2004

The Perceived Factors That Influence College Choice Among Low And Middle-Income African American High School Seniors: A Comparison Between A Predominately White And A Predominately Black High School

Kinna F. Perry
Seton Hall University

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THE PERCEIVED FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COLLEGE CHOICE AMONG LOW AND MIDDLE-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN A PREDOMINATELY WHITE AND A PREDOMINATELY BLACK HIGH SCHOOL

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Seton Hall University
2004
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CHAPTER 1

The Research Problem

In search of the American dream each fall thousands of students flood American colleges and universities. The decisions high school students make about college will have a lasting impact on their lives. A college education is one of our county’s most significant human capital investments. A college education in America typically leads to increased salaries, longer working lives, greater career mobility, and a greater quality of life (Becker, 1992). The education a person obtains is not only beneficial to them as an individual, but to their families, their children, their community, and society. College educated persons are more likely to have children who go on to college, they tend to be healthier and have healthier families, be more philanthropic, and are more likely to be involved in some form of service to their communities (Paulsen, 1998).

The importance of attending college and its accessibility to the country’s citizens should be communicated to all high school students nationally. Choosing the right college is also important. The college choice decision is often the first decision of major consequence in the students’ lives. The outcome of this decision will affect the decision-maker, their families, their communities, and the nation. The choice of institution also has a tremendous impact on whether or not a student will persist to the completion of their bachelor’s degree. It is important for students to choose an
institution that will provide them with the opportunity to grow academically and socially. High school students in the United States choose from a myriad of colleges and universities of various types and in various regions of the country. Choosing the “right” institution is not just a matter of preference, but it is imperative to a student’s success in college and degree attainment. There are many factors that can influence the choice of the “right” institution. High school seniors must contend with the expectations of their parents and family, the pressure of their peers, the influence of teachers, and the advice of guidance counselors to weigh in on the decision of which institution is the “right” institution (Ray, 1992).

Like many other aspects of American society race and socioeconomic status plays a large role in how individuals experience every day life (McDonough, 1997), and choosing a college is no exception. Historically African Americans had very few opportunities to obtain a college education. Very few Blacks were able to attend college prior to the mid 1800s. During this time several benevolent societies and religious groups began to establish colleges specifically for educating Blacks. They were limited to these colleges, which were mostly in the south, because segregation barriers made it nearly impossible to attend Predominately White Institutions (Gurin & Epps, 1975). By 1954, 90% of African Americans with bachelor degrees were educated at a Historically Black College and University (Kim, 2002).

By 1999, the United States Department of Labor estimated that of the 453,000 African American students who completed high school only 268,000 (59%) were enrolled in college in October 2000. African American high school students made up 14.7% and 13.0% of students who were enrolled in college of 1999 and 2000.
respectively (U.S. Department of Labor, 2001). In New Jersey the number of African American students attending community colleges in 1998 was approximately 16,600, and of the 335,930 students enrolled in New Jersey’s colleges and universities 11.6% were African American (NJ Commission on Higher Education, 2001), compared to 11.1% nationally (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). All of which are few in comparison to the numbers of White students that enter higher education each year.

The college choice process for African American high school students has changed considerably over the past 50 years. African American high school seniors have the opportunity to choose among the 103 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001), or among the hundreds of Predominately White Institutions throughout the country. Although the choices are abundant, for many African American high school seniors the college choice decision process is not easy especially when they have few or no resources within their families or communities to help guide them through the process. For those students who are the first in the families to consider going to college, obtaining information about college can be extremely difficult, and they often rely heavily upon counselors, teachers, and others in their communities who attended college for information, encouragement, and guidance.

African American students from more middle-class and affluent communities are expected to attend college. Their college choice process is likely to be more fluid and less difficult. They can rely on parents, siblings, counselors, peers, and other members of the community for information about college. They have the means to obtain information on their own through college websites and through campus visits.
Most importantly, they are strongly encouraged by their families, friends, teachers, and counselors to obtain a college education.

The Problem Statement

Family, community, culture, race, and socioeconomics all shape student expectations about college and college choice decisions (McDonough et al., 1997). For many African American students the college choice decision is not always easy especially when most of the people around them have not attended college. For these students obtaining information about college and navigating the college choice process is an arduous task to undergo on their own.

African American students who attend schools where the majority of students and their families tend to have middle class values may have different expectations placed on them by their families, peers, teachers, and counselors. African American student experiences throughout the college choice process can vary depending on numerous factors like their family’s socioeconomic status, their academic ability, and the high school in which they attend.

The purpose of this study is to explore and compare how the various factors can affect the college choice process of low and middle income African American high school seniors from two towns in Central New Jersey. The factors that this study will focus on are family background (i.e. socioeconomic status, race, education level etc.), peers, guidance counselors, teachers, and institutional characteristics. All of these factors play a role in influencing the student’s decisions (Velez, 1985).
Background Information on the Districts

Little City is the southern most municipality in Union County. It is located approximately 20 minutes southwest of Newark, New Jersey and is surrounded by suburban communities. It is surrounded by suburban townships and boroughs. Little City is the only one of the aforementioned municipalities that is a city. The small urban community has many of the problems larger urban communities like Newark, Jersey City, and Paterson, but on a much smaller scale.

The population of Little City is constantly changing. Over the last few years the Hispanic population has steadily increased. Each year more Central and South Americans are migrating to the area (The New Jersey Data Book, 2002). The total enrollment of the school district in 2000-2001 academic year was 7,444 students, and there were 1,749 students enrolled at Little City High School. According to the State School Guide produced by QED the relative wealth indicator, defined as the percentage of school aged children within the school district boundaries that have a family income greater than that defined as poverty-level by the U.S. Department of Education is 47% in Little City (QED, 2002).

Large Township has a more diverse citizenry than Little City. There are significantly more Asians and Whites living in the township. Large Township is located approximately 30 minutes southwest of Newark, New Jersey, and is one of the larger townships in Middlesex County. Large Township’s bordering neighbors consist of two small urban cities with large populations of immigrants and working poor families and two comparably sized suburban townships and two small boroughs. The surrounding suburban municipalities are comparable middle-class communities.
The total enrollment in the district in the 2000-2001 academic year was 6,740, and there were 1,968 students enrolled in Large Township High School. The relative wealth indicator as defined above is 89% in Large Township (QED, 2002).

The tables that are presented below from the New Jersey Department of Education, 2001-2001 New Jersey State School Guide and U.S Census data from the 2002 New Jersey Municipal Book provide background information on the two school districts in this study.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipal Demographics</th>
<th>Population Data</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47,829</td>
<td>50,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10,258 (21%)</td>
<td>24,642 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29,550 (62%)</td>
<td>10,254 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>447 (1%)</td>
<td>12,519 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12,033 (25%)</td>
<td>4,002 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Large Township has a larger population and has more racial diversity. Although Whites make up a greater proportion, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians still make up more than half of the total population of the Township (The New Jersey Municipal Data Book, 2002).
Table 2

School District Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Data</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Total District Enrollment</td>
<td>7,444</td>
<td>6,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Wealth Indicator</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Per Pupil</td>
<td>$9,633</td>
<td>$8,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Per Teacher</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: * QED 2001-2002; The Municipal Data Book, 2002

The Little City Public School district is the larger of the two districts. Large Township has 10 public schools and Little City has 14 (QED, 2001). Although Little City has a slightly smaller pupil teacher ratio the problems of an urban district are apparent in the relative wealth of the families and the cost per pupil. Over 50% of Little City’s school-age children live under the poverty level, while in Large Township only 11% of the school-age children live under the poverty level.

Table 3

School District Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Information</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: QED 2001-2002
The demographics of the schools in both towns are not totally reflective of the population of the city or township. In the charts above the African American and White populations makes up 62% and 21% respectively of the city's population (The Municipal Data Book, 2002), but those numbers aren't reflected in the student population. The same for Large Township, White and African American students make up 40% and 30% of the student population respectively (QED, 2001) but comprise 49% and 20% respectively (The Municipal Data Book, 2002) of the township's population.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Related Data</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Avg. SAT Verbal Score</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Avg. SAT Math Score</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to Attend 4 year college/university</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to Attend 2 year college</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other College</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enroll in any post secondary programs</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As noted in the table above, the students in Large Township outperform their counterparts in Little City on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Large Township students on average scored 64 points higher on the verbal portion and 113 points higher on the
math portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (The New Jersey Municipal Data book, 2002). However, they only attended four year and two year institutions at a slightly higher rate, 8% and 2% respectively, than their counterparts in Little City (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002). Although more Large Township families as a whole are more affluent and educated, there are some factors that contribute to the large numbers of students in Little City that enroll in a college or university immediately after high school. The first could be that for a large number of working poor families that a college education is essential to their child’s success. Second, the community networks within the city may also have a role in the numbers of young people seeking a college education. There are a number of churches and community groups that strongly encourage youth to attend college. One such organization in Little City is the New Horizons College Club where students can obtain SAT fee waivers, college application fee waivers, and receive assistance completing college admissions and scholarship applications.

Research Question

A student’s college choice alternatives can be influenced by where they attend school, the community the school is located in, and their social networks. The college choice behaviors are also influenced by the people they are surrounded with both at home and in school (Bourdieu, 1977). If this is so, are the factors that influence institutional choice which are perceived by low and middle-income African American high school seniors who live and attend school in a predominately African American community versus a predominately White community similar or different?
Subsidiary Questions

Students do not make their decisions about college attendance in a vacuum. These decisions are typically made based on social, cultural, and organizational contexts in which the students are situated (McDonough et al., 1997). It then becomes crucial to pose the following questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in how teachers influence institutional choice among African American students in predominately White and African American high schools?

2. What are the similarities and differences in how guidance counselors influence institutional choice among African American students attending schools in predominately African American or White communities?

3. What are the similarities and differences in how peers influence institutional choice among African American low and middle-income students in predominately African American or White high schools?

4. How does family characteristics (i.e. parent’s education level, income, birth order etc.) influence institutional choice among low and middle-income African American high school students?

5. What institutional characteristics do low and middle income African American students perceive have the greatest influence on their college choice decision, and is there a difference between the perceptions between students attending predominately White or African American high schools?
Null Hypothesis: The population of the high school (predominately black or white) has no influence on the type of institution low and middle-income African American high school students choose to attend.

Definition of Terms

College Choice Set: A group of colleges and universities in which high school seniors choose to seek admission and includes the institution that the student will matriculate.

HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Low-income: Low-income is described by the U.S. Department of Education from $8,600.00 for a family of one to $30,420.00 for a family of eight.

Middle-income: The Federal government considers those families with a yearly income between $40,000 and $100,000.00 as middle-income.

Post Secondary Institution: An educational institution that provides additional opportunities to obtain an education for high school graduates.

Predominately Black or African American high school: A high school is a high school in which students who are considered Black/African American by the U.S. Census Bureau make up a majority of the student population.

PWI: Predominately White Institution.

Predominately White high school: high school is a high school in which students that are considered White by the U.S. Census Bureau make up the majority of the student population.
Relative Wealth Indicator: the percentage of school aged children within the school district boundaries that have a family income greater than that defined as poverty-level by the U.S. Department of Education.

Significance of Study

There have been several studies conducted by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), McDonough and Antonio (1996) on what factors influence student college choice decisions, and how family, socioeconomic status, race, and other factors influence their decisions. There have also been studies conducted by Freeman and Thomas (2000) on the college choice process of African American high school students. The goal of this study is to identify and compare similarities and differences in the college choice process among low and middle income African American high school seniors who live in and attend school in either a predominately African American or White community. The results of the study can be beneficial to high school administrators and guidance counselors so that they can better assist African American and low-income students and their families in the college choice process, and make them more aware of the needs of the students. Second, the information can assist college and university admissions personnel in recruiting and preparing marketing materials for students in this group. This information can also be beneficial to government policy makers to help develop policies that can affect financial aid, scholarship programs, and other special programs (e.g., TRIO, EOF, and Minority Access Programs).
Delimitations of Study

1. The small sample population of students used for this study.

2. The sample population was restricted to students from Large Township and Little City High Schools that attended New Horizon’s college club.

3. The study only used two school districts and two school districts within the same state.

4. Although the majority of Large Township students are White, the overall student body is very diverse.

5. The respondents self reported their family’s financial information, SAT scores, and cumulative grade point averages.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

In search of the American Dream, the decisions that African American students make about college will have a lasting impact on their lives. The attainment of a bachelor’s degree typically leads to increased salaries, longer working lives, greater career mobility, and a greater quality of life (Paulsen, 1998). A college education is a great investment in human capital. African American students today have many choices of institutions they can attend. Hundreds of thousands of these students chose and still choose to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The college a student attends has a significant influence on their educational attainment. Past research indicates that the college a student attends influences their chances of completing their bachelor’s degree (Ray, 1992). It has also indicated that in the search and choice phases a number of factors have been identified as being consistently influential. These factors include parents, institutional size, location, academic programs, prestige and selectivity, as well as their peers, guidance counselors, friends, and the availability of financial aid (Velez, 1985). This literature review will explore some of the factors that can influence the college decision-making process of African American students.
Historical Perspective

Obtaining an education for African Americans in the United States has been a continuous struggle for the last 155 years. Prior to the Civil War, educating Blacks was not only seen as a waste of time and resources but, it was illegal. Very few Blacks at the time were able to read, write, do arithmetic, none the less read or speak Latin or Greek which was an admissions requirement at many of the country’s colleges during this period (Rudolph, 1990). There were only about 28 young men, of acknowledged African descent, who completed their bachelor’s degrees from American colleges prior to 1860. Princeton admitted one Black student in 1763; he completed a regular course of academic studies, but was not listed as a graduate. The first two Black gentlemen to complete their degrees did so in 1826 at Bowdoin and Amherst Colleges. Neither of these institutions graduated additional Blacks prior to the Civil War. Harvard did not graduate its first Black student until 1870, two hundred and thirty four years after its founding (Bowles & DeCosta, 1971). During this period free Blacks were only able to choose from a handful of institutions that included Oberlin College of Ohio, Berea College in Kentucky, and a few other Midwestern institutions. By the mid 1850s two Negro colleges were founded that awarded bachelor degrees, Lincoln College in 1854, and Wilberforce College in 1856. During the late 1800’s several colleges specifically for Blacks were founded by religious and philanthropic organizations. These organizations helped to lay the groundwork for the public higher education system for Blacks throughout the South (Allen & Jewell, 2002). They reported that with the founding of the Morrill Act Land Grant Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890 the majority public HBCU’s were
founded and many more White colleges began opening their doors to Blacks. As the opportunities for Blacks to obtain a college education increased, and so did their choices. HBCU’s were primarily responsible for the collegiate educational opportunities that existed for Blacks, especially in the South. Civil Rights Legislation and orders by the Supreme Court to desegregate continued to increase their choices and opportunities to obtain a college degree (Rudolph, 1990). By the 1990s there were more African American students that chose to enroll in Predominately White Institutions than Historically Black Institutions. The experiences of African American high school students that engaged in the college choice process continues to be very different and often times very challenging than those of their White counterparts.

