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Recruitment Barriers for Minoritized Females That Limit Access to Higher Education

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RECRUITMENT BARRIERS FOR MINORITIZED FEMALES

THAT LIMIT ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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Abstract

Minoritized Black students who are average academic performers have often been overlooked as a targeted group in empirical studies that look at barriers and other limitations for minority students (Rodriguez, 2015; Stewart, 2013). This study seeks to identify the practices that higher education institutions are currently utilizing to recruit underprivileged minoritized girls who are not high performers or athletes, the effectiveness of those practices, and what changes could potentially be made to improve overall access to college for these students. The qualitative ethnographical study was comprised of semi structured interviews of seven high school personnel, which included high school counselors, administrators, and teachers who were current or previously employed with the Camden City School District in New Jersey. The results suggest that Average performing Black female students make college choices based on negative perceptions of higher education and limited outreach efforts by higher education institutions. The research also found that Higher education institutions can help average performing Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education by targeting student support systems and expanded opportunities to experience university settings. The study concluded: a) understanding how underrepresented students are motivated to attend college could help increase their access to higher education; b) increased access to higher education for minoritized populations can help break the poverty cycle and enable better access to The American Dream.

Keywords: college recruitment, minoritized groups, access, higher education, average academic performers

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughters, Aaleyah, Allana, and Alleyna. Often, I am asked what my greatest accomplishments are in my lifetime in which my response remains the same – my children. Finishing this dissertation was fueled by me wanting to set an example and letting you all know that the sky is limitless. You truly can be ALL that you choose to be with hard work, dedication, and the ambition to succeed. I am confident that with God at the center and proper guidance from your parents you all will continue to make us proud!

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to all the black and brown girls from the city of Camden, New Jersey. Please remember that people from Camden CAN do great things! Continue to break the glass ceiling and be the change that you want to see in the world because YOU Matter!

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Introduction

For some, post-secondary education is an automatic step in the process after graduating from high school. However, this is not the reality for many students who may be first-generation students or individuals that are the first to attend college in their families (Engle et al., 2006). Youth who reside in urban, economically disadvantaged communities face many barriers that limit their access and exposure to higher education institutions. Notably, students from low-income families are less likely to consider or seek out college due to several factors, including financial aid and community influences (Perna, 2015). One particular disadvantage for these lower-income potential college students is simply the lack of knowledge related to college requirements, making appropriate choices for college, and navigating the pathways that would enable them to attend college (Fry, 2021; Perna, 2015).

In education, minoritized students are those that, due to events beyond their control, must deal with prejudice, ableism, and teachers who assume they are incapable (Smith, 2016). Smith (2016) states that a student who is different from any other group in terms of race, religion, nation of origin, sexual orientation, or gender is only considered minoritized when the educational system in which they are enrolled forces them to have less authority over, representation in, or access to the same rights as their fellow students. In turn, when those differences exist and the student is ignored and treated unfairly due to their identity, it is known as minoritization (Smith, 2016). More broadly, minoritization refers to oppressive treatment towards subordinated groups rather than the numerical makeup of a minority vs. majority group (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Wingrove-Haugland & McLeod, 2021). However, the numerical

status may also be relevant, as low-income communities nearly always include a disproportionate number of minoritized students.

In this dissertation, I focused on the recruitment of minoritized Black girls who are average academic performers to higher education institutions, and the barriers impeding their access to higher education. Based on self-reports from college recruiters in a study by Hakkola (2019), a recruiter's primary responsibilities are "recruiting students through high school visits, on-campus tours, college recruitment fairs, e-mail communication, and individual outreach," (p. 368). Therefore, for this study, recruitment specifically refers to the efforts made by college recruiters to encourage or persuade potential students to apply for and/or attend their college or university. Average academic performers are those students who generally have GPAs between 2.0 and 3.4 (Rodriguez, 2015). The value of conducting this study was to identify the practices that higher education institutions are currently utilizing to recruit underprivileged minoritized girls who are not high performers or athletes, the effectiveness of those practices, and what changes could potentially be made to improve overall access to college for these students.

Background

Minoritized Black students who are average academic performers have often been overlooked as a targeted group in empirical studies that look at barriers and other limitations for minority students (Rodriguez, 2015; Stewart, 2013). Regardless of race or minoritized status, most scholarly research focuses more on low or high performing students, rather than those who are in between these two ends (Rodriguez, 2015). However, given that these Black students are a subset of both minoritized and minority student populations that are studied, many of the outcomes that result from these studies are still applicable to them. Further, these outcomes influence the ability for minoritized students, and to that end, minoritized girls, in achieving The

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American Dream (TAD). In particular, how prepared minoritized students are for college can be a critical factor in them realizing this goal.

College Aspirations for Minoritized Students

There are both positive and negative associations with minoritized students with regard to college aspirations for minority students. From an asset-based perspective, the cultural capital of minoritized groups suggests that they embody certain strengths which can be an advantage in helping these students navigate college (Reyes & Duran, 2021). In addition, Reyes and Duran (2021) emphasized that minoritized students have aspirational capital, which suggests that these students have goals and want to achieve them.

While deficit-based illustrations of minoritized groups are increasingly being challenged in higher education research (Reyes & Duran, 2021), there is still some relevance to the college aspirations for minoritized students. The specific and unique barriers that they face still contribute to their ability to access and attend college. For instance, In June 1996, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published a survey titled *Urban schools: The challenge of location and poverty*. This research discussed various factors on the students within urban schools to include background, educational outcomes, characteristics and after school activities, and school experiences. It also gave insight into the perception versus reality that these students are disadvantaged. The survey compared all students within urban schools with other students in rural/suburban geographic locations on post-high school outcomes; mainly focusing on schools with a higher concentration of low-income students.

The NCES survey (1996) gave insight on how societal limitations such as poverty and being academically disadvantaged in terms of resources and familial structure have impacted continuing education. The survey revealed that students from urban schools were less likely to

have a traditional family structure, and lack economic security, and stability that are most associated with desirable outcomes. Some examples of common background characteristics for these students include coming from single family homes or absent paternal parent homes, receiving financial support through the Board of Social Services, and living in low-income housing communities.

According to the survey, areas where additional research could benefit would be by examining educational challenges faced by students who come from single parent homes and have little to no school mobility (Lippman et al., 1996). The survey details issues within the school district to include staffing issues, educator control over the classroom as it pertains to what is taught, tackling daily student absent rates, discipline, pregnancy, and weapons possession. While this research offered some notable outcomes, the study's findings lacked information about the student's home environment, perceptions as it pertains to school currently, and the student's views on institutions post-high school.

According to Swail (2003), institutions have experienced declining enrollment and retention rates over the past ten years with students of color. African American, Hispanic, and Native American students have historically had lower access and completion rates than White and Asian students from low-income backgrounds (Swail, 2003). Swail (2003) suggests that because they often make up a considerably smaller portion of the student body, people of color's experiences and needs are frequently overlooked.

Access to Higher Education

Compared to general or vocational education, ethnic minorities have less access to higher education (Harper et al., 2009). Access to higher education for minorities and minoritized groups is largely dependent on several factors, namely the social structures that impede college

readiness. Additionally, the practical issue of affordability imposes further constraints on the minority and minoritized students. According to Hakkola (2019), "college recruiters need to be able to identify and adapt their language and recruitment methods to the backgrounds and expectations of different individuals," (p. 366). Therefore, the issues that serve as barriers to college access for minoritized groups should be part of that effort.

Researchers contend that a mix of intrinsic and career-oriented variables inspires students and gives them a sense of readiness for higher education (Byrne et al., 2012; Monnapula-Mapesela, 2015). Despite the barriers discussed previously that limit minoritized access to higher education for students within urban communities, students are still able to find ways to achieve preparedness for higher education even if it means fostering positive thoughts that allow these students to feel hopeful about their circumstance. For example, the students' capacity to use proactive learning techniques include critical inquiry, meaning-making, strategic awareness, and creativity, as well as their own personal traits and knowledge-construction techniques (Crickand & Goldspink, 2014; Monnapula-Mapesela, 2015).

The issue of how well-equipped students are for higher education is still relevant today (Monnapula-Mapesela, 2015). College readiness remains a major factor for Black students in accessing higher education, in particular (Byrd, 2021; Castro, 2021; Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). Highlighting the unique issues of being a minoritized, Black female student and being prepared for college, Byrd (2021) conducted a phenomenological study on ten high-ability African American women who were in their second semester of a predominantly White college (i.e., recent high school graduates) in a Midwest U.S. city. Byrd (2021) specifically noted that academic measures of college readiness, which typically include grade point averages and standardized test scores, fails to account for cultural experiences, access to opportunities, and

oppressive practices that also influence college readiness for Black girls. Using a combination of interviews and focus groups, the study concluded that support from family and friends, community culture and resources, school relationships and experiences, opportunities for college exploration, and demystifying the college process all contributed to these women's successful preparation and access to college.

Complete and equitable access to higher education for all people continues to be difficult in many places. Low-income students continue to be unable to afford the costs of attending four-year postsecondary institutions, including housing accommodations, food, and other college-related fees. Students of African descent and their families frequently rely on the student's athletic ability to secure scholarships (Harper et al., 2009). Urban students are less likely to have the family structure, economic security, and stability associated with desirable outcomes (Hines et al., 2019).

Compared to Whites, African Americans enroll, remain enrolled, and graduate from high school at lower rates (Lofstrom, 2007). Numerous African American pupils are underprepared for college entrance exams because they did not develop crucial academic foundations in elementary school (Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). A study conducted by Kitiashvili et al. (2016), on minority group perspectives, attitudes, and barriers indicates that a basic education is essential to developing specialized educational approaches outlining that social justice, the knowledge-based economy, and the welfare of individuals are all advanced by education. The researcher suggests that closing socioeconomic inequities between majority and minority groups and fostering the leadership necessary for social and economic development all depend on higher education (Abu-Saad, 2016).

In this dissertation, I considered how recruitment practices for African American girls in a small city impacts their perceptions of higher education and ultimately their motivation to attend college. Attaining a college degree is the most recognized and accepted path to reduce poverty and improve the comparable wealth for minorities in the U.S. (Naylor et al., 2015; Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). By increasing the likelihood of these students going to college, their trajectory towards TAD becomes a realistic possibility. In addition, much of the current research on college recruitment is focused on males (Naylor et al., 2015), athletes (Letawsky et al., 2003), or high and low academic performers (Comeaux et al., 2020; Rodriguez, 2015). Therefore, for this research, I focused on college recruitment efforts for underprivileged African American girls who are average academic performers, where relatively less literature has focused.

This dissertation contains interviews with questions that were selected to understand the types of barriers that occur for minoritized students from urban schools with regard to higher education recruitment. While student athletes may be part of this group and may have different experiences, this research does not target this group within this study. In addition, this research considered gender disparities that also appear to be present in recruitment of students who are not high academic performers. Both race and gender are understudied factors relative to higher education recruitment of average performing students yet still have the potential to be successful in college.

Achieving the American Dream

The American Dream (TAD) includes variations of meaning for minoritized families (Coates, 2015). People generally define TAD as the idea that anyone can achieve their own brand of success in a society where everyone has the opportunity for upward mobility, regardless of where they were born or what class they belong to. Despite some African Americans having

faith in TAD's promises, according to experts, others are gloomy about TAD and continue to doubt their ability to succeed (Armstrong et al., 2019). For example, the central tenet of TAD is that anyone can achieve success through taking chances, perseverance, and hard work; however, this success is measured by having a home, a family, a good education, and a steady income (Dalgo, 2016). The variability in the meaning of TAD for some African Americans suggests that they are disproportionally impacted by many factors such as single parent households and little to no income which may make TAD less likely to be attainable.

Lack of educational resources – such as high-quality teaching materials, technology, and highly skilled instructors – is often the first sign of poor preparation for achieving TAD with regards to higher education attainment (Coates, 2015). The quality of students' educational experiences is significantly impacted by their access to technology. Children from middle-class families usually have greater resources and support systems outside of the classroom to make up for shortcomings in the public education system. The development of American society to meet the demands and difficulties of the twenty-first century depends critically on higher education (Ntiri, 2001), which can significantly affect a community's capacity to compete in the international economy.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education institutions tend to focus their minority, low-income recruitment efforts on high performing students (Andrews et al., 2020). If high performing students are the focus, then students who are average performers, yet still capable, are not. Thus, minoritized students in high poverty areas who are average performers are likely not recruited with the same consistency and effort as high performing students. In turn, the limited access to college that already challenges this population is further exacerbated. When considering minoritized female students,

this access to higher education becomes even more challenging, especially since male students have greater likelihood of athletic recruitment (Porter, 2019).

There are a number of benefits to recruiting average performing students, regardless of their minoritized status. First, there is a much wider pool of average performing students than either high performing students or low performing students (Rodriguez, 2015). As such, universities could increase the likelihood of successful recruitment. Second, universities should focus on recruiting minoritized average performing students because it not only improves the social mobility of these students, but it improves their economic productivity while reducing reliance on social welfare programs (Perna, 2015). Studies on Early College High School programs, which often target at-risk students, and notably average performing students, have demonstrated that these students can successfully handle college level courses and transition into higher education (Edmunds et al., 2019; Smerden & Means, 2005).

This discrepancy in accessing college for average-performing minoritized female students contributes to an already damaged pipeline from high school to college, as most high school graduates grapple with negative perceptions, finances, and other barriers to higher education (Huerta et al., 2018). Students who do not even perceive that college is an option are less likely to attend (Huerta et al., 2018), thereby limiting their opportunities to break the poverty cycle and become reputable, self-sufficient adults. Females from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be at even greater risk for remaining in the poverty pipeline.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is twofold: I seek to (a) identify current outreach efforts towards the recruitment of average performing minoritized Black girls from high-poverty communities, and (b) unearth possible solutions that may promote college as a viable option for

average performing students, particularly minoritized Black girls. In doing so, it is my hope that the results of this study will help "level the playing field" of opportunities for all students, which includes ensuring that all minoritized students, including those who are average performing students, are sufficiently exposed to and equipped with the tools to help change their circumstances.

Higher education institutions are in a unique position and have the greatest opportunity to make a meaningful difference for these high school graduates due to their combined recruitment and financial leverage. It is important to understand this issue because economically disadvantaged high school graduates are less likely to pursue higher education due to a combination of barriers that are typically associated with those in poverty (Perna, 2015). Specifically, these barriers include socioeconomic background, limited availability of funds to pay for college tuition, lack of knowledge about resources such as financial aid, and low academic preparedness (Lang, 1992; Perna, 2015).

Throughout this research, I explored and analyzed higher education institutions' efforts to actively recruit minoritized Black female students who are average academic performers. By doing so, this research may provide institutions with insight that aids them in diversifying and enabling access to minorities and females at a much larger rate when prioritizing their enrollment practices.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. In what ways do average performing minoritized Black female students make college choices?

2. In what ways can higher education institutions help average performing minoritized Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education?

Significance of Study

By conducting this study, researchers, school administrators, and university leaders may better understand the underlying problems and consider the unique ability of universities to help break the poverty cycle for those who are most in need. This study may also provide insight on how high school seniors approach their decisions to pursue or not pursue higher education. With respect to higher education institutions, the findings from my research contribute to improved higher education access, particularly for minoritized high school girls.

