CHOOSING HBCUS: EXPLORING THE COLLEGE CHOICE OF HIGH-ACHIEVING BLACK STUDENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Amy Stich)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine college choice from the perspective of high-achieving Black men who chose to attend one prestigious historically Black college or university (HBCU). Black male college attainment is consistently among the lowest when compared to all other ethnic group (Beaudry, 2015). Economic disparities between Whites and Blacks continue to exist (Traub, Sullivan, Meschede, & Shapiro, 2017). Harper (2012) has suggested that long-standing college attainment disparities between Blacks and Whites will continue to exist until college and university officials further explore successful strategies that promote higher educational attainment for Black males in college. This study explored the college choice experience of 20 high-achieving Black students at one of the most prestigious HBCUs in the United States to illuminate the factors that directly influenced their college choice decisions in the five stages of Toutkoushian and Paulsen's (2016) college choice framework. Findings indicate that participant's college choice was influenced by a strong alumni and professional network, institutional reputation, institutional environment, family support, and scholarships and financial aid. Findings in this study support the need for further exploration of how high-achieving Black males considering HBCUs make college choice decisions, and how the knowledge about their college choice experiences can inform college and university administrators seeking to create programs and services that will attract and retain Black males.

INDEX WORDS: college choice, black students, black males, black men, high-achieving, HBCU

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DEDICATION

To my beloved mother, Dr. Carrie McDonald Malloy, you inspired me and challenged me all of my life to believe in myself, serve others, and be the best that I could be. You encouraged me find a yes when I encountered a no. Your words of wisdom are forever etched in my heart. The last promise that I made to you is now fulfilled. I am certain that you are smiling in heaven. I will always be proud to be known as your son.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The college one chooses to attend is impactful for the student and the higher education institution (Iloh, 2018). The choice of a college can often have lifelong economic implications that students must carefully consider (Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016). These significant and important decisions are part of the college choice process, described by Bergerson (2009) as the decision of "whether and where to go to college" (p. 2). Though important for all, college choice decisions are of the utmost importance for Black male high school graduates because there are so few of them. Nationally, Black male high school graduates trail White males high school graduates by 21% (Beaudry, 2015). In 35 of 48 states, Black males rank last in graduation rates when compared to White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic high school students. This is not a state problem. It is a national problem.

Without high school degrees, it is unlikely that students will attend college. Individuals with college degrees earn considerably more over a lifetime than those without degrees (Zeidenberg, 2008). Thus, higher education administrators have a vested interest in understanding how college choice decisions affect the economic engines of higher education and the country (Chapman, 1981; Paulsen, 1990: Vrontis, Thrassou, & Malanthiou, 2011). This is especially true for Black males. Exploring their college choice decisions has implications for higher education institutions, Black families, the Black community, and the national economy.

The United States is a nation with a thriving economy, yet there is still much work to be done before there is equitable access in higher education (Mullen, 2009). Each year millions of

men and women with high school diplomas and graduate equivalency degrees (GED) submit applications to colleges and universities with hopes of receiving favorable responses from their top choices (McFarland et al, 2018). Unfortunately, Black students continue to be underrepresented in the more selective and prestigious institutions of higher education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). While many may assume that each student has an equal chance of gaining access to the best colleges and universities, recent events have provided evidence that the deck is still stacked in favor of students from affluent backgrounds (Winton, 2019). Recently, officials at highly competitive universities, including Georgetown, Stanford, Wake Forest, Yale, the University of Southern California, and the University of Texas at Austin experienced a scandal in which wealthy individuals paid millions of dollars to increase the chances of their sons and daughters to gain admission (Jaschik, 2019). The idea of a meritocracy in which the college choice process provides an equal playing field for all seems to be more myth than reality.

As they compete for the best students, college and university administrators are becoming increasingly unable to depend on the funding models of the past (Mumper & Freeman, 2005). Decreases in government funding (Marcus, 2019; Han, 2014), the growth of online higher education delivery strategies (Anctil, 2008), and international competition for students from the United States (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006), have made the college choice process all the more important for the survival of higher education institutions in the United States. College choice models were designed to help college enrollment managers understand the process students use when choosing one college over another (Han, 2014). As administrators become more informed, they can devise more robust marketing and recruitment strategies.

Reputation and rankings at the more elite and prestigious higher education institutions give them an advantage in the college choice process (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009). If higher education is perceived to be the great equalizer, all students must be able take full advantage of the opportunities to obtain college degrees while simultaneously minimizing debt. There is an undisputed symbiotic relationship between higher education institutions and students; yet Black students continue to be underrepresented at the nation's more elite and prestigious higher education institutions and overrepresented at less selective and for-profit institutions where they are less likely to graduate and more likely to leave in debt (Mettler, 2014). Thus, making sense of the college choice process has important implications for all students, especially Black students.

The purpose of this research is to examine college choice from the perspective of high-achieving Black students who chose to attend a historically Black college or university (HBCU) instead of predominantly White institutions (PWI) and other choices. Black students, specifically, Black men at HBCUs are the focal point of this research because HBCUs empower Black men culturally, historically, and economically (Freeman & Cohen, 2001). Researchers have asserted that Black men who attend PWIs are subjected to stereotyping, racism and unwelcoming environments (Harper, 2015; McGee & Martin, 2011). This study explores college choice decisions as they apply to HBCUs, the place where high-achieving Black males have been historically educated in a supportive and empowering environment (Freeman & Cohen; Fries-Britt, Hurt, & Franklin, 2012, Goings, 2015).

Going to college has not resulted in reducing the economic disparities between Whites and Blacks (Traub, Sullivan, Meschede, & Shapiro, 2017). It is particularly alarming that the proportion of Black undergraduates earning college degrees has been declining since 2012 (McFarland, Hussar, de Brey, Snyder, Wang, Wilkinson-Flicker, et al., 2017). Blacks account

for less than 12% of all individuals who earn college degrees (McFarland et al., 2017). Unfortunately, along with declining college degree attainment, it is likely that economic disparities will continue to exist. Therefore, the need to understand college choice from the perspective of Black males is all the more pressing, given the well-established link between higher education and upward mobility (Carnevale et al, 2018). This study explores the college choice experience of high-achieving Black students at one of the most prestigious HBCUs in the United States to illuminate the factors that directly influence college choice in the various steps and stages of the college choice process as described by Toutkoushian and Paulsen (2016).

Background

Historically, the college choice process was limited to rich White males (Thelin, 2011). For centuries, after the founding of the first colonial colleges, the college-going patterns of Blacks have lagged behind Whites (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). For centuries, Blacks have been consistently, systematically, and legally denied access to higher education in the United States (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Prior to the Civil War, there were limited opportunities for Blacks to participate in higher education in the Midwest (Allen and Jewell, 2002). Nationally, things changed significantly during Reconstruction, after which most Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) emerged (Gasman, 2009; Harper, 2001).

Black students who enrolled at the newly formed HBCUs faced uncertainties and unequal opportunities and physical resources in comparison to students at PWIs (Fries-Britt, 2002). Some of the early HBCUs started in church basements, old schoolhouses, and even in some personal homes (Gasman et al, 2010). With few exceptions, when Black students participated in the college choice process from 1865 – 1965, their choices were limited to

HBCUs, the vast majority of which were located in the South. With the passage of the Second Morrill Land Grant Act in 1890, public higher education for Blacks became a reality (Jenkins, 1991). As generations of Blacks graduated from HBCUs, they had only one frame of reference for higher education (Harper, 2001). In 1965, in the aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the Higher Education Act became a law in the United States. College choice, once limited for Black students, was forever changed.

Three federal programs designed to increase access to higher education for all opened the door to greater college choice in the United States in the 1960s (Dortch, 2018). Upward Bound was first introduced as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Talent Search followed in 1965 as part of the Higher Education Act. Finally, in 1968 Student Support Services was introduced in amendments to the Higher Education Act. The three programs became known as the federal government's TRIO programs.

TRIO programs were designed to promote academic achievement and put students on the path to postsecondary education. Because of these programs, college choice and access to higher education changed significantly for Blacks (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Along with the bevy of new choices came new complexities in the college choice process (Whitehead, Raffan, & Deaney, 2006). Without a history or experience dealing with PWIs, and having only HBCUs as their primary frame of reference for college and university life, Blacks were more likely to have difficulty in dealing with the decision-making associated with expanded college choice (Cox, 2016).

There is a robust body of research on Blacks and college choice (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Albritton, 2012; Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Brown & Freeman, 2002; Freeman, 1995; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Johnson, 2017; Johnson & McGowan; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Pitre, 2006; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005),

though literature on college choice and HBCUs continues to be limited. Much of the college choice literature that includes Black students focuses on their college choice experience at PWIs (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Freeman, 2005; Freeman & Thomas, 2002;). Some have researched the influence that Black parents on the college choice process of their sons and daughters (Brown & Freeman, 2004; Chapman, Contreras, & Martinez, 2018; Perna & Titus, 2005). Others have included Black students in studies with other ethnic minorities (Bergerson, 2009; Ng, Wolf-Wendel, & Lombardi, 2014). Their studies focused more on the parents of Blacks and other minorities and the strong influence parents of ethnic minorities demonstrated on the college choice process of their sons and daughters. Squire & Mobley (2015) researched gay Black students at HBCUs and PWIs to identify the factors that most influenced their college choice. Others (Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005) focused specifically on the roles that HBCUs played in the college choice process of students in California. Van Camp, Barden & Sloan, 2010 focused primarily on the race-related reasons that influenced Black students to choose HBCUs.

Several researchers have touted the benefits of higher education (Baum, 2004; Ma, Pender & Welch, 2016; Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016). Others, (Carnevale & Rose, 2014; Carey, 2004) have asserted that higher education leads to opportunity, social mobility, and economic progress. Baum and Payea (2004) has asserted that higher education provides the skills necessary for underrepresented students to obtain the types of jobs that provide entry into the middle class. Higher education matters, and the choice of where one chooses to attend college also matters. According to Steinberg, (2010), students who attend more selective and prestigious colleges and universities earn considerably more than students who attend institutions that are not selective and prestigious.

Blacks, for historical and other reasons, continue to be underrepresented at selective and prestigious institutions (Carnevale et al, 2018). To make matters worse, the courts continue to consider removing the consideration of race as a factor in admission. Espenshade and Chung (2005) have asserted that if race considerations are set aside in admission practices, Black students would face a severely negative impact. Since the Supreme Court ruling that disallows the consideration of race in admission decisions could change the landscape of college choice in the United States, it may be time for larger percentages of Black students to reconsider HBCUs as a viable college choice option.

Though HBCUs still have problems, some are performing well and are highly-regarded (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). HBCUs have traditionally played a significant role in the education of Black students and should continue to be the focus of scholarly research. Curiously, after over sixty years of research on college choice, few studies (Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Freeman, 1999 & 2012; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Johnson, 2017; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Chapman, Contreras & Martinez, 2018) have examined the college choice experience of Black students who choose HBCUs.

Among the research that has focused on Black students and HBCUs, only a smattering of studies have focused on high-achieving Black students who elected to attend HBCUs instead of PWIs. Prior to desegregation, Black students could only choose HBCUs (Freeman, 2012). Unfortunately, nearly sixty years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, researchers have given little attention to college choice as it pertains to Black students who continue to choose HBCUs instead of other institutional types. More recently, Blacknall & Johnson (2011), Johnson, (2017) and Johnson & McGowan (2017) have researched high-achieving HBCU alumni who to identify factors that influenced their choice to attend HBCUs. In each of their studies, former students reflected upon their college choice experiences after they had

graduated. This research project differs from these contemporary studies because it captures a more current perspective of the college choice process as experienced by currently enrolled Black males.

Statement of the Problem

Since desegregation, HBCUs have experienced enrollment issues. Some HBCUs are facing tough times (Duderstadt & Womack, 2003; Gasman, 2013). Nearly 90% of Black students enroll at PWIs. At PWIs, Black men have the lowest six-year completion rates (Shapiro et al, 2017). Harper (2009) has asserted that the master narrative of Black male underachievement has overshadowed the lived experience of Black males who experience educational success. Historically, Black women hold an advantage in educational attainment and in the labor market (McDaniel & DiPrete, 2011).

HBCUs were originally designed to educate Black students. They have a reputation for providing supportive environments in which Black men and women can succeed (Goings & Gasman, 2014). Alarmingly, since 1964, 12 HBCUs have closed. Several others, Barber-Scotia College, Morris Brown College, and Knoxville College have lost accreditation and are on the brink of closure (Suggs & Stirgus, 2019). Once the greatest symbol for Black higher education, HBCUs are graduating only 36% of students who enroll within a six-year period (Rudley, 2017; Schexnider, 2013). The more selective and prestigious HBCUs perform considerably better.

Spelman College's six-year graduation rate is 74%. Howard University's website advertises it's six-year graduation rate at 60%, while Hampton University and Morehouse College both have a six-year graduation above 53%. Spelman, Howard, Hampton, and Morehouse are consistently ranked among the top HBCUs by *U.S. News and World Report*.

As HBCUs seek to make increases in their academic reputations, it will be essential for them to recruit and retain high-achieving Black students, especially Black males (Johnson, 2005).

Blacks continue to enroll at top-ranked HBCUs, however, Blacks with above-average ACT and SAT scores continue to be underrepresented at selective and more prestigious public colleges (Carnevale et al, 2018). Conversely, Blacks are overrepresented at non-selective public colleges (ibid) and for-profit institutions (McFarland et al, 2018). Non-selective public colleges graduation rates lag behind selective public colleges and universities by more than 30%. Carnevale et al (2018) have asserted that Blacks are systematically funneled into these colleges and graduate a much lower rates that students who attend selective public colleges. All too often these colleges enroll larger numbers of Black males.

With the potential of court rulings that may remove race as a consideration in college admission practices, continued research that focuses on the factors that influence high-achieving Black students to choose HBCUs has the potential to inform ways in which HBCU recruiters can transform their institutions to be more attractive to a population that is associated with higher academic quality. Rudley (2017), like Johnson (2005) has also asserted that more high-achieving students are necessary for many HBCUs to survive. As state and federal funding in higher education continues to decrease (Marcus, 2019) there will be continued competition for high-achieving students in the United States (Geiger, 2002).

High-achieving Black men who may have opportunities to attend PWIs, may likely be the key to future stability for some struggling HBCUs. In an era of fierce competition for funding at all levels, and waning support for considering race in the college admission process, HBCU administrators could benefit greatly from a better understanding of the experience of high-achieving Black students who continue to choose HBCUs. These students are prepared

for the academic rigors of college and are likely to succeed (Hoxby & Avery, 2012) regardless of the institutional type they choose.

As enrollment managers spend “thousands of dollars” per student during the recruiting process (Capraro, Patrick, & Wilson, 2004), HBCUs must find new ways to connect with students who are adequately prepared to succeed. This study will identify the factors that influence high-achieving Black males to choose to attend HBCUs. The findings can be used to serve as a frame of reference to refine and adapt recruitment policies, programs, and strategies to help both HBCUs and PWIs attract and retain high-achieving Black males.

Research Questions

College choice literature points to several ways to identify factors that influence college choice. This study is focused only on those factors that influence the college choice process of high-achieving Black men who choose HBCUs. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do high-achieving Black men who decided to attend prestigious HBCUs, reflect upon the college-choice process?

a. What are the personal factors that high-achieving Black men consider to be important in the college choice process?

b. What are the personal factors that motivate high-achieving Black men to choose to attend an HBCU?

This study reviews relevant college choice literature and college choice models. The ensuing chapters will focus on a review of relevant literature, research design, presentation of findings, discussion of those findings, and implications for future research.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions are provided for clarification purposes of the terms used throughout this study:

Black or African American - A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa who could have been born either in the United States of American or in a country within the African diaspora. In this study, persons or groups of African origin will be represented by the term "Black".

High-achieving Students - students with high school grade point averages of 3.4 and above; SAT and ACT scores that exceeded the national average; and received academic scholarships at the HBCUs where they enrolled.

Historically Black College or Universities (HBCUs) - are degree-granting institutions that were established in the 1800s and prior to 1964 with the principal mission of providing educational opportunity and access for African Americans. While HBCUs have traditionally and contemporarily served mainly African Americans, enrollment is available to all students regardless of their ethnic make-up or background. There are 102 public and private HBCUs across the nation that confer associates, bachelors, and advanced-level degrees.

Predominately White Institution (PWI) - postsecondary colleges or universities with White students accounting for 50% or more of the student enrollment population. Additionally, these institutions are considered historically White and are most commonly rooted with patterns and traditions of Western Europe.

Title IV universities - Title IV schools are the only institutions where individuals are eligible for federal student aid. Attendees of these colleges can receive student loans, grants, and enter a

federal work-study program. To be eligible, the state where the school is located must authorize it to offer postsecondary educational degrees.

White students - persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe. In this study, White is capitalized in an effort to demonstrate equality since Black is always capitalized when referring to the race of an individual or group.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

College choice is influenced by a variety of factors. Multiple studies, both qualitative and quantitative (Chapman and Jackson; Holly & Richards, 1965; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee, 1997; Jackson, 1978; Litten, 1983; Manski & Wise, 1983; Paulsen, 1990; McDonough, 1997) have provided ample evidence of those factors. College choice literature is rooted within the disciplines of economics, sociology, and psychology. Models have emanated from each discipline. In each model students make decisions about 'whether and where" they will attend college (Bergerson, 2009, p. 2; Manski & Wise, 1983).

There is a proliferation of literature that has investigated the various factors that influence college choice. There is also an abundance of college choice literature that focuses on the Black student experience (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Albritton, 2012; Blacknall and Johnson, 2011; Brown and Freeman, 2002; Freeman, 1995; Freeman and Thomas, 2002; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Johnson, 2017; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Other studies have focused on high-achieving students and their college choice experiences (Avery, 2012; Bradshaw, Espinoza, & Hausman, 2001; Davis et al, 2013; Fosnacht, 2014; Freeman, 2002; Furakawa, 2011; Griffin & Allen, 2006; Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Hoxby & Turner, 2015). The study I propose is narrower in scope and focuses on the college choice experience of high-achieving Black males who chose to attend an HBCU. In order to gain a greater understanding of the multiple aspects of the college choice process, this chapter will provide a review of the relevant research and explore (1) college choice theory and

models; (2) HBCUs and college choice; (3) high-achieving Black students; and (4) factors that influence and motivate college choice.