There continues to be a general perception among mainstream America that many African American students are academically less prepared and are not capable of college level work. They along with women and low-income students are especially likely to attend less selective colleges and universities, even if they are high academic achievers (Hearn, 1990). Many often have the preconceived notion that those African American students who have chosen to attend HBCU’s are less well prepared academically and have fewer options. Until the late 1970s most African American students chose to attend HBCU’s. Until that time for many African Americans these institutions were their only choice. By 1980, only 20% of African American college students were attending HBCU’s (Wilson, 1994). Many African American students who chose to attend PWI’s did so for financial assistance and attended HBCU’s for low tuition (Astin & Cross, 1981). In a study during the late
1980s by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), the findings supported the importance of financial aid for African American students.

Like today, many of these students were first generation college students. In 1975, approximately 60% of African American students who attended HBCU's and 45% of African American students who attended PWI's had fathers that had not graduated from high school. One-third of African Americans at HBCU's and one half of those at PWI's held scholarships or grants that covered all or most of their college expenses. The availability of financial aid very likely influenced the college African American students chose to attend. These financial considerations encouraged students to stay close to home. Approximately 90% of students attending HBCU's in the south were southerners (Freeman & Thomas, 2002).

Although more African American students are attending PWI's, their enrollments at HBCU's are once again increasing. Students are once again choosing to attend HBCU's because of their interest in embracing the tradition and the history of these institutions (Freeman, 1999). They are also choosing HBCU's because of negative experiences at PWI's; they often suffer lower achievement and higher attrition than their White counterparts. African American students at HBCU's demonstrate higher levels of academic involvements than African American at PWI's. Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) reported that African American students at HBCU’s are not only more engaged academically, but are more satisfied overall. The researchers noted that they tend to be happier with the racial diversity of the faculty and student population, the sense of community on campus, leadership opportunities, and their interactions with other students. On the other hand, African American
students that have chosen to attend PWI's tend to experience higher intellectual gains and have a more positive self-image, stronger racial pride, and higher aspirations (Freeman & Thomas, 2002).

Historical studies have implied that financial aid likely influences student selection of higher education institutions. Significant numbers of students at both HBCU's and PWI's held scholarships and/or grants that covered all or most of their college expenses. The financial constraints on students also encouraged them to remain close to home. This alone can have a significant influence on the type of institution a student chooses (Freeman & Thomas, 2002).

The profiles of current students who attend HBCU's vary considerably but they still have some common characteristics with students who chose to attend HBCU's in the 1970s. A recent study by Freeman (1999) conducted on 21 African American students found that differences between the background characteristics of students choosing HBCU's versus PWI's was not distinguishable. Only five of the 21 students had parents who were college graduates. Two of those five students chose to attend HBCU's. They did not choose to attend HBCU's because their choices were limited by grades and/or test scores, nor their socioeconomic background. Regardless of the type of institution they chose, all 21 students indicated that financial aid was one of the most important characteristics. The characteristics of African American high school students choosing to attend HBCU's have remained fairly consistent over time. The findings also indicate that HBCU's are actually attracting more high achieving African American students.
Some other historical influences on college choice for African American students are the backgrounds of student population at the high school in which they attend. The percentage of White students, percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged, the student/teacher ratio, and the student/counselor ratio can all have negative effects on African American student’s decisions to attend college or which college to attend (Freeman, 1999). The more an African American student’s high school is populated by White students, the less likely they are to receive the support and encouragement they need to achieve their academic goals of attending and completing college (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). Even African Americans from affluent communities with greater academic achievement than other African Americans in the state still do not perform as well as their White peers in the same communities (Ogbu, 2003). With all of these things in mind many African American seniors will likely seek out those institutions where they feel safe, where there is a sense of community and family, and where they may feel there are students and faculty that could relate to and can identify with their values and beliefs (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). This could account for why HBCU’s have enrolled over 25% of African American undergraduate students and awarded over 30% of bachelor degrees to African Americans in the United States (Carter & Wilson, 1997).

Theoretical Frameworks

Before diving into the factors that can influence the decision of what institutions students choose to enroll, in there needs to be a discussion about the college decision making process. There has been a considerable amount of research
on the college choice process. The most often cited model of college choice appears to be the Hosler and Gallagher model (1987). This three-phase model by Hosler and Gallagher looks specifically at how middle and high school students progress through the college choice process.

The first stage of the process is the predisposition phase. This phase typically occurs in grades seven to nine. The factors of this phase are parental involvement and support, parents' savings for college, socioeconomic status, parental collegiate experiences, student academic ability, and the information the family has about college (Nora & Cabrera, 1992).

In phase two, the search phase of the process, students begin to seek information on colleges and universities. The search phase tends to occur in grades ten through twelve. The factors of student ability, parental involvement and support, education, career, occupation aspirations, and socioeconomic status remain important. High school academic resources become more important during this stage of the process. Two new factors introduced during this stage of the process is the prominence and quality of the potential institutions in which they are interested in applying to, and their peers. During this phase peers become more influential than parents. The outcomes at this stage include the tentative listing of institutions, the narrowing of the list, and the securing of information on institutions on their list (Hosler & Gallagher, 1987, Nora & Cabrera, 1992).

The choice phase of the process begins during the student's junior year of high school. All of the factors mentioned previously continue to have influence on the student's decision including some new factors. These new factors include institutional
attributes (i.e. campus life, majors, availability, distance etc.), and the perceived ability to pay (i.e. resources and costs) (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Nora & Cabrera, 1992).

A considerable amount of research has been based on Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper’s work in Indiana (1999) and Patricia McDonough’s (1997) works on college choice. A considerable amount of their research works are based on the College Choice Process Model by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper (1999) conducted a study in the state of Indiana between 1986 and 1994. The researchers used a sample of 56 students in a series of interviews with 10th through 12th graders. The research produced results on the impact of family income, parent’s education, and some other background characteristics.

Some of Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper’s (1999) findings can be divided into the stages of the College Choice Process Model. In the predisposition stage of the model, they found that most high school students develop stable post secondary plans by the time they complete the ninth grade. In their study, 60% of the students in the sample followed through with the plans they expressed in the ninth grade. Nearly 70% of the students followed through with the post secondary plans that they made in the tenth grade. They also found that parents play a key role in shaping the early post secondary plans of the high school students in the study.

In the second phase of the process, the findings indicated that as early as the tenth grade many students could name one or more colleges that they were considering attending after completing high school. Their parents played a key role in identifying these institutions. The sophomore students became more certain about the
particular characteristics of colleges and universities that were important to them. The characteristics that were mentioned were the institutions size, costs, and academic selectivity. The tenth graders in this study were actively engaged in the search stage of the college decision-making process. The 11th graders were engaged in gathering information on various colleges and universities. At this stage, both juniors and seniors begin to seek information from persons other than family, friends, and peers. Students begin to turn to teachers, guidance counselors and the colleges and university admissions personnel to obtain information. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) also found that students’ consideration sets tend to include schools with similar tuition costs or academic selectivity had high grade point averages and talked frequently with peers, teachers, counselors, and admissions counselors.

In stage three of the process, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) found that admissions selectivity and costs of colleges in the students’ consideration sets had high degrees of consistency from the tenth and eleventh grades. It was interesting to note that the students were most certain about what institutional characteristics that were important to them in their sophomore and senior years of high school. The 11th graders in the study had the largest consideration sets, and the 10th and 12th graders had the smallest consideration sets (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999).

Although the study participants already had specific colleges and universities in mind in their sophomore year they were not actively gathering information or making any serious plans. During their junior year, the students became more certain about plans and careers. As they progressed to their senior year they narrowed the
size of their considerations sets, and became more certain about what institution
characteristics are most important to them (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999).

The high ability students, however, were slightly different. As the other
juniors were becoming more certain about plans for college and careers the high
ability students became more uncertain. These students also continued to have large
consideration sets. They were also less certain about what characteristics they were
looking for in a college or university. Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper (1999) also found
that students whose consideration sets included schools with similar tuition costs or
academic selectivity had high grade point averages and talked frequently with peers,
teachers, counselors, alumni, and less with parents about college. These students were
more involved in searching for information and institutions. Other researchers have
noted that high ability students and students with better academic preparation tend to
prefer the private and selective colleges and universities (Hu & Hossler, 1998).

In the third stage of the process the researchers also made note of the financial
and actualization factors. The findings indicated that high school students are not
generally concerned about tuition costs or financial aid until their senior year. They
indicated that there are many conflicting studies on how financial aid influences
student enrollment decisions. The findings also indicate that the most important factor
in whether students went to college was strong support and encouragement from
parents. The family’s social and economic status was not a key determinant (Hossler,
Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999).

There are other important findings of the Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper (1999)
study that do not necessarily fit within the three stages of the model framework.
These findings indicate that most high school seniors conduct serious evaluations of the schools they are considering between October and April, and about 50% complete admissions applications between early November and early January. Women tend to complete and submit their applications earlier than men. The college direct marketing materials and recruitment activities had an effect on the choice stage, although its extent was difficult to measure. Approximately 60% of the participants reported it having some influence. Many students also reported that family, school, and community-based efforts to organize visits to colleges helped students learn more about the institutions they were considering.

The results also indicate that African American students in the sample thought more about their post-secondary plans than White students. However, turning thoughts into actions seem to be more problematic for many African American students. A study by Hurtado, Kurotsuchi, Briggs and Rhee (1997) in the late 1990’s, indicate the opposite when it is time for students to apply to college.

The Hurtado, Kurotsuchi, Briggs & Rhee (1997) study examined national data obtained from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) Longitudinal Study. The findings indicated that proportionately fewer African American students than White students actually matriculated in a post-secondary educational institution. The analysis found that there were significant group differences in preparation behaviors, application behaviors, and attendance at first choice institutions among students from various racial and ethnic groups. The study found that over 40% of African American students may delay or forego their opportunity to attend college. Many had not submitted college
applications prior to the end of the 12th grade, and of those students that did apply. 17% submitted one application. Only 5% of African American students applied to five or more colleges, over 50% less than their Asian counterparts. Analysis of low-income students indicated that over 52% did not apply to college by the end of their senior year of high school. In general, low-income students are likely to apply to fewer colleges than students with a family income of $50,000.00 or more. The researchers also suggested that college choice models may be based on the behaviors of students from higher socioeconomic categories, and can select from two or more colleges and universities (Hurtado, Kurotsuchi, Briggs & Rhee, 1997). Low-income students tend to be more fixated on costs and the availability of financial aid rather than which institutions they will attend (Berkner & Chavez, 1997).

The findings also support that student involvement in student athletics, student government, clubs, and other groups are minimally significant. The degree of student involvement in high school activities may be an indicator of overall motivation and self-confidence among high school students (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999). In the early stages of the study family income was not a good predictor. As students realize their aspirations to continue on to college parental income played a more significant role. In the early stages on the process parental encouragement and support and academic success were more important. A student’s ethnicity and gender was found to have little or no effect on educational aspirations, and the student’s grade point average was the best predictor of post-secondary aspirations.

McDonough’s (1997) work examined ways in which social class and high school guidance operations can shape a high school student’s perceptions of their
opportunities for a college education. Her work took into consideration two very important theories, the Weberian and Bourdieu theories. These works have had a tremendous influence on many of her research studies on college choice behaviors of high school students.

The Weberian Theory of status groups and the intergenerational status transmission has considerable influence on organizational context and status culture background on individual decision making. The theory can provide insight on the differences in attainment rates among the various socioeconomic status groups, while the organization theories can shed some light on how and why a particular environment (e.g., school environment or context) can influence an individual’s behavior (Weber, 1978).

The Bourdieu Theory of Cultural Capital also plays a role in an individual’s decision making behaviors. Bourdieu (1977) gives an explanation as to why middle and upper class families highly value a college education and advanced degrees. They view education as a means of ensuring and continuing their family’s economic security, in addition to whatever money and/or financial assets can be passed along to their children.

Bourdieu (1977) describes cultural capital as a symbolic good. It is most useful when it is transformed by its possessors into economic capital. All economic classes possess their own forms of cultural capital, however, the most socially and economically valued forms are enjoyed by middle and upper class families.

This form of capital is the knowledge that elite families value. This value is typically learned in the home, but not in school. It also has no intrinsic value. The
utility comes in using, manipulating, and investing it for what is seen as socially valued and resources that are difficult to secure (Bourdieu, 1977). Included in this theory is the concept of habitus. It is system of deeply internalized outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about society that an individual obtains from their immediate environment. It is a set of common subjective perceptions held by members of the same group, or socioeconomic class. Habitus shapes an individual’s expectation “attitudes and aspirations”. This may provide some explanation as to why students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and/or different school environments make different choices as to which colleges and universities are most appropriate and acceptable for them. A wealthy student from a private high school in an affluent suburban New Jersey community may perceive Columbia University as a more appropriate choice than a state university versus a student from an urban public high school who may perceive that Columbia University is out of their reach and a state university is the more appropriate institution for them. These individuals are also aided in their decision making processes by observing those around them and by paying close attention to what is considered good and appropriate across a variety of dimensions. Hence, students who attend different schools, are from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and are of different races may have different perceptions of what colleges are suitable, what academic majors may be appropriate, and what career paths will be acceptable to their families and communities.