An additional nuance that is explored within my study is the related gender issues pertaining to college access. For example, not only are females awarded less financially in terms of scholarship, but they are not recruited at the same rate as male students (Jacoby et al., 2022). By incorporating this into the study, there may be added understanding of ways to better mitigate it. Most importantly, this study would serve as an additional measure for educating the general public on some of the more nuanced issues surrounding economically disadvantaged females that are being left behind in our communities.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT). As I discuss in greater depth in Chapter Two, I considered institutional circumstances around recruitment as contributing to the key concepts of White privilege and inherent inferiority, which manifests as a social construct of racism – one of CRT's five tenets. Figure 1 presents a conceptual map of the framework illustrating how CRT's social construct of racism develops from institutional circumstances regarding recruitment with this study's target population.

Figure 1

Conceptual Map

Institutional Circumstances   Concepts   Social Construct

Recruitment
- minoritized Black female students
- average academic performers

White Privilege

Inherent Inferiority
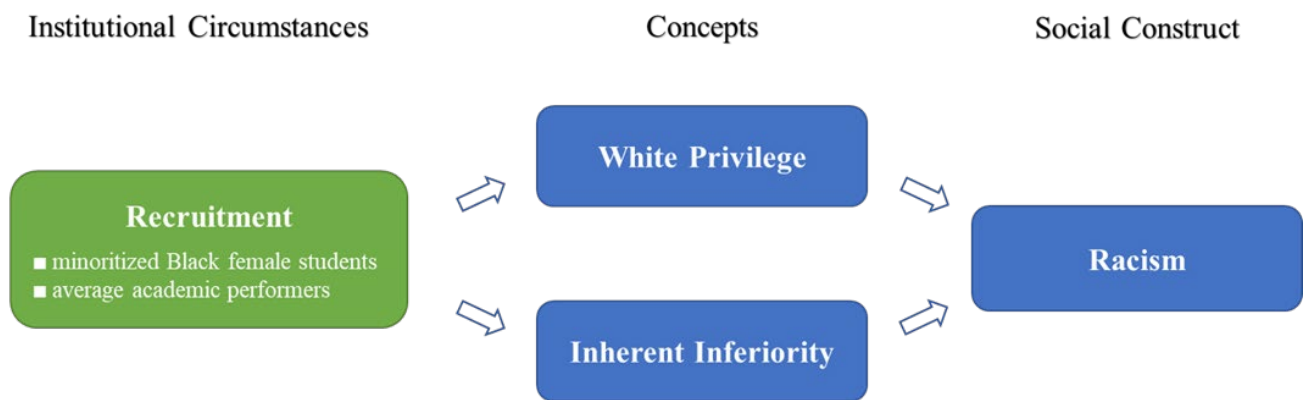
Racism

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is defined as the disparate impact of institutional racism evident in by way of tracking as well as other related ability group practices (Naylor et al., 2015). According to UCLA Law (2021), the term "tracking" in the context of CRT refers to a project that monitors, identifies, and analyzes actions taken to limit access to accurate information about race and systemic racism. CRT criticizes prevailing conceptions that sustain White supremacy, emphasizes the centrality of race and racism as important components of American culture, works for social justice, and acknowledges higher education as both repressive and empowering domain (Allen et al., 2018).

CRT has frequently been used to undergird studies in higher education. According to Hiraldo (2010), the eight tenets of CRT are intended to expose the numerous ways that higher

education institutions support racism, however many people expect that CRT serves as a model for institutions attempting to become more inclusive. Inequalities are a logical and foreseeable byproduct of a radicalized society, according to Critical Race Theory (CRT), and a lack of education is a fundamental component in that inequality (Franklin et al., 2020). According to CRT, social advantages such as affirmative action have not come close to delivering the benefits that society expects (Franklin et al., 2020). CRT generally subscribes to certain basic tenets, five of which according to Hiraldo (2010) are:

1. Counter-story telling

2. Permanence of race and racism

3. Whiteness as a property

4. Interest conversion

5. Critique of Liberalism

Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests that the use of counter-stories in examining the culture in higher education gives teachers, staff, and students of color a platform to share their marginalized experience-based narratives. This tenet applies to this study because specialized outreach efforts to enable more students of color contributes to university efforts to build a more diverse campus and student body (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Specifically, by recruiting more Black female students, higher education institutions may increase their opportunities to diversify and bridge the gap between race and gender disparities on their campuses.

The second tenet of CRT refers to how the permanence of racism dominates American society's political, social, and economic domain because diversity action initiatives are considered useless when institutional racism is ignored in higher education (Iverson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This study is directly aligned with this tenet because it offers an

examination of a potentially untapped resource in underperforming minoritized students from low-income communities that institutions of higher education may seek out as they reconsider their outreach efforts when it comes to Black female students.

Whiteness as property is the third CRT tenet. This study is relevant to this principle and will be used in Chapter Two to provide an overview of how Whiteness in terms of racial dominance contributes to racial disparities amongst Blacks. The separation of student issues from academic concerns in higher education supports the idea that race is a set of property rights in which being White is more valued and significant than being a person of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The fourth principle of CRT is the convergence of interest. This principle recognizes that White people have benefited most from civil rights laws that only gave African Americans the most fundamental rights (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006). Under this principle in higher education, Hiraldo (2010) suggests that institutions make a significant effort to attract students of color who can afford to pay for their education. Research suggests that, financially, colleges and universities have the most to gain by attracting and recruiting diverse students from throughout the world (Hiraldo, 2010). This tenet is relevant to this proposed study because it directly speaks to the outreach efforts (or lack thereof) by universities to help underperforming, underprivileged minoritized female students.

Lastly, the concepts of colorblindness, the legal system's objectivity, and equal opportunity all contribute to CRT's fifth tenet, which criticizes liberalism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). People who are colorblind to the law are able to disregard laws that uphold societal injustices (DeCuir & Dixson, 1999; Hiraldo, 2009). In response to this tenet, this study aims to highlight the need for more prescribed outreach that is more inclusive of a more academically

diverse population that has thus far disadvantaged underperforming minoritized female students, despite an institution's efforts to achieve equality.

CRT's tenets may highlight some of the ways that universities contribute to the lack of diversity due to their outreach efforts. For this study, the focus on race as a social construct illustrates how routine outreach practices towards underperforming high poverty minoritized girls have contributed to diminished opportunities for reaching the college level. By exploring college access as a barrier from the lens of CRT's racial construct tenet, universities may identify new opportunities as they attempt to become more inclusive. In essence, using the CRT tenet that racism is a social construct, this research considers the concepts of White privilege and inherent inferiority as foundational barriers to college access for average performing high school students.

Summary

Through the perspectives of higher education administrators and teachers, this study examines how barriers or inequality with regard to recruiting average student performers into higher education. Participants are high school personnel who routinely engage with their Black female students and their school's college recruitment efforts in the state of New Jersey. The findings of this research are beneficial to institutions, urban school districts, and students because acceptance into higher education institutions, which play a key part in not only prospective economic development, but as an opportunity to change students and their families' economic situations. Additional advantages for this study include uplifting the community and diversifying higher education institutions which would allow for greater representation of disadvantaged Black or African American girls.

It is crucial to stress that the goal of the research is not to shift responsibility for any "wrongdoing" onto the school district, but rather to expose institutional access problems, identify

where institutions may be responsible for inequities in college access, and most crucially, advance toward closing the gap caused by disproportionate recruitment and representation of African American girls in higher education. Next, in Chapter Two, I review relevant scholarly research that provided a foundation for this study.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two presents the literature review for this study that examines the barriers that limit minoritized Black female recruitment to higher education. The chapter begins with the background information on minoritized groups – how they are defined and their connections with race and gender. Next, the chapter specifically looks at the empirical literature on minoritized Black students and the specific factors connected to this study's target population. Given the focus on recruitment to higher education, the next major section of the chapter presents scholarly work related to the different levels of outreach by education stakeholders. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and its alignment to elements of the research study.

Minoritized Groups

People of color are often referred to as minorities in popular culture, governing policies, and in research. However, some scholars argue that "minoritized" is a more appropriate term to discuss oppressed groups. In defining these groups, scholars and empirical studies on race and gender further describe the White privilege and inherent inferiority that contributes to the minoritized status for these individuals.

Defined

A minoritized group is a devalued group in society with less access to resources (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). While traditionally, minoritized groups were referred to as minority groups, doing so capitalizes on their numerical constitution rather than the dynamics that surround their status in society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In this study, Black female non-athlete high school

girls can be considered a minoritized group given that they may be seen as less important with regard to accessing and successfully completing college.

According to Wingrove-Haugland and McLeod (2021), the term "minoritized" refers to subordinated groups of people and the microaggressions that are part of their daily existence. Further, the authors state that minoritized "connects racial oppression to the oppression of women and gives us an easy way to conceive of intersectionality as being a minoritized member of a minoritized group," (p. 1). Further, they offer seven advantages for why this term is appropriate to use with subjugated groups: a) minoritized is about power and equity; b) connects oppression to both race and women; c) intersects minoritized members of a minoritized group; d) acknowledges that dominant groups (e.g., White males) minoritize subordinate groups; e) describes microaggressions more clearly; f) explains the need for solidarity among minoritized groups; and g) promotes racial justice (Wingrove-Haugland & McLeod, 2021). For the purposes of this study, the term "minoritized" will be used where relevant and appropriate, except when citing other scholarly works that do use or intend the use of this term.

CRT and Minoritized by Race

Race is often the first consideration when thinking about marginalized or minoritized groups. Critical Race Theory considers racism as an inherent social construct that exists in institutions and conventions of governance (Zou, 2021). In education research, Critical Race Theory has posited race and racism as key factors in the lack of positive social outcomes for minorities (Sung & Coleman, 2019). In Critical Race Theory, the term minoritized captures marginalized groups based on race where racial inequality clearly exists and persists as a social construct, thereby impeding certain social outcomes for that group (Sung & Coleman, 2019). The third tenet in Critical Race Theory focuses on whiteness as property, which highlights inherent

inferiority and white supremacy as part of the social construct that inhibits an equitable education for minoritized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rector-Aranda, 2016).

Inherent Inferiority. Historically, White people created "whiteness" in order to incorporate persons of European origin into a social category to discursively express their alleged racial superiority over all people of color (Cabrera, 2019; Whitehead et al., 2021). Whitehead et al. (2021) suggests that the inherent inferiority of African Americans has been engraved into the White American mentality, portraying African Americans as essentially subhuman and a departure from the universal marker of superiority which serves as another opportunity to assert racial dominance.

Stony the Road by Jane Dailey (2020) examines the history of racial segregation in the United States between 1890 and 1925; it credits the "New Negro" as one of Reconstruction's most notable legacies. Dailey (2020) claims that post-Reconstruction South narratives were created to persuade the country that liberation was a mistake, and that Reconstruction's demise was due to the new liberation of African Americans; thus, the birth of Jim Crow. In contrast, the New Negro stereotype was created as the race's strongest defense against the "demonic" White domination of the New South (Dailey, 2020, p. 267). Attacks on the Black character and their inalienable rights tended to elicit a retaliatory response from African Americans (Dailey, 2020).

White Supremacy. White supremacy is generally defined as "A political, economic and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, and in which White dominance and non-White subordination exists across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (Ansley, 1989, p. 1024). In Critical Race Theory, White supremacy and racism are viewed as one and the same (Sung & Coleman, 2019). Gibbons (2018) suggests that on a global scale and because of its ties to White supremacist structures, capitalism must be

addressed and the refusal of White people to empathize with or believe in the humanity of people of color must be rejected. According to the study, White supremacy as a global system "disrupts normal framings, conceptualizations, and disciplinary divisions" (Gibbons, 2018, p.750; Mills, 2003, p.184). Essentially, White supremacy functions as an established dominance and reinforces a perception of African Americans as being inherently inferior to White people.

Moon and Holling (2020) examined White supremacy by considering the ways "whiteness" reinforces dominance over African Americans via current social movements. The authors suggest that the hashtag movements of #MeToo and #TimesUp are two recent examples of (White) feminism's tendency to marginalize women of color by being mirrored in the popularization of White victims. Instead, Moon and Holling (2020) refer to the hashtag #livingwhileblack, which is an initiative that aims to destabilize White dominance by documenting current African American liberation efforts. Accordingly, the researchers argue that popularized social movements reflect the established dominance over the African American race and as such, continues to oppress them and limit their success or growth. As White privilege has been maintained, so has the notion of inherent inferiority among African Americans.

In contrast to Critical Race Theory's focus on white privilege and supremacy, scholars Kolluri and Tichavakunda (2022) caution education researchers to avoid using deficit oriented analyses that focus more on the negative aspects associated with marginalized groups. Instead, education researchers should use asset-based frameworks which speak more to the possibilities and opportunities for racially minoritized groups by targeting the behaviors of students and families (Kolluri & Tichavakunda, 2022). In doing so, it is suggested that educational outcomes are more likely to improve for minoritized groups. While Critical Race Theory fundamentally describes race as a social construct that helps account for racial differences in social outcomes,

asset-based frameworks encourage accepting the existing structural constructs and refocusing on changing mindsets instead of the structures themselves. However, Gillborn (2005) denotes that Critical Race Theory is not pessimistic; rather "its recognition of contemporary white supremacy is intended to advance and inform the struggle for greater equity, not to detract from it," (p. 497).

Minoritized by Gender

Gender, specifically relating to women, has frequently been considered when studying minoritized groups – particularly those with persons of color (Wingrove-Haughland & McLeod, 2021). Further, women have been classified as a minoritized group given their lower status in social and economic opportunities compared to White males (Rutledge & Grillka, 2022). Gender disparities are often exacerbated when additional factors such as race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and/or disabilities are taken into account (Hewitt, 2020). For example, according to Davis et al. (2017), White female students who were not classified as low-income were the most likely to be participants in a college pathway acceleration program; which suggests that non-White female students who are low-income may be less likely to participate in college pathway acceleration programs. In both K-12 and higher education, there is still a long way to go in terms of equality (Hewitt, 2020). To that end, empirical research that highlights gender differences, especially for minoritized high school females, has revealed that for a variety of reasons female students are less likely to apply for and attend college.

Hurtado et al. (2020) conducted research on Latino high school students and their assets, college readiness, and access to college. Notably, in this study, the assets included college socialization, which was measured by student reports of meeting with a high school counselor about college admission, and participation in college prep programs on the survey. Using the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009-2016 of 2,064 Latino students, the study found several

significant gender differences. First, female Latino students applied to fewer colleges than their male counterparts. Second, although female Latino students generally had higher GPAs, when controlling for this variable, female Latino students still reflected a lower number of applications to college. Third, female Latino students that discussed college admissions with their high school counselors were more likely to apply to more colleges. Among the study's conclusions is that college socialization with counselors, teachers, and peers is needed, particularly in rural and undeserved communities (Hurtado et al., 2020).