College Choice

College choice has been defined as a "complex, multistage process in which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training" (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 234). Individuals experience the college choice process differently. College and university officials have a vested interested in finding ways to understand the college choice process. Since individual characteristics of students help shape both reputations and narratives of colleges and universities (Kinzie et al., 2004), college choice is a process that is important to students and higher education institutions. Colleges and universities need student revenue in order to operate (Stange, 2012). Students need colleges and universities in order to secure an education that increases the likelihood of future economic success (Baum & Payea, 2004; Carnevale, Smith, & Stroh, 2013). The college choice process is therefore the convergence of the needs of higher education institutions and students to meet the needs for the future and advance society.

College choice begins with college-going aspirations that occurs over multiple stages and ends with a decision to attend a specific college or university or pursue advanced vocational training (Hossler et al, 1989). Though other scholars have questioned various aspects of Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model, there is universal agreement that there are aspects of the college choice process that is shared among students, but are experienced differently from student to student because of the unique situations, circumstances, and expectations (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Freeman (2012) asserted that Black students have different financial, post-secondary, and cultural experiences when compared to other

ethnic groups. Thus, Black students may tend to make college choice decisions differently than White students.

There are multiple factors that influence how a student makes a final college choice decision. Though the final decision lies in the hands of each aspiring student, there is a variety of influences throughout the college choice process that may affect the decision. Thus, college choice can be viewed from two perspectives (Furukawa, 2011). The first is to view the process by examining the individual factors (parents, guidance counselors, peers, etc.) that influence it. The second perspective is to view each decision within the college choice process as a series of actions associated with higher education institutions that occur in stages (i.e., college visits, submitting the application, applying for scholarships, narrowing the choice set, etc.) that cumulatively influence the final choice. By utilizing both perspectives, we gain clarity about personal and institutional factors as well as the steps taken in the narrowing process employed by students to make a final college choice decision.

College choice has evolved over time. A report issued by the Lumina Foundation for Education provided insight on how college choice had evolved over the last 60 years (Kinzie et al., 2004). In the authors' analyses of the changes that have occurred in the college choice process, they concluded that significant changes were attributed in part to four factors. They included (1) funding shifts in higher education from scholarships to loans; (2) the introduction of enrollment management strategies that target students at early ages; (3) the emergence of new technology that has provided unprecedented avenues for student contact; and (4) greater emphasis on the availability of financial aid. Regardless of the changes in college choice over the years, the process is still rooted and grounded in the same theoretical models that have existed, with few changes, for many years. Refining the models is necessary to keep pace with contemporary student expectations and the ever-changing higher education funding models.

Toutkoushian and Paulsen's (2016) five-stage college choice model is the chosen theoretical framework for this study. It provides a contemporary lens from which to investigate the growing complexities associated with the college choice process as it pertains to high-achieving Black students who chose to attend an HBCU. Employing this model enables the researcher to investigate opportunities, constraints, utility, and traditional college choice factors encompassed within the model to gain a deeper understanding of why high-achieving Blacks choose to attend HBCUs instead of other options. Unlike traditional models, Toutkoushian and Paulsen's model is also well-suited to examine the college choice process from the predisposition stage to the enrollment stage. The model utilizes a five-stage process that accounts for the various college choice decisions made by students as they matriculate from high school or work to college.

When and where one chooses to go to college is a monumental decision that deserves equally thoughtful college choice models. Though Toutkoushian and Paulsen's model is relatively new, like other models, it is staged-based and thus presupposes some degree of order. For years, scholars have asserted that high-achieving students engage in a much more robust college choice decision-making process than non-high-achieving students (Ihalanfeldt, 1980; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Hoxby & Turner, 2015; Borus, 1984). The traditional model with only three stages does not capture a comprehensive view of the college choice process because it ends with a choice from a choice set. The actual college choice process, particularly for high achieving students, is much more complex.

The Toukoushian and Paulsen model allows the researcher to study the factors that influence college choice stage by stage through enrollment. It further allows for research that goes beyond the point of enrollment. The model begins with a self-assessment of whether in one's life there is a continued demand for education. The student makes a rational decision

that determines how she or he will proceed. The advantage of the model is that is can also be applied to graduate and professional education because it is not restricted to prescriptive age ranges associated with other stage-oriented models. The five stages in the model include predisposition, application, initial search, admission, and enrollment. The Toutkoushian-Paulsen model is the most well-suited model for this study because though most students likely engage in a cost-benefit analysis regarding their college choice, high-achieving students have more options and are more likely to attempt to bargain with selective and non-selective colleges that are in competition for the best students (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). Though it incorporates the psychosocial elements of Hossler and Gallagher's model, it is based on rational decision making from an economic perspective. As a result, those who aspire to participate in the college choice process do so by applying a cost-benefit analysis beginning in the first stage and continues even after the student has enrolled. Finally, Toutkoushian and Paulsen's model is by far the most user-friendly model for practitioners. It provides the most accurate description of the college choice process and should therefore appeal to future researchers. In contrast to other models, the Toutkoushian and Paulsen model is updated and contemporary, and more likely to yield accurate results.

Factors that Affect College Choice

Many college choice studies have been conducted over the last six decades. Those studies have identified the factors that most significantly influence college choice. In order to understand the college choice process, it is important to understand the factors that influence it. Many students have the information to make college choice decisions on their own, yet they still solicit advice from others (Bradshaw, Espinoza, & Hausman, 2001) and are influenced by a variety of factors. Researchers have found that the academic ability of the student, reputation of the institution, parents, costs, availability of desired major, location, socioeconomic status,

and significant others (e.g. teachers and counselors, and friends) affect college choice decisions (Kinzie et al, 2004; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Chapman, 1981).

Academic Ability

Researchers have found that students' academic ability, including high school grades, overall grade-point average, and scores on standardized test like the SAT and the ACT have a significant effect on college choice decisions (Henry, 2012; Hossler and Gallagher, 1987). Students with high academic achievement are more likely to choose to attend college; and are even more likely to attend more selective institutions, more private institutions, and institutions that are further away from home than students who have not experienced high academic achievement (Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Henry, 2012).

Reputation

The academic reputation of a higher education institution is also among the most significant factors that influences college choice (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). The reputation of an institution is significant, particularly when students consider why an institution has a certain type of reputation. Harvard and other academically elite institutions (Pallais & Turner, 2007); have a reputation for providing significant scholarships to deserving minority students. Thus, reputation may have meaning for aspiring students that goes beyond rankings. For the most part, students consider that academic reputation of institution. This may include academic quality, graduation rates, employment rates, and rankings. Institutions with good strong academic reputations often look for high-achieving students because the quality of students enrolled can improve an institutions academic rank (Johnson, 2005). Bergerson (2009) has asserted that an institution's social reputation is a factor to be considered during the college choice process.

Parents

One common factor among college choice studies is that parents are often identified as the most influential factor associated with the college choice process (Henry, 2012; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). Parents often provide significant financial support for students and have a vested interest in knowing that the investment will pay off. Parents who are educated encourages higher education for their students that begins at an early age (Carnevale & Rose, 2013). Multiple studies over the years have found that parental hopes and discussions about family expectations pertaining to college attendance are major factors in college choice decisions. (Ceja, 2006; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Perna, 2006; Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2006; Freeman, 1999). Researchers, (Henry, 2012; Shankle, 2009)) have asserted that parents invest in their students by establishing funds to pay for college, choosing schools that prepare students for college, sharing expectations, and planning college visits.

Costs

Though there has been much discussion about making college free of costs to students, costs continues. College costs still rank high among the most important factor for many students as they decide when and where they may attend college (Lillis & Tian, 2006; Munday, 1976). College costs and the availability of the many forms of financial aid impact a student's decision to enroll in the top school on their lists of colleges (Pope & Fermin, 2003; Hossler et al., 1989; Manski & Wise, 1983). Students prefer grants to loans and are more likely to enroll (Hoyt & Brown, 2003; St. John, 1990) in colleges what offer grants. Students' college choice decisions are often limited to their ability to pay (Paulsen & St. John, 1997).

Availability of Major

The availability of a student's desired program of study is a significant factor in the college choice process (Kezar & Eckel, 2007; Chapman, 1981). In Sevier's 1992 study of

more than 1100 college-bound Blacks students, he found that the availability of a specific major was among the top three factors that influenced college choice. Hayden (2000) also conducted a study that included Black students and also found the availability of specific programs to have a significant effect on college choice decisions.

Location

As long as college choice as been a topic of scholarly research, location has been an important factor in the decision-making process (Kee & Sia, 2013, Cummings, Hayek, Kinzie & Jacob, 2000; Garbett & Hale, 1999; Briggs, 1998; Nora & Cabrera, 1992; Lisack, 1978; Draper, 1976; Comfort, 1925; Ripperger, 1933). Historically, the location of a college was essential in the college choice decision (Lisack, 1978; Draper, 1976; Comfort, 1925, Ripperger, 1933). Chapman (1981) found that location, particularly, an institution's proximity to the hometown of a student was a significant factor in the college choice process. Kezar & Eckel (2007) also found that location was a significant factor in college choice decisions, particularly for students who were financially disadvantaged. Other researchers (Hoyt & Brown, 2003) found new generations of students are more likely to attend out-ot-state colleges.

Socioeconomic Status

For years, researchers have explored how socioeconomic status affects college choice decisions (Cho, Hudley, Lee et. al, 2008; Perna and Titus; 2004; Cabrera, Burkum, and La Nasa, 2003; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998). Studies have found that students who have parents that did not attend college face major disadvantages in terms of persistence, even after controlling for academic ability and (Choy, 2001). Other studies have found that students' family income is immensely important as they consider whether or not they can afford college after all aid has been applied (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Perna; 2006; Teranashi et al., 2004, Chapman, 1981). Studies have also found that students from families that are economically

disadvantaged are less likely to attend selective colleges and universities (Hoxby & Avery, 2012, Alon, 2007; Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Hoyt & Brown, 2003).

Significant Others

Bergerson (2009) has asserted that significant others, including counselors, and teachers have significant influence on the college choice decisions of students. Cabrera & LaNasa (2000) have found that economically-disadvantaged students often rely on teachers and counselors to help them with college choice decisions. Cabrera & LaNasa, (2000) also found that students who do not face socioeconomic deficits often rely on a variety of sources, including privately hired counselors and advisers to help them navigate the college choice process. Additionally, Cabrera and LaNasa (2000) found that the assistance that economically disadvantaged seniors received from guidance counselors significantly influenced their college choice college decisions.

Early College Choice Models

Various college choice models have been developed over the years. Throughout the literature, college choice models have been predominantly grouped into three categories: (1) econometric or human investment capital models; (2) sociological or status attainment models; and (3) a combination of econometric and sociological models. Recent studies have utilized blended models. In blending the models, scholars argue they provide a better understanding than any of the single models could provide alone (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Hossler & Palmer, 2008; McDonough, 1997). The various models have provided benefits to students and administrators by painting a picture of the interactions, decisions, in some cases, stages, that students experience as they choose a college or university to pursue their higher education. These models have been utilized by researchers to identify the factors that influence college

choice (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Bergerson, 2009) and provided the impetus for more contemporary models.

Chapman's Model

In 1981, Chapman proposed a five-stage model of student college choice. The model was created based on his analysis of several other college choice studies. The stages of his model included the (1) pre-search behavior; (2) search behavior; (3) application decision; (4) choice decision; and, (5) matriculation decision. Chapman (1986) believed that to fully understand college choice, the background of the student and current characteristics of the student and his or her family needed to be considered. In his model, Chapman described how the interrelationship between student characteristics (i.e., socioeconomic status, aptitude, level of educational aspirations, and high school performance) and external influences (friends, costs, location, major, recruitment information, etc.) significantly affect college choice (See Figure 1). The model is

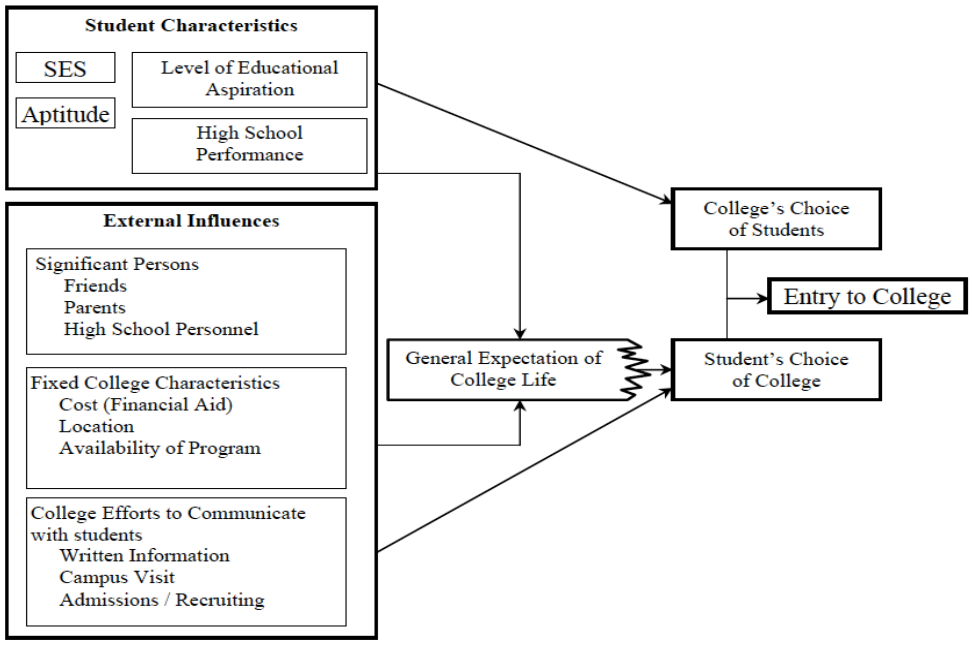

Figure 1. Chapman's Model of Influences on Student College Choice (Chapman, 1981).

limited. Notice in Figure 1 that Chapman does not include race within the student characteristics.

Additionally, his model attributed the age of college choice to be within that range of 18-21 years old, thus limiting its usefulness for researching the growing population of first-time non-traditional students who may not fit neatly into such an outdated model.

Jackson's Model

Jackson's college choice model (1982) consists of three phases. The three phases include (1) the preference phase; (2) the exclusion phase; and (3) the evaluation phase. In the preference phase, academic achievement is strongly correlated with educational aspirations (Vrontis, Thrassou, and Melanthiou, 2007). The student's family background and the student's perceived social status influences the student's aspirations. During the second phase, the exclusion phase, the student excludes institutions from the list of prospective colleges and universities based on the resources that are available. Potential reasons for exclusions could include perceived academic quality, proximity, and the amount needed for tuition and fees. The result of the exclusion phase leaves the student with a choice set, or group of remaining institutions to be evaluated in the third and final phase. In the evaluation phase, the final phase, the student devises a rating scheme, evaluates and ranks the important college choice variables, and eventually selects one institution over others as the final choice. Similar to Chapman (1981), in Jackson's model, race is not a factor in either of Jackson's three stages.

Hanson and Litten's Model

The Hanson and Litten model (1982) is a blending of Jackson's college choice model and Chapman's model (Hanson and Litten, 1989). Most notable about their model is that Hanson and Litten described it as a continuing process (Hossler et al., 1999). Among the items listed as student characteristics are race, gender, and religion. The model proposed a three-stage, five-process college choice model. In stage one, the student decides to attend college. Stage two involves an investigation of institutions and establishes a list of desire colleges. In

the final stage, the student completes the application process. The five processes within the model include (1) developing college aspirations; (2) starting the search process; (3) gathering information; (4) sending applications; and (5) enrolling.

In Hanson and Litten's model, the four categories of variables that influence college choice are *personal, background, high school, and college characteristics*. Variables include class rank, self-image, academic ability, parent income, level of education, race, gender social composition, curriculum, college characteristics, size of the university, quality of interactions with college officials, and availability of financial assistance. Though this model (see Figure 2) has not been widely utilized, some aspects of it are included Hossler and Gallagher's model.

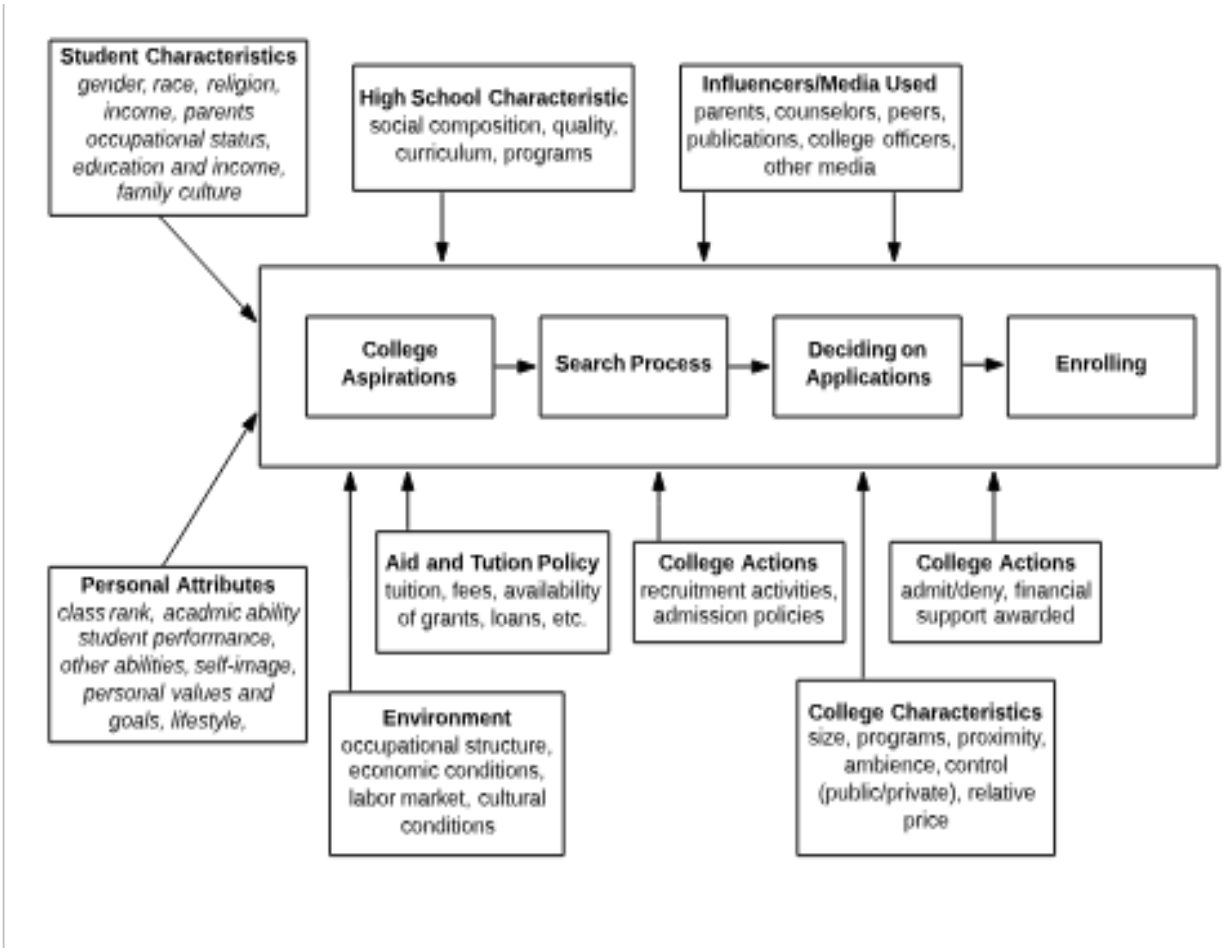

Figure 2. Hanson and Litten College Choice Model

Hossler and Gallagher's Model

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) provided a review of what was at the time, the current body of research on college choice. They reviewed and built upon work of Chapman, Jackson, and Litten, and introduced their own three phase college choice model. Hossler and Gallagher posited that students increased their understanding of the higher education options available to them and were influenced by individual and institutional factors as they moved through each of three phases. The three phases of their model include (1) predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice. (See Figure 3).