Social capital is the norms and networks that enable collective action. This particular form of capital, also known as social cohesion, is critical to poverty alleviation and sustainable human economic development. The World Bank describes
social capital as the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of society’s social interactions, and it is the adhesive that holds them together. Social capital has an effect on community’s productivity and well being. Social capital includes families, communities, government, and corporate enterprises. Economic and social development thrives when all of these sectors create forums through which they can identify and pursue common goals (World Bank, 2004).

Social capital’s role in the college choice process is how the various groups (family, community, government etc.) come together to assist the young people within the society by providing resources and information about colleges. An example of this would be community organizations that sponsor college tours, churches that provide college preparation workshops, and the various test preparation service companies that provide test preparation courses to students at little or no cost.

Both the Weber and Bourdieu theories provide insight into the theories surrounding status attainment. Status attainment often refers to economic position within society as well as the ability to be mobile and advance to greater positions. Status attainment is often the result of the individual’s background, personal characteristics and levels of achievement. One’s socioeconomic background often affects educational attainment and occupational achievement. Family background and resources are often used to predict a student’s or individual’s ability, aspirations, and occupational attainment (Blau and Duncan, 1967). This is why parents and those persons with close relationships (i.e. extended family members, clergy, neighbors, teachers etc.) to children have an impact on their educational and occupational aspirations. These influential adults socialize children to understand the importance of
obtaining a college degree and continuing on with some form of post baccalaureate education (Becker, 1981). The mobility of African Americans is much lower than that of whites. This may be attributed to the socioeconomic differentials which include wages and earnings. The socioeconomic class differential between Whites and African Americans and Latinos place a tremendous hindrance on their overall attainment, and they are at an economic disadvantage due to their race. This disadvantage often leads to an “unlevel” playing field in their elementary and high school classroom, in the college classroom, and possibly later on when they immersed in the college choice process (Mizell, 2004).

There were three propositions that guided McDonough’s and colleagues (1997) study, they are (a) a student’s cultural capital will affect the level and quality of the college education that student’s intend to acquire; (b) a student’s choice of college will make sense in the context of that student’s habitus; and (c) through a rationalization process the student sets limits on the number of alternatives that are actually considered.

This extends across theoretical notions of habitus and presented evidence that it exists not only within families and communities, but in organizational contexts as well. Organizational contexts and status cultures exist in high schools and have an impact on where seniors choose to attend college. High schools act as a mediator of a collective social consciousness in regards to the process and outcomes of social choice (McDonough et al., 1997).

The alternatives that students consider are influenced by their physical location, social networks, and their environmental stimuli or habitus. The students
become aware of their choices by scanning their environment. Their choices are often limited by geography and their social contacts. High school seniors' frame of reference and perceptions are often conditioned by the high school organizational context for college choice (McDonough et al., 1997). This supports the notion that students from different high schools in the same town or different towns, where the socioeconomic background and racial composition of the student body will have different ideas of what they think, is an appropriate or acceptable college choice set.

McDonough and colleagues 1997 study did not focus on counselor effectiveness, or biases, but on how each school's structural arrangement affected the college choice advisement process. The structuring of college guidance follows class based patterns, and it exhibits similarities across high schools with similar class backgrounds. Each school serves as the mediator of the collective social consciousness of the community that it serves. The school's guidance counselors have a direct impact on students and they play a crucial role in constructing a school's expectations and formal planning for college. This is done through the counselor's perceptions of what parents and the communities' expectations are for appropriate college destinations combined with their own knowledge and expertise (McDonough et al., 1997). Another important aspect in how organizational structure plays a role is how students are tracked in a districts' educational system. The expectations and formal planning for a child's future often begins prior to enrolling in high school. The tracking or leveling of students may begin during grades four and five (Ogbu, 2003). Here is where schools begin to categorize students according to their academic ability and those students that are viewed by their teachers, counselors, and
year institutions at lower rates than those seniors whose parents did have some college (76% versus 81%), or were from middle income families (83% and 82%, respectively) provided they took the appropriate entrance exams and submitted applications. The more education a student’s parents have the more likely they will enroll in a four-year college or university.

Parental educational level has a tremendous affect on the selection process. The parents’ education level has a greater affect than race and gender (Litten, 1982). Students whose parents are highly educated rely on them heavily for information, whereas students with less educated parents are more likely to rely on teachers, counselors, employers, and others for information about college (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Hu & Hossler (2000) found that the mother’s education, and more specifically her post graduate education, can have a significant impact on a student’s preference to attend a public or private institution.

A study conducted by Michael Smith (2001), which examined ways in which low-income African American parents assisted their children with the decision making process, explored ways in which they were involved and what barriers prevented them from being involved. His findings indicated that the parents were not extremely concerned about the cost of attendance, but the cost of applying to college. The parents’ limited financial resources inhibited their children from applying to several institutions, as well and taking the admissions exams multiple times. Smith also found that the families that participated in his study relied heavily on school personnel for information and resources, consistent with McDonough 1997 study. Parental involvement in the school affairs such as parent/teacher conferences,
education and advanced degrees as a means of ensuring the continuance of their family’s future economic security, in addition to the money and financial assets that can be passed along to their children (Bourdieu, 1997). Middle class and upper middle class families tend to start very early to give their children messages about and encourage them to attend college, and the importance of a college education (Olszewski-Kubilius & Scott, 1992).

Students from middle and upper middle class families are expected by parents, extended family, and those in their communities to attend college and are offered assistance from all of these sources (Exum, 1979). This is not a reality for many African American families, and a very new concept for those in the middle and upper middle income brackets. The parents of these families may be first generation college students themselves, and the idea of promoting college attendance and the pursuance of advanced professional degrees for their children are relatively new. For those students whose parents have not attended college this process will be quite different.

Berkner and Chavez (1997) in their study indicated that 65% of high school students whose parents did not attend college enrolled in a four-year college or university within two years of completing their high school diploma, 73% of those students whose parents had some college enrolled in a four-year institution, and 87% of those whose parents have a bachelor’s degree enrolled in a four-year college or university within two years of completing high school. The rates for enrolling in four-year institution by income are somewhat similar. Those college qualified seniors from low-income families where their parents did not attend college tend to enroll in four-
thinking about the decision making process. The institution's culture plays an important role in that it represents the articulated and formalized values of the institution. There is a need to make students and their families aware of the necessary courses needed for college admissions, the college prep curriculum and all it entails, and how students are enrolled in these courses.

Familial Influence

The role of the family is the most influential in student college choice decisions. Parents and parental expectations have the strongest influence upon a child's educational goals. In White families the educational background of the father plays an important role in the decision to attend college, the role of the mother in African American families plays a crucial role in the student's decision to attend college. This is typically because many African Americans are first generation college students; the ways in which African American families impart decision making about higher education is through the significant role the mother plays, through extended family, and their desire to go beyond the family's level of schooling (Freeman, 1999). There are numerous African American low-income families are led by a female (Bureau of the Census, 2000). All of which tends itself to how the cultural capital a student's family possess can affect the level and quality of college education that they intend to obtain. The decisions students make about which institution to attend will be done in the context of their family, friends, outlook, and their environmental surroundings (McDonough et al., 1997). A family's socioeconomic status can often determine how much value is placed on a college
administrators as being an achiever. They will be placed into a class and/or courses where they are prepared for and are expected to attend college immediately after completing high school.

A student's decision-making process is affected by the expectations that exist among their peers, parents, and school faculty. This process is affected by the anticipated consequences and the alternatives to be considered and/or ignored. Each student's perceptions of available alternatives are conditioned or ignored and their perceptions of available alternatives are conditioned by their family's social status and the combination of social networks and their environment. Both of which are the student's frame of reference for college planning. All of these things come to bear during the guidance process. Guidance counselors seldom take into account status characteristics like cultural capital, and how much of it is available to the student (McDonough et al., 1997). The counseling services will greatly impact students differently from different social classes. Individual students are influenced by their high schools in how they structure the flow and content of information through the explicit expectations of what types of institutions are appropriate or acceptable, and the imposition of a specific schedule (Perrow, 1979).

This is especially true for students from low-income families, first generation college students and African American students. Counselors are identified as the prime resource and are used more often than parents and teachers, and are critical to the decision making process (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Galotti & Mark, 1994).

The high school guidance office provides a social context that influences individual choice behaviors. The structure is a symbolic medium that guides students'
appointments with guidance counselors, and attending college fairs was limited or restricted by the parent’s blue-collar occupations (Smith, 2001). Their jobs made it extremely difficult for them to participate in these activities with their children, and as a result parents are unable to obtain the valuable information required to help their child make these very important decisions. Hence, low-income and some middle-income African American youngsters must negotiate this process without the assistance of their parents; and parents can often feel disconnected and left out of the process.

Economic Influences

Economic influences of college choice decisions come in two forms for the purpose of this study. It comes in the form of the family’s socioeconomic status or income level and financial aid assistance. Students from low and some middle income families are sensitive to the costs associated with college attendance. Poor families in particular understand that their children are at a considerable disadvantage because they are unable to apply to as many or attend selective colleges and universities as their more affluent peers (Ray, 1992). Finances are perceived by many poor families as an insuperable barrier for college attendance. Although a student can be accepted to some of this country’s most reputable and competitive colleges and universities both income and financial assistance can be the determinant as to where a student will eventually enroll or if they enroll at all. Hearn (1990) found that independent of academic ability and achievement, students from wealthier families are much more likely to attend elite colleges and universities, whereas, students from low-income
families are more likely to attend less selective institutions. However, this study did not find that less affluent students and their families felt that a college education is less important.

The college choice process for many young people does not always follow what may be considered to be a rational or normal pattern. Students' college choice sets are not always reflective of the economist ration choice model theory. This theory assumes that all high school seniors make their decisions based on perfect information. This is not possible considering that many low-income students do not have access to as much information as some middle and upper-income students (McDonough et al., 1997). Not all students have access to the same information or are faced with equal choices if they start out with different family, social, and school resources that enable or restrict their education opportunities or their career possibilities.

The knowledge of and availability of financial aid is crucial to low and middle income students. This particular influence has a significant impact particularly for African American high school seniors. It has a tremendous influence on the student's decision to attend college, and it can be the determining factor of which type and the location of the institution they may choose to attend (St. John, 2000).

The availability of financial aid very likely influences the colleges that African American students chose in the past, and which institutions they choose to attend now. In 1975, one third of African American students who attended HBCU's and one half of those attending PWI's held scholarships or grants that covered all or most of their college expenses. The financial aid considerations strongly influenced
many young people to stay close to home (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). A 2001 government publication indicates that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of race, are most likely to consider institutions close to home, and where commuting is an option (Bernal, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2001). During the 1970’s many African American students chose to attend PWI’s because their ability to offer significant financial assistance, or they chose HBCU’s for their low tuition costs (Astin & Cross, 1981). A study conducted by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) supported the importance of financial aid for African American high school students. McPherson and Shapiro’s (1998) study indicated that status does not always play a significant role in college attendance patterns. African American students in particular view financial aid and costs as important factors in deciding which institutions they apply to and attend. When costs are not a constraint for attending private or selective institutions, students consider and apply to them providing they meet the selection criteria. Sensitivity to tuition and financial aid are highly related to college choice of private institutions. Students who prefer private institutions are less concerned about costs compared to those who choose public colleges and universities (Hu & Hosaler, 2000). They also found that students with interests in private institutions think that financial aid is a more influential factor than costs as compared to students who intend to go to public institutions. This could explain why many low-income students consider private institutions instead of public institutions.

High school students in the lowest socioeconomic status quartile are the minority in post secondary education. Only about 15% of college freshmen were in the lowest quartile, in the 1989-90 academic-year, whereas, 40% of college freshmen
were in the top socioeconomic status quartile. The imbalance of low SES to high SES freshmen is significantly greater at four year colleges and universities. High SES freshmen outnumber low SES freshmen by more than 10 to 1 (Bernal, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2001). Low SES students constitute about 19% of the first year student population in two-year institutions.

Research over the past two decades has been consistent showing that there is a negative relationship between tuition increases and enrollment. The increase in cost to attend college has prompted many low-income students to restrict their enrollment to less expensive colleges and universities (Bernal, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2001). In the early 1990s most low-income students chose to enroll at public institutions and were clustered in community colleges at rates disproportionately higher (50%) than those of their upper-income counterparts and their high-income peers (17%). Forty-seven percent of the wealthiest students enrolled at a university, while only 13.5% of the poorest students enrolled in universities (Bernal, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2001).

A study by McPherson and Shapiro (1998) in the mid 1990’s, indicate that 81% of low-income freshmen were enrolled at public two-year and four-year colleges, where 88% of the middle and upper income counterparts were enrolled at universities. Other financial issues that remain important to the lowest socioeconomic status students financing can often be perceived as insurmountable barriers, especially for those students who would prefer to attend private institutions. They are aware of their financial constraints and they tend to be proactive with meeting their financial needs. Once these students are made aware of the financial aid opportunities they often choose private colleges and universities because of the institutional prestige,
and reputation (Bernal, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2001). What is unfortunate is that policy makers are not always convinced by the arguments made in the research that aid is needed to increase freshmen enrollment, but to also increase retention rates of students currently enrolled in colleges and universities across the country (St. John, 2000). With the declines in government grants, students respond differently to tuition subsidies in their decisions to enroll in the various types of institutions. It also impacts their decisions to remain enrolled at an institution. A financial aid package may be sufficient to attract a first-time student to a college, but it may not be sufficient to keep them there.