Saunders et al. (2004) surveyed 243 Black high school students at one urban school to explore gender differences with regard to self-perceptions in the areas of self-esteem, racial self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and the importance of school completion to self. These self-perceptions were compared with two academic outcomes – the student's intention to complete the school year and their grade point average. The results of the survey revealed that females had more intentions to complete school than males and had higher GPAs than males (Saunders et al., 2004). Notably, the average GPA for these Black females was 2.20, or a low C, indicating they were average academic performers. There were no significant differences between males and females on the remaining variables (Saunders et al., 2004). The study concluded that although Black females were average academic performers, their academic achievement was consistent with national trends. Specifically, the study stated that Black females tend to have higher grades than Black males and therefore more frequently enter college (Saunders et al., 2004). Saunders et al. (2004) recognized, however, that their average academic achievement level could still be problematic for these Black girls to successfully be admitted to college.

The intersectionality of gender and race hold an important distinction for Black women and Black girls (Byrd, 2021). Intersectionality for women of color can be classified as

representational intersectionality, by which the historical and current conditions place Black females in situations where they are either hypervisible or invisible (Byrd, 2021). These conditions are clearly present with minoritized Black female students who are average academic performers and the college recruiting process. Being "invisible" to college recruiters due to their minoritized status, as well as being overlooked for being average academic performers, could therefore exacerbate their disparate status.

The research focused recruiting of Black girls was limited, however there are emerging studies about the recruitment and participation of transgender women in college sports. Other relatable research inclusively spoke about the recruitment of women in STEM related fields (Hewitt, 2020). By focusing on the recruitment of the female non-athlete, this dissertation examines how institutional outreach by way of recruitment limits access into higher education.

Minoritized Black Students

Minoritized students are more likely to encounter white privilege, inherent inferiority, worse academic outcomes, and gender inequities. Many cultures have examined The American Dream (TAD), especially in relation to how White privilege has operated as an established domination that supports the idea that African Americans are fundamentally different from White people (Gibbons, 2018; Mills, 2003). According to Rector-Aranda (2016), White privilege "tends to ensure whites rights of use and enjoyment of all-around better schools, materially and curricularly," (p. 8). The academic literature suggests that this white privilege may also play a role in the disproportionately high rate of African Americans living in poverty and being unable to enroll in higher education (Moon & Holling, 2020).

Academically speaking, higher education institutions often neglect students who are average performers but who are nonetheless capable of completing college-level work; further,

they also fail to concentrate their efforts on attracting minoritized, low-income students (Andrews et al., 2020). These low-income, minoritized students' chances of success are further constrained by their own views about college, which are already unfavorable towards higher education (Rosa, 2006). Students who do not believe attending college is an option are less likely to do so, according to Huerta et al. (2018). Another obstacle to higher education, particularly for minorities, is gender inequality. When other criteria like ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability are included, the gender disparity grows (Hewitt, 2020). White privilege, innate inferiority, average academic performance, and gender all together have a special relationship to the low-income, underrepresented female students who are the subjects of this research.

The American Dream (TAD)

African Americans have had restricted access to The American Dream (TAD) due to historical obstacles related to equitable opportunity and economic accomplishment caused by racial prejudice (Armstrong et al., 2019; Coates, 2015). According to Armstrong et al. (2019), James Truslow Adams is noted for the creation of TAD in 1931, which is defined as a meritocratic philosophy that is strongly ingrained in the minds of Americans. Other scholars have defined TAD as an ideology that promotes financial and economic success, while others have defined it as a steadfast optimism in the face of hardship to accomplish any opportunity and personal fulfillment via hard work (Armstrong et al., 2019; Hanson & White, 2010; Hauhart, 2015; Kwate & Meyer, 2010).

African Americans have historically been deprived from TAD's benefits because of restrictions inherent to their minoritized status, such as racial prejudice and poverty (Armstrong et al., 2019; Cernkovich et al., 2000). Yet, experts emphasize that some African Americans continue to believe in TAD's promises (Armstrong et al., 2019). Others are pessimistic about

TAD and remain doubtful that they can achieve it (Armstrong et al., 2019; Cohen-Marks & Stout, 2011). In either case, access for African Americans in terms of TAD appears to be inequitable and, in some ways, TAD may be a factor that limits success for minoritized groups.

For minoritized families, the role of education in the framework of the American Dream takes on a different language and meaning (Shapiro, 2005). Shapiro (2005) explains that minoritized families see education as vital because they want their children to succeed, and they want to help their children navigate educational choices so that they might have a better future. However, poor families may rely more on non-financial resources to get their children into higher education such as personal knowledge, contacts, and tenacity.

Socio-economic Factors for Minorities

There are socio-economic factors that affect minorities, in particular, and potentially inhibit their ability to access quality education. Notably, poor preparation at the elementary and secondary school levels and an inability to access or successfully complete college level work were identified as factors contributing to the low ratios for higher education enrollment (Abu-Saad, 2016). Similarly, those with low-income households are not in a financial position to sponsor a college education nor are they usually well versed enough to seek out, complete, and successfully compete for financial assistance. These factors are disproportionately aligned to African Americans, further inhibiting their ability to achieve TAD.

The racial implications associated with most socio-economic factors are clearly evident in access to a quality education. Poor preparation as it relates to available resources and educational experiences contributes to a continuous cycle of low socio-economic conditions. A disproportionate number of Black adolescents come from poor families and lack the financial

means to obtain the necessary resources to thrive in today's economy; therefore, the ability for Blacks to enhance their overall quality of life remains at risk (Ntiri, 2001).

Poor preparation generally begins with a lack of resources – such resources include quality instructional materials, technology, highly qualified teachers, etc. For example, access to technology resources, such as a laptop, makes a major difference in the quality of educational experience for students. In a study it was observed that 70 percent of White students, compared to 30 percent of Black students, own personal computers (Ntiri, 2001). Further, Dobbs (2000), reflecting on a speech made by Michael Milkin, founder of Knowledge Universe, noted that in technology, poverty and racism contribute to the formation of two distinct Americas – those with access and those without (Ntiri, 2001).

In low-income communities, which are largely composed of minoritized students (Teasley, 2019), schools have high expenses, poor facilities, inconsistent administrative leadership, and almost no community support and involvement compared to schools serving predominantly majority pupils in higher-income regions (Abu-Saad, 2016). Additionally, middle-class majority children frequently have more resources and support structures outside of school to compensate for flaws in the public educational system, whereas low-income minoritized children typically lack these resources and support structures (Abu-Saad, 2004b, 2011, 2016; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007; Golan-Agnon, 2006; Jones et al., 2002; Shavit, 1990).

Minorities, whose public-school systems are generally the weakest, are further plagued with a substantially greater percentage of high school dropouts than majority students (Abu-Saad, 2016). To that end, the quality of elementary and secondary education is essential in determining whether young minorities continue on to higher education (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

Further, this foundational preparation has implications on what kind of institutions they attend, how well they perform, and whether or not they are able to complete their degrees (Abu-Saad, 2004b, 2011, 2016; Astin, 1982; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Coursen-Neff, 2005; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007; Jones et al., 2002).

Average Academic Performers

Most of the research on academic outcomes for minoritized students generally focuses on high or low academic performers. For example, the Minnesota study by Davis et al. (2017) on college attendance based on participation in an acceleration program revealed positive college outcomes for high school graduates with higher levels of academic performance. At the other end of the spectrum, a recent study showed that education reforms were generally ineffective for low academic performing minority high school students (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2019). Average academic performers, or those that typically have grades that are in the "C" range or fall between 2.0-2.4 on the standard grade point average scale, are generally overlooked not only in research but in the schools they attend (Rodriguez, 2015). Furthermore, the disproportionately high number of minority students that are average academic performers compared to high academic performers indicates less likelihood for recruitment and attending college (Rodriguez, 2015).

There was one scholarly work that specifically highlighted average performing students. In 2015, Rodriguez conducted a case study on average performing students with regard to college choice and matching them with appropriate postsecondary opportunities. In the review, Rodriguez (2015) highlights the characteristics of average performing students as including racial demographics, socioeconomic status, and college application behavior. With regard to racial demographics, Rodriguez reports that between the two categories of average and high

performance, Black and Latino students are generally categorized among the average performers, with only 1.2% of them in the high-achieving category. The socioeconomic conditions of the average academic performers were reported that nearly half (45.2%) come from families that earn below $50,000 (Rodriguez, 2015). Further, among those just over half (56.0%) have a parent with at least a college degree, which influences college choices (Rodriguez, 2015). Notably, average performing students still applied to college with nearly the same frequency as high performing students; however, average performing students tended to be more concerned about financial aid and proximity to home than the high performing students (Rodriguez, 2015).

The study concluded that average performing students were less likely to attend colleges that best matched their actual preferences regarding degree-level, debt amounts, and graduation rate (Rodriguez, 2015). Rather, Rodriguez (2015) reports these students preferred to enroll in colleges near their homes, even if they may be better matched at other institutions that are less close to home. To that end, improved college guidance is needed to address the amount, timeliness, and accuracy of college information these students receive. Additionally, more targeted informational marketing is also recommended (Rodriguez, 2015).

Access to Higher Education

Access to college results from a combined effort of students looking for colleges and colleges looking for students (Salazar et al., 2021). Therefore, access to higher education is at least in part based on college recruitment. Yet research has shown that minoritized groups, while having made some strides, still do not have equitable access to higher education. Historically, African Americans have individually and collectively fought for their rights to access basic education. However, despite the federal, legislative, and judicial gains, African Americans continue to lag behind in accessing college. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021

Population Survey, African Americans made up only 9% of all Bachelors degrees earned for ages 18 and up.

African American civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), brought legal challenges to both the federal and state supreme courts to overturn separate but equal educational segregation by the mid-century. They won some notable victories in *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938) and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), which helped lay the groundwork for the federal *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision (Miller, 1970; Ogletree, 2004; Stewart, 2017). This landmark decision was critical in African Americans gaining access to education. Gibbons (2018) noted that *Brown v. Board of Education* was a watershed moment in American history, ushering in massive societal transformations.

In the Brown case, the court found "separate, but equal" practices did not promote equity within the schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 2021). Further, the Supreme Court established that all that was required for racial equality was official access to what Whites already had; in their opinion, African American schools could not be compared to schools for Whites. However, some scholars believe that Brown failed to evaluate the whole range of racial segregation's harmful implications, including racism's effect of dehumanizing African Americans in the eyes of Whites (Austin, 2004; Onwuachi-Willing, 2019). For example, there is a diminished sensitivity towards African Americans which manifests as unequitable conditions. A current example of this would be standardized testing whereby the language used to form certain questions that limit the capacity of African American students to answer questions appropriately given their limited access to a high-quality education (Mustafa, 2017). Onwuachi-Willing (2019) explored and analyzed the Supreme Court's Brown decision to show how the Court's

unwillingness to address the psychological impacts of racial segregation perpetuated White supremacy.

During the last two decades, federal, legislative, and judicial initiatives have promoted increased access to higher education for protected groups, particularly White women, African Americans, and other racially minoritized persons of all genders, as well as students of all races and genders from middle- and working-class households (Stewart, 2017; Thelin, 2011). However, in many communities, complete and equitable access to higher education for all individuals remains a challenge (Abu-Saad, 2016).

Facilitating access to education is especially crucial for disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, because they frequently require more time, services, funding, and assistance than majority groups to obtain a good education (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). Although postsecondary enrollment has expanded significantly in recent decades, many students remain underrepresented in higher education (Means et al., 2016; Perna & Kurban, 2013; Ross et al., 2012). Ethnic minorities have less access to higher education than the local population (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). Supporting minority communities' and individuals' access to education is critical not only for employment and financial well-being, but also for successful integration into society as a whole (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

In a survey focused mostly on community perceptions, statistics revealed that ethnic minorities have less access to higher education than general or vocational education (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). More than half of the respondents believed that general education and vocational training are equally available to ethnic minorities, although minority access to higher education is much less common (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). These perceptions indicate that access to higher education for ethnic minorities is improving, but participation remains limited since the main

barriers to education for minorities are institutional, which can be difficult for students who are dependent on so many other factors (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

Education access is also dependent on financial ability to pay for higher education, which is often a deterrent for many African American high school graduates. Tuition prices, coupled with housing, food, and other college related expenses for four-year post-secondary institutions remain high and generally out of reach for low-income students. Notably, African American students and their families may tend to rely on athletic prowess to gain scholarships as their primary access to college. This is likely due to the prevalence of African American males recruited for sports in higher education. For example, Harper et al. (2013) conducted a study of African American undergraduate football and basketball players between 2007 and 2010, finding that these students made up 2.8% of the full-time, degree-seeking student body but 57.1% of the football team players and 64.3% of the basketball team players.

Recruitment in Higher Education

Recruitment in higher education involves several stakeholders. The responsibility primarily rests with higher education institutions, with supplemental support from secondary schools and communities, typically via partnerships or other outreach programs. Recruitment refers to the process in college admissions when colleges or universities reach out to prospective students and attempt to convince them to apply or attend their respective institution. Some recruitment definitions expand this to includes the enrollment of students (Levick et al., 2015). However, for this research, the term "recruitment" focuses on the university or college's effort to communicate with prospective students, namely the minoritized Black high school girls who are average academic performers.

While there may be notable barriers for African Americans, their successful recruitment to higher education tends to rely on six factors. According to Franklin et al. (2020), these six factors are: 1) expressed support at the administrative level; 2) early outreach to students at elementary, middle, and high school; 3) non-traditional recruitment methods (e.g., community centers, churches); 4) establish summer bridge programs; 5) provide academic and cultural support services; and 6) engage in diversity awareness or multicultural sensitivity programs. These factors may occur in higher education outreach, school outreach, and/or through partnerships and programs in the community.

School Outreach

School outreach is an important supplement to the efforts of higher education institutions when it comes to recruiting high school students to college. The school and the school district are uniquely positioned to provide support for their students not only in preparing them for college, but in helping them actually get there. In particular, high school personnel, such as teachers and counselors, often provide exposure, information, and access to college through various outreach opportunities and facilitated partnerships with local universities or community organizations that focus on youth development towards college.

School Personnel. High school teachers can be a major part of college recruitment for African American students. Teachers are often the first line of information, motivation, and encouragement to seek higher education. Teachers can contribute to a revolving door of preparation, recruitment, retention, and graduation among African American students (Ortiz et al., 2020). Scholars have acknowledged that it is important for those most directly involved in the education of African American students, namely their teachers, to understand the links that exist between sustaining Black students' interest and mastery and what they bring into the

classroom in a variety of capital (Ortiz et al., 2020). In essence, teachers aid in recruitment by providing a supportive foundation to students that seek and aspire for college.

Similarly, high school counselors are instrumental in ensuring college recruitment occurs for the students they serve. Specifically, part of the role of high school counselors is to provide access to college information, assist with post-secondary planning (including college options), and encourage a college-going culture (Christian et al., 2017).

Partnerships & Outreach Programs

Partnerships and community outreach programs have emerged as a possible solution to get minoritized groups into the college pipeline in recent years. Many high schools partner with local colleges and universities to provide a pathway to college for their students (Davis et al., 2017). Dahir (2020) acknowledges the gap towards a successful college education can be somewhat alleviated through university and school partnerships that focus on engaging students early in college planning. Such partnerships include those that provide general college enrichment to credit-based transition programs, which may offer early college credits to high school students. A 2005 study by the U.S. Department of Education recommended that outreach programs, such as transition programs, should develop a program culture that supports and encourages students from all academic levels to participate.