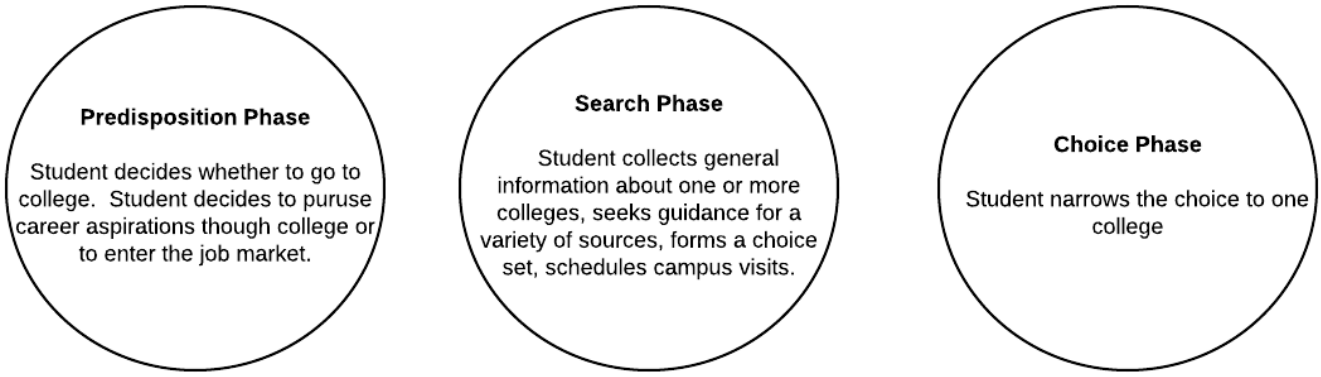

Figure 3. Hossler and Gallagher College Choice Model

In the predisposition phase, students decide if they will continue their education beyond high school (Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith, 1989). Hossler et al. (1989) asserted that the predisposition phase happens as early as junior high school. During this phase, occupational and educational aspirations are explored (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000). The second phase, the search phase, occurs between early childhood through the 9th-10th grades. It includes searching for and identifying characteristics and attributes of colleges and universities to be considered, compared, and evaluated as potential choices (Hossler et al., 1989).

Courtship activities could include a personal letter from the president of the college, a special event on campus to which the student was invited, and various forms of aid.

The final phase of Hossler and Gallagher's model is the choice phase. In this phase, lessons learned and evaluated in the predisposition and search phases are utilized to weigh the most significant factors regarding colleges and universities in order to determine where applications will be submitted. In this final phase, colleges and universities engage in "courtship procedure" designed to influence the student's decision during the final stage (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987, p. 217). During the choice stage, after getting responses from submitted applications and evaluating and weighing their highest ranked institutions; students decide and choose the college or university they will attend (Hossler et al.).

Though Hossler and Gallagher's model stands alone as the most widely cited college choice model (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Stewart, 2017), it is not without critics. Some (Iloh, 2018; Kasworm, 2010) have suggested that Hossler and Gallagher's model is limited because its design presupposes that prospective students are within the age range (18-21) of typical high school students. Thus, Iloh and Kasworm believe that the model is not inclusive of a growing population of non-traditional students who are generally older than 21 years of age. Others (Blacknall & Johnson, 2011: Freeman, 2005; Perna, 2006) have suggested that Hossler and Gallagher's college choice theory has not evolved with the changing landscape of higher education in the United States. Blacknall and Johnson question the applicability of the model for African-American students because Hossler and Gallagher failed to discuss the influence or impact on race and how it might affect college choice. Freeman (1999) and Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) have also recommended a revision to Hossler and Gallagher's predisposition phase to allow for a greater

understanding of the differences found in the diverse populations that are embarking upon the college choice process.

Freeman's Model

In Freeman's (2005) critique of Hossler and Gallagher's three-phase model, she suggested that aspects of the model may not be applicable across cultures. She implored future researchers to look beyond Hossler and Gallagher's model to find ways to more adequately understand how primary and secondary schools influence the aspirations of Black students to attend college. Specifically, Freeman found it problematic that Hossler and Gallagher failed to narrow the timeframe in which students decided if they are going to college. She further suggested that the failure to narrow the timeframe in the predisposition stage could be the reason so little research has been focused on the predisposition stage of the Hossler and Gallagher model. She further posited that the failure to narrow the timeframe in which students decided if they would attend college was compounded by the lack of emphasis on the family. Freeman therefore offered an alternative model.

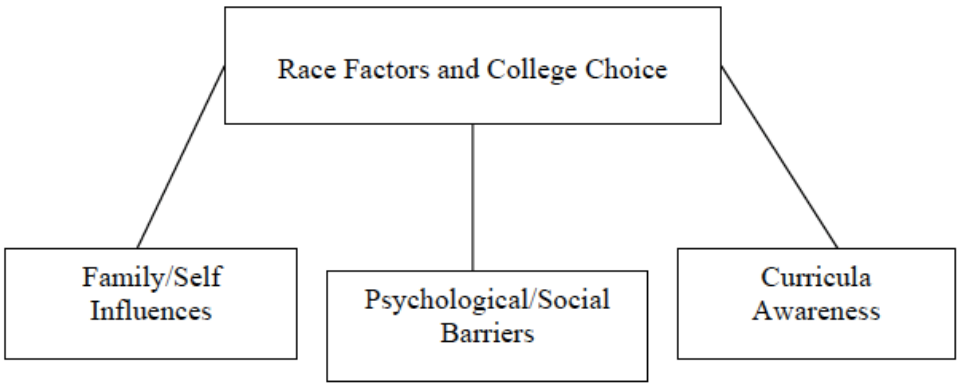

Figure 4. Freeman's College Choice Model

Freeman (1999) created a college choice model with 3 domains that she found to be the primary influences on college choice for Black students (See Figure 4). The three domains of her model include (1) family or self-influences, (2) psychological or social barriers, and (3)

curricular awareness. She found strong familial ties among Black students and noted that Black students had an intention of exceeding the education of their parents. She also found that although Black students in her study were motivated to go to college, they faced psychological as well as real social or societal barriers that affected their decision to go to college or to go to work.

Finally, Freeman noted that Black students were keenly aware of curricular aspects that were culturally unwelcoming and failed to show appreciation for Black culture. Freeman (2002) considers family to be pivotal in the college choice process for African-American students. She took issue with family being a subcategory within the predisposition phase of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. She asserted that there needed to be a greater emphasis on the family as a motivator in the predisposition phase for the purpose of determining if Black families motivate students in ways that were not accounted for within Hossler and Gallagher's model (1987). Freeman also suggested that a greater emphasis on family could provide a better understanding of when and how Black parents influence and motivate students to choose to attend college. She further critiqued the three distinct type of students found to have emerged during the predisposition phase in Hossler and Gallagher's model (1987). They include the *whichers, whethers, and nots,* and are listed below with associated characteristics.

1. *Whiches*: students who never seriously consider not going to college.
2. *Whethers*: students who apply to one or two local colleges, but may not attend at all.
3. *Nots*: students who never really consider going to college.

Though Freeman did agree with Hossler and Gallagher (1987) that three types of students emerged from the predisposition phase, based on her research, she proposed three different types of students that were based on the observed experiences of African-American in

her research. They include *knowers, seeker*s, and *dreamers*. They are listed below with associated characteristics.

1. *Knowers*: students who know they will be attending college. They have always known, "like breathing," as one student expressed it to me.

2. *Seekers*: students who come to believe "I can do this" and begin to prepare and seek information about higher education.

3. *Dreamers*: students who believe that higher education is not an option but may dream about the possibilities.

Freeman (2002) asserted that her adaptation of the three types of students who emerged from the predisposition phase allowed for more flexibility for students to choose to attend college from either of the three types.

Hossler and Gallagher could not have foreseen and controlled for all the changes that would occur in higher education. Freeman, in her critique of their model, accepted the usefulness of the Hossler & Gallagher model in identifying student and institutional characteristics. Much like Hossler and Gallagher did with work of Jackson, and Chapman, Freeman (2002) sought to adapt the aging Hossler and Gallagher model to more adequately explore college choice as experienced by Black students to create a model that would apply to other cultures.

Contemporary Models of College Choice

Perna's Model

Perna (2006) has asserted that sociological and economic college choice models alone are insufficient for understanding differences across groups engaged in the college choice process. As a result, she proposed a college choice model that integrates aspects of sociological and economic models. Her model assumes that college choice decisions were

shaped and influenced by and within four contextual layers. These layers include (1) the individual's habitus (Perna, 2006), defined as the system of values and beliefs that shape and form an individual's views and actions; (2) school and community context; (3) the higher education context; and (4) the broader social, economic, and policy context. Her model presupposes that students will utilize aspects of each layer and compare expected benefits with expected costs within the context of higher education, policy, school, community, and habitus.

Perna's model offers an update to what she believed were limited college choice models. Specifically, she argued the Hossler and Gallagher model was limited in providing adequate understanding of how Black and Hispanic students from low-income families experienced the college choice process (2006). Central to Perna's model is the assumption that educational attainment and college aspirations are not necessarily universally experienced. Instead, she has asserted that educational attainment and college aspirations might differ based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other individual dynamics. Also, within Perna's model is the assumption that "an individual's habitus as an influencer of college choice, is likely to be determined by one' gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as cultural and social capital" (Perna, 2006, p.116).

She also noted that much of the research on college choice involves quantitative methodologies and referenced adapted and alternative models (DeLarge, 2003; Freeman, 1999) that employ qualitative methodologies. She further referenced the inability to identify the timing associated with the stages of existing college choice models as problematic. Perna argues that in order to adequately research how students engage in the college choice process in various stage-based models, it is essential to establish a range in which those stages might occur. In other words, in order to understand the dynamics associated with a particular stage in a college choice model (e.g., predisposition), it would be important to know when the stage

begins and ends, and if the starting and end points are applicable to all groups or just unique to some.

Perna questioned the applicability of Hossler and Gallagher's model to non-traditional students much in the same way that Freeman questioned the applicability of the predisposition phase to persons of color. Both Perna and Freeman questioned the universality of the Hossler and Gallagher model. Thus, Perna introduced a new model that incorporates sociological and economic underpinnings. See Figure 5.

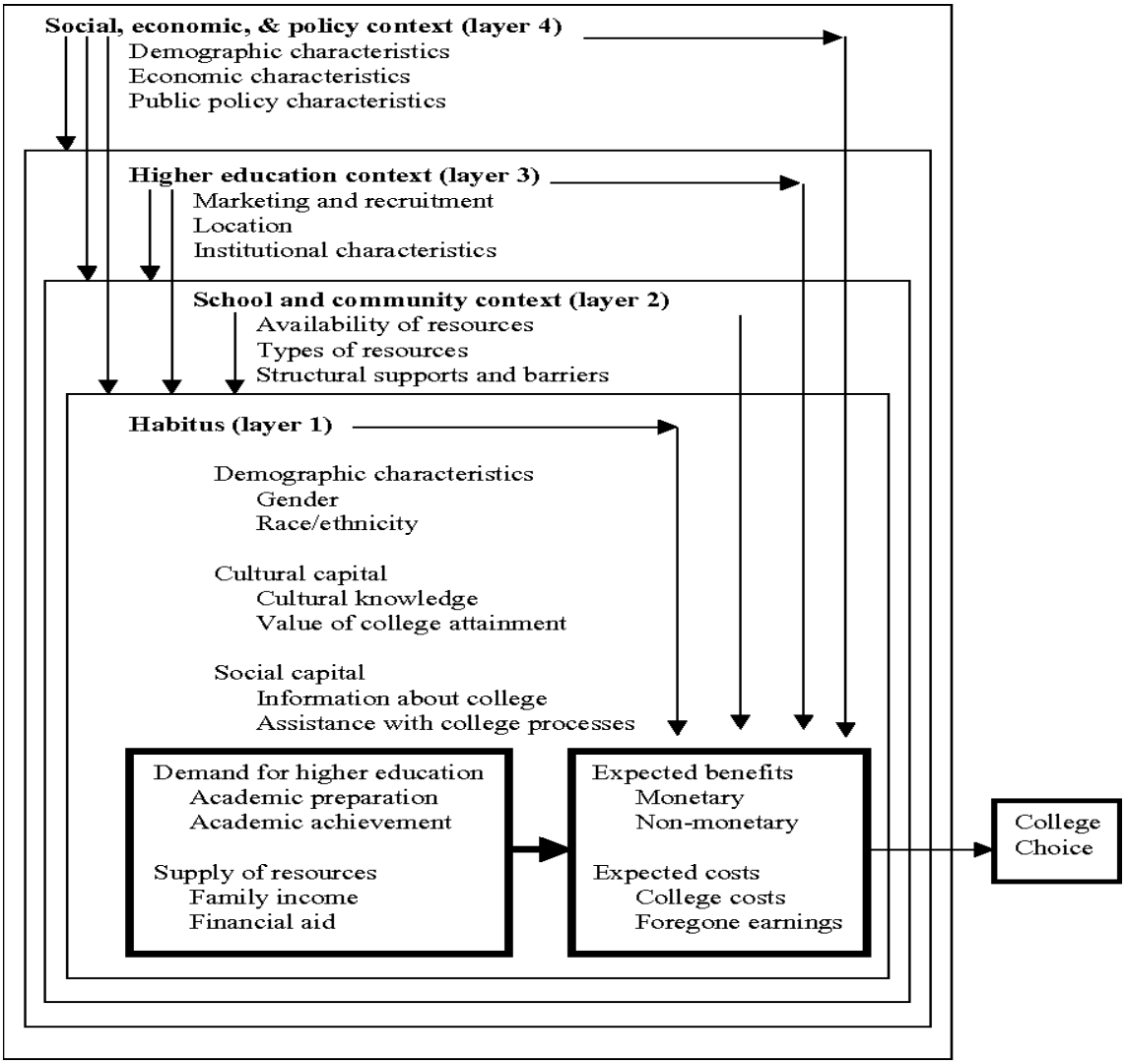

Figure 5. Perna's College Choice Model

In the first layer of Perna's model, a student's habitus or ways of thinking as a result of how their race, gender, socioeconomic status, social and cultural capital converged to affect the college choice decision. In the second layer of Perna's model, the student makes college choice decisions within the context of school and community by considering the availability of resources, types of resources, and structural support or barriers that exist. A guidance counselor or teacher who either recommends college and provides resources to help a student get on or stay on track toward college readiness is an example of what happens within this layer. Within the third layer, the student makes decisions within the context of higher education. Within this layer, the student would ponder institutional characteristics for fit. Students would also make decisions about location and consider the impact of marketing and recruitment activities while making the decision to go to college or choose another alternative. In the fourth and final layer, students make college choice decisions in the context of changes in demographics, changes in economic conditions, and public policies, and choose the college they will attend.

While Perna's model is more comprehensive than most contemporary and prior models, she agrees with other college choice researchers that information is a key factor in the college choice process (Perna, 2006). Though Perna's model has elements of human capital models (Perna & Kurban, 2013), it is much more. In her critique of human capital models, she asserts that the concept of rational decision-making, as it relates to access to information, is a drawback to the human capital model (2006). In Perna's model, college choice decisions are shaped within the context of each layer of the model and culminate in a "situated context" for each individual (p.116). She asserted that there is no single course that individuals follow while making college decisions. Instead, she argued that there are multiple paths to arrive at the point where the final decision is made. In Perna's model, college choice decisions are

influenced and formed within the four contextual layers of her model. Students are affected and influenced by (1) the cultural and social capital of their parents; (2) the resources available to them in secondary schools, (3) positive or negative interactions with individuals in higher education institutions; and (4) political and social realities that face them as a result of race, gender, socioeconomic status, on the local, state, and federal levels.

In Perna's (2006) research, she utilized the term *habitus* to discuss reasons why high-achieving Black students continue to be underrepresented in more selective colleges and universities. Perna has used her model to persistently explore college choice as it pertains to ethnic minorities and describes how the habitus of Black students may lead to difficulty accessing the kind of information that could lead to greater ease in maneuvering the sometimes very complicated college choice process. Other researchers offer a different perspective that considers how black males are treated in high school classrooms and the workplace and come to the realization that the messages from society confirm that they are either unworthy, underprepared, or simply unwanted (Harper, 2015; Johnson & McGowan, 2017). These individuals may not feel that there is a choice all.