A 1992 study has shown that student's academic ability does not have a greater influence than their socioeconomic status on where or if a high school senior chooses to attend college. Olszewski-Kubilius and Scott (1992) did a comparative study of 50 predominately minority low-income high school seniors and 42 middle to high income predominately white and Asian students in the early 1990s showed that the disadvantaged students had lower educational aspirations, felt less prepared, and less confident about gaining admittance to college. The disadvantaged students also reported that the did not have a clear understanding as to how they could finance their college education, and had negative perceptions about college life. Although both groups of students indicated that they were highly motivated to attend college and received support from their families the low-income students, they were in greater need of counseling and support programs to assist them during the college choice process.
A study by Exum (1979) also looked at gifted students from middle and upper middle class families. He found that these students were expected to attend college, and they were offered assistance from multiple sources. Whereas, minority gifted students from low-income families are in tremendous need of early encouragement, exposure, and access to information, but they are less likely to receive it. Unfortunately, schools are less likely to identify and properly serve high achieving minority students. These students are less likely to be identified as superior by school officials, they are often less likely to be in a school that will give special attention to their needs or receive adequate educational guidance compared to their Caucasian counterparts. Exum reported that the lack of services provided to these youngsters is due to the misconception that gifted students are self sufficient and do not need assistance. It is important for schools officials to understand that economically disadvantaged minority students have little if any experience with higher education. These students often lack the confidence in their abilities, and do not always believe they are capable of completing a college degree or obtaining gainful employment in their career of interest. Low SES students and their families often perceive these opportunities are simply not available to them.

Other Influences

In addition to familial and economic factors, there are numerous other influences in the college choice process, but for the purposes of this study the school staff, institutional characteristics, race and peers influences will be examined. The influence of these factors can often be determined by the student's family income and
education levels. As previously mentioned, those students who parent(s) attended college, and those from upper income families, more influenced by and rely more on their families and community networks for information about colleges and college experiences. When students choose a college their decision-making process is affected by the expectations among the students at their school, parents, and the faculty. The students' perceptions of the available alternatives are shaped by their social status as well as the guidance process (McDonough et al., 1997).

Those students who rely on resources outside of their families tend to be from underrepresented racial groups and the poor. These students rely on administrators, teachers, and most often the guidance or college counselor for information. The school's guidance office provides a social context that influences individual behavior. How the office is structured is a symbolic means that will guide student's thinking about the decision making process (McDonough et al., 1997). College-bound students visit the guidance office quite often to arrange campus visits; to confer with counselors; conference with college representatives; browse through catalogs, brochures, college guides, and directories; and obtain financial aid and scholarship guides (Ray, 1992). One study found that the resources that the student participants relied upon were college students, friends, and counselors. African American high school students were more likely to use their high school counselors and less likely to rely on family members for information on college than White students. This has strong implications if African American students attend predominately White high schools. They may only be given information on certain institutions or may be discouraged from attending college altogether (Stewart, 1987).
Guidance counselor influence does not start in the student’s senior year of high school. In 1987, Norman Stewart noted in his research on the impact of guidance counselors on college choice, that the first thoughts of college tend to occur in nearly two-thirds of grade school children and in over 80% of junior high school children.

A late 1980’s study by Stewart (1987) asked students to rank college characteristics. An overwhelming majority of the students (90%) indicated that the institutions’ academic reputation and the quality of available programs were the most important of fifteen institution characteristics. Cost was a factor that was considered by 80% of the students, and more than half (55%) reported that the offer of financial aid was also important. The institution’s athletic programs and family and friends preferences were rated the least important of the fifteen factors.

The same study also reported that there were found gender and racial preferences. These findings indicated that men rated the extra curricular activities, athletic programs, and friends’ preferences as more important than women did; whereas women rated academic reputation, quality of available programs, friendliness of the school, size, campus beauty, and distance from home more important than men. African American students rated academic reputation, cost, financial aid offered, and distance more important than White students. They also rated financial aid and cost as the third and fourth most important factors. Among 15 characteristics all of the subgroups of students (male, female, African American, and White) rated academic reputation and quality of available programs as the two most important characteristics in determining college choice (Stewart, 1987).
In 1999, Kassie Freeman conducted a study of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade African American students from Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington DC. These cities were chosen because they have the largest cross-section of African American populations and they had the highest median income and lowest poverty rates among African Americans. The students in the study were given the opportunity to voice their perception of influences on why they think African Americans choose to attend or choose not to attend college. Freeman found that in the beginning of the interviewing process that race-related issues played a significant role in the way students perceived the influences on how they and other African American students choose or choose not to attend college. The students also reported that they perceived race factors as affecting every aspect of their school lives.

Although the students are influenced by economic expectations, African American students are particularly influenced by the expectations of a job that is commensurate with of their level of education after completing college. There is a tremendous gap between choosing to attend college and actually attending college. Many students have stated that they want to attend, but it often does not translate into attendance. Freeman (1999) also discusses how economic expectations might affect African American student interest in college. Many African American students perceived that they will face a job ceiling and that they will not obtain employment that would commensurate with their educational level. They are, therefore, unwilling to invest such a great deal of time and money in the higher education process. Both family and the job market play a vital role in influencing African American students,
and while they place a high value on the benefits of education, their aspirations far too often do not translate into college attendance.

There are a few reoccurring themes that repeat throughout the literature examined. The first is that African American students are very sensitive to cost and financial aid. Both have a significant impact on where African Americans choose to apply and enroll. The second theme is that of parental involvement in the college choice process. Those parents that have attended and graduated from college are more involved in the process, and are better equipped to assist their children in choosing a college. They are also able to influence which institutions their child applies to as well as provide insights on college experiences. Cultural capital was mentioned throughout numerous works used for this study. Having it or not having it (cultural capital) is what can determine the ease in which a student can navigate the college choice process. Race and socioeconomic status are the underlying factors of many of the works used for this review. No matter what the student’s family income and race will always be an underlying factor in their decision making process.

What seems to be absent from the literature reviewed is the influence of friends and peers. It is understood that peers and friends can influence the way that high school students dress, what music they listen to, and the activities in which they participate; they may also influence the colleges and universities in which they choose to apply. Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper’s study (1999) does indicate that in phase two of the process that peers become more influential than parents, and McDonough (1997) also indicates that a close friends have an influence as well, but little if any is mentioned in the other studies examined. The lack of literature on this
aspect makes it difficult to determine the extent of peer influence on college choice decisions.

The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) College Choice Model has had considerable influence on the works of many researchers studying the college choice decision making process over the past 17 years. This model has been cited in numerous works including federal government reports, journal articles, and research studies that focus on the college choice process. This model in conjunction with Pierre Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital Theory (1977) has been utilized numerous times by researchers in an attempt to explain the underlying factors that can and do influence the choices college bound high school seniors make each year. Bourdieu’s theory in particular has considerable significance because it facilitates the understanding as to how a student’s family background can be such an influential factor in the college choice process.

Family influence on this process can come from the family’s structure (e.g., single parent home), and/or the parents, siblings, or extended family’s experiences with the college choice process. Family income and socioeconomic status appear to have the greatest influence on the process. Students from low income families are quite limited in their choices because of their sensitivity to college costs. African American students, regardless of parental income level, share many of the same college cost concerns. The literature suggests that they too are very sensitive to college costs and financial aid offerings, and their college choice sets are developed based on their perceptions of their parents’ ability to pay. Many of these studies have indicated that their family’s socioeconomic status is important because it not only
determines how students select the colleges in their choice set, but how many institutions are in the choice set. African Americans, Latinos, and low income students are so sensitive to costs that they tend to only apply to one institution. Some of the studies reported that the majority of African American student participants have indicated that the costs of an institution and financial aid offerings are only slightly less important than the quality and reputation of the institution, its programs, and its faculty. Whereas, their White and wealthier peers are much more concerned about the quality and reputation of an institution, its faculty, and the academic programs and majors they offer.

There also appears to be some consensus among researchers that adults outside the family can be influential during the process. Guidance counselors are visited more frequently and are viewed as the primary source of information for students who will be the first in their family to attend college, who are low income, and who are African American. High school guidance counselors are especially influential for African American students, regardless of their family’s socioeconomic level. Some of the literature implies that guidance counselor’s can have an even more significant positive impact on students’ decisions to attend college, and the colleges in which they choose to enroll by informing parents earlier about college admissions criteria, financial aid, and providing more general information to help parents with little or no experience in this process assist their children in making better informed decisions.
CHAPTER III
Methodology

Conceptual Framework

The study proposed is based on two theoretical frameworks. The first is the framework of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) entitled “The Three Stage Model of College Choice”. The model outlines the decision making process of college bound students from middle school through their senior year of high school. The first stage of the model refers to the student’s predisposition for study after completing high school. In stage two of the model students begin to identify preferential characteristics of an institution as well as evaluate the institutions they visit, receive materials from, and research on the Web. In the final stage of the model students choose an institution in which to enroll.

This study will focus particularly on stages two and three of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model. The study will provide information on how low and middle-income African American students in Little City and Large Township High Schools in Central New Jersey perceive which factors (i.e., teachers, counselors, peers, family, and institutional characteristics) influence the institutions they apply to and eventually attend.

The second framework used for the study is that of Patricia McDonough (1997) from her study of social class and school structure. In this study McDonough examine ways in which social class and school guidance operations combined to
shape the perceptions of several young women's opportunities to attend college. The young women in the study attended different high schools in three different communities, had parents with various educational levels, and were from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Two high schools were private and two were public. The communities that surrounded each school were made up of the three different socioeconomic groups (low, middle, and upper). The study's participants were of different racial backgrounds. McDonough interviewed 12 young women, their best friends, and a guidance counselor from each school. With the data she developed a cross sectional analysis to evaluate and analyze the data to determine how the intersection of family, friends, and school effects college choice.

This study attempts to combine both of these very well known studies to determine if there are any differences in experiences and perceptions of low and middle income African American high school students from different high schools in different types of communities. One community being predominately African American, where the poverty level is high (52%) and a predominately White community where a majority of the citizens are middle or upper middle class, 89% (QED, 2001). Theses two high schools were used because of their close proximity, and the significant disparity in economic levels in order to identify if there were any significant differences in how the students from the different schools perceived how their school's environment influenced their college choice decisions.
Selection of Participants

Large Township and Little City High Schools were chosen because like in McDonough's 1997 study, the districts were the different in location of campus (busy urban neighborhood versus quiet suburban area), relative wealth of families, and the contrast in the composition of the racial population of the community and the school. They were also chosen because despite the significant differences in SAT scores, where Large Township students score an average of 64 points higher on the verbal portion and 113 points higher on the math portion, Little City High School only sends 4% fewer students on to some form of post secondary education (QED, 2001; The Municipal Data Book, 2002). In the McDonough study the high school student's attended made a difference in the colleges they wanted to attend. The differences the income levels of the families in Large Township and Little City and the environmental factors, like cultural capital, and organizational habitus, can play a large role in the differences or similarities in what the students perceive as factors that will influence the institutions in which they intend to apply.

The New Horizons College Club (NHCC) population was chosen because 99.9% of the program's participants are African American high school students from both the Little City and Large Township communities. Although there are some freshmen and sophomores, most of the program's participants attend during their junior and senior year; this is the time when most high school students are in the midst of stages two and three of the college choice process. The organization provides students with information on scholarships, colleges and universities, SAT waivers, college application fee waivers, assistance with competing college and scholarship
applications, essay writing, and also sponsors college tours that assist them in making their decisions during these stages. The club's participants also typically intend to enroll in four-year colleges and universities immediately after completing high school.

Although a number of the participants have parents who did not attend college or did not complete their bachelors degree, many do have parents with advanced and professional degrees; they attend club meetings to obtain information and for the workshops. All of the students who attend the program are from families with various income levels, the majority being the working low-income and middle income. The accessibility to the students was also a primary factor for selecting them to participate in the study. NHCC maintains a student information database with addresses, phone numbers, and grade level. Students and their parents could be contacted directly with inquiries regarding interest to participate in the study, parental consent to participate, making appointments for interviews, and follow-up questions. The study's participants were in the spring semester of their senior year, and had busy schedules planning for the many year end activities hosted by their schools, were employed part-time, and planning for college in the Fall.

Instrumentation

This study employed both a quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The questions for both the questionnaire and interview were developed using previous research of Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper (1999), and McDonough (1997). The factors that drive this research study are: (a) family influence, (b) peer influence,
(c) teacher influence, (d) counselor influence, and (e) institutional characteristics. A questionnaire was developed to assist in the retrieval of demographic data, the institutions that the student applied to, and other general questions about their perceptions of the college choice process. This study also employed the use of semi-structures interviews to obtain more in depth information about the student’s college choice decisions. The goal of employing both methods was to fully understand how the students think and develop their perceptions about what factors influenced their college choice decisions. The questionnaire (Appendix A) used was developed and piloted in November 2002 by high school students at a New Horizon’s College Club meeting. Ten students participated. There were five juniors and five seniors. As students came into the meeting they were asked what grade they were in, and if they responded that they were a junior or senior they were asked to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to the first five juniors and seniors that entered the room.

The preliminary questionnaire was designed to elicit specific information from the participants regarding the factors that influenced which colleges and universities in their choice sets. The participants were asked to identify institutional characteristics (e.g., location, size, type), the institutions to which they applied, and what factors would influence their final decisions. The respondents were also asked to provide vital demographic information like family income, their parent’s educational background, if any siblings were enrolled in or attended college, grade point average, and SAT scores.
The interview questions were designed to explore the possibility that there may be different responses from the participants based on the high school that they attend. The interview questions along with the demographic information (Appendix B) in the questionnaire could possibly reveal any patterns in the data based on the high school the respondents attended. The interview questions (Appendix C) were designed to draw information from a taped conversation that would help identify which factors had the strongest influence, and if the students perceived that their high school environment played a role in their college choice decisions. Michael Smith (2001), Miguel Ceja (2000), and Sandra Horvant (1997) all used interviews to assist them in identifying themes that have an affect on the college choice process for African American and Latino students. Ceja and Horvant used matrices to compare the data from the students at different schools. The interview can provide a more holistic description of the process as it is experienced by the participants (Merrian, 1998).

Procedures

The population selected to participate in the study attended New Horizons College Club. There were approximately 120 students who attended New Horizons College Club during the 2002-2003 academic year. Of the 120, approximately 80 (67%) are seniors. About 87.5% (70 students) are from Little City or Large Township High Schools. The remaining 12.5% attend Union Catholic, Union County Magnet, or other local private high schools. A list of Little City and Large Township High School students were generated from the database. From these lists ten to twelve students from each school would be randomly selected by choosing every third name
on each list. The participants selected for the study were required to meet the following criteria: the students must be low or middle income, African American, attend Large Township or Little City High Schools, and be a senior planning to attend college in the Fall of 2003.