In a case study on the LEAP (Leadership, Education and Partnership) program in Camden, New Jersey, the school-university partnership between Rutgers University and one charter high school resulted in a 100% matriculation of low-income minority students into college between 2005 and 2010 (Bonilla-Santiago, 2016). Although this study showcases a positive outcome for these students, it is important to distinguish the charter school from the general public schools in Camden, NJ, whereby such resources and programs are less likely to be

present. Still, the study also highlights the continued need for shared responsibility between universities and schools to more fully support these disadvantaged students (Bonilla-Santiago, 2016).

Some federally funded programs, like Upward Bound, are specifically designed to prepare high school students for post-secondary education (Bryant, 2022). For many students, such as those in minority females in more rural environments, outreach programs like Upward Bound are hugely beneficial, naming the mentorship, financial support, and relationships with Upward Bound staff among its attributes (Jean, 2022). While these programs have improved the trajectory for many economically disadvantaged minority students, recent research supports that more is still needed. For example, one recent study conducted a meta-analysis of the current data on Upward Bound programs and highlighted that support for low-income minority students was limited to academics, retention, and degree conferment (Bryant, 2022). Notably, recent studies on Upward Bound have indicated that more research is needed on both teacher efforts towards college preparation and improving collaboration with school districts to aid in the overall success of students who matriculate through Upward Bound programs (Maldonado, 2022).

Higher Education Outreach

Recruiting college students is one of the major functions of colleges and universities. In 2014, Cellini and Chaudhary report that higher education institutions spent $730 million on advertising to recruit college students. College outreach from these institutions can involve direct contact with the student and/or their family, indirect contact through marketing efforts, or in hosted settings by the university, high school, or community organization. Recruitment can also occur as part of a partnership or other outreach program (Davis et al., 2017). Examples of

common recruitment practices include career fairs, campus visits, digital advertising, direct mail, Upward Bound, and various early college credit programs.

The goal of recruitment is college admission and attendance; therefore, much of the research that includes college recruitment tends to focus more on college preparation, college access, or college admissions. Therefore, this section on higher education outreach first presents empirical studies related to general recruitment efforts, followed by barriers in admissions and then financial aid. Because of their unique commitment towards recruiting minoritized students (Bracey, 2017), additional scholarly review is then presented on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

General Recruitment. In a recent study, Franklin et al. (2020) noted that African Americans have a lower rate of admission, retention, and graduation than Whites due to a lack of resources, availability, and disinterest. To examine opportunities to increase these rates, a qualitative case study explored the perceptions of nine minority employees from eight 1862 Land Grant Institutions (LGI). Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT), the study identified recruitment strategies that would entice prospective African American students. Some of the strategies included using race-specific promotional materials that address admissions, scholarship, and diversity programs; training previously recruited African American students to attract more African American students; establishing on-campus summer programs; and organizing faculty committees and community partnerships that provide ongoing support and resources (financial and non-financial) to African American students. The research concluded that not only was there a gap between recruiters and minoritized students, but universities are contributing to racial inequality by not allocating sufficient resources towards recruiting African Americans. However,

the noted strategies can serve to help overcome this disconnect and increase college admission, retention, and graduation for African Americans (Franklin et al., 2020).

Salazar et al. (2021) examined the recruitment efforts of 15 public research universities. The study specifically investigated off campus recruiting efforts that included receptions or college fairs at hotels, convention centers, or high schools and engaged in day-time visits at high schools. The study concluded that most of the universities conducted most of their off campus recruiting outside of their state in large metropolitan areas. In addition, the universities favored more affluent areas, which by default excluded high-poverty minoritized populations. In terms of racial composition, the study found that out-of-state recruitment efforts favored public high schools with lower percentages of minorities. Accordingly, these outcomes suggest that historically undeserved student populations are not a priority for college recruiters. Notable for this study is that one of the universities included in the Salazar et al. (2021) sample was in New Jersey, which showed that their off-campus recruiting included at least one visit to 63% of the 400 in state public schools. Among those public schools visited in New Jersey, minority students comprised less than half (27%) of those schools' total enrollments as compared to the minority enrollment of schools that were not visited (51%).

Student athletes are among the most well-known groups that are recruited into college. Studies on their recruitment strategies have been beneficial not only to understanding recruitment overall, but in recruiting athletes who are members of minoritized groups (e.g., African American student athletes). Further, understanding effective recruiting strategies for prospective student athletes can give universities a distinct advantage in enrolling their preferred students (Vermillion & Spears, 2012). For example, university recruiters can gain insight on how to

navigate their efforts to improve their success rates given the various factors that may influence a student's college choice.

Letawsky et al. (2003) examined the factors influencing the college decisions of high level student-athletes' college decisions. The study surveyed 135 first-year student-athletes who considered 25 criteria for selecting a college. Among those surveyed, 79% were White and 14% were Black, with the remaining 7% being other minorities. The study's results showed that the top three factors that influenced their college choice were degree-program options, head coach, and academic support services on campus. The two least influential factors were the college choices of friends, the prospect of television exposure, and non-athletic related financial aid. While these outcomes showcase student athlete perceptions, the study concludes that recruiters should be aware that college choices are not solely dependent on athletic-related factors, but that academics are important to students, as well.

Higher education outreach is a critical component in recruiting prospective students to college, especially those in minoritized groups (Hakkola, 2019). Given the various resources and opportunities at their disposal, including an ability to offer financial aid, some scholars have highlighted the importance of higher education's role in specifically reaching out to applicants (Castleman et al., 2017). While some have participated in general outreach, or engaged in school and/or community partnerships, their focus has largely remained on specific types of students – those with higher grades or athletes. Diversity in college recruiting, however, seems to be lacking (Hakkola, 2019). According to Hakkola (2019), higher education institutions, and especially recruiters, must be aware of the diversity issues, and intentionally connect with students who are not identified with the same characteristics that their institution embodies. To

better do this, Hakkola (2019) suggests that higher education institutions integrate and measure their diversity efforts and move beyond standard strategic planning and policies on diversity.

      Admissions Barriers. As noted earlier, admission into college is the end goal for recruitment; if students are unable to get admitted, then recruitment efforts are in vain. Minoritized students are disproportionately impacted by admissions barriers, which primarily are issues with academic preparation and standardized testing. Academic preparation is one potential setback for minority students and their ability to be admitted into college. Some students feel they are not academically prepared due to limited advanced/college placement courses in high school (Means et al., 2019). Further, in reading, math, and science, African American pupils have historically performed far worse than their White counterparts (Davidson et al., 2020). Not having certain academic foundations in grade school causes many African American students to be underprepared for college entrance tests, which are often required for admission to many higher education institutions (Davidson et al., 2020; Davis & Palmer, 2010).

      Related to academic preparation is the use of psychometric testing for admissions. Many universities' admissions practices heavily rely on psychometric testing, such as the SAT and ACT, which negatively affects minority students in particular (Abu-Saad, 2016). Psychometric testing is used to rank students in relation to one another (Abu-Saad, 2016), yet evidence suggests that it is not a pure measure of a student's knowledge or learning potential (Abu-Saad, 2016). Minorities in the United States have been shown to score significantly lower on several standardized examinations than their White counterparts, according to research (Abu-Saad, 2016; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Choy, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; McDowell, 1992). Psychometric exams serve as gatekeepers, essentially blocking minority students from admission or entry into the field of their choosing because they "are not good enough" or "not as good as" their counterparts

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(Abu-Saad, 2016). Exams such as these could disqualify applicants who may be ideal candidates. This gap signifies that the current systems in place limit Black people from attaining or furthering their educational experience.

This pattern is influenced by various things which include individuals from privileged ethnic backgrounds profiting from their parents' educational, professional, and financial success as well as privileged social origins that also increase scholastic attainment (Abu-Saad, 2016). Abu-Saad (2016) suggests that because it influences the mental models that people create to make sense of the world and mediates the methods in which people exhibit their knowledge, culture has a significant impact on test performance (Abu-Saad, 2016; Abu-Saad et al., 2007; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; McDowell, 1992). The capability and viability of creating psychometric testing instruments that do not elicit unfair differential performance are limited by these variables, both individually and collectively. As a result, when these tests are used to decide who gets into universities, opportunity is frequently distributed based more on race and culture than on aptitude (Abu-Saad, 2016; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; McDowell, 1992; Sa'ar, 2003). These limitations create a culture that contributes to systematic racism and oppression.

As an illustrative example, in one particular study in California, it was found that many high-achieving African American students do not attend University of California (UC) campuses (Contreras et al., 2018). The UC system and individual UC school policies have cut back their efforts to recruit high-achieving African American students from California due to hyper-implementation of Proposition 209, which limited UC campuses' ability to use race as a significant admission consideration (Contreras et al., 2018). Researchers suggested that the University of California is passing up an opportunity to further develop the state's talented

students who have previously demonstrated their potential to prosper and thrive in highly selective postsecondary environments (Contreras et al., 2018).

However, according to Gieser (2017), the socioeconomic status of the applicant has the biggest impact on test results that are nationally normed, such as the SAT and ACT. Specifically, at the University of California, the impact of socioeconomic status on test results has significantly increased over the past 20 years, and exams are now a bigger barrier to admission for underprivileged students (Gieser, 2017). Gieser's (2017) study suggests that for California high school graduates applying to UC in 1994, socioeconomic background variables such as family income, parents' educational level, and race/ethnicity were responsible for 25% of the variation in test scores.

Admissions barriers through a critical race lens implies that admissions practices in higher education such as testing and racism limit access and serve as a barrier for Black students to advance. However, the availability of financial help, the elimination of age restrictions for entrance, and the implementation of procedures for admissions screening that are culturally neutral are of utmost importance in improving cultural limitations (Abu-Saad, 2016).

Financial Aid Barriers. Financial aid is one of the key ways that higher education institutions recruit students. It is among the most cited barrier for all students entering college, but especially for African American students who disproportionately come from low-income households. Financial aid issues not only affect the ability to attend college, but it impacts what kind of college a student can afford to attend. Low-income and minority students are more likely than high-income, non-minority students to attend lower-tiered universities and graduate with more student loan debt (Huelsman, 2015; Naylor et al., 2015). Without the financial support of their families, more African American students are forced to negotiate the admissions and

enrollment process (Davidson et al., 2020), putting minorities at an additional disadvantage (Abu-Saad, 2016).

Financial aid regulations, like admissions policies, have a significant impact on minoritized groups' access to higher education (Abu-Saad, 2016; Astin, 1982; Bown & Bok, 1998; Coursen-Neff, 2005; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; Padron, 2004; Pounds, 1987; Wetsit LaCounte, 1987). In 1944, many lower-income Americans who would never have contemplated higher education were able to do so because of the GI Bill (Clark, 1998; McCardle, 2017). The GI Bill granted all veterans equal access to higher education (Boulton, 2007; Harris-Lacewell & Albertson, 2005; Herbold, 1994; Humes, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007; Jolly, 2013; Katnelson & Mettler, 2008; Kidder, 2003; McCardle, 2017; Mencke, 2010; Onkst, 1998; Turner & Bound, 2002). An example of a current educational program would be the New Jersey College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) program that was launched by Governor Phil Murphy in the spring of 2019 to offer students that enrolled in community college a free education (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2018).

Research states that students aspired to attend a higher education institution but reconsidered after realizing the magnitude of their financial obligations, which included the cost of attendance and individual living expenses (Means et al., 2019). Financial and time constraints, having too many work-related responsibilities, childcare, and transportation issues are other situational barriers that come into consideration for many minoritized, low-income students (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). When compared to White students, African American students were less likely to have or be able to obtain financial aid from their parents (Davidson et al., 2020). Additionally, minority students tend to have dispositional, or motivational, barriers, which may

include personal, intellectual, or job-related motives, as well as the influence of previous experiences and community attitudes (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

HBCUs. One place where minoritized students have had some positive outcomes with accessing higher education is through the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Black academic institutions founded before 1964 by ex-slaves in Black churches or linked with Christian faiths are known as HBCUs (Bracey, 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020), there are currently 101 HBCUs in the United States, most of which matriculate more than 212,000 (76%) of African American students. Allen et al. (2018), suggests that it is critical to examine African American higher education development in America in the aftermath of the Kerner Report and Fisher v. Fisher, which was a study that found that HBCUs make up 2% of the higher education landscape, while they only account for 14% of baccalaureate degrees conferred to African Americans. Between 1976 and 2015, the proportion of African American undergraduates at several of the country's most prestigious universities fell dramatically (Allen et al., 2018). Between 1976 and 2015, the proportion of African American undergraduates at the majority of HBCUs decreased (Allen et al., 2018). Affirmative action programs tried to address African Americans' unequal access to higher education and jobs (Allen et al., 2018).

Bracey (2017) suggests that African Americans have been compelled to attend segregated schools and universities for the majority of the last two centuries. To that end, institutions of higher education with mostly White student populations have not demonstrated a long-term commitment to educating African American students; therefore, HBCUs have been the primary avenue for educating African Americans at the college and university levels (Bracey, 2017).

While HBCUs are a viable option for African American college-bound students, there are some challenges that are still present. These hurdles include lower family money and parental education, fewer academically rigorous courses, poor academic accomplishment, and postsecondary aspirations (Adelman, 2002; Byun et al., 2012; Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Koricich, 2014; Means et al., 2016). Low retention and graduation rates were also noted issues (Gasman & Commodore, 2014). Beyond these, HBCUs struggle with sustaining administrative leadership, effectively marketing their success stories, pressure to desegregate while staying true to their mission, and producing future scholars who care about the needs of HBCUs (Gasman & Commodore, 2014).

However, despite these barriers, HBCUs offer several benefits. These include their willingness to educate "at-risk" students, affordability in terms of tuition, community engagement. Future generation leadership training, an Afrocentric curriculum, and a competitive yet supportive learning environment (Gasman & Commodore, 2014). Additionally, HBCUs have been leaders in attracting African American students to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields, as well as maintaining a focus on teaching with a diverse faculty and student body (Gasman & Commodore, 2014). Most importantly, HBCUs create an environment where African American students can prosper in a setting that accepts and supports them (Bracey, 2017).

While scholars have highlighted the negative aspects of recruitment, admissions, and financial aid for minoritized students, several have also offered solutions. Franklin et al. (2020) suggests that the low rates at which African Americans are admitted, retained, and graduated, can be improved when Historically White Institutions (HWI) make a more concerted effort to address the issues and boost the minority population. Some scholars argue for a more holistic

approach, tackling racism openly and directly. For instance, they suggest that universities should have open discussions about how they have dealt with race related issues in order to provide a safe and welcoming environment for their students (Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2020).

These approaches are considered positive efforts given that African American families and communities seem to be interested in learning about the strategies universities use to combat racism (Berkel et al., 2009; Feagin & Sikes, 1995). Similarly, other scholars note that student affairs professionals should look for opportunities to collaborate with family members, K-12 and other school professionals, and community leaders as part of the college or university's effort to be more inclusive, in addition to communicating and educating students (Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2020). Notably, there were not any studies that combat racism, but instead there was research pertaining to address issues of diversity and inclusion on campus.

