 1998). In the current study, 41% of the students said they would consider joining the military, and the remaining 59% replied that they are not thinking about joining the military. For those African American male participants who are considering joining, 25% said they would join the Army, 25% would join the Navy, 29% said the Air Force and 21% would join the Marines (Table 38). In the focus groups only one student was seriously considering joining the Army and making high rank. The research literature and the results from this study did not correspond entirely, but did show that the students are considering other avenues besides an educational institution.

Assumptions

Recalling the introduction of this study, one assumption was that 18-year-old high school seniors might not know their potential college academic level of performance. According to the findings of this study, students fear they will not be able to do the class work and fear they cannot perform. In preparation for college, 32 students were taking honors classes and 29 students were taking AP classes. The findings are inconsistent and inconclusive because there are African American male participants who took or are taking advanced courses and African American male participants who had not taken their college entrance exams. This should indicate that guidance counselors are not being consistent in counseling these students on the importance of both taking the proper classes as well as taking their college entrance exams. This could also indicate that the counselor should be working with first generation students who need clarification on the proper steps to take when preparing for college.

The second assumption was that high schools students who made initial contact with a college representative may or many not continue that contact. Only in the literature was a college representative mentioned. Also in the literature, a college admission officer was seen as a contact through a visit to the high school. The study discovered that there is more contact with high school counselors than with college representatives.

The next assumption was that most high school seniors have several choices of institutions and have not chosen one specific school. The students' mentioning several in-state and out-of-state schools in the focus groups confirmed this. Also with so many characteristics to choose from and to look for in a college, it was difficult for students not to have several choices. This assumption was confirmed.

The fourth assumption was that high school seniors may not have taken their college entrance exams and may not be well prepared. According to the findings in this study, only 45% of the students had taken the SAT and 18% of the students had taken the ACT. The remainder of the students had not taken either exam. Since data was collected in the early part of the fall, many of African American male participants were late in trying to take these tests for admission requirements. Those who had not taken them would need to prepare prior to taking the test. This assumption was confirmed by the percentages of students who had taken college entrance exams at the time of the data collection.

The final assumption was that African American males are difficult to recruit into post-secondary education. The findings show that the African American male students in this study know college is an opportunity to further their education, live more

comfortably, and experience different cultures. They are not difficult to recruit; they just have different needs and must be approached differently by colleges and universities.

Implications for Practice

Access to research findings will help recruiters from colleges and universities better understand this population and will assist them in recruiting African American males. Recruiters must understand that many African American males are aware of college and its availability, but they have not been approached in a manner that is appealing to them to pursue post secondary education. Many African American males are worried about money and are looking for financial aid. But if these students do not have the support or do not seek advice from a parent, family member or counselor, they may not be prepared to take on the challenge of looking for the right college or university. By recruiters having this accurate information about the students, they will know they need to tailor presentations according to the audience, create specific institutional visits, and establish personalized contact with the student until they have successfully enrolled at their campus. They also need to develop a recruitment strategy based on the students' preferences in college characteristics.

By understanding what African American males are interested in, institutions can tailor the presentations of their schools, market the various academic majors in a different manner, and create websites and publications that are interesting and user friendly, informative and attractive. They can promote special services such as tutoring and cultural organizations for African American males as well as other minority students. Contact with the student must be personal and consistent in the form of a letter, postcard or phone call just to inform them of upcoming events or as a general contact. Institutions

need to use this information to reach those students, whom they normally would not reach, specifically the African American male population.

Information from this study also needs to be disseminated to high school counselors in order to inform them of their students' goals, needs and interests. While conducting the focus groups, many of the students commented on the counselors' not being helpful. The information found in this study would enable the high school counselors to determine what they need to focus on when counseling students on their educational future or career, and to help them understand what their students' needs are. When there are only two to five counselors for approximately every 100 to 200 students in some larger inner city schools and suburban schools, it is difficult for counselors to make personal, quality contact with each individual student. The counselor needs to make a point to involve the parents or guardians when discussing preparation for college. There needs to be a time for counselors to meet with African American males who are interested in continuing their education and helping them determine their academic needs regarding college admission early. By the time the student realizes that he wants to go to college, he may not be prepared and may have waited too late for assistance.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that further research be conducted on several of the following topics. A study is needed to explore types of recruiting strategies that would work well with students of parents with low income and limited education backgrounds.