After selecting the participants, each was given the preliminary questionnaire (Appendix B), that they were instructed to bring with them to their interview. The participants were encouraged to obtain assistance with the financial portion of the demographic data from their parents. The questionnaires were collected prior to the interview.

Interviews were scheduled prior to New Horizons College Club meetings at a Little City elementary school or on a day most convenient to the respondent at the Little City Public Library, their homes, or Large Township High School. Upon completing the questionnaire the respondents were asked to be interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately one half hour. In the interview students were asked questions that allowed them to elaborate on the factors that influenced their college choice set (Appendix C).

Method of Analysis

The questionnaire responses were tabulated and analyzed using simple statistical methods. Frequency tables were used to display and analyze the data. Three frequency tables were utilized, one table displayed results from all of the respondents, and one table for each Large Township and Little City High School students.

The responses were placed in cross reference tables. These tables were used to help detect any reoccurring themes in the responses among all of the students, and to
compare and determine if there were any differences in the responses among the students from the two high schools. The responses were then coded using the Grounded Theory by Glauser and Strauss (1967). Axial Coding was used because it has the ability to show how the categories and the responses can relate to one another (Appendix D). The context variables are extremely important to this study because it helps to identify specific conditions (or factors) which can affect the respondent's college choice set. The Coding Matrix can then be used to further analyze the responses. In particular, the responses among students in the same school will be coded to see if there is a difference in socioeconomic status and parent's education level, and explore the data for similarities and differences in the responses from students among the two high schools.
CHAPTER IV

Results

The study’s results were obtained from a questionnaire completed by each participant and through individual interviews. The purpose of the questionnaire was two fold. The respondents were able to provide demographic information such as cumulative grade point average and SAT scores, and data pertinent to the study. The interview served as a follow-up to the questionnaire and provided comprehensive data on how their families, peers, teachers, guidance counselors, and various institutional characteristics influence their college choice set decisions. The data collected is representative of study participants from both Little City and Large Township High Schools. The aggregate data and the data collected from the individual schools were analyzed and compared for similarities and differences. Appendices D through G contain the raw data collected from both the questionnaires and interviews.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data was retrieved from the questionnaire. The demographic data provided a frame of reference for the data presented in this chapter and a general profile of the respondents from both schools. All of the respondents were African American and attended Little City or Large Township High Schools. Of the 23 respondents 11 were from Little City and 12 were from Large Township. There were 14 female respondents (61%), 6 (43%) from Little City High School, and 8 (57%)
from Large Township High School. Of the 9 males, 56% attended Little City High School.

Table 5:

**Demographic Comparison Among Little City and Large Township High School Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Respondents</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondents</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family that Attend(ed) College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income (000's)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10-19</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20-29</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30-39</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50-59</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60-69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70-79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100+</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Point Averages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-2.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50-2.99</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00-3.49</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.50-4.00</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-799</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800-999</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1199</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200-1399</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were asked to indicate if their parents attended college or if their sibling(s) were enrolled in college. A majority of the respondents (65%) indicated that their parents attended college; 67% (n = 12) participants from Large Township
and 64% ($n = 11$) of the participants from Little City respondents reported that their parents attended a two or four year institutions. All of the Large Township respondents indicated that their parents attended four year institutions. Three (43%) of the Little City respondents' parents that attended college went to a two-year institution. Of those with siblings old enough to attend college, 30% ($n = 23$) indicated that their siblings were currently enrolled or attended college. Of this group the 57% ($n = 11$) of the respondents attended Little City High School.

The respondents were asked to self-report their current cumulative grade point averages and their SAT scores. The majority of the sample population, 91% ($n = 23$) had cumulative grade point averages between 2.5 and 3.49. Very few students were at the extremes, only 4% ($n = 23$) reported a cumulative grade point average above a 3.49, and 4% ($n = 23$) below 2.49. Nearly half (48%) of the respondents reported that their combined SAT range was between 800 and 999. Slightly more than one-third reported that they scored between 1000 and 1199, only 4% ($n = 23$) reported scoring between 1100 and 1399, and 9% ($n = 23$) reported scoring less than 800.

Approximately 27% ($n = 11$) of the Little City respondents reported that they had combined SAT scores between 1000 and 1199, 55% ($n = 11$) reported scores between 800 and 999, and the remaining 9% scored less than 800. Half (50%) of the Large Township respondents report combined scores between 1000 and 1199, 47% ($n = 12$) reported scores between 800 and 999, 8% scored less than 800. The SAT score ranges of the majority of all of the students is fairly close to the average combined scores of the 2001-2002 school year as mentioned in the 2002 edition of *The Municipal Data Book*. This source indicates that the average combined score for Little City High
School students is between 800 and 900, and the average combined score for Large Township High School students is between 900 and 1000.

The respondents reported family income levels varied, however, more than one-third (39%) of the respondents indicted that their family income was less than fifty thousand dollars. One-third of the respondents indicated that their family income was between $50,000 and $80,000 a year, and nearly one-third reported family incomes of more than $100,000. A majority of the Little City respondents' family income was below $50,000.00. Nine percent of these respondents reported that their family income was below $20,000.00, 27% (n=11) reported a family income between $20,000 but less than $30,000 and 27% (n=11) reported between $30,000 and $40,000. Only a few students, 18% (n=11), reported a family income between $50,000 and $60,000 and another 18% (n=11) reported incomes of more than $100,000. A third, 33%, of the respondents from Large Township High School reported that their family income was $100,000 or more. A few, 17% (n=12), reported a family income of less than $30,000.00, and 42% (n=12) reported family incomes between $50,000 and $80,000. The family income ranges were consistent with those from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau reports for both municipalities (The Municipal Data Book, 2002), and the Relative Wealth Indicator that indicates that 48% (n=1,749) for Little City residents live above the poverty level and 89% (n=1,968) of Large Township residents live above the poverty level (QED, 2002).
Questionnaire and Interview Results

The questionnaire and interviews were designed to obtain specific information on how family, peers, teachers, guidance counselors, and institutional characteristics influence college choice decisions. The questionnaire asked students to respond to approximately eight questions to which they were required to respond on a Likert Scale. Peer influence, institutional characteristics, and their parents' ability to pay were some of the topics addressed on the questionnaire. The interviews allowed students to elaborate on how these very influential factors played a role in their college choice decision making process.

Family Influences

Overall, families played a key role in the decision making process for all the students who participated in this study. An overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that their parents not only encouraged and supported their college choice decisions, but they influenced the institutions to which they submitted applications. Students from both high schools gave numerous similar responses in regards to their families influence in their decision making process. The influence was in the form of expressing their ability to pay, stressing quality in the institutions they applied to, and the proximity in which they should confine their college choice set selection. During the interviews, both Little City and Large Township respondents had similar responses in that they indicated that their parents' ability to pay for their education will affect the institution they will eventually attend. Many students also expressed how college costs and their parent's financial circumstances weighed heavily into
their decisions on which institutions they applied to and where they would possibly attend in the fall.

"My parents stress attendance and whatever they could afford to pay."

"My Mom preferred Rutgers; she didn’t want me to go far. What my parents think about the school will play a role in my final decision."

Statements like those above indicate that students were very conscious of their parent’s financial ability to pay their tuition, fees, and various other college expenses for the upcoming fall semester. The aggregate questionnaire results indicate that 35% (n=23) and 39% (n=23), strongly agree and agree, respectively, that their parent’s ability to pay will determine which institutions they will attend. However, after analyzing the results of the two high schools individually there was a considerable difference in the responses between the respondents at the two schools. The Large Township High School responses were more greatly distributed. Fifty-eight percent (n=12) strongly agreed or agreed that their parent’s ability to pay for college would affect were they attended, whereas, 90% (n=11) of the Little City High School students strongly agreed or agreed that their parent’s ability to pay tuition will influence where they would attend college. Hence, parent’s ability to pay does in fact influence where college seniors will choose to enroll (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; St. John, 2000). Students from the two schools may have different ideas of what parents’ ability to pay means. For Little City students, parents’ ability to pay is more of a limitation due to lower income levels. For Large Township students parents’ ability to pay may be viewed as their parents are able to pay tuition and fees,
and they are free to choose from any number of colleges and universities. For a number of the students in this study, financial aid will play a tremendous role in their enrollment decisions. Combined with the parent's ability to pay, the amount of financial aid offered by the various institutions can be the determining factor as to whether a student would possibly enroll in a large, public, out-of-state university or a small, private, in-state, Liberal Arts college. It could also be the determining factor if many of these young people will actually attend their first choice institution or if they settle for their second or maybe even third choice.

During the interviews, many of the students indicated that their families provided encouragement, but 36% (n=23) of the respondents specifically mentioned that their parents' influence stemmed from issues involving the financing and costs of the institutions in their college choice set. Very few students indicated that their parents did not influence where they applied. According to the questionnaire results, considerably more Large Township students disagreed that their parents' ability to pay will not affect where they attend college in the Fall. These responses are not surprising considering the socioeconomic status of the families in Large Township compared to those in Little City. The students in Large Township are more likely to choose institutions that are more selective, out-of-state, and private because they feel that their parents are able to afford the tuition. The Little City High School students' family income levels make them more sensitive to college costs and financial aid, and will greatly influence on their college application and enrollment decisions. The Little City students that choose to attend private institutions may do so because the financial
aid packages that are offered (even if they are mostly in the form of loans) are more appealing than lower tuition at public institutions (Hu & Hossler, 2000).

Although the socioeconomic factors seem to play a critical role in the college choice sets of the respondents, very few of the students mentioned their parents' educational background. More than half (61%) of all students indicated that their parent(s) attended college. An outstanding similarity among respondents from both high schools is that over 60% (n=23) of them indicated that their parents attended either a two-year or a four-year institution. Since a majority of the parents have attended college themselves, they are strongly encouraging their children to attend. This may also explain why the parents have had conversations with the respondents in regards to college costs and what they could actually afford. This would imply that through their college experiences many of their parents may be savvy about the college costs, and the amount of financial aid their child may be eligible to receive. This in turn would affect how much they would be expected to pay each year. This also suggests that for the majority of the respondents that there is cultural capital being transmitted from parent to offspring. The more education and status families in both municipalities attain will lead to higher educational expectations for their children. A bachelor’s degree for many of the young people in this study may not be sufficient, and they will be expected to go on to obtain various professional and advanced degrees (Bourdieu, 1977).

Very few students applied to an institution because of siblings. Nine percent (n=23) were influenced to apply because a sibling attends or attended a particular college or university because they had a sibling currently enrolled in that institution.
There is a significant difference in that, 18% \((n=11)\) of Little City respondents applied to institutions that their siblings attend or attended, and no Large Township respondents applied to institutions that their siblings attend or attended. The cause of this difference could also be the fact that more Little City High School respondents had siblings that attended or were currently attending college during this time.

The respondents did not mention the influence of extended family members except in terms of resources. Some respondents mentioned that they would be able to take advantage of a network of extended family members that lived near institutions they applied to if they decided to enrolled at institutions that may be located in other states. Although siblings and the resources of extended family had very little influence, it is clear that the parent’s, by far, have the greatest influence within the family (Hossler, Vesper, Schmidt, 1999).

*Peer Influences*

Although most of the students would agree that their peers don’t strongly influence the colleges and universities they applied to, some would agree that their peers may have some influence on their decisions. The respondents from both schools had similar questionnaire results and gave similar interview responses. When asked how they selected the colleges or universities to which they applied, 25% \((n=23)\) indicated that they applied because they had friends who attended the institution. During interviews slightly more than 25% \((n=23)\) of the Little City and Large Township echoed the same sentiments in their interview statements. These figures correspond to a McDonough’s study (1997) where approximately 25% \((n=12)\)
of the students were influenced by their friends, so much so that they actually attended the same college or university.

What is also important to mention is that although many of the respondents indicated that their peers had little or no influence on where they applied, they did mention during the interviews that they did discuss the colleges they were interested in with their peers.

"Hearing them say that's a good school gives you encouragement to apply."

"We shared opinions of schools. They only had influence if I don't know anything about the school and they do."

"They told me about colleges they knew about."

"Maybe a little (influence). Attending a predominately Black high school may make me more comfortable at an HBCU."

Attending a high school where a majority of the students go to college, over 70% (n=1968) for Large Township and over 60% for Little City (n=1749), can affect the expectation students place on one another to attend college (McDonough et al., 1997). This could also speak to the organizational habitus where faculty and counselors place the expectations upon their students and the students will in turn have the very same expectations of their peers (Bourdieu, 1977). These expectations can also possibly influence college attendance and college choice behaviors. It appears that the students may also unconsciously base their college choice decisions on where friends that graduated from previous years have decided to attend, and the institutions where their fellow classmates have considered applying. Students are
likely to believe that they may be expected or entitled to attend an institution based on their status among their peers (McDonough et. al., 1997).

Teacher Influences

Teachers often influence student self-esteem and their perceptions about their academic ability from grade school through high school. Teachers can have a tremendous influence on student experiences while in high school, and unlike guidance counselors, they interact with their students in class on a daily basis. This relationship can have a powerful influence of the institutions to which their students may apply (Ray, 1992).

The results of the questionnaire suggest that the teachers at both high schools have had some influence on their students. Over a one third (39%) of all respondents indicated that a teacher influenced their college choice set. During interviews, a number of students mentioned that their teachers were supportive, provided information on specific schools, and even recommended colleges and universities that would be good for their intended major.

When the data from the two schools was further analyzed, there appeared to be a significant difference (29.5%) in teacher influence among the students from Little City and Largo Township High Schools. Over half (54.5%) of the Little City respondents indicated that teacher recommendations influenced them to apply to specific colleges and universities. According to these student responses, the teachers at Little City High School appeared to be more involved with the students' college decision making process. Their teachers appeared to provide students with much more direction and guidance during the college choice process. The interactions may
have been further encouraged by the students in Little City who sought input from their teachers regarding the types of colleges and universities they should attend (HBCU versus PWI), majors, as well as the reputations of institutions.

"Ms. Thomason influenced me to go to a Black College."

"They wanted me to go to the particular school that they went to."