Financial aid in the form of grants, scholarships, and work-study programs (which require part-time labor on campus) has been proven to help minorities complete their college degrees in the United States (Abu-Saad, 2016; Astin, 1982; Jones et al., 2002; Padron, 2004). To that end, higher education professionals or other organizations may offer educational workshops for all constituents on these subjects due to a lack of awareness regarding college costs, financial aid, and higher education terminology (Ardoin, 2018; Means et al., 2016; Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2020). This can be helpful to minority students since many of these organizations play a key role in rural African American kids' educational aspirations; therefore, it is vital to include them in the college recruitment and admissions procedures (Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2020). Thus, one of the first things experts at colleges and universities may want to think about is their efforts to recruit and admit African American students (Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2020).

Summary

Minoritized groups, or those who have been systemically oppressed with extremely limited access to resources (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) have disproportionately been impacted when it comes to college recruitment, and the associated factors that surround that practice. Higher education plays a critical role in developing American society to meet the needs and challenges of the twenty-first century (Ntiri, 2001). Further, it has a significant impact on a community's ability to compete in the global marketplace (Abu-Saad, 2016). College level education is also recognized in most societies as a major pathway to greater economic rewards and social mobility (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Canton, 2003, 2002; Connor, 2002; Connor et al., 2004; Connor & Dewson, 2001; McCauley, 1998), making it of critical importance to those negatively affected by disparate socioeconomic conditions (Abu-Saad, 2016). These outcomes are even more critical for minoritized students who are average academic performers. These particular students are often overlooked in both recruitment practices, but also in the overall body of scholarly literature which tends to focus on high or low academic performers. Thus, access to higher education for these students becomes an even more implausible outcome.

Recruitment efforts that target minoritized students who are average academic performers could offer an opportunity to improve the life options for these young adults. Understanding the deficit-based perspective that these students suffer and turning it into an asset-based outcome rests with the outreach practices from higher education, the schools they attend, and partnerships from community outreach. To some extent, HBCUs may offer some support in this effort, but those higher education institutions do not have the capacity to accommodate every minoritized Black student that is an average academic performer, nor should they be expected to do so. Instead, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to first acknowledge this population and then work

to develop avenues that will both encourage them to go to college and provide them a way to successfully do so. More specifically, they will need to attend to the six factor of administrative level support, early outreach at all school levels, using non-traditional recruitment methods, establish bridge programs, provide appropriate support programs, and engage in diversity and multicultural efforts (1) expressed support at the administrative level; 2) early outreach to students at elementary, middle, and high school; 3) non-traditional recruitment methods (e.g., community centers, churches); 4) establish summer bridge programs; 5) provide academic and cultural support services; and 6) engage in diversity awareness or multicultural sensitivity programs (Franklin et al., 2020).

Given the socio-economic factors associated with K-12 preparation and finances, accessing higher education is further compounded by specific institutional barriers that further diminish the opportunity for minoritized students to attend and be successful in higher education colleges and universities. Institutional Barriers connect programs or institutions where timing, location, a lack of engaging or relevant courses, inadequate materials, and a lack of knowledge about programs and procedures, among other things, are issues (Cross, 1992; Kitiashvili et al., 2016). Minority education hurdles are mostly institutional, and they can be difficult for students to overcome because they are dependent on numerous variables other than the students themselves (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

Racial discrimination is a huge barrier to African American accomplishment and hard work (Armstrong et al., 2019). Discrimination barriers also impair one's impression of life satisfaction, which might affect one's belief in ever obtaining TAD (Armstrong et al., 2019). Financial aid acts as a barrier for African American students due to the difficulty in acquiring financial assistance information and a lack of support during the enrolling process (Davidson et

al., 2020). The growing expense of tuition and the requirement for student loans has caused some prospective students to doubt the value of attending college (Davidson et al., 2020). Despite the fact that research and local experience show the importance of financial help to minority educational performance (Abu-Skas, 2011, 2001, 2016; Astin, 1982; Choy, 2002; Connor et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2002), most American families are still unable to afford to send their children to college because tuition is too expensive (Naylor et al., 2015).

Conclusion

When building an evidence-based education policy for minorities, systematic research is required (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). Per Kitiashvili et al. (2016), it is critical to conduct research on minority group perceptions, attitudes, and hurdles to provide tailored educational solutions. Education advances a knowledge-based economy, social justice, and positive effects on individuals (Abu-Saad, 2016; Kitiashvili et al., 2016). Higher education is critical for minority growth, generating the leadership needed for social and economic development, and closing socioeconomic gaps between majority and minority groups (Abu-Saad, 2016). Given the gaps in the literature on the recruitment efforts for female non-athlete African American students into college, this study considers how recruitment practices for African American students in a small city can be motivated towards higher education, thereby changing their trajectory and making TAD a possible realization. Hence, Chapter Three presents the methodology for this qualitative study.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three presents the methodology for this qualitative research study about higher education access for minoritized female students who are not high academic performers. This chapter first recaps the research questions before providing a rationale for an ethnographical research design, followed by a description of the research site, population, and sample. The data collection via interviews is discussed, including informed consent, interview protocols, and finally data analysis. The chapter closes with a description of the validity and reliability metrics to be used.

Research Questions

To briefly recap, two research questions guide the examination of the educators' perceptions on what prevents minoritized high school girls from pursuing higher education, as well as barriers and opportunities for universities and colleges to recruit them. The first research question provides perceptions on what level of access high-poverty Black girls who are satisfactory, but not high academic performers are less aware of college requirements and resources. The second research question is also descriptive and aims to describe how higher education institutions can better leverage their outreach efforts to improve access for high-poverty minoritized girls who are not high academic performers.

Method/Design of Appropriateness

This research study is an ethnographical qualitative study. An ethnography is an appropriate research design because it focuses on describing and interpreting a group of individuals that have a shared culture (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). With regards to culture, the urban school system's high school seniors share a culture of poverty that leads to a common way

of thinking about higher education opportunities. Specifically, the common understanding among these students is more often than not that college is out of reach and their focus should be on staying out of trouble and finishing school (Capra, 2009, p.75).

Other research designs, such as phenomenology or grounded theory, would not be ideal approaches. Phenomenological studies are research approaches that aim to understand viewpoints or perspectives about a phenomenon (Bogdon et al., 2016). Although there is a phenomenon that could be explored in this proposed study (i.e., higher education recruitment efforts), the cultural element lends itself more to an ethnography. Grounded theory studies are generalizations of theories that are grounded in research or data (Chun et al., 2019). This is not an ideal approach for this study as a new theory is not being developed.

The methodology for this study uses semi-structured interviews. Interviews offered an opportunity to obtain rich, descriptive responses to the research questions. Among other qualitative options, interviews were most appropriate for this research given the potential sensitivity around the high school senior population.

Qualitative research is often used when not enough is known in the research community about a particular topic, whereas quantitative research would not take into account the significance of social phenomena; rather, quantitative studies seek answers to certain questions in order to establish or refute a particular hypothesis, and as such would not be appropriate for this study. Further, qualitative studies use the natural environment and are unique because it explores the lived experience shared by the study's subjects, which cannot be duplicated. According to research, the natural setting is best suited and has been used in similar studies to capture non-quantifiable data (Levin, 2003). Additionally, qualitative methods, such as personal interviews, help to evaluate and understand the problem under examination holistically and

correctly. Personal experiences, feelings, and subjective answers will aid in drawing conclusions about recruitment practices and perceptions. Quantitative studies are less conducive to this type of exploration.

Population and Sampling

While attempting to understand the limitations to college access for minoritized underperforming high school girls in urban schools, higher education administrators who work with their institution's outreach programs are the principal populations for this study. While other studies have focused on direct student perspectives (Freeman, 1997), I consider the outcomes of these students from the perspective of high school administrators – who oversee college outreach efforts that are aimed at improving access to college. Specifically, this study examined the perceptions of high school education administrators on the outreach efforts towards minoritized high school girls who are average academic performers in Camden, New Jersey. Camden was chosen because it is considered to be 'urban' due to its demographics with low-income, high poverty, and high minoritized population.

Educators, such as principals, teachers, and counselors may have more awareness about barriers to college and university access since they are often the first line of communication when it comes to the students (Halawah, 2005). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), there are approximately 1,284 educators currently serving in Camden city schools which includes approximately 668 Teachers (188 Secondary and 144 ungraded) for the 2021-2022 school year. The NCES (2019) data also showed that the Camden city school district has a total of 616 total other staff which included 18 Guidance counselors, 5 District Administrators, 9 District Support Administrative Personnel, 45 School Administrators, and 18 School Administrative Support Personnel. The characteristics of my final sample was comprised

of 7 current or former high school administrators, educators, and counselors who were employed with the Camden City School District.

Informed Consent and Interview Protocol

Prior to the interviews, I collected demographic information, such as race, gender, and administrator role, using a brief screening and introductory survey. The inclusion criteria, which was vetted via the screening survey, required participants to be a current or former high school educator (teacher, counselor, or administrator) employed with the Camden City School District. The screening survey also captured demographic information, such as the respondent's current position for former assignment, and their time served within their roles.

The interview protocol consisted of a script to introduce the interview purpose and parameters, followed by the semi-structured core questions, and ending with information related to member checking. Each of the core questions were asked in order during each interview, with probing follow-up questions asked whenever clarification or additional details were needed. During the interviews, preliminary questions related to the study covered the level of interaction the participant had with high school seniors and perceptions those students tend to have about higher education. Core questions in the interviews generally centered on the outreach efforts by universities and colleges to improve college access to students regardless of their academic performance levels.

Core Interview Questions

Table 1 shows the twelve core interview questions that were presented to current or former high school educators, counselors, and administrators employed with the Camden City School District Administrators.

Table 1

Interview Questions

Question	Description
1	What percentage of high school seniors would be considered average academic performers (and female) at your school?
2	What are some of the common perceptions/misconceptions among average academic performers about college that you are aware of?
3	What percentage of your high school seniors, including female average academic performers, apply for college?
4	What outreach efforts are used by higher education institutions to attract minoritized students who are average academic performers?
5	What outreach efforts are used by higher education institutions to attract minoritized students who are high academic performers?
6	How many students are typically recruited or given offers by higher education institutions, including by race/gender and average academic performers?
7	What outreach programs are offered to minoritized students residing within your school district to facilitate college access?
8	What might be some ways to encourage more students regardless of their grades to attend college?
9	How would you change institutional outreach efforts to improve college access to average academic performers?
10	What other types of outreach efforts are conducted towards improving college access for minoritized students enrolled in your school or district?
11	What types of information do you think is needed to improve college access for average academic performers, particularly those who are female? [RQ2]
12	In terms of college access for minoritized students, what differences, if any, have you observed about the recruitment of male students versus female students?

Although the core interview questions do not mention student athletes, whenever they were mentioned by participants, additional probing questions were asked to redirect them towards the target population rather than student athletes.

Confidentiality and Human Subjects Protection

Throughout this research study, it was particularly important and critical to ensure the protection of high school educators and higher education administrators. All the potential respondents were adults, and they were provided full disclosure of the study's parameters prior to participation. Specifically, the disclosures detailed the participants' rights and the researcher's responsibility to maintain both their privacy and confidentiality, outlining any potential risk of exposing their identities.

To secure the subjects' identities, I utilized encryption, password-protected software, in addition to removing all identifiers or combinations of information about each respondent, so that subjects may not be identified by their names. I also have not provided individual-level data to the public; only overall conclusions developed through a thorough analysis of my data is presented. Additionally, participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they could end participation at any time if they are uncomfortable without retaliation consequences, or exposure. As noted previously, all participants were required to provide written informed consent, acknowledging these disclosures prior to interviewing.

Location

Camden, New Jersey is considered an urban community based on its demographics and high crime rates. According to the United States Census Bureau (2021), Camden is a city that is canvases nine square miles with an estimated population of approximately 71,773 residents. Of that total population, Black or African American residents represent an approximate 42.5% (United States Census Bureau, 2021). It is also important to note that the median household income for residents is estimated at $28,623, which means that there is a 33.6% poverty rate (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Camden is known as the second poorest city in the U.S.

with nearly half of its families "living below the poverty line with children carrying the biggest burdens," (Bonilla-Santiago, 2016, p. 3404). The city has also been ranked #14 out of 100 for its crime (Franco, 2022).

The Camden City School District is comprised of 17 schools that services students from Pre-K through 12th grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). According to the Camden City School Districts website (n.d.), among its 17 schools, there are 2 Early Childhood (Pre-K-Kindergarten), 8 Family Schools (Kindergaten-8th), and 6 High Schools. Given its population makeup and high crime rates, Camden is regarded as an urban area. Since Camden, New Jersey is comprised of a high minoritized population, the location is suitable for exploring the research questions because the demographics of the high schools within the city's school district mirrors the sample population of this study.

Procedure

Following approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), data for this study was collected via interviews. Once respondents were vetted through the study's criteria, they were contacted to formally review the parameters of the study and sign the informed consent document (Appendix B). Participants in the study were required to provide their informed consent before being scheduled for an interview. Additionally, participants were assured of confidentiality and were informed that they would have an opportunity to review their audio and written transcripts prior to data analysis.

Interviews were administered through an online videoconference platform (e.g., Zoom) and scheduled for one hour. Interviews were recorded and auto-transcribed using this software. The researcher also created field notes of any observations, and maintained the option to ask follow up questions to the participants, if needed. Demographic information was collected as part of the

interview, however no identifying information was collected or used in reporting of the study. All data files were stored in a password protected file folder on the researcher's personal computer and separate from participant contact information. As advised by O'Toole et al. (2018), participants were assigned a unique identification number which was used to replace any personal identifiers such as the participants' telephone numbers, school name, email, etc. Protecting participant's privacy is considered a critical step in maintaining the protection of human subjects (Pace & Livingston, 2005). After the interviews, the recordings were stored, transcribed, and analyzed.

Data Analysis

By gathering and compiling all of the data that was collected while the interviews were performed via Zoom, I examined the findings from my study. Within one week of completing the interviews, all participants engaged in member checking to validate the transcripts. Once completed, I first cleaned the data, redacting any identifying information. Next, I used coding to categorize interview responses into recruitment practices, challenges for students, challenges for recruiters, and other groupings that relate to the research questions (Appendix C). The categorized responses were then reviewed further to identify potential themes and other connections that refined the direct responses to the research questions. This comprehensive examination of the data offered insight into the recruitment of Black average academic performing female students into higher education. The implications of these results are later discussed in Chapter Five.