Iloh's Model

In her introduction to a new college choice model, Iloh (2018) asserted that current models and those of the last two decades are ill-equipped to render an understanding of the "realities and complexities" of the college choice process, given the increase in post-traditional student college enrollment. Iloh defines post-traditional students as 25 year of age and older. In particular, she has asserted that the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model is not suitable for grasping and understanding post-traditional students, open admission institutions, and students who reenter college and are highly mobile. She has also noted that higher education has experienced several significant changes that were not and could not have been considered when

Hossler and Gallagher's model and current models of college choice were conceptualized. Her model does not the use words *college choice*. Instead she substitutes *choice* with *trajectories*.

Iloh's offered an ecological model to investigate college choice. Her model is contextually rooted. She has found that decisions are not made outside of some form of context. Hence, she has asserted that college choice decisions are best understood when they examine the ecosystem's influence on the individual and their relationships concurrently in the context of the time, information, and opportunity. In her ecological model, individuals and influencers make decisions based on the contexts of time, opportunity, and information concurrently.

In the context of information, Iloh has suggested that some experience an "information desert" (p. 236) as they are trying to make sense of whether to go to college or not. The desert experience, as she describes it, is a lack of information that is caused by the "society's" failure to provide information about college-going in an equitable manner to all who aspire to attend college. Perna (2006), in reference to high-achieving or high-ability students, cites habitus, or social and cultural capital of friends, family, or other groups with access to information that shapes or encourages, or otherwise familiarized individuals with the process necessary to prepare for to go to college. Iloh (2018) makes a similar point in her reference to access to information, though in Perna's model, the student makes a choice. In Iloh's model, the path to higher education is constantly being altered based on the individual's relationships to their environment in the contexts of time, opportunity, and information. In other words, going to college is determined based on timing, access to information, and opportunities that either are or are not available to an individual.

Though her concept of context around college choice decisions is also similar to Perna's (2006) four domains, it differs with Iloh's use of time and opportunity. Iloh and

Perna's models converge around the concept of information. Both models establish information as a key factor in the college choice process. Iloh departs from past and current college choice frameworks and asserts that in her model, there is no assumption that "factors identified in the traditional population are similar to students with different experiences" or post-traditional students (Iloh, 2018, p. 234). In her model, opportunity, time, and information are the three forces that chart the trajectory of the path toward college decision-making (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. Iloh's Three Context Ecosystem Model

Iloh's critiques of past and contemporary college choice models, have some merit, particularly as she has identified weaknesses that pertain to non-traditional and post-traditional students. She did not, however, provide evidence that would support abandoning other college choice models. In the context of contemporary college choice decisions, Iloh is likely correct in her assertion that the college choice process is not a one-time event. She further asserts that the college choice process is not sequential. By the very nature of the college admission process, there is a sequence of actions that must occur in order to participate in the college admission process regardless of the type of institution. These activities can occur concurrently (Hossler et al, 1999; Perna, 2006; Toutkoushian & Paulsen; 2016). There is at least one model,

Toutkoushian and Paulsen (2016) that addresses the weaknesses identified in Iloh's critique of current models.

Toutkoushian and Paulsen Model

Toutkoushian and Paulsen (2016) have offered one of the most recent college choice models. This econometric or human capital model expands the traditional model of college choice from three stages (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989) to five by adding additional stages that more accurately reflect the college choice process. Their model is not simply another model based on human capital investment theory. Instead, Toutkoushian and Paulsen's model takes into account that rational decisions may be viewed differently among different individuals and different groups. Their human capital investment model has evolved from being one in which the individual weighs costs and benefits and makes a decision that provides the maximum financial benefit. Their model allows for the possibility that individuals may place value on more than the monetary return from an investment in higher education. Most importantly, Toutkoushian and Paulsen view the college choice decision as a shared decision between the aspiring student and the parent. As economists, they see the decision to enroll in college as a human capital investment, yet provide some latitude to consider that the utility of higher education as a consumption good that pays off in ways that may not add to one's bank account but could instead serve to benefit society. Thus, the decision still benefits the consumer of higher education because it also benefits everyone in ways that money alone cannot.

Toutkoushian and Paulsen' (2016) model assumes that the college choice process goes beyond the selection of a college from a choice set. In their model, the college choice process does not end after the student chooses a college or university and enrolls. This is an issue with other college choice models that fail to accurately depict the college choice process. Hossler

and Gallagher's (1987) three phase model depicts only *predisposition, search,* and *choice*. The application and enrollment process are implicitly included in the search and choice phase (DesJardins et al, 2006). College choice, however, does not end with a *choice*, the final phase in the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. It proceeds beyond a decision to enroll and enrolling. Unlike the Hossler and Gallagher model, Toutkoushian and Paulsen's model provides practitioners and researchers with a true account of the college choice process.

Toutkoushian and Paulsen's' model also separates the application stage from the admission stage. Unlike other models, Toutkoushian and Paulsen's five stage model provides a stage by stage account of the actual college choice process. Compared to other models, Toukoushian and Paulsen's model stands alone because it depicts the college choice process as an on-going activity that does not end until the student discontinues or matriculates through graduation. They see the college choice process as an endeavor that does not end after a student chooses a college and enrolls.

Even though their model is practical and intuitive (See Figure 7), it is also quite complex. In their description of their model, Toutkoushian and Paulsen (2016) have asserted that their model accounts for the many times during the life of a college student in which the student decides, for one reason or another, to stay at the college where they are enrolled or choose another. The student also considers the benefits of a college degree over a lifetime in order to choose whether or not enrolling in college will be more beneficial than any non-college or delayed college options.

In their model, Toutkoushian and Paulsen have asserted that college choice decisions continue with each iteration of the registration process. Therefore, as long as the student is considering whether or not to enroll or transfer to another university, the college process continues. Students, therefore have the ability to make adjustments based on a rational

decision-making process that includes changes to one's circumstances after the initial college choice decision was made. Students continue to make these decisions through graduation and again should they choose to attend graduate or professional school, or if they plan to pursue an additional undergraduate degree.

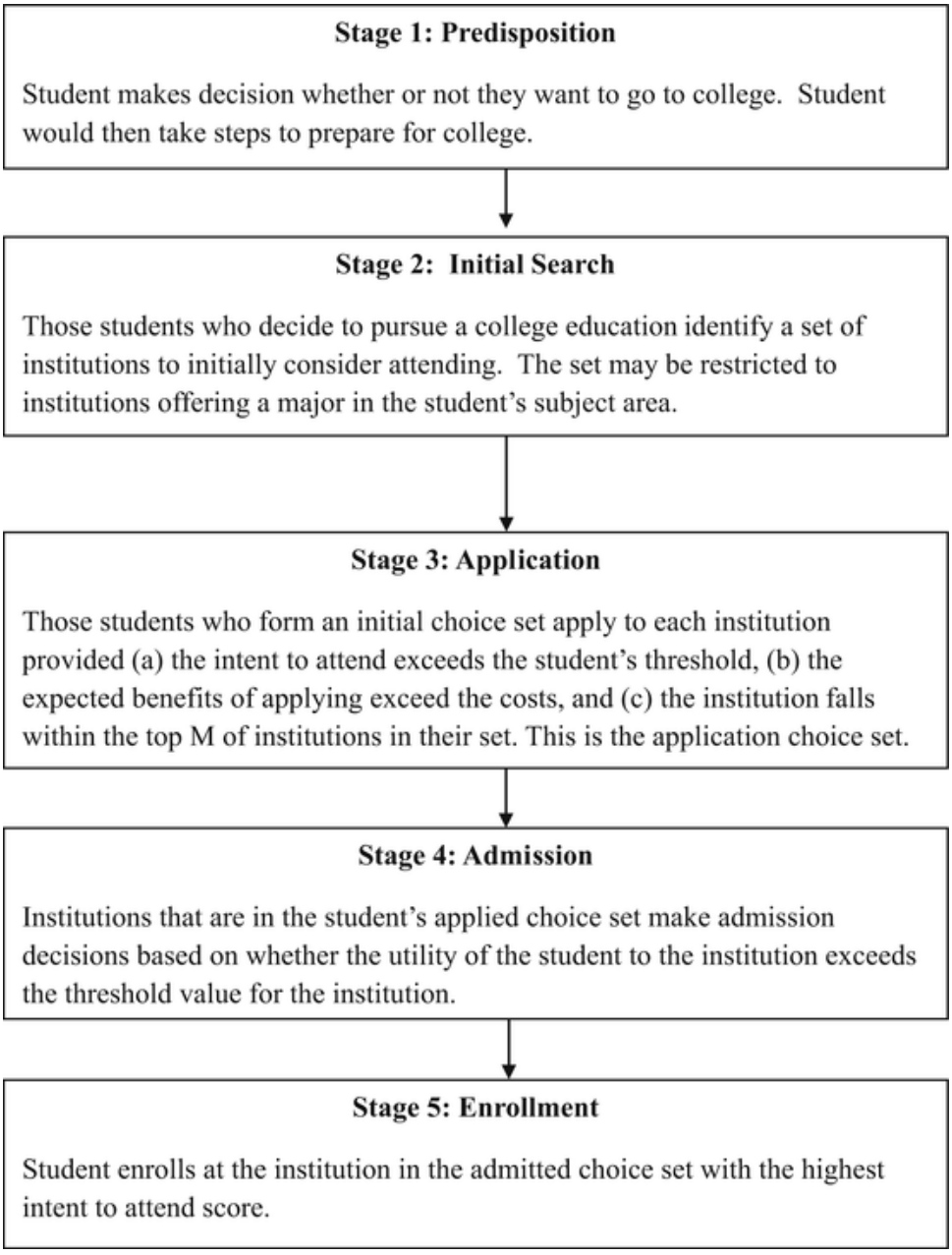

Figure 7. Toutkoushian and Paulsen's College Choice Model

I have selected this model as my theoretical framework because it embraces the notion that college choice decisions can be either one-time decisions or a series of decisions that may lead to a transfer, or the choice to stay at the same college. The model also provides the most accurate account of the actual college choice process when compared to other models. In this model, the student reassesses the college choice decision after each quarter or semester (Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016) after engaging a new rational decision-making process. I have also selected this model because this study focuses on high-achieving Black students, who are likely have higher aspirations than their non-high-achieving peers (Strayhorn, 2009). Additionally, this model has been selected because it provides a realistic and intuitive depiction of the actual college choice process for high-achieving Black males.

High achievement is often the by-product of high expectations. High-achieving students generally apply at a larger number of colleges and universities than their non-high-achieving peers (Hoxby & Turner, 2013). In order to reach high expectations, and help students become their best selves, parents and students will have to make an investment of their time, their money to identify opportunities that will assist students to successfully pursue their hopes and dreams.

As opposed to models that emphasize what students lack (Perna, 2006); Iloh, 2018) Toutkoushian and Paulsen's (2016) model focuses on the information that students do possess. Their model presupposes that students examine their current circumstances and employ a rational decision-making process that considers goal attainment, including earning potential as a result of enrollment, utility of higher education. As an economic model, the Toutkoushian and Paulsen model also takes into consideration that a student may have chosen one college over another because the student came to a rational decision over time that the choice that is made will provide for the student more utility over the course of his or her lifetime than they

would experience if they made a choice to forego college or to choose some other course. For these reasons, the Toutkoushian and Paulsen model will be used to examine the college choice process for high-achieving Black male students attending one HBCU.

HBCUs and College Choice

McDonough, Antonio, & Trent (1997) have found that geography, religion, the institution's social reputation, and family preference were strong factors that motivated students to choose HBCUs. During the 2015-16 academic year, there were 4,147 colleges from which students could choose (McFarland et al, 2016). Only 102 were HBCUs. Among them, 51 were public, and 51 were private (McFarland; Hussar; de Brey; Snyder; Wang; Wilkinson-Flicker; et al., 2017). HBCUs constitute a fraction of higher education institutions and are not the only option for Black students though they have the longest history educating Black students (Allbritton, 2012; Gasman, 2013). The college choice process allows the student to consider all colleges and universities to choose the one most suitable for their needs and desires (Closson & Henry, 2008). For several decades with very few exceptions the best and only choice for Black students were HBCUs.

HBCUs have enjoyed a long and successful history of educating Black students in the United States. Research shows that HBCUs provide an atmosphere that is academically and culturally accommodating (Albritton, 2012; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Thompson, 2008). HBCUs and college choice research consists mainly of studies that compare students at HBCUs to students at PWIs (Reeder & Schmitt, 2013; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Brown & Freeman; 2002; Kim, 2002; Pascarella, 1996), or studies that examine the experiences of Black students at HBCUs and PWIs respectively (Gasman, 2013; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Allen & Jewell; 2002). While all of

these studies have served to provide a more thorough understanding of the HBCU experience, enrollment at HBCUs continues to be a cause for concern.

HBCUs clearly have obstacles to overcome. They have received much media scrutiny regarding accreditation, financial stability, academic quality (Gasman, Baez, Drezner, Sedgwick, Tudico, & Schmid, 2007) and shared governance (Guy-Sheftall, 2006). Though some HBCUs offer academic programs similar to those offered at PWIs, most do not enjoy the same level of prestige; a factor that researchers have identified to be significant in the college choice decision-making process of Black students (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Fleming, 1985; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Another issue for HBCUs is the belief that they are all alike. HBCUs should not be viewed as one group. They have differing missions and are unique and distinct (Gasman et al., 2007). Just as there is heterogeneity among PWIs, the same is the case for HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2007). HBCUs are diverse. Gasman (2013) defines selective HBCUs as those institutions that only accept students who are "highly prepared" for college (p. 10). Blacknall and Johnson (2011) studied the factors that influenced high-achieving Black students to choose selective HBCUs, however, they omitted any operational definitions or descriptions about qualifications that constitute selectivity.

Gasman (2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014) has a rich body of work on HBCUs. Her prolific research has set the appropriate context of HBCUs from which an examination of college choice at HBCUs may ensue. Kassie Freeman has led the way in researching Black students and college choice. She is frequently cited throughout the literature on college choice and HBCUs. In 1999, in "The Race Factor in African Americans' College Choice", Freeman conducted 16 structured group interviews that included 70 students in various cities in the United States. In her study, Freeman utilized Hossler and Gallagher's model of college choice

and opened the door to college choice research from the perspective of Black students at HBCUs. She found that race is a factor in college choice decisions. She posited that there were three categories that influenced the college choice process for students who attended HBCUs. They included (1) whether parents recommended higher education to their students; (2) social and psychological barriers that included losing hope due to higher education never being presented as an option; and (3) curricula that included cultural awareness as seen in cultural aspects of self-awareness and self-identify. Freeman also found that the availability of financial aid was a major consideration in choosing a college or university. All students who were interviewed grew up in Black communities and neighborhoods and attended predominantly Black high schools. Most of them had parents who were not college graduates.

Johnson (2017), in *Choosing HBCUs: Why African Americans Choose HBCUs in the Twenty-First Century*, provided a detailed account of the college choice process. Her central research question focused on why African Americans students continue to choose HBCUs in the 21st century. In exploring the question, Johnson utilized a qualitative research design that included 51 semi-structured interviews of recent HBCU alumni. She found that relationships and positive interactions with HBCU students and alumni, and precollege experiences with racial isolation, contributed significantly to the college choice process for Black students who chose to attend HBCUs. She also identified three factors that contributed to the choice of African American students to attend HBCUs. They included: (1) the desire to be in a predominantly Black environment; (2) the reputation of the academic programs consistent with the students' interests; and (3) availability of financial resources. Johnson's study is unique because the entire sample is comprised of HBCU alumni. Her findings thus came from a sample population that was able to provide a reflection and offer a perspective not commonly associated with HBCUs and college choice. Johnson did not provide an operational definition

of “academically competitive” though she used the term to describe the participants in her sample (Johnson, 2017, p. 156). Johnson’s study is similar to the research that I propose to conduct. Similarities include a sample that is Black, high-achieving, and chose to attend an HBCU. In Johnson’s study, it is unknown if participants had the opportunity to attend a PWI.

Freeman and Thomas (2002) provided an overview of the characteristics of Black students who choose HBCUs. Their study was a synthesis of prior studies on Black students who chose HBCUs. Their data provided a wealth of information about Black students and their experiences with HBCUs. The study is relevant to higher education researchers because it examined qualitative and quantitative longitudinal surveys to provide a richer and deeper understanding of characteristics and reasons associated with high-achieving African American students and their choices to attend HBCUs. Their study examined perceptions of high school in reference to (1) how Black high school students chose HBCUs in ways that were different from previous HBCU attendees; (2) factors that influenced their decisions to choose HBCUs; and (3) challenges HBCUs faced in attracting a broad range of Black students. They found that HBCUs were attracting more academically prepared students; parental SES and education were not the major predictors of Black students' college choice patterns; and that college choice decisions were influenced by considerations of common culture and by the type of high school students attended.

Tobolowsky, Outcalt, and McDonough (2005) examined the role of HBCUs in the college choice process as it pertained to African American students, their parents, and guidance counselors at a select number of high schools in Southern California. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the researchers conducted interviews and focus groups that included 63 African American students who were college-bound juniors and seniors, eight guidance counselors, and 29 African American parents. They found that students who had limited access

to materials from HBCUs perceived their interaction to be negative; even though their perception of the HBCUs was positive before the request for materials. Guidance counselors interviewed in the study noted that even though HBCUs conducted college fairs in Southern California, parents placed more emphasis on college tours and historical religious affiliation. Students cited the quality of the academic programs and individual faculty attention among the factors important in their consideration of HBCUs. Their findings further supported that race is an important factor in college choice for African American students.

Van Camp, Barden, and Sloan (2010) studied college choice of students enrolled at one HBCU. Their quantitative study examined the racial makeup of the students' high schools, racial identity centrality; race-related reasons for college choice; non-race related reasons for college choice; race behavior intentions (the desire to participate in activities that increased their knowledge about their race). Approximately 167 Howard University first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and senior participants participated in the study and responded to a series of race-related questions. First-year students represented 70% of the sample. The study found that students who had lower contact with other African-Americans in high school were more likely to choose HBCUs. They also found that students also placed greater importance on racial identity. According to the researchers, their study was the first to provide quantitative evidence that demonstrated the existence of "distinct race-related reasons" for Black students choosing HBCUs (p. 464).