Nearly all of the respondents in Large Township did not answer the question or indicated that teachers had little or no influence on where they applied to college. Only a couple students elaborated on their teachers' influence.

"Provided me with a lot of information about different schools and about schools I may have not tried."

"Not really they support what I think I should do."

Since there were no follow-up questions regarding teacher influence, it is difficult to assume why more Little City respondents seemed to have not only more interactions, but more productive interactions with teachers in regards to college choice process.

Counselor Influences

Guidance counselors can have a tremendous influence on the decisions many young people make about college. Each year thousands of high school seniors seek out the assistance of the guidance counselors during the third phase of the college choice process. During this phase, many seniors are either inundated with applications and decisions or they are confused as to how to even begin the application process and are in grave need of assistance from a guidance counselor.
According to the interviews and questionnaires, the students from Little City and Large Township High Schools aren’t any different. On the questionnaire 26% (n=23) of all respondents indicated that a counselor recommended the institutions to which they applied. Little City students were more receptive to guidance counselor suggestions. Over one third applied to colleges and universities that were recommended by as counselor, whereas only 16% (n=12) of Large Township students applied to institutions that were suggested by their guidance counselors.

The interview responses indicated that guidance counselors were much more influential than initially expected. Over 70% (n=11) of Little City respondents and 86% (n=12) of Large Township respondents indicated that their counselor had some influence on their college choice decisions.

“Ms. Jacobson called me down a couple of times and we talked about my interests and helped me out with which schools were best for me.”

“Gave me options, helped me decided what was best for me, like my needs and interests.”

Although a few students indicated that they did not work with their guidance counselor, the majority of the students were influenced by their counselor during the college choice decision process. It is clear that the students in this study are heavily reliant on guidance counselors for information and assistance during the college choice process, more so for Little City students than Large Township students.

What is interesting to note in these results is that although the overwhelming majority of respondents in both high schools were influenced by their counselors
(n=12) more of Large Township High School respondents indicated that their choices were influenced by their counselors. It is clear that the Large Township respondents preferred to discuss their college choice options with their guidance counselors more than their Little City counterparts. It is clear that for respondents from both of these high schools, and in general, that the guidance counselors have a more critical impact on their decisions during this period (Johnson & Stewart, 1991). Although many of the students had discussions with teachers regarding this process, it is very obvious that the guidance counselor has a much more significant role in guiding students through this process. During this final phase of the search process, counselors are just as influential as parents, yet more influential than teachers and peers. Previous studies have indicated that the students from low income families are more likely to seek the support and assistance of guidance personnel, in this instance the majority of students regardless of their socioeconomic background sought the assistance of their guidance counselor. Hence, African American students in general are more likely than their White peers to seek the assistance of a counselor in regards to narrowing the choices for their college choice set. It would appear that the parents set the parameters in regards to location and cost, and guidance counselors assist students with the selection of colleges and universities that meet their needs within those parameters.

**Institution Influences**

The interviews and the questionnaires requested that students respond to questions that focused on their institutional characteristic preferences that revolved around size, type, and location. Respondents also provided a list of the colleges and
universities to which they applied, to indicate the characteristics of their ideal college or university, and what factors characteristics would influence their final decision.

The 23 study participants applied to a total of 53 different institutions. The colleges and universities that they applied to are of various types, located in various parts of the county, and range from highly selective to moderately selective institutions. When the data from the schools were analyzed separately a significant difference in the number of institutions the respondents from the different schools applied to was discovered. On average the Little City High School respondents applied to more institutions than the Large Township respondents. The 11 Little City respondents applied to 37 colleges and universities for an average of 3.3 applications per student. The 12 Large Township respondents applied to 30 institutions at an average of 2.5 colleges and universities per student.

A majority of the institutions that the respondents applied to were concentrated along the eastern seaboard. Most of the colleges that the respondents applied to were out-of-state. Nearly one quarter (24.5%) of the colleges and universities applied to by the respondents were in-state, and 28% (n=23) were in neighboring states (New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware). Nearly one third (30%) of the institutions applied to were in the Mid-Atlantic states of Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. The institutions that the respondents applied to in the southeast (7.5%), New England (4%), the Midwest (2%), and the southwest (2%) were less substantial. An analysis of where the most popular colleges and universities that high school seniors across the country requested that their SAT scores be sent in 2002 indicated that the majority of those institutions are located
along the eastern seaboard ("Black Enrollments", 2003). The most popular institutions among this study’s participants were among the top 10 institutions that high school students across the country applied to, but especially those of their African American peers across the county. These institutions include Clark Atlanta University (17% of respondents; n=23), Hampton University (30% of respondents; n=23), Howard University (17% of respondents; n=23), Norfolk State University (12.5% of respondents; n=23), and Rutgers University (39% of respondents; n=23).

The respondents from both districts were about equally interested in applying to out-of-state institutions and HBCU's however, there were substantial differences in the sizes, types, and locations of the colleges and universities the respondents from the two districts have chosen for their college choice sets. Nearly half (49%, n=11), of the Little City respondents are seeking admission to small colleges and universities. The majority of Little City respondents were also indicated that they applied to private (57%, n=11), predominately white (67.5%, n=11), and out-of-state (70%, n=11) institutions. The Large Township respondents primarily applied to institutions with populations that were medium to large in size. Unlike the Little City students they were more interested in public (53%, n=12), predominately white, and out-of-state colleges and universities. The most substantial differences between the districts are the sizes of institutions respondents applied to, and if they are state supported or privately funded institutions. Surprisingly more Large Township students, 10% (n=12) more, have chosen to apply to public colleges and universities, whereas more Little City students chose to apply to institutions with smaller student populations. Just over three-quarters (77%, n=12) of Large Township students chose to apply to
institutions with a student body of 7,000 or more students. Slightly more than half (51%) of Little City students applied to institutions where the population was larger than 7,000 students, that is 22% less than the Large Township students. During the interviews, more than half of the Little City students indicated that their ideal college or university would have a small student body, and have comfortable surroundings/ environment.

“A small environment, academics, campus culture, people like me and programs that I could join.”

“Close knit school, a family type, good academic programs, small but good.”

Although Little City High School is a large high school the students appear to have this type of environment within their high school. This is the environment where they feel comfortable, and have had some academic success, and those are the types of institutions that they appear to be drawn to for their college choice sets.

Large Township respondents appear to be drawn to a different type of college experience. A number of the respondents indicated that they are seeking institutions with diverse populations, further away from home, and are more interested in larger institutions.

“Medium size population, HBCU, not too far from home.”

“HBCU, or diverse student population, large, out-of-state, academic major.”

In fact when the respondents were asked to rate the questions on the questionnaire that looked specifically at institutional size, half of the Large Township students indicated that they felt large institutions had better academic programs, and a majority were uncertain or disagreed that small colleges and universities were best for them.
Students from both schools appear to have chosen colleges and universities that were very similar to their high schools. Although the majority of all of the respondents stressed the quality of the academic programs and the strength of their probable major at a particular institution the Little City students are drawn the community oriented aspects of small institutions and the Large Township students are drawn to large diverse student bodies of the larger colleges and universities.

Each of the respondents indicated five characteristics that they viewed as ideal. However, the most substantial responses are those where 15% or more of the respondents indicated that the characteristics are ideal. The most substantial responses are as follows: strong faculty (65%, n=23), accredited programs (65%, n=23), support programs (48%, n=23), close to a large city (35%, n=23), Historically Black (35%, n=23), Large (22%, n=23), strong athletic programs (22%, n=23), small classes (26%, n=23), public (26%, n=23), and prestigious (26%, n=23). Table two, below, illustrates the comparison between the ideal characteristics between the two high schools respondents.

Table 6:

*Ideal Institution Characteristics Comparisons*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Little City High School</th>
<th>Large Township High School</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large (15,000 or more students)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (10,000 or more students)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (2000-6000 students)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Faculty</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliated</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accredited Programs 82% 50% 30%
Liberal Arts 9% 17% 8%
Close Knit Community 27% 0 27%
Public Prestige 36% 17% 19%
Non-Religious 18% 0 18%
High Ranking in US News 9% 17% 8%
Far From Home 9% 25% 14%
Small Classes 27% 25% 2%
Support Programs 36% 58% 22%
"Party School" 18% 0 18%
Close to Large City 36% 33% 3%
Strong Athletic 18% 25% 7%
Tradition 0 0 0
Single-sexed 18% 0 18%
HBCU 36% 33% 3%

There were little if any difference indicated between the respondents at the two schools for the following characteristics: large size, private, liberal arts, religious affiliated, prestige, high ranking in U. S. News, small classes, close to a large city, strong athletic programs, tradition, and HBCU. There were moderately substantial differences between the respondents for research institutions (10%, n=23), and institutions that are far from home (14%, n=23). The most substantial differences between the responses among the high schools were strong faculty (20.5%, n=23), accredited programs (32%, n=23), close knit community (27%, n=23), public institution (19%, n=23), medium size (50%, n=23), non-religious (18%, n=23), support programs (22%, n=23), "party school" (18%, n=23), and single-sexed (18% n=23).
Little City respondents placed heavy emphasis on small institutions, close knit community, strong faculty in their major, accredited programs, small classes, support programs, close proximity to a large city, prestige, being close to home, and HBCU’s at the top of their lists for ideal institutional characteristics. The Large Township respondents were interested in similar types of institutions, but placed little or no emphasis on close knit community, or being close to home. As previously mentioned, they were more interested in colleges and universities with student populations of more than 7,000 students.

When the respondents were asked what characteristics will influence their final institutional choice, 65% (n=23) indicated cost, 52% (n=23) indicated the financial aid package, and 56% (n=23) indicated the scholarships offered, 48% (n=23) of the respondents indicated that both location and activities will have some influence on their final decision. Forty-three percent (n=23) indicated social life, 35% (n=23) indicated services, and 26% (n=23) of the respondents indicated that the dorms and the student body will influence their final decision. Table 7 further illustrates these and other differences.

Table 7:
Factors That Influence Final Decision Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Package</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships Offered</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorms</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Body</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance to</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Programs</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Life</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factors with the most highly substantial differences between the two high schools were: financial aid package offered (39%, n=23), services (20%, n=23), activities (28%, n=23), student body (15%, n=23), and dorms (15%, n=23). The Little City respondents indicated that the financial aid package offered (72%, n=11), services (45%, n=11), and activities (45%, n=11) were more influential characteristics than the Large Township respondents. The Large Township respondents indicated the dorms (33%, n=12) and the student-body (33%, n=12) are the factors that would have greater influence on their final decision.

The moderately substantial differences among the characteristics selected by the respondents at the two different high schools were: scholarships offered (14%, n=23), costs (14%, n=23), acceptance into special programs (10%, n=23), and the library (10%, n=23). All of these factors were selected by the Little City High School respondents to be more influential in their decisions.

The most frequently mentioned or discussed institutional characteristics during the interviews were the institutions atmosphere/environment/setting, location, academic programs and majors, comfort, cost, financial aid packages, scholarships offered, and size. Financial Aid was the most frequently mentioned characteristic with the greatest influence (48%, n=23). More than half, approximately 60% (n=11), of those respondents, from Little City High School, indicated that financial aid will
play a key role in their final decision. Financial aid will have a tremendous influence on the location, type, and the selectivity of the institution in which high school seniors will choose to enroll (St. John, 2000). The second most frequently mentioned characteristic was academic programs and majors. Academic reputation tends to be one of the most important factors among all high school seniors regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or gender (Stewart, 1987; McDonough & Antonio, 1996).

Although the majority of students indicated that their families' ability to pay has been a great influence as well as the importance of financial aid in their final decision, many have still chosen to apply to colleges outside of the state. This speaks to the point that high school seniors' choice sets are not reflective of the economist rational choice model theory (McDonough et al., 1997). The study participants are bound by the parameters set by their parents in regards to what they can afford to pay for college expenses. The study participants are not only ready to experience life away from their homes, but seek to experience it out of state. They appear to be under the impressions that institutions will offer them enough financial aid, but more importantly, aid in the form of grants and scholarships that will allow them to experience college at an out-of-state college or university.

Differences

In collecting, analyzing, and reviewing the data for this study it became evident that differences weren't always clear-cut. There were three types of differences were: (a) there were some factors that the majority of the respondents indicated that were influential, but the factors were influential for different reasons;
(b) there were other factors where the majority of the respondents indicated that they were strongly influenced by the factor, but there was a significant difference in the percentage of respondents that were influenced; and (c) the factor influenced the respondents from one of the high schools, but not the other. The differences were identified in the family, teacher, and institutional characteristics factors.

Family income has a tremendous impact on how students navigate the college choice process. In analyzing the results of the study, it is clear that socioeconomics can greatly influence which factors are the most influential, and how they can influence students. A majority of the students clearly stated that their parents' ability to pay for college affected the colleges and universities to which they applied, and would also affect where they would choose to enroll the following Fall. However, there was a substantial difference between the two high schools. Nearly all, 90% (n=11) of Little City High School respondents indicated that their parents' ability to pay has an affect on their decisions versus 58% (n=12) of the Large Township High School respondents. This not only indicates the parents' ability to pay influences where students will enroll (Hosler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999), but the Little City students will be much more sensitive to college cost and financial aid (St. John, 2000). The Large Township students that indicated that their parent's ability to pay will affect there decisions did so for a different reason. The data suggests that they are confident that their parents' can afford to pay for college and their college choice decisions are not as restricted as their Little City counterparts.

High school faculty and staff also play a role in the college choice process. Teachers can have a tremendous influence on student college choice decisions
because they see their students' everyday in class (Ray, 1992). Over one-third (39%) of the students that participated in this study indicated that their teachers' did have some influence on their college choice decisions. Little City students were much more influenced by their teachers than their Large Township counterparts. Over half (54.5%) of Little City students indicated that their teachers' had some influence on the institutions to which they chose to submit applications. Twenty-five percent of the Large Township respondents indicated that their teachers influenced the colleges and universities to which they applied. The teachers at both Little City and Large Township High Schools were supportive and provided recommendations of colleges and universities to apply to, however, according to student interview responses the teachers in Little City went a step further. Some Little City teachers worked closely with their students and provided them with more direction and guidance in the college choice process.