Trustworthiness

This study was qualitative in nature, and thus the trustworthiness of the data was critical to maintain. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the four measures

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that help ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data. To establish credibility, it is important to ensure that the study assesses the intended purpose of the investigation (Shenton, 2004) which is to access the recruiting efforts by institutions when recruiting non-athletic students who are graduating seniors from a Camden or Trenton, New Jersey high school. Verifying the authenticity of participants' replies to interview questions and triangulation of various methods help establish trustworthiness of the data, various checks should be completed to ensure the study operates within the approved parameters (Shenton, 2004). Following member checking, some of the checks that were performed include an examination of the data for recurring words and phrases that the audience participants frequently used in their responses, an analysis of primary data to determine if there were any differences, and analyzing the data to look for information that should be there but was missing from participants' responses (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the ability to generalize or transfer findings to other contexts and settings (Williams & Bryan, 2013). I demonstrated transferability in my study by ensuring that the findings from my data were both reliable and valid, and that the participants were knowledgeable experts (Stacey, 2019). Dependability generally refers to comparable results should the study be replicated by another researcher with the same research design, methods, and sample (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). Interview recordings, field notes, and reflective journaling contributed to the dependability of this research study. Confirmability is demonstrated when there is clear impartiality (Shenton, 2004). To ensure impartiality, all participants were treated equally, using a standardized process in which any questions asked during the interview were pre-selected and provided in the same order. Further, triangulation requires three different sources to verify information for interviews. In this study, I used field notes, transcripts from the interviews, and a reflection journal to support the study's impartiality

while also maintaining the integrity of the study. Overall, by showcasing each tenet rendered that the data or findings of the study are credible.

Assumptions

The study made several assumptions, such as acknowledging respondents provided truthful responses to all the interview questions because they had been assured that their identities and personal information would be kept private. This information was also outlined in the confidentiality section and was available to access by the respondent at any time. Participants were considered volunteers, which means that it was within their rights to leave the study at any time and without penalty or question. During the study it was also assumed that all respondents read and comprehended the interview questions since the parameters and guidelines were set forth prior to beginning the interview. Lastly, the sample was assumed to be representative of the population from which inferences could be made because a preliminary questionnaire was given in order to determine if the inclusion criteria for participation had been met.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS

Demographics

To explore college access among Black female average academic performers, seven educators in New Jersey who have direct experience with the target population were interviewed. While ten educators were initially planned for interviews, only seven were conducted due to data saturation. Data saturation was determined based on no new codes being generated from the interview data (Saunders et al., 2018). The demographics for the seven participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Study Participants

Participant(s)	Position	Gender	Age	Years in District
Dan	Educator	Male	18-25	1
Abby	Administrator	Female	44-54	26
Beth	Educator	Female	55 & Over	32
Carla	Counselor	Female	55 & Over	21
Danielle	Counselor	Female	55 & Over	8
Ella	Educator	Female	35-43	8
Felicia	Educator	Female	55 & Over	23

Note. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis for this study first presents and aligns the interview questions with the research questions. Following a brief description of the overall interview results, the descriptive coding technique and resulting coding tiers are illustrated and defined. Table 3 shows the alignment of interview items with each research question for purposes of analysis.

Table 3

Alignment to Research Questions

Research Question	Aligned Interview Item(s)
RQ1. In what ways do average performing minoritized Black female students make college choices?	Q2, Q4
RQ2. In what ways can higher education institutions help average performing Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education?	Q8, Q9, Q11

The average interview took approximately 31 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 46 minutes. The audio data for each interview was transcribed and cleaned to remove any identifying information that could compromise participant anonymity or confidentiality. The transcripts were uploaded into NVivo software for further analysis. Using a descriptive coding technique, which labels transcript passages based on the topic of its content (Saldaña, 2021), excerpts from the respondents were coded and recoded to find general common concepts. Figure 1 shows the tiered coding categories that best responded to the study's research questions.

Figure 2

Tiered Coding Categories

Negative Perceptions

Unprepared financially

Academic confidence

Limited Outreach

School/District sponsored
• College Fairs/Tours

School-University Partnerships

Higher Ed Athletic Recruiters

Better Access

Support System
• Parents/Mentors
• Finances

Extend Outreach
• College campus
• College culture
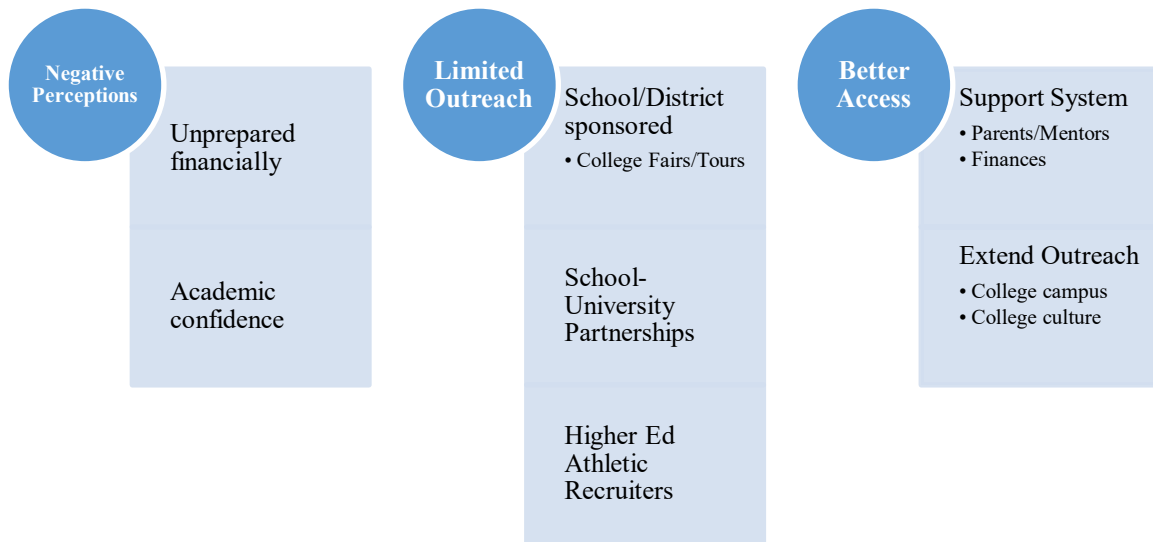
The listed topics located in the boxes represent the initial coding; the three over-arching topics which appear in the spheres, represent the refined categories based on the interview narratives. The code descriptions for both tiers of topics are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Code Descriptions

Coded Category	Description
1. **Negative Perceptions**	Average academic Black female student perceptions that indicated negative perceptions about attending college.
a. Unprepared – Financial	Average academic Black female student perceptions that indicated they felt unprepared to attend college due to financial reasons.
b. Academic Confidence	Average academic Black female student perceptions that indicated a lack of confidence in being academically successful in college.
2. **Limited Outreach**	Describes standard outreach efforts or programs that could provide exposure or access to college for average academic Black female students.
a. School/District sponsored	Describes outreach efforts or programs sponsored or hosted by the school and/or district to promote college and are inclusive of average academic Black female students.
b. School-University partnerships	Describes outreach efforts or programs based on school-university partnerships (e.g., CHAMPS-GEARUP, Rutgers Future Scholars) that promote college and are inclusive of average academic Black female students.
c. Higher Ed Athletic Recruiters	Describes to the ways higher education institutions admit average performing Black female students as well as the practices that support Black female average academic performing students make better decisions about pursuing higher education.
3. **Better Access**	Improving access to college for average academic Black female students may require more attention to student support systems and expanding university experiences.
a. Student Support Systems	Describes the need for a support system, including parents, mentors, and financing, that could help promote college to average academic Black female students.
b. Expanded University Experience	Describes the need for more experiences in college settings to promote college to average academic Black female students.

Findings

The findings for this study begin with some preliminary details on average academic performers as reported by the participants. Next each of the two research questions are presented with the specific outcomes generated from their aligned interview questions. The findings also

highlight an overarching theme that provides additional context to those outcomes. The findings are then summarized as the study's results in response to each research question.

Average Academic Performers

Three of the interview questions requested preliminary demographics of this study's target population. Participants provided general responses to interview questions 1, 3, and 6, which ask participants to estimate the percentage of high school seniors that would be classified as average academic performers by race and gender; what percentage of these students apply for college; and what percentage of these students are recruited or made offers to attend college, respectively. Given that the participants confirmed that their schools had a majority Black population, Table 5 presents the participant responses to the requested preliminary demographics on average academic performers.

Table 5

Average Academic Performers (est.)

Participant	Q1. % Average Academic Performers		Q3. % AAP Applied for College	
	All	Black Female	All	Black Female
Dan	40%	70%	30%	50%
Abby	50%	50%	100%	50%
Beth	77%	60%	100%	60%
Carla	41%	35%	100%	60%
Danielle	40%	30%	100%	65%
Ella	50%	20%	100%	20%
Felicia	20%	55%	90%	85%

Research Questions

To respond to the research questions, the outcomes from the descriptive coding were applied per the aligned interview questions. Relevant passages from the interview transcripts are

also provided to demonstrate support of the resulting themes associated with each research question's results.

RQ1. For the first research question, which asks about the ways average performing Black female students make college choices, the following two interview items were considered:

> **Q2.** What are some of the common perceptions/misconceptions among average academic performers about college that you are aware of?

> **Q4.** What outreach efforts are used by higher education institutions to attract minoritized students who are average academic performers?

> In response to the first research question, the interview participants collectively indicated the following outcomes related to the ways average performing Black female students make college choices:

Negative Perceptions. According to the participants in this study, the average performing Black female students make college choices based on their perceptions of college and the types of outreach that expose them to college. For example, Abby stated:

> There are many different perceptions, but I think the one that most frequent among the high schoolers, the seniors in particular, is that: Will I be able to get in college; if I get in college, will I be able to maintain and sustain it because of financial obligations?

Overall, the respondents indicated that average academic Black female students have negative perceptions of college. Specifically, the respondents shared that these students saw themselves as unprepared for college. Initially, students felt they could not afford college, such as when Beth said, "I think a lot shy away because they know financially, they can't afford to go to college." Others questions their ability to be academically successful in college, such as Ella who shared:

They think that it's too hard and [they] won't be able to succeed in college; a lot of times again they hit the wall and just stay, and they don't go no further because there is no one there pushing them and letting them see that although you may not have been the best in high school, you can still succeed in college.

However, most of the respondents also stated that these students preferred to pursue vocational or other post-secondary options that may prove to be successful faster than earning a four-year college degree. Specifically, Felicia felt that "They have the fear that once they get in, they won't finish, or they won't make it." As a result, Black female students that are average academic performers feel unprepared to attend college due to finances and lack confidence in their academic ability to be successful in college.

Limited Outreach to Schools. With regard to outreach, the respondents had mixed responses. Some participants reported that higher education institutions do not currently pursue average academic Black female students beyond the standard efforts that are in place for all students. According to the respondents, these efforts are primarily the result of school or district sponsored activities, such as college fairs or local college tours, or part of a school-university partnership, such as the CHAMPS-GEARUP program or Rutgers' Future Scholars program. Participants further reported that when students are actively pursued by higher education recruiters, it is most often sports-related (notably, track); however, the participants said this was still a rare occurrence. When describing the situation, Ella stated:

I wouldn't say higher education institutions actually reach out to those average students. It's very rare that you see them reaching out to average students for the most part, they're reaching out to the students who are a student [that] have good grades, [or] athletes.

These outreach efforts, according to the respondents, are limiting and do not provide sufficient

exposure to any students, including those Black female students who are average academic

performers. Specifically, Carla noted:

> I've had them [university recruiters] come out and actually sit down with our students
>
> and do the application and do the financial needs and things like that. But…they could do
>
> a better job because I think we have many more students who would get accepted if that
>
> was the case.

However, Felicia highlights that "other than them coming here or the students going there on like

on a class trip, there isn't anything else." Thus, Black female students that are average academic

performers are exposed to college primarily through school-sponsored events and school-

university partnership programs; however, universities can do more to extend their outreach to

the schools.

In contrast to the mostly school-sponsored and program approach to college recruitment,

some respondents mentioned that both the school and the local universities are active in

recruiting their students to college. These efforts are inclusive of the average performing Black

female students. In particular, participants from this perspective highlighted the school-university

sponsored programs such as after school or summer activities (e.g., tutoring, seminars, etc.).

While these respondents appeared more optimistic about outreach for all students, they still noted

that more was needed to make a more meaningful impact on these students. However, according

to Abby:

> We're always looking to partnership with the local universities, but we need to have more
>
> of a hands-on approach where it's like a real partnership where they come to us, we go to
>
> them and it's more than one session and it's more opportunities where it doesn't just have

to happen in school, so it could be at a…They could be at the library, or they could be at the municipal hall. They could be any place, but it doesn't always have to happen at the school.

Additional information from interview Question #6 was not received by more than half of the participants due to the information not being known.

RQ2. For the second research question, which asks about the ways higher education institutions can help average performing Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education, the following three interview items were considered:

> **Q8.** What might be some ways to encourage more students regardless of their grades to attend college?
>
> **Q9.** How would you change institutional outreach efforts to improve college access to average academic performers?
>
> **Q11.** What types of information do you think is needed to improve college access for average academic performers, particularly those who are female?

In response to the second research question, which refers to the ways higher education institutions can help average performing Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education, the interview participants collectively indicated a need for better access. Specifically, they noted that improving access to college for average academic Black female students may require more attention to student support systems and expanding university experiences.

Student Support Systems. The overall response from the participants indicated that the average performing Black female students could be encouraged regardless of their grades to attend college is by increasing support and expanding outreach efforts. Specifically, student

support systems describe the need for a support system, including parents, mentors, and financing, that could help promote college to average academic Black female students. According to Abby:

> If they're not high proficiency but just proficient to get into college, provide some tutorials and interventions for them, maybe throughout, maybe there should be, like maybe it could be like a tracking system; or something set up between the schools and maybe the universities or whatever to monitor the students. And for those who just maybe need just a little bit more support, then there are some type of interventions at the college level and not just the school level cause guess the school level, we do our part, we provide all that. But even at the college level where they can come in.

Overall, the respondents agree that support by way of both parents and mentors being present are ways that can encourage more students to attend college. For example, one participant expressed the importance of empowering parents by giving them the information or tools to provide better support for their children in terms of higher education at home. Danielle also suggests that "When the parents are given the information, it holds them accountable. So, if we expose our parents, then the children want to learn."

Further, respondents confirmed that more financial aid could be a motivator given that the lack of financial aid support for both students and their parents remains a barrier for students to not attend college. Notably, the educators remarked that if resources, funds, and the quality of educators were as equitable as in surrounding districts, there would be increased interests and more positive outcomes for their students in pursuing college. Yet, by improving access to college for average academic Black female students may require more attention to student support systems and expanding university experiences.

Expanded University Experiences. In terms of expanding outreach by higher education institutions, some participant responses focused on increased exposure to college campuses. Notably, Ella expressed a benefit of the college experience by suggesting:

> It's not just a place for students who are well versed or have good grades. Anybody tends to see it in college. If you put your mind to it. So, I think if they had those programs to remind students of that and make them feel comfortable, more comfortable on their campus once they arrive. I think they can go a long way.

For example, respondents mentioned students having overnight campus visits, facilitating college-like experiences, and/or visiting schools beyond the local colleges. According to Beth:

> You know, the college visit, exposed these things and that's what we always had those things to encourage our students. You know, we tried to expose them to as much of many things as possible because, you know, a lot of times they're not exposed [to] these things and they don't have interest. But when they're exposed to them, I think it helps them a great deal.