Another area for potential research is a study of students from rural and inner city environments to determine their financial need and their educational motivation.

Researching a different minority population such as Hispanic or Latino males to determine their motivation and desire to pursue a post-secondary education could yield useful information.

The final implication would be studying first semester African American freshman male students' concerns about continuing their education and to see if their expectations were met with the completion of their first semester at an institution of higher learning.

While conducting the present research, several elements could have been changed to improve the study. One element that could have been done differently would be to stimulate better participation from African American male participants in the focus groups. This could have occurred by having an icebreaker or activity to stimulate conversation. It was difficult to get more than one statement out of the students at times. It was also difficult to get different responses from members of the group. Some of the students made the same responses or just added to other students' responses.

Another element that could have been improved is the manner the questionnaire was given. Instead of providing the students with just the paper questionnaire, I could have provided them with a scantron form and the questionnaire. This would have enabled the data analysis to be less time consuming and more accurate. Other elements to consider are, after collecting data from early in the school year, revisit the students later in the school year to follow-up on whether they had taken their college entrance exams. One last element that would have provided more information would have been to put all of the guidance counselors into a focus group for their responses to the questions that were asked in their personal interviews. It would be uncertain if their responses

would be any different or yield richer data, but having them in a group could stimulate more responses. These are just a few changes that would have improved the study and provided more data on this particular population.

Summary

It is crucial to look at what factors are influencing African American males in pursuing post secondary education. The results of this study clearly showed that the African American male participants are looking for specific characteristics in a school. The study also showed how underprepared some of the students are and reasons why they may not be prepared to enter into an institution of higher learning. Knowing where these students stand academically and motivationally can determine whether they will succeed.

This chapter summarized and discussed the findings from this study by using responses from a questionnaire instrument, focus group questions and guidance counselor interviews and comparing those to findings reviewed in the literature. This chapter also discussed the assumptions that were established to determine the outcomes of this particular population. Ultimately, this chapter discussed the recommendations that would lead to a population being better understood and better prepared to further their academic education. This chapter concluded with recommendations for future research to acquire a more in-depth understanding of African American males as well as other minority populations. They know and understand that an education will aid them, but they may not be prepared for what lies ahead in selecting the right institution to achieve that education.

APPENDIX A
Questionnaire Questions

PLEASE TAKE 5-10 MINUTES TO COMPLETE THIS. THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WILL BE USED IN A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES TO PURSUE EDUCATION. PLEASE ANSWER TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. ALL RESPONSES WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL. *THANK YOU.*

1. What type of college do you think you will probably attend?

- ☐ 4-yr college ☐ JR/community college
☐ Technical/vocational ☐ other: _____

2. Do you plan to visit the college(s) you are interested in before you make your final decision? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. What is your grade point average (GPA)? _____

4. Have you taken the SAT? ☐ Yes ☐ No Score(if known)? _____

5. Have you taken the ACT? ☐ Yes ☐ No Score(if known)? _____

6. What college major are you likely to select? _____

7. How far do you want to travel to attend college?

- ☐ Less than 1 hr away ☐ 1-3 hrs away
☐ 4 or more hrs away ☐ out of state

8. Do you live in a single parent household? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, is your single parent male or female? ☐ Male ☐ female

9. What is the approximate family/ household income (if known)?

- ☐ Under \$10,000
☐ \$10,000 to less than \$20,000
☐ \$20,000 to less than \$35,000
☐ \$35,000 to less than \$50,000
☐ \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
☐ \$75,000 to less than \$100,000

10. Do you have sisters or brothers? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Only child

11. If yes how many? #of Brothers _____ # of Sisters _____

12. If you have older sisters or brothers, did they attend college?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

13. What school did your brother(s) or sister(s) attend? _____

14. What is your age? _____

15. What is the highest level of your mother and/or father's education? (check one)

Mother's education level

Father's education level

☐ Elementary

☐ Elementary

☐ Some high school

☐ Some high school

☐ High school graduate

☐ High school graduate

☐ Some college

☐ Some college

☐ college graduate

☐ college graduate

☐ Other _____

☐ Other _____

16. What High school do you attend? _____

17. What type of classes are you taking? (check all that apply)

☐ Honors classes

☐ AP classes (Advanced Placement)