African American students appear to rely heavily on their guidance counselors during phase three of the college choice process (Stewart, 1991). The students that participated in this study aren't any different. On average, 78% (n=23) of all of the respondents indicated that their counselors influenced their college choice decisions. However, 16% (n=12) more of the Large Township respondents indicated that they were influenced by their guidance counselor. According to the data, Large Township students relied more on their guidance counselor to assist them with the selections for the institutions in their college choice sets.

Students from both schools applied to a total of 53 colleges and universities. Little City students applied to a total of 37 institutions, an average of 3.3 institutions
per respondent, and Large Township students applied to 30 colleges and universities, and of 2.5 per respondent. After reviewing the list of colleges and universities the respondents applied to, it was apparent that the Little City respondents preferred private institutions and the Large Township respondents preferred public institutions. There were also significant differences in the sizes of the institutions that the respondents from the two high schools considered ideal. Slightly more than 40% (n=11) of the Little City High School respondents preferred small institutions with populations of less than 7,000 students. Nearly one third, 32%, of Little City respondents preferred medium sized, and 27% (n=11) preferred large colleges and universities. Large Township respondents’ preferences were the opposite, with 43% (n=12) preferring large institutions, 37% (n=12) medium sized, and 20% (n=12) preferred small colleges and universities. During interviews, the Little City students indicated that they were seeking colleges and universities that had close-knit communities and a family atmosphere. None of the Large Township respondents indicated that they sought such characteristics; they were more influenced by the diversity of the population and the medium to large size of the institution. The respondents from both schools appear to seek colleges and universities that are closer to the size, population, and atmosphere of the high schools that they attended.

Not all students have the same preferences in the colleges and universities to which they choose to apply. There were particular institution characteristics that the respondent identified that would have an impact on their final decision to enroll. Substantially more, at least 15% (n=12), respondents from Large Township High School indicated that the dormitories and student body would have a greater influence
on their final decision. Substantially more Little City respondents indicated that the financial aid package offered, student services, and activities were of more influence. Characteristics with at 10% to 14% difference included costs, scholarships offered, acceptance to special programs, and the library for the Little City respondents.

**Similarities**

The students that participated in this study shared some similar influences, and in some cases non influences. They were all influenced by their families, and some of their institutional characteristic preferences. Like students across the country involved in the college choice decision making process, both Little City and Large Township High School respondents reported being greatly influenced by their families support. Although all of the respondents' parents did not attend college, they all indicated that their families were very supportive of them during the college choice process.

Although the majority of the respondents indicated that peers had little or no influence on their college choice decisions, some students did indicate that they did have conversations with or wanted to apply to the same institutions as their classmates and friends. Like the McDonough (1987) study, about 25% of the students applied to or attended the same colleges and universities as their friends.

Although the respondents from the two high schools had many different preferences they still shared similar ones. Respondents from both high schools preferred colleges and universities out-of-state. The majority of the institutions they applied to were on the in the neighboring states of New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, as well as Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, North Carolina, and
Georgia. The respondents applied to approximately the same percentage of Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

As far as institutional characteristics, the respondents from both high schools appeared to have chosen colleges and universities with environments much like their high schools. Like many of their peers across the county they were also influenced by the quality and reputation of the institutions themselves, and the academic programs and majors at the different institutions (Stewart, 1987; McDonough & Antonio, 1996).

Overall, all family, teachers, guidance counselors, and the various institutional characteristics appear to have the most influence the respondents’ college choice decisions. They are also the factors where the students from the two high schools have the most differences. Many of these differences can be explained by the students’ sources of cultural capital, which can be attributed to their race and family’s socioeconomic status, and the environment and organizational habitus of the high school in which they attend.
CHAPTER V

Conclusions & Implications

Conclusion

In the Spring of each year, hundreds of thousands of high schools seniors are faced with the decision of which college or university they choose to attend in the upcoming fall semester. Their choices are influenced by their families, peers, teachers, counselors, and the various institutions themselves. Previous studies by Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper (1999), McDonough (1997), Smith (2001), McDonough and Antonio (1996), Horvant (1997), Hu and Hossler (2000) all indicate that race and socioeconomic status play a very crucial role in how students determine the college or university in which they will attend. A students’ race and socioeconomic status will determine who or what (family, peers/friends, teachers, counselors, and institutional characteristics) will have the greatest influence on the institution they will eventually attend (McDonough et al., 1997).

Cultural Capital and Organizational Habitus also play an important role in the choice process. Students do not make their decisions in a vacuum. They make their decisions with in the context of their family, community, and school. All of the experiences within these lend themselves and influence all of their life decisions (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, the high school a student attends does in fact influence their college choice decisions. They must consider whether or not these decisions are appropriate and acceptable to their family, their peer, and their community. Although
there are similarities between the students from the two high schools, for the most part there are some very distinct differences as to whom and what influences their college choice decisions.

In this particular study, five specific factors that influence institutional choice among low and middle income African American high school seniors were examined. It is important to first mention that because of the limitations of sample size and the population in which the sample of students were drawn, few if any generalizations can be made from the study's results.

Family, peers, teachers, guidance counselors, and institutional characteristics were the factors chosen to be examined in this study. The findings indicate that each of the factors have an influence on the participants from both high schools, but not in the same manner. Family and community cultural capital and the organizational habitus of the two high schools combine with the five factors to shape the experiences and can determine how students make all their most important life decisions like which college to attend, what major is appropriate for them, which graduate schools to attend, which job offer to accept, where to live, whom they should marry etc.

Prior research by Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper (1999); Smith (2001); McDonough (1997) all indicate that families have the most significant influence on college choice decisions. While the majority of all of the study's participants indicated that their parents were very influential in their college choice decisions, their parent's income had the most influence. The students from Little City tended to come from lower income families whose income was less than $50,000.00 per year. The Large Township respondents on the other hand, were from families with higher
income levels. The majority of who, 75%, had income levels well above $50,000.00. For the Little City participants, their family’s influence on college choice tends to come in the form of their parent’s ability to pay their college expenses. Their parent’s ability to pay actually restricted the types and locations of the colleges and universities in their college choice sets. The Large Township students on the other hand, were able to freely choose which institutions were in the college choice sets, and there were few if any restrictions that were based on cost. This also implies that the parents of the study’s participants were involved in the college choice process.

Students communicated with their parents the colleges and universities that they were interested in attending and parents’ were aware of the costs of these institutions, and the means by which their child’s education could be financed.

Peers had about the same influence on students from both high schools. Although the majority of students indicated that their peers had little or no influence on their college choice decisions, their peers do appear to influence whether or not they engage in the process. A majority of students from both high schools do enroll in a two or four year colleges or universities. Their habitus dictates that college attendance is essential to success. This is a prime example of how cultural capital can influence students outside of their home environment. Peer pressure, in its positive form, does have an impact on student decisions about academic performance, college attendance, and career choices. Students often may not recognize, as they did in this study, how their peers can and do influence them when making these types of life decisions. The students of each school bring with them their families ideals and expectations, and inadvertently share them with one another. The students not only
have these expectations of furthering their education for themselves, but for their peers as well. Students in effect create a climate and culture of expectations, norms, and taboos for themselves (Ogbu, 2003). A positive result of this would be high percentages of college enrollment immediately after high school.

School staff, teachers, and counselors, can also influence students' college choice decisions at both high schools, but in varying degrees. High school students spend a considerable amount of time with teachers each day, and come to develop trusting relationships. Their role is more at the "grass roots" level; they are steadily encouraging, supporting, and providing information about colleges. For this study's participants at Little City High School, this does not appear to be the case. The students have developed a very good rapport with their teachers, so much so that the teachers at Little City High School have a strong influence among those seniors engaged in the college choice process. Nearly 55% of the Little City participants indicated that their teachers influence the institutions to which they applied. This would imply that the Little City High School students often rely on the opinions, guidance, and direction of teachers during the college choice process. At Little City High School and other schools like it, teachers may be the first line of encouragement and support for those students who intend to go to college. For the Large Township participants, and other students like them, their teachers played more of the role of a cheerleader, encouraging and supporting the decisions that they made regarding the college choice sets.

Students, especially African American students, often seek guidance and information about college admission criteria, financial aid, and other relevant
information from the high school guidance counselor (Stewart, 1987). The students that participated in this study were no different. Nearly 80% (n=23) of all of the respondents indicated that their decisions were influenced by their guidance counselor. The guidance departments in both schools, knowingly or unknowingly play an integral part in the decision making process for these, and all African American, and low income students. There are both positive and negative aspects to this phenomenon. If African American students rely so heavily upon their counselors for guidance during this process, it is crucial that they understand the importance of their role with this particular group of students. Counselors can help steer their students along the anticipated path that is formed by their families and communities. Their interactions with these very impressionable young people can have an influence not only on where they attend college, but how they view themselves and how they understand the expectations of their parents, the school, and their community.

Like most college bound high school seniors around the county, the overwhelming majority of this study’s participants indicated that an institution’s overall reputation, quality of academic programs, and prominence of faculty are some of the most important characteristics that attract them to an institutions. However, African American students including those that participated in this study are sensitive to institutional costs and financial aid. The majority of students in this study, especially those from Little City all indicated that cost, scholarships offered, and the amount of financial aid offered can be the most important of institutional characteristics that would determine which college or university they chose to enroll in the Fall semester. Other commonalities included: a majority of students from
both schools indicated that they wanted to attend college at an out-of-state institution, approximately one-third of participants from both high schools indicated that they preferred to attend an HBCU, and that the location of the college or university was also an important characteristic.

The participants from both high schools preferred very different types of colleges and universities. Large Township students preferred medium to large sized public institutions while the Little City students appeared to prefer small to medium sized either public or private institutions. Little City students indicated that they wanted institutions with a close knit community, would prefer to participate in support programs, and participate in numerous activities. The Large Township participants were more interested in medium to large size public universities with diverse student populations. It appears that the students from high schools seek out the familiar. They would like to attend colleges or universities that closely mirror the environment of their respective high schools and communities. The Little City students seek an institution that would provide a family or communal atmosphere, where the Large Township students are accustomed to a look for an institution that has a large and diverse student body much like their high school.

Students’ college choice decisions are limited by their cultural and social capital they possess and the organizational habitus or environment of the high school they attend. The student’s race, family, and their socioeconomic status will determine their cultural capital. The participants in both high schools appear to subscribe to the middle class belief system. They highly value the importance of a college degree, professional or graduate school attendance, and financial well-being. These beliefs
have shaped how both Little City and Large Township students have been
empowered or restricted in their opportunities to attend college. The school’s
environment, which is maintained by the teachers and counselors, is shaped by the
resources of the families that live within the community. The teachers and counselors
and to some extent the student’s peers, can shape how students see themselves both
academically and socially. Their self-esteem determines whether they think they can
survive in college, and will therefore determine the selectivity of those institutions to
which they will seek admission. Although there may be some randomness in their
college choice sets, the institutions that they choose to apply to are determined by
what is safe and familiar to them.

Implications for School Administration

It is important that counselors understand the college choice process should
not and cannot be based solely on what their SAT scores are and the student’s
cumulative grade point average. A more holistic approach is needed, especially for
low-income and African American students. Counselors and teachers must
understand that these students are in need of greater support, time, and that their
families desire to be included in the process. These students often do not understand
the correlation in how their academic performance in junior high school will impact
the courses that they are enrolled in for high school, and how the high school course
enrollment will have an effect on their preparation for college. It is important to fully
inform children and their parents about the requirements for college admission long
before students become actively engaged in the selection process.
There is a considerable need to inform the parents about the college choice process, especially in school districts like Little City, where the immigrant population is steadily growing. In districts like Large Township, it is important for counselors to understand that their African American students are going to require more time and support. Both districts should consider informing parents about college admissions criteria and preparing parents the decision making process in the middle school grades.

Implications for College Admissions Personnel

College admissions personnel may want to develop marketing materials that are specifically geared toward parents. Admissions personnel may also want to begin informing and encouraging school age students sooner to attend college. Providing information about admissions requirements and financial aid to students and their parents earlier may encourage greater attendance and well as a familiarity with the particular institutions that provide the information, tours, seminars, etc.

Even though there were many parents of students in this study that attended college, many of the state and federal government regulations for awarding financial aid have changed since they attended college, and they typically change every few years. Colleges may want to inform potential applicant families about these changes and how it affects what they will be expected to pay in tuition and fees. As cost and financial aid are two of the most important determinants of whether or not low-income and African American students will enroll in college immediately after completing high school. It is important for the students and well as their families to
perceive that the degree is obtainable and that financing their education is indeed possible.

Implication for Policy Makers

Financing aid is a crucial factor in determining whether millions of students will enroll and remain in colleges and universities across the country. Each year hundred of thousands of low-income students complete high school, and meet the academic requirements for college, but perceive that they are unable to attend because their parents cannot pay their college expenses. For low-income students it is the only way in which they can obtain a college education, yet many low-income families know little to nothing about what financial aid is, how to obtain it, and the ways in which it can cover a significant amount of their college expenses.

Policy makers must also consider the obvious, when the amount of available aid decreases, the number of students that enroll in college decrease. More effort must be made to increase the amount of grant aid available to students. Many low-income students are adverse to loans and will decide not to enroll or enroll part-time because the amount of grant aid they receive does not cover a significant amount of their college costs.

There are fewer low and middle-income families that are aware of the ways in which the federal government has created tax breaks, tax credits, and the various savings mechanisms recently implemented that assist families with paying and saving for the children's college education. Both state and federal governments should take a greater responsibility and informing the public about the various forms of financial
aid, tax credits, IRA's etc. It is important to disseminate the information where it is
needed the most, in the schools. Again it is important not to wait until students reach
high school to begin informing them and their families about the ways to finance their
education. It is important to inform families as early as possible to assist them to
financially prepare for their child’s education.

Implications for Future Research

This study was limited to a special group of students from only two high
schools in central New Jersey. The study can be expanded to look at a larger sample
of college bound seniors that are not necessarily affiliated with NHCC from both high
schools. It would provide a greater depth of information about low and middle-
icome African American high school seniors perceive how they are influence by the
five previously mention factors. A more in depth longitudinal study that encompasses
more similar high schools in New Jersey and/or in other states may be needed to gain
more insightful and comprehensive findings. The study could also be modified to
include other underrepresented groups.