To further facilitate outreach for Black female students in particular, one respondent suggested on-campus childcare facilities for average academic performing students who aspire to attend college but choose not to because they became teenage mothers. Specifically, Dan states:

> I would say like trying to get it more like a social media aspect because everything is goes through social media. So, if kids can just, like visualize it or see it, it makes them wanna go, or just like understanding the importance of education. A lot of kids don't understand the importance of education or how much it can benefit you actually. So just they have to see it to believe it. So, like seeing it on social media or, you know, their friends talking about [it].

Overall, by expanding these experiences it details the need for more experiences in college settings to promote college to average academic Black female students.

When asked about the types of information needed to improve college access for average academic performers, particularly those who are female, the respondents suggested that all their students receive basic college access information with regards to applying to attend and applying for financial aid. The bigger challenge, according to the respondents, is convincing the students to pursue college or follow through to attend college when accepted. For example, Abby states:

> Cause the children, they come to school, but they don't wanna be in the school all day long. So, we need to make sure there's other opportunities located around in the city where it's a partnership, where they come and they're there, or either their housing; it's in a place where the students are able to come to on their own. Because there's not always a lot of funding and all that kind of things, that always provide transportation to take them on college tours, even though that's built into the schedule and the curriculum, but it needs to happen more frequently, just maybe once or twice a year.

As Abby noted, the broader community is a necessary stakeholder in an effort to recruit students to college. Essentially, the participants acknowledged that expanding the university experience is not limited to the partnerships between higher education institutions and the school districts, it is also inclusive of the broader community. However, despite the commentary about the community, the respondents did not identify any specific information beyond the general comment that was particularly meaningful for these disadvantaged female students. Overall, the educators mostly confirmed that these students primarily experience college recruitment via information from guidance counselors, teachers, and outreach programs.

Theme: Valuing Higher Education

There was one major theme that emerged among the coded responses that provided additional context to the results for both research questions. In their responses about college access for Black female students who are average academic performers, participants consistently remarked on the value of higher education. Specifically, participants indicated that changing negative perceptions towards valuing higher education is critical to students making better decisions about pursuing college. Some participants described only the student's diminished value for higher education, while other participants also noted opportunities to change this mindset. For example, Dan commented:

> They don't really want to go to school because of the influence of social media and content creators, so it's more of like just trying to find their little niches of you know, we're in a kind of society now where everybody wants to blow up really fast. They don't wanna work anymore. Everybody doesn't work. It's some talk about going to college, but it's very rare.

Similarly, Danielle shared that, "A lot of times the young people are so caught up into the negative world that they don't want to put their education until it's too late." When speaking about the value of a college visit, Ella explained:

> You know, the college visit, exposed these things and that's why we always had those things to encourage our students. You know, we tried to expose them to much or to [as] many things as possible. Because, you know, a lot of times they're not exposed [to] these things and they don't have interest. But when they're exposed to them, I think it helps them a great deal. You know, that encourages them that they can do what they can [to] go to college.

Felicia summed it up as, "Bridge[ing] the gap of education really, really is important… because many of them don't see beyond today.

Summary of Results

Based on the findings from the interviews, Table 6 presents the results for the two research questions:

Table 6

Study Results

Research Question	Results
RQ1. In what ways do average performing Black female students make college choices?	In general, average performing Black female students tend to make college choices based on negative perceptions of higher education and limited outreach efforts by higher education institutions.
RQ2. In what ways can higher education institutions help average performing Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education?	Higher education institutions can help average performing Black female students make better decisions about pursuing higher education by targeting student support systems and expanded opportunities to experience university settings.

In addition to these results, the study found support for valuing education, as respondents commented on a lack of confidence in pursuing college by the Black female students that are average academic performers. This overarching theme was evident in the outcomes for both research questions.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presented the results from this qualitative study that interviewed seven educators that have worked with high school students in Camden, New Jersey. This study first acknowledged that Black female students who are average performers have negative perceptions of higher education. These students also have less exposure to higher education because those institutions conduct limited outreach to them in the school. Second, the results showed support

for higher education institutions being more proactive towards average performing Black female students by targeting student support systems, such as parents, mentors, and financing. Additionally, offering students more opportunities to experience college in campus settings is another way to encourage these disadvantaged students to make better decisions about pursuing higher education. Chapter Five discusses these results, their implications, and recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Five is comprised of the discussion for this qualitative research study about higher education access for minoritized female students who are not high academic performers. Following a brief study summary, this chapter discusses, describes, and interprets the implications of this study. More specifically, this chapter elaborates on the outcomes and themes that were presented in the previous chapter. Lastly, this chapter concludes with recommendations for practice and future research, as well as offers final thoughts on the study and opportunities for Black female students who are average performers.

Study Summary

The objective of this study was to explore the outreach efforts of higher education institutions in terms of underperforming female students who are high school seniors within urban and impoverished communities. This study examined student interest and access from the perspective of high school educators who directly worked with the target population of minoritized female students that are average academic performers through exploration of the following research questions:

Research Question #1 identified the ways in which Black female average performing high school senior make decisions about attending college. This question also explored factors or barriers that may limit the student's aspirations of attending college. Research Question #2 examined the outreach efforts of higher education institutions when recruiting underperforming Black female students. This question also explored resources and information that colleges and universities should provide to both parents and students which would allow them to make more informed college choices.

This qualitative ethnographic research study consisted of one-on-one interviews comprised of seven high school counselors, administrators, and/or instructors who were either current or former employees of the Camden City School District. Interview questions focused on the percentages of female students who perform on par with their male peers academically, the perceptions and myths about their attitudes toward higher education, and the outreach programs from universities that specifically target this group.

Discussion

The results from Research Question #1 suggest that average academic preforming Black female students' college decisions are influenced by their negative misperceptions about higher education and the lack of outreach initiatives from universities, which serve to perpetuate those feelings. According to this research, Black female students with average academic performance choose to pursue college based on how they see higher education and the kinds of outreach that introduce them to it. Specifically, as it relates to exposure and outreach, Dan suggests that higher education institutions should incorporate social media efforts to increase their outreach for these students. Most respondents said that higher education institutions do not go above and beyond the routine measures that are in place for all students; recruiting Black female students with average academic standing are not a targeted priority.

Others who responded said that school-university sponsored initiatives or partnerships, like after-school or summer programs, are used to actively attract students to attend local colleges. While respondents did not indicate whether there was an academic requirement or not to participate in such programs, the general consensus was that Black female average performing students were not excluded from these opportunities. However, the onus would be on the student to pursue those programs, as well. Given that these students seem to have minimal confidence in

their ability to go to college due to academic or financial reasons, it suggests that they might also choose not to participate in these programs that are meant to ease the pathway to college. College Therefore, as noted by the respondents, to enable a more significant influence on these students, more outreach efforts by the higher education institutions to the school would be needed.

These findings suggest that the results pertaining to Black average academic performing students who are minoritized are aligned with the noted barriers to higher education for most high poverty, low-income students. Specifically, their socio-economic condition places them in an environment where support and involvement are minimal to nonexistent (Abu-Saad, 2016). According to Carla, "these students do not have a proper foundation." Further, given that most of them are also not athletes and/or they are not considered high academic scholars, there is less focus on whether or not they go on to college. Again, this supports the existing literature, such as when Letawsky et al. (2003) emphasizes that non-athletic students are both under-recruited and are often not awarded financial scholarships. Their perception that college is beyond their reach and capabilities is likely magnified because they are not being pursued by higher education institutions, as well as not being pushed towards it given the limited capabilities of the school system where they reside. These perceptions are consistent with those minoritized populations who are skeptical of achieving the American Dream (Armstrong et al., 2019; Cohen-Marks & Stout, 2011).

Research Question #2 found that by enhancing access via student support systems, student mentality, and increased outreach, higher education institutions may assist Black female students that are average academic performers in making better choices about continuing higher education. The most significant information from this study is that enhancing support and broadening outreach activities might benefit or better prepare Black female students with average

academic performance to choose to attend colleges. Many studies have found that financial

assistance is critical to disadvantaged groups in any effort to encourage their college attendance

(Abu-Saad, 2016; Astin, 1982; Bown & Bok, 1998; Coursen-Neff, 2005; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007;

Jones et al., 2002; Padron, 2004; Pounds, 1987; Wetsit LaCounte, 1987). Similarly, support from

parents or family has also been known to be a contributing factor towards college pursuits

(Matthews-Armstead, 2002; Smith, 2009).

According to Smith (2009), low-income minority parents tend to promote the high school

diploma as the culminating credential. Thus, universities must be more proactive in engaging

parents to be more supportive for their low-income minoritized students if there is to be effective

change towards more of these students' pursuing college. The respondents in this study clearly

made those same two connections. The support system that was somewhat less noted in the

research was that of mentors. Yet in the Jean (2022) study of Upward Bound programs,

mentorship (as well as financial aid) was identified as a benefit for secondary students who went

on to pursue higher education. Ultimately, all three – Financial assistance and support from

parents and/or mentors seems to be an essential part of the formula to inspire more students who

are of low income and minoritized status to apply for and enroll in college. Figure 1 presents a

Venn diagram of the key stakeholders and their areas of contribution for minoritized students.

Figure 3

Stakeholders for Minoritized Students
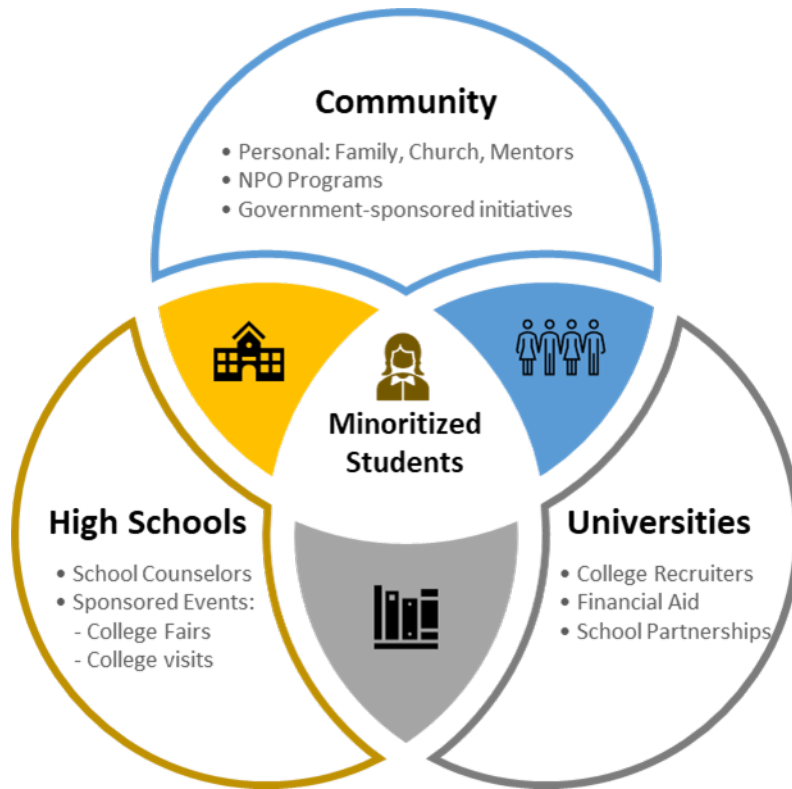
Engaging students in campus experiences was part of the continued commentary among the educators in this study. Essentially, they remarked that students staying overnight on campus, engaging in real college-like activities, or visiting institutions outside of the neighborhood universities are all opportunities to create a more hands-on experience to college that can serve as encouragement to attend college post-graduation. Franklin et al. (2020) suggested that new recruiting tactics by universities are needed to better support low-income minority students. In light of the prevalence of teenage parenting that many times is part of a poverty cycle in low-income minoritized environments, one of the respondents mentioned that having childcare

services available on-campus could be another way to improve support for individuals with average academic performance who want to attend college when they have young children.

The findings from Research Question #2 were consistent with the previous research studies in terms of the unique circumstances for minoritized students. Wealthier school districts are able to provide more engaging experiences on college campuses, both near and far, because they have the financial means and/or the parents have the financial means to facilitate them (Smith, 2009). The Black female minoritized average academic performing student within the Camden City School District generally has limited exposed to colleges and universities, and only a few when they participate in athletics. More active recruitment tends to occur for male students instead. For instance, Danielle shared that "everything is sports related for African American men." Given these outcomes, there is an opportunity for recruitment practices to be expanded so that they target this population better and increase their chances to access TAD.

Implications

The implications for this study focus on the outcomes from the study with regard to college choices and outreach from higher education institutions. There are also implications for the value of education, which emerged as an overarching theme in the study. Finally, how these results relate back to Critical Race Theory has additional implications for this target population of average performing minoritized students.

College Choices

Generally high school students tend to be excited about the possibility of going to college. High school seniors are choosing their final destinations and reporting them to their schools to be showcased during the coming commencement. Yet, average performing minoritized Black female students may not truly know these feelings. As the results of this study

indicate, many of them have negative perceptions with regard to college and do not see it is a viable option for themselves. Because of the limited outreach in recruitment, these students are operating with limited information about their actual options for college. As Rodriguez (2015) highlighted, average performing students, particularly minoritized students, have a diminished capacity to actively pursue higher education as compared to their higher performing peers.

These negative perceptions not only discourage pursuit of college, but it also manifests into a continuous cycle of poverty, as these students will become the parents who do not have a college education and who are then less likely to encourage their children to pursue college. The limited outreach is problematic because these students could be successful in college, and they live in an area where there are two public universities. By not being pursued as worthy potential college students, the negative perceptions are likely maintained, thereby contributing to the diminished capacity to achieve an improved socioeconomic trajectory.

Higher Education Outreach

Higher Education institutions are not unwelcoming of average academic performers. Given that only a small percentage of students in the country have cumulative grade point averages above 3.4, there simply are not enough students in that category to fill all the seats of the many academic institutions of higher education. Yet when it comes to minoritized groups, some higher education institutions may be missing the mark in targeting these potential students. In this study, educators remarked these students getting better access – first, with regard to the student support systems that are being left out of the recruitment process, including parents, mentors, and financing. Parents can be a gateway to encouraging these students to pursue college; as can mentors. Perhaps recruitment efforts should include marketing to these two groups so that these young girls hear positive messages about college from multiple sources that

they trust. Financing is another factor, which continues to be a barrier for all minoritized students. For average academic performers, it can seem insurmountable since they often do not qualify for academic scholarships. Universities are uniquely poised to offer financial aid packages to students – providing such benefits to these students that are oftentimes local to their campus, could be a game changer.

Second, the educators in this study suggest that universities expand their recruitment practices to include overnight campus visits, and other direct exposure to the university so that students will see themselves in that environment. These suggestions are in line with two of the six factors identified by Franklin et al. (2020) when universities aim to recruit minoritized groups: using non-traditional recruitment methods and establishing summer bridge programs. Should universities take advantage of these recruitment suggestions, there is an improved likelihood that minoritized female students who are average academic performers will be able to visualize themselves making different college choices and perhaps even begin to value this option for post-secondary education.