In another study, Awokoya and Mann (2011) explored the aspects of HBCUs most valued by students. The researchers focused on the uniqueness of the HBCU experience and highlighted the diversity of HBCUs. Their qualitative study sought to specifically shed light on student perspectives about private HBCUs; why the students chose to attend; and what they valued most about their experiences. They found that the factors that influenced the choice to

attend HBCUs included, (1) a sense of belonging; (2) the need to feel welcomed; (3) noteworthy alumni; (4) school reputation; and (5) financial aid awards (p. 12). Among the factors students valued most about their HBCU experience was the small and welcoming environment, significant relationships with a caring faculty, mentoring relationships with administrators, campus diversity, and an environment in which they felt empowered.

Awokoya and Mann's study was conducted to inform the United Negro College Fund, a major supporter of private HBCUs, about the characteristics of private HBCUs that were valued most by students. The researchers conducted 10 semi-structured telephone interviews. Individual HBCUs were allowed to select students to be interviewed. The majority of selected students (7 out of 10) were seniors. The gender distribution was equal. Though the study produced interesting and insightful findings, another method of selecting study participants would have constituted greater confidence in the findings.

Studies that have explored college choice and HBCUs depict HBCUs and diverse institutions that have many aspects in common. They include a commitment to the success of Black students, the preservation of Black cultural traditions, and a caring and supportive faculty that encouraged students to complete their studies (Cokley, 2002). The common factors affecting college choice for Black students considering HBCUs that have prevailed throughout the review of the literature include the availability of financial aid (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005), the existence of a welcoming environment (Palmer and Gasman, 2008), and the location of the campus (Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005).

Though HBCUs may not be suitable for all, they have continued to offer an alternative for Black students who wish to be in an environment that is nurturing and affirming. They also offer cultural traditions like lifelong fraternity and sorority affiliation, a historic commitment to

social justice in the United States, and a commitment to a musical heritage that includes high-stepping bands, soulful college choirs, poetry slams and spoken word showcases, and leadership opportunities that provide a college experience like no other (Killough et al, 2018). HBCUs continue to be a viable option for higher education for not only Black students, but for all who wish to enroll.

High-Achieving Students

It is important to understand the decision-making process for high-achieving students. They are among the most highly recruited segment of the men and women who aspire to go to college each year (Wilson and Adelson, 2012). The definition of a high-achieving student differs from one study to the next. Blacknall and Johnson (20ll) define high-achieving students as those who had been accepted at a PWI and a selective HBCU. Wilson and Adelson (2012) described high-ability students as those who were still in high school and enrolled in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes. Hu (2010) identified high-achieving students as those who had received the Gates Millennium Scholarship. Hoxby and Turner (2013) defined high-achieving students as those who scored a combined 1300 on the combined verbal/math portions of the SAT. Though researchers have noted the advantages that certain high-achieving students have in the college choice process (Hoxby and Avery, 2012; Geiger, 2002; Wilson and Adelson, 2012), there is great variety among studies regarding what constitutes high achievement.

Geiger (2002) utilized the term “super students.” He defined them as having scored 700 or more on either the math or verbal portions of the SAT and a minimum score of 30 on the ACT. He explained that high-achieving students are coveted and sought after by multiple institutions and therefore have greater college choice opportunities to consider. Geiger also described high-achieving students as being in low supply and high in demand. Other

researchers found that high-achieving students were more likely to be accepted and enroll in college than students who were not high-achievers (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006). In context, high-achieving students would be the students who completed college preparatory classes in high school, took and passed Advanced Placement courses, and ranked in the top 10% of their classes. DesJardin et al. posited that high-achieving students tended to be competitive and understand that they would be in competition with other high-achieving students in the college choice process. Thus, they needed to apply to more colleges and universities that they deemed to be desirable.

High-Achieving Black Males

Research that has focused specifically on high-achieving Black males is limited, though it is expanding (Bonner, 2003; Fries-Britt; 1997; Goings, 2016; Harper; 2009; Harper & Davis; 2012; Johnson & McGowan; 2017; Strayhorn, 2014). While being viewed as a high-achieving student would seemingly be a badge of honor, some researchers (Bradshaw, Espinoza, and Hausman, 2001; Johnson and McGowan, 2017; Strayhorn, 2009) have found that some Black students experience pressure and isolation as a result of the designation. Strayhorn and Johnson and McGowan both discussed the self-described feelings of alienation by high-achieving Black students at PWIs and HBCUs. Harper (2009) has suggested that the research on high-achieving Black males in college serves to disrupt the negative and deficit-thinking related beliefs that Black males are ill-equipped with the skills and knowledge to succeed in higher education. This emerging body of research has also found that although even high-achieving Black males experience negative stereotypes, they have developed stereotyping strategies and coping mechanism designed to prove their doubters wrong (McGee & Martin, 2011). Researchers have also found that support from other high-achieving Black students,

faculty, and staff has been instrumental in the success to high-achieving Black males at HBCUs and PWIs.

In the literature, college choice is often depicted as a process that has evolved over the years. It reveals that multiple factors and influences must be considered as college choice decisions are being made. The literature also reveals that communication in various forms, financial concerns, proximity, family dynamics, and other considerations all work together to influence the choice set and ultimate final choice of the student. The literature further suggests a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and various conceptual frameworks should be used to further inform our understanding of college choice. The literature further reveals that more research is necessary as it relates to high-achieving students, what constitutes high achievement, and how high-achieving students experience the college choice process differently than other students. Though there is an abundance of literature on college choice, there is a dearth of research that has specifically shed light on college choice as it pertains to high-achieving Black students who choose HBCUs. This proposed research will add new knowledge to that body of research and provide information about high-achieving Black students and college choice that will have implications for practice and future research. In the next chapter I review the research methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I review the research design, research approach, sample, site selection, interview protocols, data collection, and data analysis procedures. I also detail the steps taken to establish trustworthiness of the study. The following research questions, as stated in chapter 1, guide the efforts and ambition of the study.

Research Questions

As stated in chapter 1, the following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do high-achieving Black males who decided to attend a prestigious HBCU, reflect upon the college-choice process?
    a. What are the institutional factors that high-achieving Black males consider to be important in the college choice process?
    b. What are the personal factors that motivate high-achieving Black males to choose to attend an HBCU?

Research Design

For this research study, I utilized a basic qualitative research design to capture the rich and descriptive nature of the college choice process as it was experienced by the high-achieving participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted that in applied fields of study, like education, health, social work, and others, the basic qualitative approach is the most commonly used research approach. This research is based on a constructivist approach because it is rooted in the belief that individuals construct reality in the context of their own social worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, this study seeks to understand how the interview data from

various students comes together to construct the meaning of college choice from the perspective and voice of high achieving Black students who chose to attend an HBCU.

According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), researchers who use the basic qualitative study are interested in knowing how the participants interpret their experiences as it relates to the phenomenon being studied. Merriam and Tisdell also assert that researchers who use the basic qualitative approach are interested in how participants in the research construct their worlds, and how they ascribe meaning to their experiences. This study meets the criterion for the basic qualitative approach based on the Merriam and Tisdell's description. Thus, a basic qualitative study is the appropriate approach to utilize in order to examine the college choice experience of high-achieving Black students.

Selection of Participants

Participants in this study were all high-achieving Black males who chose to enroll at Harmony University, a prestigious HBCU. Harmony University researchers attempt to shed light on the phenomenon being explored (college choice), and gain information to answer the research questions, it was essential that each participant in this study met specific criteria. Each participant in the study was required to: (1) be enrolled at Harmony University and be at least 18 years old; (2) have a high grade-point-average of 3.4 or more; (3) have an 1100 or more on the SAT or 25 on the ACT; or (4) or a PSAT score that qualified the student a National Achievement Scholarship, which is also a qualifier for consideration was selected because it has a long history of success with Black male students. In the for the National Merit Scholarship; (5) have been accepted at one or more PWIs; and (6) have been awarded a merit-based academic scholarship by Harmony University.

The sample population (see Table 1) was comprised of 20 high-achieving Black males who were enrolled at Harmony University. Participants were "purposefully selected"

(Creswell, 2014, p.189) to gain greater insight into the research problem and questions.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the participants (n = 20)

Participants	Year in College	Cumulative GPA	ACT/SAT Score
Ace	Senior	3.55	28 - ACT
Austin	Senior	3.74	1490 - SAT
Chance	Senior	3.81	33 ACT
Cole	Senior	3.44	1475 - SAT
Daniel	Senior	3.63	29 - ACT
Domino	Junior	3.77	30 - ACT
Douglas	Senior	3.82	29 - ACT
Etienne	Junior	3.42	1205 - SAT
Harold	Junior	3.56	1165 - SAT
Kerry	Senior	3.89	30 - ACT
Julian	Senior	3.52	1545 - SAT
Malcolm	Junior	3.68	27 - ACT
Martin	Sophomore	3.94	1097 - SAT
Maurice	Senior	3.76	1625 - SAT
Othello	Junior	4.00	34 - ACT
Prince	Senior	3.45	1490 - SAT
Ross	Junior	3.77	1070 - SAT
Shane	Junior	3.59	1120 - SAT
Sylvester	Senior	3.63	1240 - SAT
Justin	Junior	3.86	1098 - SAT

Purposeful selection is the process of identifying and selecting individuals believed to be knowledgeable about, or have experience with, the phenomenon being studied in order to yield rich and descriptive data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Suri, 2011). Participants were selected because they were “information rich” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and were sought to maximize what might be learned about college choice from their described experiences.

In order to recruit participants, I utilized my professional network, or gatekeepers at Harmony University (Glesne, 2006). In order to employ purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014) I targeted students who were participants in the Harmony University’s Honors College, because requirements for participation in the Honor’s College met or exceeded the criteria required to

participate in this study. Table 2 provides additional demographic data that includes the participants' hometown, major, and other colleges and universities where the participants applied.

Table 2

Student Participants' Demographics

Participants	Hometown	Major	College Choice Set
Ace	Atlanta, Georgia	Business Administration	Georgia State University., Harmony U.
Austin	Palm Beach, Florida	Political Science	Bucknell U., Fordham U., Harmony U., Harvard U., John Carroll U., Yale
Chance	Atlanta, Georgia	Music & Business	Alabama State U. Georgia State U., Harmony U., Temple U.,
Cole	Hamden, Connecticut	Business Marketing	Harmony U., Northeastern U., U. of Delaware, Western Connecticut State U.
Daniel	Accra, Ghana Charlotte, NC	Visual Arts/Graphic Design	Duke, U., Harmony U., Ohio State U., U. of North Carolina at Charlotte, U. of Pennsylvania; Princeton U.,
Domino	Atlanta, Georgia	Business Management	Georgia Tech; Harmony U.
Douglas	Baton, Rouge LA	Pre-Med	Alabama, Harmony U., LSU, Washington University in St. Louis, Xavier U.
Etienne	Atlanta, Georgia	Business Management	Alabama A &M, Elon U., Georgia State U., Harmony U., North Carolina
Harold	Atlanta, Georgia	Business Management	George Washington U., Harmony U., Wake Forest U., U. of Maryland
Kerry	San Diego, California	Physical Education	Grambling U. Harmony U. Howard University, Kentucky State U., San Diego State U., Texas Christian U.,
Julian	Port-au-Prince, Haiti New York, New York	Finance	Harmony U., Howard U., Penn State, U. of Connecticut; St. Johns' U.,
Malcolm	New Haven, Connecticut	Information Science	Harmony U., Howard U., Georgia Tech., Syracuse U., U. of Connecticut

Table 2

Student Participants' Demographics

Martin	Atlanta, Georgia	Early Childhood Education	Ball State U., FAMU, Georgia State U., Georgia College & State U., Howard U., North Carolina A&T,
Maurice	Atlanta, Georgia	Music & Business	Florida Agriculture & Mechanic U., Full Sail U., Georgia State U., Harmony U., Univ. of Miami
Othello	St. Louis, Missouri	Information Science	Harmony U., Harvard University
Prince	Sandy Springs, Georgia	Business Marketing	Georgia State U., Harmony U., Howard U., Santa Clara, Stanford
Ross	Atlanta, Georgia	Finance	American U., Georgetown U., George, Harmony U.,
Shane	Atlanta, Georgia	Business Marketing	Auburn U., Georgia State U., Kennesaw State U.,
Sylvester	Atlanta, Georgia	Kinesiology	Harmony U., Tennessee Tech
Wesley	New Orleans, LA	Finance	Harmony U., Howard U., St. Johns U., Xavier U.

In order to recruit students, I prepared a flyer and a recruitment email. Both were provided to administrators at Harmony University to provide to students who met or exceeded the criteria for this study. Flyers were posted at Harmony University and emailed to resident assistants, orientation assistants, and the membership of the Honors College. The flyer to recruit students for this study can be found in Appendix A. The recruitment email can be found in Appendix B.

Each student who responded to the information on the flyer was contacted by the researcher via WebEx for a digital face-to-face interview to verify that they met the study criteria and scheduled and scheduled for a 60-75-minute interview. If students dropped out or were otherwise disqualified, additional students would have been selected from a group of four

alternates who also meet the criteria for the sample population. Once the point of saturation was reached in the collection of data, I chose to discontinue interviews. The point of saturation is the point in which the researcher concludes that it is unlikely that new insights or information that will contribute to final conclusions will be found (Merriam, 2009).

Site Selection

The site selected for this study is Harmony University, a prestigious HBCU in the Southern United States with a celebrated past. It has a distinct history and has the reputation for cultivating Black leaders. It is known for having an engaging faculty that mentors students. Harmony University is consistently ranked among the top HBCUs by institutions that disseminate college rankings. Students at Harmony come from all over the United States and various parts of the world. They represent all socioeconomic backgrounds. Harmony University enjoys a strong athletic program and is known for its strong business school. Harmony enrolls a population of Black students who meet the criteria of a high-achieving Black students as defined in this study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were utilized as the primary data collection method for this study. Throughout the interview process, open-ended questions were posed to each participant in the study to maximize the probability of gathering information that provided answers to the research questions. The primary reason to use semi-structured interviews is to obtain specific data from each respondent through the use of flexible questions that will guide the interview process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). In contrast to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow for greater flexibility and adaptability. Semi-structured interviews are exploratory and more suitable for establishing conversations rather than simple responses to questions.

Interviews

Following a brief digital face-to-face pre-interview meeting via WebEx, semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone with each participant in the study. The interviews were utilized for the purpose of providing context and a deeper understanding of the college choice process from the perspective of the high-achieving Black students who chose to attend a prestigious HBCU. The structure for each interview included an introduction or opening statement; interview and follow-up questions; and a conclusion or closing. The steps utilized in the process of conducting the interviews included the following:

(1) began with a brief note of thanks, verified who I was speaking with, confirmed that I had received their consent form (See Appendix D) and reminded them that they had agreed to having the conversation recorded and transcribed;

(2) collected basic background information on a brief demographic from each participant; explained that I planned to record the interview, have it transcribed, and share it with them for review to control for accuracy;

(3) explained the usefulness of the study in context of college choice literature and the higher education of Black students;

(4) explained how confidentiality would be maintained by utilizing pseudonyms and keeping the data in a locked and secure environment

(5) informed participants that they would have the opportunity to review the transcribed recording for accuracy;

(6) provided my contact information and asked for permission to call them in case I have additional questions, or if they need me to answer additional questions they might've had at a later date;

(7) thanked the student for their participation and responses to my questions and informed them that a $20 token of appreciation would be electronically transferred to them.

Analysis of Data

The analysis phase of a study is the process that the researcher uses to make sense of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It requires that the raw data obtained from all sources be scrutinized concurrently to provide an understanding of how the multiple pieces of data come together to provide answers the research questions. In the analysis phase of this study, the data obtained from all persons who participated in the semi-structured interviews were compared by breaking down sentences, phrases, and words to observe the patterns and themes or categories that emerge. Those patterns and themes revealed the *what, how, when* and provided greater understanding or deeper insight to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell). For example, the data obtained from interview 1 was compared to the data from interviews 2-20 to identify the commonalities across the data. In this study, data were transcribed verbatim via Transcribe Me, an automated service that converted speech to text. The text was then reviewed and compared to the digital recording and checked for accuracy. All texts were then uploaded into NVivo, a data analysis software.

Coding is one of the initial aspects of the analysis process in which the researcher labels passages of text according to the content (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I utilized the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), NVivo11 to assist in analyzing the data for key words, sentences, and paragraphs to create themes based on the research questions and concepts from the theoretical framework. I used the raw data from the interviews by importing them as a rich text documents into NVivo to employ a two-step inductive process of open coding, followed by the process of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding is a process in which the researcher examines the raw data to by identifying pieces or segments

of the data that shed light on the research questions. It is called open coding because the researcher remains open to whatever might be found that is relevant to providing answers to the research questions. Open coding was utilized with each transcript as interview transcriptions were completed.

At the conclusion of the open coding of all transcripts, I commenced with the process of axial coding. In this process I reviewed all of the codes from the open coding process and my notes that I made during the interview process to identify categories in which the codes might be placed. The goal in this process was to examine the codes to look at possible relationships or common patterns to see where they linked together or intersected in such a manner that constituted placing them in similar or the same categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). At this point, I engaged in a more deductive approach by examining the data using NVivo 11 to search for themes associated with the theoretical framework. I proceeded in that sequence to allow the research to follow the lead of the data with the belief that some themes from the theoretical framework would emerge from the raw data after it been coded. The overall coding scheme utilized during the analysis of the data was designed to provide answers to the research questions in the context and voice of the students participating in the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a much-desired element of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). In each study, one who reads it must be able to believe or trust that the study was conducted in an ethical manner and with an amount of rigor that would lead to credibility in the manner in which data was managed, analyzed, and interpreted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthy studies are conducted by researchers who employ acceptable and established scientific research designs that would lead others within the scientific community to have confidence that the findings in the study are reliable and reflect the reality of the phenomenon as it was

experienced by the participants in the study. In this study, the college choice process and the way it was influenced by various factors that culminated in the choice of a selective HBCU, was the phenomena being explored. The college choice process was explored from the perspective of current students to give descriptive voice to the depth of their college choice experience.

In this study, a variety of strategies were used to increase the trustworthiness of findings. These strategies included (1) audio recording and verbatim transcript comparison; (2) member-checking, in which verbatim transcripts were emailed back to the participants to check for accuracy; (3) providing rich descriptions for the purpose of transporting the reader into the interview setting "to give the reader the element of a shared experience" (Creswell, 2014 p. 202); and (4) practicing researcher reflexivity, or practicing on-going self-awareness of my own worldview and experiences during the research process to avoid impacting the construction of knowledge in order to obtain accurate knowledge and accurate analyses of that knowledge (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003). As a result of taking these steps, the trustworthiness of the respective data sets was maximized.