Further investigation that examines the preferred institutional characteristics
of low and middle income African American high school seniors would also be
beneficial. Coupled with research from retention studies it would be helpful in
assisting researchers in identifying the types of institutions in which various
underrepresented groups are more likely to complete their degrees.


Quality Education Data (2002). *New Jersey School Guide*. Denver, CO


Appendix A

Permission Form
Permission Form

I __________________________ give permission for my son/daughter __________________________ to participate in the study on College Choice. I understand this study will be carried out by Kinna Perry, a Seton Hall University doctoral student for the purposes of her dissertation. I understand that my child will be asked to complete a questionnaire and asked series of questions that relate to the college choice process, and their names will be confidential and will not be included in the document.
APPENDIX B

Survey ~ Influences of Student Choice in Colleges & Universities
### Section I: Please check the appropriate response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My peers strongly influence which colleges and universities I will apply to</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strong Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Historically Black College or University is the best type of institution for me to attend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parent's ability to pay my college tuition will determine which college or university I attend in the fall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting different types of colleges is an important part of my decision making process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for me to attend college and complete my degree in order to achieve my career goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small colleges and universities are best for me to attend because they have a family atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large research universities have high quality academic programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is best for me to attend a college or university within 200 miles of my home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section II

I'm apply to the following college and universities:


The selection above are based on the following (check all that apply):

- [ ] Friends attended
- [ ] Brother/Sister attended
- [ ] Read about school in magazines or other publications
- [ ] Recommended by teacher
- [ ] Recommended by guidance counselor

Other:
My ideal university has the following characteristics (please check your top five preferences).

- Research
- Private
- Small (2000-6000)
- Large (15,000 or more)
- Religious Affiliated
- Strong Faculty in My Major
- Accredited Programs
- Far From Home
- Small Classes
- Support Programs
- "Party School"
- Close to a Large City
- Close to Home
- Strong Athletic Programs
- Traditions
- Single-Sexed Institution
- Historically Black (HBCU)

Other: ____________________________

What factors will influence your final decision to attend the institution of your final choice?

- Financial Aid Package
- Scholarships offered
- Dorms
- Cost
- Student Body
- Acceptance to Special Programs
- Library
- Social Life
- Location
- Activities
- Sports
Section III: Demographic Information

Age ___________ Sex ___________ Race/Ethnicity ___________

What high school do you attend? ___________________________________

Did your parents attend college? _______ If so, what college did they attend?
_________________________________________________________________

Do you have siblings who attend(ed) college? _______ If so, where?
_________________________________________________________________

What is your current grade point average on a 4.00 scale (please check)?

________ 2.00 - 2.49  __________ 2.5 - 2.99

________ 3.00 - 3.49  __________ 3.5 - 4.00

What were your SAT scores: (please check)?

________ 600 - 799  __________ 800 - 999

________ 1000 - 1199  __________ 1200 - 1399

________ 1400 - 1600

Family’s Yearly Income (please check):

________ $10,000 to $19,999  __________ $20,000 to $29,999

________ $30,000 to $39,000  __________ $40,000 to $49,999

________ $50,000 to $59,000  __________ $60,000 to $69,999

________ $70,000 to $79,000  __________ $80,000 to $89,999

________ $90,000 to $99,999  __________ $100,000 or more

Thank you for your participation in this study.
Appendix C

Interview Questions
Interview Questions

1. How strongly do your peers influence which colleges and universities you have applied to?

2. How has your family influenced your decisions on which institutions you have applied to?

3. How have your teachers and guidance counselors influenced your decisions on which institutions you have applied to?

4. What characteristics does your ideal college/university have, and how have they influence your decision on which you have applied to?

5. Has your school environment influenced your decision on which institutions you have applied to, and if so how?

6. What factors will influence your final decision on which institution you will attend in the fall?

7. How do you intend to pay your college tuition, and does it have an impact on the institutions that you have applied to?

8. What services or programs (either in or out of school) have you utilized to help you make your decisions on which colleges you have applied to?
Appendix D

Ideal Institution Characteristics Comparisons
## Ideal Institution Characteristics Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Little City High School</th>
<th>Large Township High School</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large (15,000 or more students)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (10,000 or more students)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (2000-6000 students)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Faculty</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliated</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited Programs</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Knit</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Religious</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ranking in US News</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far From Home</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Classes</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Programs</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Party School”</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to Large City</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Athletic Programs</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-sexed</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Highly substantial differences (15% or greater), moderately substantial differences (10 to 14%).*
Appendix E
Factors That Influence Final Decision Comparison
Factors That Influence Final Decision Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Package</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships Offered</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorms</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Body</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance to Special Programs</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Life</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Highly substantial differences (15% or greater), moderately substantial differences (10 to 14%).
Appendix F

Demographic Comparison Among Little City and Large Township High School Students
Demographic Comparison Among Little City and Large Township High School Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Little City</th>
<th>Large Township</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Respondents</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondents</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family that Attended College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income (000's)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10-19</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20-29</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30-39</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40-49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50-59</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60-69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70-79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80-89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90-99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100+</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Point Averages</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-2.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50-2.99</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00-3.49</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.50-4.00</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-799</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800-999</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1199</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200-1399</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400-1600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Highly substantial differences (15% or greater), moderately substantial differences (10 to 14%).
Appendix G

Coding Matrix
## Coding Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Code 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

Cross-Reference Student Response Data Table for Little City & Large Township High School Students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Perceived Peer Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Family Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Teacher Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Counselor Influence</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics with Greatest Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #1 (female)</td>
<td>“They don’t influence my decision at all...its my decision”.</td>
<td>“I want to pick a college that I know will help all of us...my education and some in terms of money”.</td>
<td>“Teachers helped with recommendation letters and essays”.</td>
<td>“Ms. Tate called me down a couple of times and we talked about my interests and helped me out with which schools were best for me”.</td>
<td>“Middle to large size...HBCU, I think I will feel more welcomed and comfortable” (costs, scholarships they offer, and financial aid mentioned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #2 (female)</td>
<td>“Hearing them say that’s a good school gives you encouragement to apply, friends that attend a school”.</td>
<td>“Family that attended, parents tell me to go to school that is strong in my major and academically, and close to home.”</td>
<td>“Ms. Worthy influenced me to go to a black college. Ms Jackson influenced me to go to a college and maybe to a historically black college.”</td>
<td>“She listens to me about what I want in a college and builds around that, basically guides my decision”.</td>
<td>“A small environment, academics, campus culture, people like me, programs that I can join, scholarships offered, cost and reputation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #3 (female)</td>
<td>“A school that my friends are also attending”.</td>
<td>“My parents stress attendance and whatever they can afford to pay”.</td>
<td>“They didn’t”</td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>“A good support system, cost...not too much...can help me excel in my career, and financial aid package”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #4 (male)</td>
<td>“I don’t feel my peers influence me”</td>
<td>“Told me whichever I feel comfortable at...its up to me.”</td>
<td>“Not Much”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The quality, comfort, sour south, small, small, cost”. (mentioned financial aid, scholarships, and sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #5 (male)</td>
<td>“Not much”</td>
<td>“Not much, my mother is the only person in my family who graduated”</td>
<td>“They want me to go to the particular school that they went to”</td>
<td>“Told me the pros and cons of different schools I applied to”.</td>
<td>“Diverse setting and atmosphere, medium or small size, has field of study”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #6 (female)</td>
<td>“Haven’t really influenced me”.</td>
<td>“Both parents really encourages. Stressed Rutgers, in-state colleges, they didn’t want to go out-of-state”.</td>
<td>“No Answer”</td>
<td>“Really busy hasn’t influenced me at all”</td>
<td>“Comfort, academic programs, diversity, a New Jersey or New York school”. (mentioned financial aid, extra curricular, and sports).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #7 (male)</td>
<td>“Friends haven’t influenced me a whole lot, it doesn’t matter what they think”.</td>
<td>“They really haven’t influenced me a whole lot on deciding where to go. I sit down with them mostly about financial issues.”</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>“My counselor talked to me about which college would be the best for me, they gave me some choices, and helped me in choosing”.</td>
<td>“The price, good physical therapy program, diverse, and close to home”. (mentioned financial aid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #8 (male)</td>
<td>“Haven’t influenced me much”</td>
<td>“Very little, they wanted a HBCU”</td>
<td>“Very little”</td>
<td>“Very little”</td>
<td>“Ranking in the nation, public, cost and financial aid package”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #9 (female)</td>
<td>“Maybe a little attending a predominately black high school may make me more comfortable at an HBCU”</td>
<td>“We discussed attending and colleges”</td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>“Encouraged me to go for a college that is priced well, not too expensive”</td>
<td>“Close knit school...a family type, good academic programs, small but good program, good non academic programs, HBCU” (mentioned cost, grants, scholarships and loans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City</td>
<td>“They haven’t much”</td>
<td>“Based on cost”</td>
<td>“They haven’t”</td>
<td>“They haven’t”</td>
<td>“Medium size, far from home, proven they can produce good people in my major, positive environment, resources available and the cost”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #10 (female)</td>
<td>Perceived Peer Influence</td>
<td>Perceived Family Influence</td>
<td>Perceived Teacher Influence</td>
<td>Perceived Counselor Influence</td>
<td>Institutional Characteristics with Greatest Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little City Student #11 (female)</td>
<td>&quot;I don’t think they really have a major influence&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;My family has a major influence, always talked about college. They have allowed me to have the final decision&quot;</td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>&quot;They helped me find colleges that were good according to what I want to go into and keep me in my financial range&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Small, family environment, no religious affiliation, and single-sex dorms&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Cross-Reference Student Response Data Table for Large Township High School Students.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large Township Student #1 (male)</th>
<th>Perceived Peer Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Family Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Teacher Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Counselor Influence</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics with Greatest Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;They influence me a lot, I want to meet new people, but with them.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Mom preferred Rutgers; she doesn’t really like me to apply for. What my parents think about the school will play a role in my final decision.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;They haven’t influence me much.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Mr. Lucky helped me with like where I chose&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;City area, more than 3000 people, diverse city but not diverse area, all black colleges, cheaper schools&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large Township Student #2 (male)</th>
<th>Perceived Peer Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Family Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Teacher Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Counselor Influence</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics with Greatest Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A little not really, I want to be where friends are and someplace where I am happy.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Financially Mom is paying, and family that went to college.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Not much&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Mr. Lucky&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Medium size population, HBCU, not far away from home, close to other family, credible, comfort, reasonable price&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large Township Student #3 (female)</th>
<th>Perceived Peer Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Family Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Teacher Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Counselor Influence</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics with Greatest Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Not that much&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Parents want me to stay close to home; they are really supportive of where I choose.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Not really, they support what I think I should do&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Not really, they support what I think I should do&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Vocation, safety, majors and minors, sports, clubs, teacher/student ratios, and best offer of money&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;HBCU or&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Perceived Peer Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Family Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Teacher Influence</th>
<th>Perceived Counselor Influence</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics with Greatest Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Shared&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Encourage&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Provided her&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Counselors&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;HBCU or&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;HBCU or&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township Student #4 (females)</td>
<td>opinions of schools. Only have influence if I don't know anything about the school and they do”.</td>
<td>me to go away to college, to venture out”</td>
<td>with a lot of information about different schools and about schools I may not have tried”</td>
<td>persuade students to the schools that interest them (counselors)”</td>
<td>diverse student population, large, out-of-state, academic major” (mentioned financial aid)</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Township Student #5 (male)</td>
<td>“none”</td>
<td>“A lot. They’ve been trying to send me in the right direction, helping to find the right school for my major”</td>
<td>“Not at all”</td>
<td>“Mr. Lucky helps me”</td>
<td>“Local, convenient, high quality programs, curriculum, comfort, a second home” (mentioned scholarships and working)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Township Student #6 (female)</td>
<td>“Don’t really that much”</td>
<td>“My mother and family influence what college I go to”</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>“None of my counselors really influence my decisions of going to college or what school”,</td>
<td>“They make you feel at home, educational system, major is similar to what I want to do, pretty good college, and cost” (mentioned financial aid, scholarships and loans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Township Student #7 (female)</td>
<td>“Took suggestions from friends”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Far away from home” (mentioned scholarships and cost)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Township Student #8 (female)</td>
<td>“They haven’t really influenced me; I investigated some schools they talked about.”</td>
<td>“My family pushed me to go, my brother helps with everything”</td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>“They have made suggestions based on what I wanted to do, but I researched on my own”</td>
<td>“Research ability, laboratories, small classes, and cost” (mentioned financial aid and scholarships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Township Student #9 (male)</td>
<td>“They don’t really, but I would like to have a couple of friends that go to the same school”.</td>
<td>“Encourage me to go where I want to go”</td>
<td>“Getting their thoughts of the school and what they know of it, and if it’s good or not”</td>
<td>Same as teachers</td>
<td>“Medium to large, close to a large city, a good athletic program” (mentioned cost, career and personal goals, scholarships, and workshops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Township</td>
<td>“Not at all”</td>
<td>“Encouraged me to go where I feel”</td>
<td>“They’ve made several suggestions”</td>
<td>Same as teachers</td>
<td>“Not very large, small class sizes, major, cost”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #10 (female)</td>
<td>I'd get the best education and I've taken some</td>
<td>Same as teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large Township</td>
<td>&quot;Black peers have influenced me to apply to predominately white schools&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Go to college that has the best curriculum&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Major, faculty, services&quot; (mentioned costs, scholarships, financial aid, and savings)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student #10 (female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large Township</td>
<td>&quot;They want me to attend a college based on their records, not how many blacks go to their schools or its social life. They influenced 80% of the colleges I applied to&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #11 (female)</td>
<td>&quot;They really don't&quot;</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>&quot;The counselor left it up to me&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Far from home and my major&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Large Township</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student #12 (female)</td>
<td>&quot;Not strongly, they told me about the colleges they knew about&quot;</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>&quot;Gave me options, helped me decide what was best for me, like my needs and interests&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Small classes and a good study environment&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>