☐ TAAS Prep classes

☐ Other: _____

18. What activities did you participate in at school? (check all that apply)

☐ Band

☐ Sports

☐ Clubs

☐ Other _____

19. Have you ever thought of joining the military? ☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, which one:

☐ Army

☐ Navy

☐ Airforce

☐ Marines

20. Rank the importance of each characteristic in your enrollment decision by placing the number 1-20, (1- most important and 20-least important).

___ Financial aid/ scholarship offer

___ Total cost

___ Living Arrangements

___ Size of school

___ Program in major

___ Student/faculty ratio

___ HS counselor preference

___ Extracurricular activities

___ Surroundings (city/town)

___ Region of country

___ Campus clubs or organizations

___ Faculty of same ethnic background

___ Social Activities

___ Academic reputation

___ College faculty

___ Attractive campus

___ Reputation

___ Athletic programs

___ Ethnic makeup of student body

___ Friends attending

APPENDIX B
Focus Group Questions

1. As you decide which college to attend, you may seek the advice of others. Name one whose advice is important to you and why?
2. How would you describe the role your parent(s) played or are playing in your college choice process?
3. How would you describe the role your high school guidance counselor played or is playing in your college choice process?
4. What is your primary source of information about colleges and universities?
5. As you think about attending college, what are some of your biggest fears?
6. What may discourage you from coming to college?
7. What are 2 life goals that you would like to accomplish?
8. Name one of the best reasons why you decided to attend college.
9. What knowledge do you expect to gain from college?
10. How do you get along with other students? Teachers?
11. Describe what you liked most/least about your school.

APPENDIX C
Student Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for participating in completing the questionnaire on _____, 1999. As described on the questionnaire, the information you provided will be used in a study to determine the factors that influence African American males to pursue post secondary education. Your participation with this study is appreciated and being an African American male, your responses are valuable.

Thank you again for your time and support to this study.

Sincerely,

Beverly Woodson
Masters Candidate
Southwest Texas State University

Student Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for participating in completing the questionnaire on _____, 1999. As described on the questionnaire, the information you provided will be used in a study to determine the factors that influence African American males to pursue post secondary education. Your participation with this study is appreciated and being an African American male, your responses are valuable.

The next step in this process is for everyone to meet as a group. I am inviting you to be a part of focus group of approximately 10-12 African American males from select high schools in the Dallas and Houston area. The focus group will offer an opportunity to acquire more in-depth information. The session will be held on a Saturday and will last approximately 50 minutes to an hour. If you would like to be a participant, please complete the consent form that is enclosed and return it signed and dated.

Thank you again for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Beverly Woodson
Masters Candidate
Southwest Texas State University

Southwest Texas State University
Consent Form

This consent form is for the participation in the study, The Factors That Influence African American Males to Pursue Post-Secondary Education. Please complete and return to the researcher.

I _____, agree to participate in the study listed above. I agree that I will attend the focus group session at the designated time and location stated by the researcher. I hereby state that I am participating in this study by my own will and not forcefully. I understand that the focus group will be audiotaped and all identities will be confidential.

I have understood the above statements and agree to all.

Signature of Participant

Date

If the participant is under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must read the above statement and sign the form along with the participant.

Signature of Participant

Date

Thank you again for your participation and support. If there are any questions or concerns, I can be reached at _____.

APPENDIX D
Counselor Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for allowing me to interview you on the basis of the African American Males: The Factors That Influence Them to Pursue Post Secondary Education study. As mentioned prior to the interview, this study is to determine some of the factors that influence this population to attend college.

As a counselor, you work closely with all students of all ethnicities. Your role is an important one. As a guidance counselor, you are one of the keys to a student's success in searching and applying for a college. Your responses are appreciated and are valuable to this study.

Thank you again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Beverly Woodson
Masters Candidate
Southwest Texas State University

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VITA

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