Researcher Positionality

In relationship to this study, I have looked inwardly to assess my own biases and the ways in which they might affect participants and the study. As an experienced higher education administrator, a Black man, and the son of a pastor, I continue to utilize my work in higher education try to make the world a better place. Over the past twenty years, I have presided over forty-five new student orientations sessions and met thousands of students and parents. During those sessions, I listened to parents and students discuss what they expected from their college experience. Those meetings led to my curiosity about the types of things that helped shape and influence college choice decisions.

Since I attended Shaw University, an HBCU and served as associate vice chancellor and dean of students at Winston-Salem State University, another HBCU, I became particularly interested in conducting research that would provide a deeper understanding of the college choice process of high-achieving Black students at HBCUs. Because I am an experienced administrator and a former student at an HBCU, I tried to remain cognizant that students would likely say things that might trigger my propensity to fix things. I worked to avoid interjecting my truth as an administrator into the college choice process of the students participating in my study.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include a definition of high-achievement that may not be consistent the definition used in other college choice research. The lack of a common definition, regardless of race, may make it difficult to effectively conduct a meta-analysis of previous and current college choice qualitative research on high-achieving students. The second limitation is the single gender of the participants. Having another gender would have allowed for a deeper analysis and provided an opportunity to see if factors that influence the college choice of high-achieving Black men are consistent with those found across a population of high-achieving Black women. The third limitation is that interviews were all conducted via telephone for consistency. Thus, the researcher may have missed opportunities to pick up on visual cues from the participants. The fourth limitation is that any attempt to provide a more precise description of the unique attributes of Harmony University; would most likely diminish the integrity of the study by revealing the actual identity of the institution. The fifth and final limitation is that the Harmony network may be so unique to Harmony University that it may not be factor in in the college choice process of student who may choose to attend another HBCU.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of this study are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide a greater understanding of the college choice process of high-achieving Black males who chose to attend a prestigious HBCU instead of other choices. Data from 20 interviews of high-achieving Black males were analyzed after employing the process of open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data were organized using NVivo 12, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) database program to explore the themes that emerged from the interview data. Findings address the following research questions below.

1. How do high-achieving Black males who decided to attend a prestigious HBCU, reflect upon the college-choice process?
    a. What are the institutional factors that high-achieving Black males consider to be important in the college choice process?
    b. What are the personal factors that motivate high-achieving Black males to choose to attend an HBCU?

Results from this study identified key interactions throughout the course of Toutkoushian and Paulsen's (2016) 5-stage college choice model that shaped and influenced the decision-making process for high-achieving Black males as they weighed the costs and benefits of attending PWIs and HBCUs. Interviews with participants in this study revealed

strategic parental involvement that influenced the college choice process from the predisposition stage through the enrollment stage. It is clear that the perceptions of participants in the study indicated an expected return on their educational investment as they pursued career success. Additionally, findings from this study indicate, as Freeman (2002) has posited, that the racialized experiences of Black students in post-secondary schools impacted their higher education choices.

Specifically, the results of this study indicate that there were several institutional and personal factors that influence the college choice of high-achieving Black students. Data suggest major reasons high-achieving Black students continue to choose prestigious HBCUs over PWIs because of (1) the network; (2) institutional reputation; (3) institutional environment; (4) family support; and (5) scholarships and financial aid. Not unlike existing literature on the college choice process, findings also indicate that high-achieving Black males did not experience the college choice process as phenomena that began during the high school years. Instead, many acknowledged that the college choice process began prior to the 6th grade. The high-achieving Black males in this study were groomed from childhood by their parents to believe they were going to college. They were also instilled with the belief that college would make leaders of them.

Harmony University

Each participant in this study had multiple college choices, but eventually chose to attend Harmony University (pseudonym), a prestigious HBCU with a celebrated past. It is important to note that though each high-achieving student enrolled at Harmony University was Black, there was diversity among the group. Participants were from different parts of the country. Some were born in other countries. Some were athletes. They came from varying socioeconomic backgrounds and religions. Some were wealthy and had traveled to various

parts of the world, while others had struggled to afford Harmony University. Most selected Harmony University as their first choice, even though a few of the participants were accepted prominent universities in their home states. One of the participants admittedly enrolled because he was not accepted by a more prestigious college or university.

Despite variation, several themes emerged during individual interviews with the participants in this study. Themes are grouped into two categories. The two categories are termed institutional factors and personal factors. Institutional factors are the important institutional characteristics that influenced participant's college choice. Institutional factors include a strong institutional reputation, institutional environment, and a strong alumni and professional network. Personal factors are the characteristics that are more closely associated with the life of the student and include having family support and encouragement, and concerns regarding institutional affordability.

Institutional reputation refers to a variety of characteristics that collectively constitute fame or high regard. Similarly defined by Jones (2013) and Porter & Toutkoushian (2006) institutional reputation is characterized by faculty quality, historical accomplishments, student quality, rankings, quality of alumni, and a variety of other characteristics as perceived by individuals and organizations to be worthy of esteem. Many HBCUs have more than a century of experience serving Black students. Strong alumni and professional networks are often by-products of successful HBCUs. Many of the leaders In Black communities throughout the United States are HBCU graduates (Gasman & Tudico, 2008). Black students continue to choose HBCUs in order to access and join the ranks of influential Black leaders who preceded them.

Family support and encouragement refers to the degree to which immediate family and closely held kinships were instrumental in assisting the participants in this study in setting

expectations, predicting outcomes, and providing resources and encouragement throughout the college choice process. Finally, affordability refers to the ability of individuals to have the capacity, regardless of the origins of resources, to afford the costs associated with college attendance. These institutional and personal factors were analyzed by the researcher and are presented in the voice of the participants in this study.

Institutional Factors

Central to this study is the question about the institutional factors that influence the college choice process of high-achieving Black students who choose to attend prestigious HBCUs. An analysis of these factors shed light on, and provide answers to, the first part of the research question. The themes presented in the section include the network, institutional reputation, and institutional fit.

The Network

Another common factor that influenced the college choice process of participants in this study was the Harmony University network. The network is the collective power of the Harmony University alumni and all of their professional contacts in the workforce who served as mentors and employment catalysts and provide access to information and opportunities for current students to enter the workforce. Harmony University accepts parents and siblings as part of the Harmony family. As a result, the Harmony University network is vast. Participants spoke passionately about the power of the network. While most par actually called it the network, others used the term *connections*. When asked about the most important factors that influence college choice, most of the participants referred to the network. When asked how they thought they might benefit from attending Harmony University, Ace and Prince provided similar responses. Ace replied, “So, if anything, I think it’s the connections with other

businesses that were started by people who went to Harmony University and other HBCUs. They have alumni all over the world." Prince offered a similar response. He added,

> I met a lot of people, you know, that have serious connections, whether that be their parents or someone they know. One of my friend's mother who went to a nearby college is an entertainment lawyer, and she's very successful in the city. The network is crazy. It's everywhere, even in other countries.

During the interview with Othello, who shared that he hopes to be a millionaire someday, he discussed his academic success. He also talked specifically about the importance of his attendance at Harmony University as it related to his goals for future employment. Othello said,

> I've always wanted to go to college. People who know me and know my personality know that I'm very driven to be successful. I'm driven by my lifestyle. Odds are to live the lifestyle you want, you need to go to college and create your network. I've always been smart and gifted. I've always had a 4.0. But even the ones with high GPAs need someone who can give them the little push that they need. Harmony has a great network. Once you get in (to Harmony), then you have to work that network. I don't know it, but I believe that someone in my network is going to help be become a millionaire.

Harold, a rising senior, provided an example of how he and some of his friends experienced the Harmony University network while they are out dining. He stated,

> What I'm saying is that I love, I just love being there and being able to go to school there. And lastly, the network, the network, in my eyes is just so unparalleled. I was out with friends and we were just talking and chilling. We saw a Harmony University alumnus who had his shirt on, so we all rushed over to say hello to him. We talked for a little bit and his friends arrived and he went

> to his table. We were just talking at our table and hadn't ordered yet. Then a bunch of stuff just starts coming. We told the waiter that we didn't order it and he told us that the guys at the other table sent the appetizers and had already paid for our check. So, if anybody ever asks me, I going to tell them that they have to come here. Undergrad students got alumni paying for their food. This is a powerful network and I just, I, I love it. Even little things just send a message. You know, I think it's an awesome thing that those who came before you think enough of you to want to do things to help you get to where they are now. It's a beautiful thing. I love being a part of it

Austin, a star football player at Harmony University from Palm Beach, Florida, shared that initially, he did not want to attend an HBCU. Since everyone in his family had attended HBCUs, he "wanted to be different." He shared his experience with a Harmony University alumnus and how it affected his college choice process. He shared,

> I got looks from Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Georgetown, Fordham, Bucknell, John Carroll University, which is small NCAA Division III School in Cleveland, Ohio. I committed unofficially to John Carroll in February 2016. A family member who went to Harmony told me that I had to go there. He invited me to an interest meeting. I met with him and some Harmony alumni, and the rest is history.

The study participants collectively shared their experiences and examples about the nature of influence of the Harmony University alumni network on the college choice process. The network, made up of individuals all over the country, was seen by students as a conduit to internships, employment and leadership opportunities. While some participants shared that they were in awe of the network prior to arriving at Harmony, others shared that the

employment and leadership opportunities the network could provide for them influenced their decisions to remain at Harmony and reinforced their decision to enroll there. They talked about what they would tell others who were considering Harmony. Having access to employment and job opportunities the Harmony's network was a sense of pride. Austin, Othello, Ace, and Prince and others provided examples that suggest that access to employment and job opportunities through the Harmony University alumni network, and knowing that they would be a part of it one day was a factor that strongly influenced their respective decisions to choose Harmony instead of other institutions they had considered.

Institutional Reputation

Throughout the process of interviewing participants in this study, the importance of an institutional reputation was a recurring theme. The esteem bestowed upon an academic institution by those who are external to it constitutes the institution's reputation. Academic rankings, teaching quality, rigor of faculty scholarship, selectivity, faculty-to-student ratio, class size, physical facilities, notable alumni, employment rate after college, and a host of other characteristics are often used in the literature to describe and define institutional reputation (Jones, 2013; Porter & Toutkoushian; 2006).

Several students cited the prestige of Harmony University as a factor that influenced their college choice process. Daniel was born in Ghana. He admitted that he grew up as an Ohio State University football fan because his third-grade teacher was an Ohio State Buckeye fanatic. He said that his dad would always change the subject when he talked about going there to pursue a degree. Daniel believes that he can change the world for the better by raising the consciousness of African Americans about Africans. He applied to two Ivy League schools, Princeton University and University of Pennsylvania and was accepted at both. He was rejected

by Duke University, his first choice. Daniel admitted that he chose Harmony University because he was not accepted at Duke.

Though Daniel was not accepted at Duke University, his first choice, he was proud to receive a scholarship from Harmony University, a place that he described as being "the best HBCU in the country." Daniel shared,

> Like my sisters were telling me, you've got to pick this school, you've got to go to a school that's high in the rankings. And then I did some research online, like, you know, and I'm typing it in and I see that we are one of the top schools in the South. So, I am really proud to be going to one of the most prestigious HBCUs in the country, because it is number one. Harmony University is consistently ranked among the top HBCUs, but they don't really publicize it a lot like other universities, but it is a top school. You can say you attend Harmony University and it means something. To me that's a big deal. That's why so many come here.

Daniel was not alone in noting that Harmony University's reputation was an important factor in his college choice process. He shared more about Harmony being ranked as the leading HBCU and placed less emphasis on being accepted to two Ivy League schools. Ross, a rising junior, majoring in finance, was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He is the older brother of two brothers and one sister. Ross also cited Harmony's reputation and prestige as important factors in his college choice process. He said,

> Location and ranking were definitely a part of why I chose Harmony. Once I got in, I had no problem getting a scholarship from 100 Black Men and Big Brothers Big Sisters. I think I got those scholarships because I was accepted at Harmony. Harmony was the first school to accept me.

Ross was accepted at George Washington University, Georgetown University, and American University. Though each of those universities has a good reputation, Ross chose Harmony University. He intimated that Harmony's reputation was the reason he received two scholarships that are normally given only to Black students.

Austin is a senior, political science major and former athlete from Palm Beach, Florida. He attended a prestigious prep school in the Midwest. He shared how important it was for him to attend a prestigious college that brought notoriety to himself and his former high school. He shared,

> My school prided itself on sending their students to the top institutions in the country. And so, I was on the cover of the magazine that they sent out as a recruiting tool. Colleges would read it and they were recruiting me. Schools like Dartmouth and Cornell and Columbia and Washington University of St. Louis were recruiting me. So naturally you wanted to go to that school that brings you recognition. That's what the guidance counselors really pushed for…….I was on the cover because I played football. I knew why I was there. I was recruited by some of the top schools but I chose to attend Harmony. I chose the best HBCU in the country after being at a White high school.

Austin continued the tradition of star-athletes from his prestigious prep school when he chose to enroll and play for Harmony. Chance, a rising senior majoring in music and business, from Atlanta, Georgia turned down a full-ride at another HBCU because Harmony University was the place he dreamed of attending since he was a young child. He reasoned,

> Like I said, I could have gone to Tennessee State with a full ride and I wouldn't have to pay for anything, but Harmony University is a much better school. It was my dream

> school and I wasn't going to let the cost of a school stop me from going to my actual dream school.

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that when some of the participants in the study talked about academic programs and majors, they were also essentially referring to Harmony's strong institutional reputation. In Chance's case, after weighing his options, he chose Harmony University instead of another HBCU that had offered him a full football scholarship. He chose Harmony, as he stated, because it was his "dream school" even though it the financial cost was more. The value associated with going to his dream school, a very prestigious HBCU, meant more to him that going to another HBCU where there would have been little to no financial cost to him. Based on the responses of the students, reputation connoted strong academic programs that were associated with strong faculty relationships, and a consistent focus on the success of Black males.

It should be noted that Harmony University does not offer nearly as many majors as some of the PWIs that are within close proximity. Some of the PWIs in the region are nationally ranked and highly acclaimed. Some participants in this study were accepted at some of them, but chose to attend Harmony University. Each participant in the study was asked how important a specific major was, if at all, in their decision to attend Harmony University. Participants were also asked about the three most important considerations that led them to choose and HBCU. The majority of participants reported that the academic programs offered at Harmony University were important in their college choice decision-making process. Domino is a rising senior majoring in business management. He summed up his sentiments about being able to obtain an internship as a result of Harmony University science programs.

> It was extremely important because in my senior year of high school, I knew I wanted to major in physics. So, without physics I didn't want to

> come. Having his major or choice was also pivotal for Austin, who shared, "It was very important. I've always been in love with science, so that influenced the decision to do physics. That also helped in my decision with Harmony University. I wanted to get focused on the rest of my life. Having my major was definitely important. I only looked at schools if the school had great science programs.

Domino had the opportunity to attend several colleges, but his love for physics led to the Harmony and their strong physics program. Similarly, Harold chose Harmony because of their very unique journalism program. Harold shared,

> I think that was so key to my final decision to come to Harmony University because coming out of high school I was going to be a mass communication major; but Harmony has a unique journalism program.

Similarly, Etienne, a senior biology major who plans to be a doctor like both of his parents, said the following about the importance of Harmony University sports medicine program to his college choice process.

> I mean, I wanted to be a sports medicine major, but I came in as a biology major. I'm trying to go to a medical school, so. I mean, I knew there were lot of the schools that offered me a scholarship have a track for students who wanted to go to medical school. So, knowing I could get to med school from here was a big part of my decision." Chance shared similar sentiments. He said, "It was pretty important because I wanted to do a great program either in business or music. At Harmony, I could double major and get degrees in business and music. So that was a big plus for me.

Ace, a senior majoring in economics, had similar sentiments. He shared,

> Having my major, it was important, but I knew Harmony University had it. I didn't give real consideration to any schools that didn't have it. So, I knew that I would be good. Schools that did not offer economics did not make the list.

Maurice, a music major, like most of the other students, cited his major as an important factor in his decision to choose Harmony University. He shared, "I considered a lot of schools. They have a good program in my major. That was really important for me."

Several participants articulated the importance of Harmony's reputation for strong and unique program as an important factor in their decision to attend Harmony instead of other options. The strong programs the participants mentioned are undoubtedly among the reasons Harmony University is ranked as one the top HBCUs in the country.

Institutional Environment

Institutional environment is determined by the degree of to which a student is able to experience a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018). Students who do not believe they fit it will likely also dislike the institutional environment They see the environment as unwelcoming or exclusive. Using a circle as an analogy, those inside the circle fit in the circle and are included. Those outside of the circle do not fit in and are on the periphery, or are excluded. Though they are within the environment, they do not feel a part of the environment (Strayhorn, 2018). Being in an academic environment in which participants derived a sense of belonging, or good fit was an important factor that influenced their college choice decisions.

During the interviews, more than half of the participants mentioned considering the environment of the institutions in their choice set. They explained that it was important to be in an environment in which their culture would be affirmed. In other words, they wanted to be in an environment where they already fit in. Several of the participants who attended

predominantly White high schools and had a bad experience, stressed the importance having a different experience in college.

Chance stated that his most important considerations in choosing to attend an HBCU were the "marching band, the alumni network, and the culture." He went on to make a distinction between PWIs and HBCUs in the following statement,

> I think one thing that a lot of Black students are missing at PWIs is the culture aspect and knowing that there's a lot of diversity in Black people. So, a lot of times, when you're at PWI, you just a small in numbers, so you're kind of like surrounded by this White superiority complex, but not at an HBCU. You're going to see all types of black people like Caribbeans, Africans, Black Hispanics, and even brothers from England. We come in different shades and different backgrounds you know.

Chance followed with another comparison of HBCUs and PWIs.

> At Harmony, you're going to see West Africans, South Africans, and people from places in the Islands that you've never heard of before. So, that's what I think we need. As Black people, we need to understand that all our people don't come from just United States. All our people didn't come from just slavery, right?

In addition to Chance, Domino, Kerry, Maurice, Julian, Douglas, Daniel, Harold, Etienne, and Cole each made mention of culture as a major factor in their college choice process. Kerry was having difficulty deciding if he wanted to be an athlete at a PWI. After sitting down with his family, Kerry commented,

> I just kind of sat down with my family and that's when we got into the whole culture conversation. After that, I ended up opting out of my letter of intent.