Valuing Education

The results from this study showed a consistent pattern that added more context to the findings of the research questions. Specifically, the value of education was regularly mentioned by participants, which directly impacts how minoritized, Black female students in high school who are average academic performers make college choices. Additionally, the lack of attention from higher education institutions exacerbates the negative viewpoints for this population, thereby maintaining their lack of confidence and diminished value in higher education for themselves.

Participants made it clear that improving students' negative perspectives in terms of the value of higher education is essential to helping them make better choices about going to college. Although some of the participants simply highlighted the lack of value for education by these students, other participants remarked that changing this perspective should be a goal. According to Matthews-Armstead (2002), having the confidence and value for education was key to the successful pursuit of college for African American women who came from poverty-stricken communities. This notion was also supported by Franklin et al. (2020) who highlighted that disinterest was one reason students did not pursue college after high school.

Critical Race Theory

Although elements of this study may touch on all five tenets of Critical Race Theory, this study was guided by the CRT tenet of race as a social construct. More specifically, this tenet refers to the permanence of racism in the political, social, and economic domain when institutional racism is ignored in higher education diversity initiatives (Iverson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The limited outreach by higher education institutions to this minoritized low-income group of average academic performers speaks to how this group is ignored despite the fact that their situation is largely a result of the inherent white privilege and inherent inferiority manifested in their socio-economic conditions. This oversight contributes to the reduction in these students being able to access information that would aid minoritized females in making more progressive decisions about attending college.

There remains a disproportionate gap among race and gender in higher education institutions in terms of Black female students and graduates (Libassi, 2018). Unfortunately, for this group, the gap widens even further when athletic participation is considered. Athletes that are recruited into college by and large tend to be male students. Respondents noted that when the

female students are recruited, which is very rarely, it is for track. Therefore, when the female student is not an athlete and does not have superior grades, without an intentional and concerted effort, it is likely that this student will remain in a poverty cycle or be subject to the poverty to prison pipeline – and most likely not headed towards achieving the American Dream.

Another finding within the data was that other inequalities with regard to resources, the quality of education, and the quality of educators were highlighted and also support the permanence of racism tenet. For instance, respondents noted that minoritized students were not afforded the same amount, quality, or availability of resources compared to predominately White suburban school districts. Specifically, Danielle expressed that as a "district, the students are disadvantaged because we are disengaged." These findings are consistent with the permanence of racism construct in CRT because it has been contended that due to both the current climate of the school district and education system with respect to recruitment, institutional and structural racism remains at the root of African American poverty (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). More importantly, educational inequity is still largely determined by racial disparities (Franklin et al., 2020).

The importance of education and its connection to Critical Race Theory were the main topics of this study. The research revealed that in order to help students make better decisions about attending college, it is crucial to change their negative perceptions of the value of higher education. Racism in institutions and systems, disadvantages for minoritized students, and racial disparities are a major factor in educational inequity. Thus, the discrepancy remains that average academic female minoritized students in high-poverty areas are not recruited with the same rigor and diligence as high academic performing students, further limiting access and ability to achieve TAD.

Limitations

  After conducting the study, some limitations of the study were the framing of the questions and the order in which the questions were asked to participants during the interviews. Also, during the interviews, it appeared that the participants were unclear about answering for the target population because they often defaulted to discussing all Black students or high academic performers. To address this limitation, I was required to engage in considerable follow up to get more focused responses. For future research, either questions should be framed in such a way that participants can easily reference the target population (e.g., sample list of their students who meet certain criteria) or be able to more quickly identify who the question is asking about. Further, a mixed-methods approach might also offer better clarity and consistency in responses. Lastly, another limitation is the small sample size and limited interviews which would have constituted a robust ethnography. Although the size and the interviews were limited, the study remains effective because it provided valuable information that was pertinent to understanding the perceptions and attitudes of the students about recruitment and access to higher education.

Recommendations for Practice

  For school districts, like Camden, New Jersey, where there are a disproportionate number of low-income, minoritized Black female students who are average academic performers, the following recommendations from this research are:

- **Changing The Narrative**

  The research revealed that students have negative perceptions or attitudes with regards to higher education. A future recommendation is that higher education institutions should employ a team of individuals that are both trained in diversity and working with

minoritized populations. In doing so, the students may view access to higher education more attainable.

- **Opportunities Equitable for All**

   Higher education should consider recruitment opportunities for all students, beyond the traditional high-performing students or athletes. The findings suggest that there are opportunities that exist for such efforts. With greater opportunities present, both the district and the institution may begin to narrow the disproportionate gap in high school graduation and college enrollment.

Recommendations for Future Research

In terms of future research, there are several places where this study can serve as a starting point to expand the scholarly discourse in education. In addition, there are some opportunities to use alternative research designs and methodology to capture additional perspectives on this topic. First, given the limited empirical research on average performing students, more attention should be given to this target population, especially comparing outcomes for minoritized and non-minoritized students. Second, future researchers should consider research on closing the recruitment gap. While the research revealed that many participants were in support of higher education support efforts with regards to recruitment, future research should explore the perceptions of higher education recruiters. By doing so, researchers may gain more insight that will aid in increasing recruitment efforts for Black minoritized students.

Third, a couple of the participants mentioned social media influences with regard to the target group being considered in this study. Therefore, exploring how social media influences student perceptions with regard to pursuing college could offer new insight to this technology-

driven generation. Another topic for consideration is to examine the retention practices of higher education institutions for students who have been identified as minoritized and who come from economically disadvantaged communities.

With regard to methodology, as noted previously, a mixed methods approach using a survey or observations may offer a different perspective for this target group. Similarly, obtaining the perceptions from the actual students, and not just the educators that engage with them would likely offer even more insight into the ideas, needs, and motivators that influence college choices for Black female economically disadvantaged high school students who are average academic performers. Another practical implication is to replicate the research study in an effort to be fully robust with more participants, interviews, and participants observation. By doing so, the study could provide more details.

Summary

The goals of this study were to (a) identify current outreach initiatives for the recruitment of underperforming girls from high-poverty urban areas and (b) find potential solutions that might enhance minoritized girls' access to higher education. The current study reinforced discussions about minoritized students' access to resources for higher education, including outreach initiatives, and attitudes toward college with current or former high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. Understanding how underrepresented students are motivated to attend college can help districts and institutions deliver relevant, timely, and accurate information to students, preferably in the media they are most likely to be exposed to (e.g., organization websites, social networking sites, campus visits, and college brochures, television). Teachers can also lessen those barriers by being aware of the obstacles these students face and actively help them in overcoming their lack of confidence in being capable and able to attend and

be successful in college. Finally, increasing the minoritized populations' access to higher

education can help break the poverty cycle and ultimately improve their trajectory and that of

future generations. In doing so, it will support equity in higher education, and, ideally, equity in

the distribution of the socio-economic benefits that come with it that enable better access to the

American Dream.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Form

January 20, 2023

Tya Miles
Seton Hall University

Re: Study ID# 2023-398

Dear Tya,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled "Barriers Which Limit Minority Access to Higher Education" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Barriers Which Limit Minority Access To Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Tya Miles, Doctoral Student *The association between mind mapping as a learning strategy and critical thinking dispositions in undergraduate pre-health science students.* (ELMP), Seton Hall University

Sponsor: This research is supported by the Education Leadership, Management, and Policy (ELMP) Department at Seton Hall University.

Brief summary about this research study:
The following summary of this research study is to help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. You have the right to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to identify barriers that occur in the recruitment of minority female students from high-poverty, urban communities, and unearth possible solutions that may help students and universities overcome or eliminate these barriers. You will be asked to participate in a recorded (virtual) videoconference via Zoom. I expect that you will be in this research study for approximately one hour.

There are two foreseeable risks in the current research. First, as with most social science research, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality, in the event that unauthorized parties gain access to my data or if a participant reveals identifiable information during the interview. To mitigate this risk, I am using a password-protected Zoom account to conduct interviews, the data will be encrypted on Zoom's servers, and I am using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. I will redact any identifiable information revealed in the interviews. Second, there is a risk of psychological discomfort with the questions asked, given that participants are recalling the struggles of some of their students with accessing college. To mitigate this risk, participation is voluntary, and participants can refuse to continue, which includes skipping questions. The participants will be informed that they can stop the interview at any time.

There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, you may obtain personal satisfaction from knowing that you are participating in a project that contributes to new information. Your participation in this study may also contribute to insights for enhancing college access for Black female high schoolers.

Purpose of the research study:
You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a current or former High School Counselor, Administrator, or Teacher employed with the Camden City School District.

Your participation in this research study is expected to last for one hour.

What you will be asked to do:
Your participation in this research study will include:

- You will be asked to participate in an interview guided by open-ended questions.

Informed Consent Form

- The entire interview should last one hour. The research study is built upon a qualitative ethnographical research design method. By using an ethnography, the goal is to collect and build the stories of participants based upon their cultures and personal life experiences which are all centered around specific phenomena.
- All interviews will be conducted through Zoom in the convenience of your own home or other desired location. Interviews will be semi-structured, in which the core questions will be asked of all participants in each interview. Example interview questions include "What are some of the common perceptions among average academic performers about college that you are aware of?" and "What outreach efforts are used by higher education institutions to attract minority students who are average academic performers?"
- During the interview, with your consent, I will record the video and audio of the interview. The accuracy of the answers and information shared during the interview is improved by the recording. At any time, if you choose to only have the interview audio recorded without video, you may turn off the video in the Zoom application during the interview.
- The recording will be transcribed. As a participant in this study, you have the right to inform the researcher of any data that you wish to have revised or removed. Participants can also provide additional insight and/or clarify information at any time during the interview.

Your rights to participate, say no or withdraw:
Participation in research is voluntary. You can decide to participate or not to participate. You can choose to participate in the research study now and then decide to leave the research at any time. Your choice will not be held against you.

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include missing study visits or non-compliance with the study procedures.

Potential benefits:
There may be no direct benefit to you from this study. However, possible benefits may include that you may obtain personal satisfaction from knowing that you are participating in a project that contributes to new information.

Potential risks:
The risks associated with this study are minimal in nature. Your participation in this research may include your involvement in this study which is completely anonymous. Any identifying information collected will be kept private and will never be shared without your express written consent. The researcher will be the only one with access to the password-protected computer where all study-related data will be stored.

There are two foreseeable risks in the current research. First, as with most social science research, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality, in the event that unauthorized parties gain access to my data or if a participant reveals identifiable information during the interview. To mitigate this risk, I am using a password-protected Zoom account to conduct interviews, the data will be encrypted on Zoom's servers, and I am using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. I will redact any identifiable information revealed in the interviews. Second, there is a risk of psychological discomfort with the questions asked, given that participants are recalling the struggles of some of their students with accessing college. To mitigate this risk, participation is voluntary, and participants can refuse to

continue, which includes skipping questions. The participants will be informed that they can stop the interview at any time.

The researcher places the utmost focus on the treatment and safety of study participants. Although there is no reason to believe that participating in the study will put the participants in an unreasonable danger, it does require them to explore subjects that might make them feel strongly about anything. You are free to decide not to answer a question or to withdraw from the study without consequence if any part of the interview causes you worry or anxiety.

Confidentiality and privacy:

Efforts will be made to limit the use or disclosure of your personal information. This information may include the research study documents or other source documents used for the purpose of conducting the study. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that oversee research safety may inspect and copy your information. This includes the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board who oversees the safe and ethical conduct of research at this institution. This survey is being hosted by online videoconference via Zoom and involves a secure connection. Terms of service, addressing confidentiality, may be viewed at https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/. Upon receiving the results of your survey, any possible identifiers will be deleted by the investigator. You will be identified only by a unique subject number. Your email address, which may be used to contact you to schedule a study visit will be stored separately from your survey data. All information will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible by the research team. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Data sharing:

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance knowledge. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Cost and compensation:

You will not be responsible for any of the costs or expenses associated with your participation in this study. There is no payment for your time to participate in this study.

Conflict of interest disclosure:

The principal investigator and members of the study team have no financial conflicts of interest to report.

Contact information:

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, you can contact the principal investigator Tya Miles at miles.tya @shu.edu email address, Dr. Manuel Gonzalez at manuel.gonzalez@shu.edu or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at (973) 761-9334 or irb@shu.edu.

Informed Consent Form

Optional Elements:

Audio and video recordings will be performed as part of the research study. Please indicate your permission to participate in these activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

I agree   I disagree

The researcher may record both my audio and video interview. In understand this is done to help with data collection and analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the study team.

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of participant	Date

Printed name of participant

Signature of person obtaining consent	Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Appendix C

Data Analysis Codebook

Name	Description
AAP_Apply	High school seniors applying for college that are average academic performers
AAP_Apply_Female	High school seniors that apply for college that are average academic performers AND female
AAP_Improve_Access	Ways that institutional outreach efforts could improve college access for average academic performers (RQ2)
AAP_Misconceptions	Common misconceptions among average academic performers about college.
AAP_Perceptions	Common perceptions among average academic performers about college.
College_Access_AAP	Information needed to improve college access for average academic performers, in general.
College_Access_AAP_Female	Information needed to improve college access for average academic performers, particularly those who are female.
College_Access_Minoritized	Outeach efforts are conducted towards improving college access for minoritized students
College_Encourage	Ways to encourage students regardless of their grades to attend college
Demographics	Demographic information on the participant
Expand_Outreach	Ideas for HEI to expand outreach.

Name	Description
HE_Benefits	Higher Ed benefits to students
High_Acad-Performers	Details on high academic performers
Outreach_AAP_HE	Outreach efforts by higher education institutions to attract minoritized students who are average academic performers (RQ1)
Outreach_HAP_HE	Outreach efforts used by higher education instittutions to attract minoritized students who are high academic performers
Outreach_Programs	Outreach programs offered to minioritized students within the school district to facilitate college access
Outreach_Sports_HE	Outreach efforts used by higher education institutions to attract minoritized students who are athletes or in sports
Perc_AAP	Percent of Average Academic Performers
Perc_AAP_Female	Percent of Average Academic Performers that are Female
Perc_Accept	Percent of students accepted to college
Perc_Apply	Percentage of high school seniors applying for college
Perc_HSS	Percentage of high school seniors considered average academic performers (all students)
Perc_HSS_Female	Percentage of high school seniors would be considered average academic performers that are female.

Name	Description
Perceptions_Parents	Perceptions of parents regarding their child's future trajectory, including college.
Perceptions_Students	General student perceptions about their future, including college.
Recruit_AAP	Students recruited by higher education that are considered average academic performers
Recruit_Females	Recruitment efforts for college access among minoritized female students
Recruit_HE	Number of students recruited or given offers by higher education institutions (overall)
Recruit_HE_Black	Black students recruited by higher education institutions
Recruit_HE_Gender	Recruited students by higher education by gender
Recruit_HE_Offers	Students who accept offers among those that are typically recruited or given offers by higher education institutions,
Recruit_HE_Other	Other minoritized students recruited by higher education institutions
Recruit_HE_White	White students recruited by higher education institutions
Recruit_Males	Recruitment efforts for college access among minoritized male students
School_Efforts	Activities or efforts towards college access generated or facilitated by the school or district.
Support_System	Support systems for students, particularly average academic performers