> It took, maybe two weeks. Then I signed my letter of intent to Harmony University.

Harold summed up his sentiments in a short and succinct manner. He said, "Black culture is HBCU culture and HBCU culture is black culture." Other studies have also emphasized the importance of the need for an environment that embraced or celebrated Black culture as a key factor for Black males as they make college choice decisions (Harper, 2015; Fries-Britt, 1997). In this study, participants clearly expressed their desire to be in an environment that embraced Black culture. When Maurice was asked for the top three factors that motivated him to choose an HBCU, he replied, "The culture, and the location, and the strength of the academic major I was pursuing."

Douglas applied to more than 15 colleges and universities. When it was time for him to make his final decision, he was influenced in a significant way by the support students received from faculty and administrators. Douglas shared,

> I actually visited a PWI and HBCU I was applying to within the same week in my senior year in high school. I really enjoyed my visit at each school. I think the deciding factors were the talk that I had with my parents and with my friend who is attending the HBCU I attend now.

He talked about the support received from the administration, faculty and fellow students. He said,

> I saw it for myself when I visited the campus. I was able to see exactly what they were talking about. It was just a family atmosphere. I mean the culture, the support, and the opportunities.

Ross is a junior finance major, one of Harmony University's strongest academic programs. He remembered choosing Harmony over some very reputable PWIs

because he believed that an HBCU was the right place for him. He noted that it was important for him to be around other Blacks so he could gain a better sense of who is truly is. He also talked about the caring nature of the people who work at Harmony. As he reflected on the three reasons he chose to attend Harmony, he shared,

> The reasons I chose an HBCU would be for the people, really for my people. So, attending an HBCU, I just felt was right for me and fit me best, and I think I could really use the knowledge of who I am to guide me through the world. The second reason would be that the people that work there really care. So, it would be support. The third reason would be that I just can't picture myself at a PWI. It's kind of different. I don't know how to explain it. I just like being around my own people.

An affirming environment in which Black culture was the focal point was consistently mentioned as a factor that influenced the participants to choose Harmony University instead of some very fine PWIs. Another example is found in Domino's reflection on conversations when he was strongly considering a PWI instead of Harmony University. His sister attended Hampton University and his brothers attended Morehouse College. Domino stated, "They were telling me about the culture of their schools and they kind of influenced me to go to an HBCU."

Malcolm also chose to attend Harmony University instead of Syracuse University because of Harmony's culturally affirming environment He stated,

> Well I could have gone to Syracuse. After I narrowed my top choices to Harmony University and Syracuse, I just chose Harmony because at Harmony I could just be one person. At Syracuse, I would have spent too

> much unnecessary time trying to be two people. I spent enough time doing that in high school. I did not want the same experience in college. So, for me it was easily Harmony University. It has a good history when it comes to Black students. It feels good to go to class every day and see so many Black students just going after it, you know?

Culture was a highly influential factor in the college choice process. It injects race into the college choice process in a manner that goes beyond skin color. Culture, in the context of conversations with the participants, include the traditions of the flamboyant marching bands, helpful faculty and staff, academics programs that groomed leaders, and a spirit of comradery and mutual cooperation between alumni and students that led to the feeling of harmony on campus.

Othello is a senior from St. Louis, Missouri. He applied only to Harmony University and Harvard University and was accepted at both. He discussed being affirmed by a neighbor who believed he would do well at an HBCU and a PWI, but encouraged him to attend an HBCU. He shared,

> So, my mom's friend took me to school every day. She had two sons who graduated from Hampton University and Howard University. She has a younger son that's close to my age. We were both bad kids and we ran around. I had good grades and he didn't. His mom wanted me to spend time around him. Feed into him. I told her I was deciding what college to go to and I was applying at an Ivy League college and Harmony University. She told me that should really about putting myself around Black people because I had spent some much time around White people in Catholic school. She also told me that I would be successful at an HBCU or a PWI. What matters to me is that if

> you have to pay all this money to go to college, you ought to be able to go to a place that has people who look like you. You know, people who you can relate to. That is important to me. A university ought to teach you to have love for yourself. So why not go to a place where Blacks can learn to have love for each other. It might sound selfish but I wanted to go to a place that celebrated me and celebrated the Black community. I have nothing against PWIs. I may still go to one someday. They just have a different experience.

Harold is a junior from Atlanta, Georgia. He attended public schools though his mother could have afforded to send him to boarding school for high school. His high school was most Black. When he reflected on why he chose an HBCU instead of a PWI, l he stated,

> When it comes to choosing a college, I don't really think one has an advantage over the other. They all have some good things about them. But the biggest thing for me is being at a place where I don't have to work hard to be accepted. At PWIs cultural events just happen every day because what HBCUs do represents who we are. But then when you think about a White school, cultural things can be a big deal or controversial. At HBCUs the Black experience is you being you and me being me. At PWIs the Black experience is worrying about making somebody man because I am proud of who I am. It shouldn't be that way. Living like that is very stressful. So, I feel like I have an advantage over Black students at PWIs.

Though Harold was the only participant in the study who believed that attending an HBCU provided an advantage, there were others who indicated that they felt as though they fit in better at HBCUs. Wesley is a senior from New Orleans. He was educated in Catholic schools

since the third grade. When discussing the primary reasons why he chose to attend an HBCU, he said,

> I am unapologetically black. I don't have to water myself down to please anybody else. I did that enough when I was in Catholic school. I wanted to go somewhere where I can just be myself without any worry of consequence. There're no worries about having to act a certain way or code-switch. You don't have to act anyway, or talk a certain way at HBCUs. I don't know if everyone agrees or if people can understand what I'm saying, but there is no pressure to please anybody at an HBCU to make other people feel comfortable around me. When you do that all the time, you end up being the one who is uncomfortable. I am happy at my HBCU even though Black people sometimes get on each other's nerves, we know it's all love.

Chance, a senior from Atlanta talked about his perceptions of the differences in the cultural experience for Black students at HBCUs and PWIs. He added,

> I think one thing that a lot of Black students are missing at PWIs is the cultural aspect and knowing that there's a lot of diversity in Black people. So, a lot of time, when you're at PWI, it's just a small little group, and they're kind of surrounded by this White culture. But at HBCUs you're going to see all types of black people. It's cool.

Ross, is a finance major from Atlanta. He attended public charter elementary and high schools that were predominantly Black. He believes that there is a common aspect of culture that all students at HBCUs share. He explained,

> I went to a predominantly black high school, middle school, and elementary school. But now I get to see, I guess, the different backgrounds that people come from. When I was younger, I never even thought about race. I just lived it. At an HBCU, we all have the same color of skin. But, here you notice upper-class Blacks, middle-class Blacks or the

> lower-class blacks. It really helps you figure out which one of those you want to be. We all hang out together and we are all figuring things out together. When one of us makes it, we have to help the other. I learned that at Harmony. That would not happen I think at PWIs. Here at Harmony, if you have money or not. We all know that once we leave here, we will all face the same struggle of making it. Everybody here is going through a struggle. This makes us stronger and maybe prepares us better than PWIs. And I think this tends to happen mostly at almost every HBCU.

Julian was born in Haiti. He and his family moved to New York City, where he was educated in Catholic schools. His Catholic high school was predominantly White. Julian succinctly summed up why he chose Harmony University over the PWIs he considered attending. He shared,

> My elementary I had majority black, but that changed in high school. I feel more comfortable being the majority. I also knew Harmony University had a great business school, and I wanted a school outside of NYC to feel independent.

The institutional environment and a sense of a welcoming place to engage in academic pursuits were important factors throughout the data. Kerry, a senior from San Diego, California majoring in physical education discussed traveling to Harmony University and feeling like it was home. He stated,

> I visited the campus. What I was looking for was a college that gave me the feeling like it was home. I wanted it to feel comfortable. When I visited Harmony University, just from being around a whole bunch of people who look like me in mind and body was important. But so many of us came from different backgrounds, but we understood each other. We like the same kind of music, play spades, laugh at the same things and don't

> get offended. It is important to know who you are. That can get lost at some of the White schools. I am not saying all of them, but probably most of them.

While Kerry focused on being comfortable around others of the same race, Douglas articulated a different perspective. He talked more about being inspired by Black professionals and being encouraged by the support services available to him. He added,

> Like I said before it really provides me with the support that I need to feel like I could do anything in the world. Being able to see black physicians, and others in science, in like people in every possible profession and really provide me with the support from faculty you know if I need help talk to other students and if I'm not on the understanding of all of those things really provide me with the support that I need in addition to the resources.

Cole is a senior from Hamden, Connecticut majoring in business marketing. He and Kerry had similar sentiments regarding why they chose to attend and remain at Harmony University. He shared,

> I think it's amazing. You get a great sense of self-confidence. I think at HBCUs, I think I became a much more confident, outgoing person. I feel like it's just prepared me in so many different ways. They talk to you-- they talk to you about things like being a Black person in the workplace, being a Black person in America that you just would not get at a PWI. They teach you how to carry yourself in certain environments as a Black person and what you have to think about that your White counterparts don't. I feel like those things are very important because Black people don't think about the need to be at their best because it sometimes takes our best just to compete with an average White person. A lot of black people don't think about this all the time and they're not aware of it, but it is real. So, I think being at Harmony, it's prepared me in a lot of ways.

High-achieving Black males in college are susceptible to marginalization, discrimination, and alienation based on their race (Strayhorn, 2014; Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Harper, 2006). The participants in this study came from varying socioeconomic conditions, yet were keenly aware of social ills in the United States that pertain to race. As they made college choice decisions, regarding their attendance at HBCUs and PWIs, they admittedly struggled with finding the right institutional environment, or the right fit. They were looking for places where they believed they would fit in. Strayhorn's (2018) concept of the sense of belonging sums up the struggle of the students in this study. He defines sense of belonging as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers." Though Strayhorn's definition applies to college students regardless of race, the participants in this study, in choosing HBCUs, through their own words, considered the various aspects of belonging prior to making their final decision. They chose an environment that was support of their race and culture.

Though the network, institutional reputation, and institutional environment are the institutional factors that influenced the college choice process of participants in this study; their college choice decisions were also influenced by personal factors.

Personal Factors

Family Support

Family emerged as the most influential factor on the college choice process of the participants in this study. Each participant mentioned their family's involvement in their college choice process. Participants also mentioned siblings and extended family as persons who significantly influenced their respective college choice processes; however, among family

and friends, parents play the most significant role in the college choice process of participants in this study. Multiple studies (Ceja, 2006; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Perna, 2006; Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2006; Freeman, 1999) found that parents of high achieving Black students were deeply involved in Stage 1 predisposition activities early on in their lives of their students. In this study family support included parents and siblings; however the support most students received was skewed significantly in favor of parents.

Most participants shared that their parents began talking to them about college at various ages within their childhood. Many recalled talking to their parents about college throughout their childhoods. One of the participants was unable to recall the first college conversation with his parents. When asked how old he was when his parents first started about talking with him about college, Austin responded by saying,

> As young as I can remember I was thinking about college. That was never not a question. My family is full of educators. On my dad's side, there are lots of teacher and some just work for the School Board. Education is something we value. Also, I was the youngest, so I attended all the graduations. So, I always knew I wanted to do this. I didn't know how or when, but I knew I wanted to.

Ace's parents enrolled him into KIPP Academy, a charter school that prepares students for college. When asked when he had his first thoughts of going to college, Ace responded,

> Um, at KIPP, in middle school. Um, cause they start getting you ready for college in the fifth grade. And it's like once you're get into the fifth grade, they were like oh yeah, you're going to college and college is for you. Like we're preparing you for college now. They didn't just talk about graduating

> from high school. Each classroom is named after a college. I was in the Georgia Tech home room. From 5th grade, you are referred to as the class you will be in when you graduate from college. All I knew was that I was supposed to graduate in 2019 and finish my education. Education was important in our house.

Maurice, when asked when he started discussing going to college, he said that it occurred around the 7th grade. He followed up by saying, "My mom was the main influence on going to college." Prince said that is mother had the biggest influence on his college choice process. He also explained that college was an expectation of his parents. He shared,

> In our household it was always kind of assumed that we're going to college. My parents said, "You're going to go to college," but I didn't really start thinking about where I wanted to go until about my junior year of high school.

Julian was born in Haiti. His family had high expectations of him. At a young age, his parents talked to him about attending college. When asked if his parents encouraged him to attend college, he commented,

> Yeah, they always talk about the importance of education and how you need a college degree to get a good job. I feel like I always thought about college, but I really started thinking about it in high school. I knew I would need it to get a good job. Specifically, I think it was Freshman year of High School when I really started thinking about college.

Domino, is a senior who was born in Atlanta. His parents are from New Orleans. When asked about how his parents influenced his choice of colleges, he shared,

> I was probably around like three years old. Both my mom and dad went to HBCUs. So they always took us to Grambling's football game. As I got older, I realized that the Grambling (University) and Southern (University) game was a big rivalry. I remember thinking that I wanted to go to Grambling. I loved the band and the football game. My dad used to buy t-shirts that we all would wear.

It is important that note that Domino grew up as a fan of Grambling State University. He traveled from Atlanta each year with his parents to their hometown to see the big Grambling versus Southern football game. Though Domino did not choose to attend Grambling, he chose Harmony University, another school with a reputation of having a strong football team, a great band, and strong football rivalry. It appears that he might have been predisposed to attend an HBCU based on having two parents who attended and remembering all the good times he had at the Grambling versus Southern games.

Malcolm is a junior from New Haven, Connecticut. His major is information science. When asked who were the persons who most influenced his college choice decisions he named only his mother. He explained,

> My mother was my biggest cheerleader. When I was a little boy talked to me every morning in the car on the way to school. We talked about I wanted to do after graduating from college. I wanted to be like her. She is the chief information officer for a major corporation. She talked a lot about hard work

> and how it pays off. She talked to me about being Black in America. She is the greatest person I know. All I want to do it to be like her. It was hard to understand why she did not let me watch television until I was 10 years old. I did all the school plays and student government. She told me what was important for me to do to get into college. She checked my homework every night until I was in the 11th grade. I did not appreciate what she was doing for me then, but now I do. When it was time to choose a college, I looked at a few. She let me make the decision. She told me that all she expected is that I do my best. I want to be a CIO like her. I want to make her proud. I hope I have done that.

Malcom's interview revealed his desire to be like his mother, a CIO for a major corporation. He called his supportive mother his "biggest cheerleader." Malcolm chose to enroll at Harmony University, a place with a very reputable information science program with a goal of "making her proud."

Throughout the interview with participants in this study, others like Malcolm talked about the things their parents did to prepare them for college. It appears that some parents took the steps to get their students to the point of thinking about college, but then backed off to allow the student to make their own choices about which colleges they would eventually choose to attend. Daniel, who was born in Ghana and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina called his college choice decision a partnership with his parents. Like others, he believes the final decision was his to make. When talking about the influence of his parents, he said,

> I think it was greatly influenced by, I mean it was a partnership between me and my parents, I would say. And because everybody else, when I said, Oh, I am going to Harmony University, it's was like, oh my God, that's great. That's awesome. But what was most important to me is that I did not have to worry about how they felt. But if my parents had been the ones who picked the school, I probably would not have wanted to go there. They just wanted me to go to a top school. I liked Harmony right away and I hoped my parents liked it too. I mean it did not look modern or anything like that, but it's one of most important universities in the world. When I came for my visit and they talked about the school history, I knew right then that I wanted to go there. The decision was easy. My parents agreed. Everybody's happy.

All participants in this study identified one or both parents as persons who most influenced their college choice decisions. College choice researchers have consistently found that parents strongly influence the college choice process of their students (Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Bergerson, 2009). Though others influenced the college choice decisions of participants in this study, no individuals influenced the participants college choice decisions more than their parents.

In this study, parents' early activity in the predisposition stage indicated that a K-16 educational approach as espoused by Fleming (2006) was utilized to present going to college as a non-optional endeavor. All participants in this study chose to attend an HBCU (Harmony University). Some of their parents also attended HBCUs. Actions taken in the predisposition stage including trips to HBCUs to see football games and marching bands, discussions about HBCUs, and enrollment into schools

that featured information about HBCUs like KIPP academy, likely nudged participants to consider the merits of attending an HBCU.

Parents have the greatest ability to influence college choice decisions. They have unfettered access. They set expectations and values, serve as role models, and finance the costs of higher education for their students. Parents have a positive effect on the college aspirations of their children (Bergerson, 2009; Freeman, 2005). This study found no evidence to the contrary. Though other family members and extended family members were mentioned as having influenced college choice decisions, the gap between parents and other influential persons was immense.

Siblings

All siblings of the participants in this study, with exception of one, attended college. Siblings who enrolled in college did not graduate. They chose to attend both HBCUs and PWIs. Some siblings attended prestigious PWIs and prestigious HBCUs, while others chose to attend community colleges, PWIs and HBCUs. The majority of study participants shared that their siblings influenced their college choice process, while a select few shared that their siblings college choice decisions did not affect their college choice decisions. Austin, a graduation senior and former athlete bound for Harvard, discussed the college choices three of his four siblings and shared that his sister's suggestion that he attend an HBCU was a factor that influenced his decision to attend an HBCU and eventually to choose Harmony University. He said,

> I'm the youngest of five. My older sister is a graduate of Bethune Cookman University. My second oldest sibling is a graduate of University of South Florida. and then I have two older brothers. One went to

> Tallahassee Community College, but he did not finish. My other brother did not go to college. My sister told me that I should consider going to an HBCU because I would get more support there. She went to an HBCU. My brother went to University of South Florida. He also said he received a lot of assistance there. Since my sister is my heart, I sort of took her advice and chose Harmony as my final choice. It was the right school for me. If I had not come to Harmony, I doubt that I would be headed to Harvard.

Douglas is a junior pre-med major from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He has one sibling and hopes to be a surgeon one day. When talking about persons who influenced his college choice decisions, Douglas shared, "Definitely my older cousins and my older brother as well. He is an aerospace engineer. He inspires me to be the best I can be every day." Throughout the process of interviewing the participants in this study, it became apparent that participants who had siblings who attended other elite or prestigious higher education institutions tended to be influenced by those siblings. Such was the case with Daniel, who was born in African and reared in Charlotte, North Carolina. His sister attended an Ivy League university. Daniel identified his sister as one of the persons who had the most significant impact on his college choice process. He explained,

> I would say my sister. Yeah, my sister honestly. She went to Princeton. When my parents talked about her to their friends, they bragged about her being at an Ivy League school. You know, it is one of the best schools in the world. Everybody's like, oh my God, you have a sister that goes to

> Princeton. I'm like, okay, I want that too. She told me though that if she could do it all over again, she would have chosen Spelman and might have gone to Princeton for a master's degree. She said that it really bothers her when students there ask her if she was an athlete. I didn't want that. So that's really the reason. That's why I went to Harmony. For Blacks, it's as good as any of the Ivy League schools.

Harold's college choice decisions were not influenced by his siblings. Harold is a junior from Atlanta, Georgia majoring in business management. He stated,

> I have one older sister. She is one year older than me. She is a student at Florida Agricultural and Mechanic University (FAMU). She went where she wanted to go and I chose to do same thing. She did not influence my college choice decision at all. It was my decision.

Across all of the participant interviews, whether students explicitly stated that their parents, family members, or extended family members influenced their college choice decisions, it is clear that family members played a major role and took steps to encourage students to attend college. Parents had the earliest opportunity to influence the college choice process by carefully selecting the public and private schools where their students would attend. Some of the study participants attended public schools. Those who chose public schools attended public charter schools like the Knowledge is Power Program Academy (KIPP). KIPP prepares students for college beginning with 5th grade and features the names of PWIs and HBCUs as names for homerooms. Throughout the interviews with participants in this study, parents, as found in other studies (Freeman, 2005) were cited as having the most influence on the college choice process. Parents partnered with siblings and other extended family members

to shape and influence the participants in this study in a variety of ways that ultimately led to their enrollment at Harmony University, a prestigious HBCU.

Scholarships and Financial Aid

Though none of the participants in this study were independent students, and thus responsible for financing their own education, scholarships and financial aid still emerged as one of the most important factors that influenced their college choice decisions. Each of the participants, with the exception of one, received an academic scholarship and was enrolled in honors courses through the Harmony University's Honors College. These young men were high-achieving individuals who had multiple colleges and universities to consider as they made the final college choice. Even so, the costs associated with their college experience after all scholarships and other forms of financial aid had been applied were of major concern. While some students stated that cost was not a factor, most admitted that is was a very important factor in their decision to choose Harmony. Participants voiced their desire to not be a burden to the parents. Some had siblings who were already in college or planned to enroll. Others had siblings who were concurrently enrolled in college with them.

Martin, a senior from Atlanta, Georgia chose Harmony University over 3 PWIs and 2 other HBCUs. He stated,

> The biggest thing was I have a twin brother. That was the biggest factor. We were in school at the same time. I had to go somewhere that we could afford. However, I will have a great time. So, I was going to Harmony University and he was going to a less expensive university. We couldn't afford to both be at expensive school at the same time.

Prince, a senior and business marketing major from Sandy Springs, Georgia talked about affordability being an important factor in his college choice decision. His scholarship is the

reason he chose to attend Harmony University. He shared,

> As it is, there were a lot of factors that I thought about and when, you know, considering an HBCU and a PWI, I mean I could have taken loans, but it was more expensive at the PWIs. They did not want to give me that much assistance. I would say for the opportunities that I was looking to get out of it, after weighing the pros and cons, Harmony just had the most pros.

Harold, much like Prince weighed his HBCU and PWI options and concluded that Harmony University was the place for him. He stated,

> My family and I really buckled down and started looking at where the dollars were adding up. We considered all the financial packages. Harmony made the most sense. Besides, it was my dream school anyway. It's just expensive. We took a campus visit and everyone was so nice. It just verified for us that it was the right place.

Conversely, Cole who has a sister who is currently attending St. John's University stated that he did not consider finances to be a major factor. His comment is interesting because he also admitted that he does not come from a wealthy family. He said,

> Well, finances were not important at all when I was thinking about where I would apply. No. When I was applying, I never thought about money. It was about where I thought I could get in. My mom did not want that. Even though I don't come from a very--I don't come from a wealthy family by any means, my mom, she did not want that to be a burden at all. If I had the grades to get into Harvard and it cost $80,000 a semester to go there and I wanted to go, my mom would have tried to figure something out for me to go. She was not trying to allow money to be an issue, even though we weren't in the best financial position all the time, but yea. No, when I was applying, money wasn't-- we didn't think about money.

When Cole was asked why financing his higher education was not an important factor even though his family was not wealthy, he shared that his mother had been a consultant with Harmony's president and had known him for years and told him she would handle the finances there. Cole added that his scholarship was "a good one." He did not share whether or not he received any aid as a result of his mother's relationship with Harmony's president.

The participants in this study, though each received a at least one academic scholarship to offset their college expenses at Harmony University, approached their college decisions by weighing the financial packages of the institutions to which they applied to make the best decision based on costs and the perceived benefits of the institutions. Students chose the HBCU. They chose to attend Harmony University for various reasons, however; Prince clearly stated that one of the reasons he chose Harmony University instead of the PWIs on his list was the amount of scholarship dollars that Harmony provided. Harmony covered more of the costs of his education than would have been covered by the financial packages that were offered to him at the PWIs in his college choice set.

Chapter Summary

An analysis of the data across participants interviews yielded five themes. Each theme relates to the factors that influence the college choice process of the participants in this study. The five themes include (1) the network (2) institutional reputation; (3) institutional environment; (4) family support; and (5) scholarships and financial aid.

The data suggests that high-achieving Black males are predisposed to seek culturally affirming collegiate environments that prepare them to be future leaders. Though findings are consistent with existing literature on high-achieving Black males who choose HBCUs (Going, 2017; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Blacknall & Johnson 2011). Existing college choice literature does not affirm that high-achieving Black students choose HBCUs because they

expect the alumni/professional network to provide them with a competitive advantage in career and leadership opportunities, as found in this study. Finally, participants shared that the amount of scholarships, mostly due to their status as honors students at Harmony, were significant factors as they weighed and made decisions regarding their college choice options. The ensuing and final chapter includes a discussion of the findings and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The participants in this study provided important insight on the college choice process of high-achieving Black students. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon on their pre-college experiences and the various factors that informed and influenced their decisions about whether, when, and where they might choose to participate in higher education. Five primary themes emerged across all participant interviews. The themes include (1) institutional reputation; (2) institutional environment; and (3) the network (4) family support; and (5) scholarships and financial aid.

The findings in this study further substantiate the results from prior research related to factors that influence the college choice process of high-achieving Black men who choose HBCUs (Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Chapman et al., 2018; Johnson & McGowan; 2017). This chapter provides a discussion of the major research findings, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research. The discussion of the major research findings and how they related to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 commences in the following paragraph.

Analysis of Findings

Five themes emerged from the data obtained from participants in this study. The research questions were designed to explore the institutional and personal factors that influenced the college choice decisions of high-achieving Black students who chose to attend a prestigious HBCU instead of other options. Participants in this study indicated that support of

family, access to scholarships and financial aid, the network, institutional reputation, and institutional environment were the primary factors that influenced their final college choice decisions to attend a prestigious HBCU. From the careful selection of private schools and public charter schools that instilled the importance of a college education at a very young age, to trips to HBCUs, visits to homecoming and similar activities, to introducing their students to friends and alumni who attended HBCUs, parents shaped the predisposition stages of their students (Smith & Fleming, 2006) in a manner that eventually led to an HBCU as the final college choice. In this study, students knew that they were going to college at very young ages. The college choice process of high-achieving Black males, as experienced in the Toukoushian & Paulsen (2016) model, is listed below in Table 3.

Table 3

High-Achieving Black Males' College Choice Experience in the Toutkoushian & Paulsen (2016) College Choice Model

STAGE 1: Predisposition	▪ Parents shared expectations for their students to go to college. ▪ Parents enrolled students in public K-12 college prep schools. ▪ Parents enrolled students in private K-12 college prep schools. ▪ Students experienced some racial issues ▪ Parents visited college campuses with students prior to teen years. ▪ Students studied for and took SAT and ACT.
STAGE 2: Initial Search	▪ Students decided to go to college and devised their college choice sets. ▪ Students explored major, distance from home, institutional environment. ▪ Students and parents explored multiple college websites. ▪ Student and parents considered HBCUs & PWIs and made college visits. ▪ Student and parents considered housing options and college environment.

Table 3

High-Achieving Black Males' College Choice Experience in the Toutkoushian & Paulsen (2016) College Choice Model

STAGE 3: Application	▪ Students explored their choice set, considered prices and applied ▪ Students talked with colleges about scholarships and aid ▪ Students weighed pros and cons - costs, benefits, and utility ▪ Students applied to universities and wait for college decision. ▪ Students updated where SAT and ACT scores were sent.
STAGE 4: Admission	▪ Students and parents waited for colleges to send their admission decisions. ▪ Colleges weighed student grades, scores, essays, against college needs. ▪ Colleges made admission decisions, notified students, and made student aware of their financial packages (discounts, scholarship, loans and all other applicable aid).
STAGE 5: Enrollment	▪ Students considered family advice, financial packages, availability of desired major, institutional reputation, and institutional environment and chose to attend Harmony University. ▪ Student enrolled at Harmony University

In Toutkoushian and Paulsen's college choice model, the five stages are not rigidly sequential. Thus, activities within the five stages can occur concurrently. In this study, students discussed parental involvement in a predisposition stage that also involved some aspects of the initial search stage. Parents were heavily involved in the predisposition stage. This is the stage that parents used to shape opinions and attitudes about going to college. Students whose parents placed them into KIPP academy realized that their parents placed them there with the purpose of making sure they were introduced to regular conversations about

college life. As some of the students reflected upon their college choice process, they cited having homerooms at KIPP Academy named for HBCUs and learning about those HBCUs as a significant part of their college choice process.

Participants in this study reflected upon a college choice process that began when they were small children. They remembered going to football games, homecoming and other events on the campus of HBCUs. They spoke about family expectations, hopes, and dreams. They talked about Harmony University and other universities like it. They recalled being told about the historic reputation of Harmony University. They reflected on the preparation for standardized tests. They discussed their desires to not be a burden on the parents. They even recalled that going to college was never in question, as though going to college was a rite of passage.

Each participant talked about their strong sense of family and how instrumental their parents had been in their college choice process. In this study, parents set expectations, provided encouragement, and were present and active supporters of their students as they navigated the college choice process. Their actions are consistent with prior research about parental involvement in the college choice process (Smith & Fleming, 2006; Kinzie et al, 2004; Cabrera & LaNasa; 2000; Hossler et al, 1999). In the context of Toutkoushian and Paulsen's (2016) college choice model, participants in this study asserted that parental involvement was heaviest during stages 1-4, the predisposition, initial search, application, and admission stages. Similarly, Pratt and Evans (2002) found that parents are heavily involved in the college choice process in stages 1 and 2 of traditional college choice models. They also found that parental involvement decreased in the stage 3 or the choice stage, which is the final stage in traditional models (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). In this study, parental involvement also decreased in the final or 5th stage, or the enrollment stage. Participants in this study reflected on parental

involvement that was consistent through stage 4, the admission stage (Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016).

Eighteen of 20 parents participated in the selection of the final choice of their student. Student characterized the final decision as one in which they informed or conferred with their parents. Each of the high-achieving students in this study had impressive academic credentials. Most attended Catholic schools. Some attend preparatory schools with strong reputations for preparing students for college. Some attended college prep schools in other states, and others attended public charter schools designed to prepare students for college. As high-achieving Black students, the participants in this study were presented with college choice options that many other Black students would have been likely unable to afford. Some applied to and were accepted at very prestigious private institutions and flagship institutions in their home states.

As aforementioned, the participants articulated their belief that going to college was not an option. It was an expectation. Participants had been involved in many activities that had prepared or conditioned them to believe that they were going. Freeman (2005) would have categorized these students as "knowers" in her college choice model. Her model offered a revision to the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. In Freeman's model, based on her research of the Black experience with college choice, she offered what she termed as predetermination as an alternative to predisposition as the first stage in the college choice process. Knowers in the predetermination stage are students who have no doubt about attending college. They know that they are going. It is a natural progression in their lives.

Institutional Factors

Participants in this study were asked to reflect upon the institutional factors that led them to ultimately choose a prestigious HBCU instead of a PWI. The themes or factors that emerged across interview data related to institutional characteristics include (1) the network; (2)

institutional reputation; and (3) institutional environment.

The Network

As students reflected on their college choice experiences, they noted in particular, expectations to graduate or attend graduate school and become leaders in their respective fields of study. Several participants recalled that they chose Harmony University because of its long-standing success in producing leaders. They articulated a desire to be a part of Harmony's powerful professional network. They discussed meeting or knowing about individuals who were a part of Harmony's impressive alumni roster of leaders in business, art, and politics. They expressed their own desires to join and access the network with the expectation that the network would benefit them with employment and leadership opportunities.

HBCUs have long history of producing Black professionals and leaders in the United States (Nichols, 2004). 80% of Black federal judges, 80% of Black United States military officers, 65% of Black medical doctors, 60% of Black lawyers, 50% of Black engineers, and 50% of Black teachers are graduates of HBCUs (Bailey, 2003; Henderson, 2001). Researchers have found that Black males earn higher wages after attending HBCUs compared to other colleges (Mills & Mykerezi, 2008). Others have asserted that HBCUs have contributed to linking the cultural empowerment of Blacks to economic opportunities in ways that uplift the Black community (Freeman and Cohen, 2001). The network at Harmony University provides an example of such linkages. The network is indicative of a positive counter narrative about Black males that may serve to offset the negative stereotypes that Harper (2009) suggests are prevalent in higher education and beyond. Likewise, and similar to Palmer and Strayhorn's (2008) findings, the network depicts Black males as successful young men who are concerned about their communities and families.

Some of the participants in this study chose an HBCU instead of other higher education

options. Avery & Hoxby (2004) have found that high-achieving students are more likely to apply to the most prestigious and selective institutions. However, within the context of the value that participants and their parents may have attributed to the benefits of becoming leaders, it may have been entirely more rational to choose the HBCU instead of any of the other institutions within their prospective choice sets. In their study, Johnson and McGowan (2017) found that high-achieving Black males participated in community service and professional development activities, and became leaders in their student organizations. Participants in this study discussed becoming lawyers, doctors, and being driven to succeed. These are the types of opportunities that participants in this study articulated that they expected when they chose Harmony University.

Institutional Reputation

Among the characteristics of a college or university, institutional reputation is among the most important factors that influence college choice decisions (Goenner & Snaith, 2004; Geiger, 2002; Kezar & Eckel, 2007)). The participants in this study followed and paid attention to rankings for HBCUs. As rankings improve, applications and student quality also improves because increased ranking attract higher quality students (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Luca & Smith). Participants in this study were cognizant of the fact that Harmony University was highly ranked among HBCUs and perceived as being one of the best universities in the nation. The reputation of the college and specific academic programs at Harmony University was a major factor of influence on the college choice decisions of participants in this study. When students spoke of Harmony University, they did so with reverence for Harmony's reputation.

There are a variety of factors that influence individuals to choose HBCUs. In this study, participants discussed choosing Harmony University because it has produced great

leaders in the past and present. Participants viewed themselves potentially as the next groups of leaders. In the context of the theoretical framework for this study, participants articulated their expectation that their investment in Harmony University would pay off monetarily for them and in ways that would benefit their families and communities.

HBCUs have historically provided an outlet for Black males to obtain an education and experience success as professionals (Goings & Gasman, 2014). Participants in this study consistently articulated that they chose to attend Harmony University because it's storied reputation for producing leaders. Prestigious HBCUs are successful in preparing students in science, technology, engineering, and math because of sound career services assistance, personal relationships between students and faculty, and academic support services (Albritton, 2012; Tobolowsky et al, 2005; Perna et al, 2009). Prestigious HBCUs also produce students who were adequately prepared to be successful in Ivy League graduate programs (Thompson, 2008).

Participants in this study conveyed parental expectations that they prepare themselves for leadership roles in their communities, families, and society. Participants reflected on their expectation to attend college and also acknowledged the expectation that their education would empower them to leadership roles that would advance their families and communities. They were expected to be future leaders in their respective fields of study, in their families, and in their neighborhoods, like so many before them who attended Harmony University. Chapman et al. (2018) have explained that these types of expectations distinguish Black parents of high-achieving students from other parents. Therefore, a key distinction in this study related to institutional reputation is that reputation is less about US News and World Report rankings and more about whether or not the institution has a reputation for producing leaders.

Institutional Environment

Participants in this study enjoyed supportive environments at home and performed very well academically. It is not surprising that they would seek similar environments as they considered which college or university they would attend. Several participants articulated their experience in pre-college racialized environments. They expressed their desires to avoid similar environments as they were making college choice decisions. Findings on this institutional factor is in alignment with existing research that found that precollege college experiences of Black students in secondary and high schools that included alienation, isolation, discrimination, and low expectations influenced their decisions to attend HBCUs (Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Harper, 2006; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Squire & Mobley, 2005; Strayhorn, 2009; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005; Van Camp, Barden & Sloan, 2010).

High-achieving Black students, particularly those in schools with significant White populations often experience alienation, isolation, and discrimination with a greater level of intensity (Carter Andrews, 2012). The data obtained from participants in this study revealed that some had negative experiences that contributed to their selection of Harmony University. Research has found that Black colleges foster a family-like environment for Black male college students (Palmer, Wood, & McGowan, 2014) and encourage them to attain their future aspirations (Shorette & Palmer 2015). Participants articulated their level of comfort with the positive characteristics of HBCUs. They also shared aspects of their college experiences that included being with students with a common heritage and common plight. They articulated a desire to be in a place where they would experience a sense of belonging. One participant, though accepted at both an HBCU and a PWI, stated that though he had nothing against attending a PWI, he just felt as though it just wasn't for him. Other

participants articulated their desires to be in a place where they felt comfortable. Research has shown that for some Black students, HBCUs provide family-like environments (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Participants articulated their desires to be at an institution where they could have meaningful relationships and mentorship opportunities with the college professors. These were important considerations in their college choice process as they chose between the HBCUs and PWIs in their college choice sets. Research on the Black collegiate experience has found that Black students often seek educational environments that are free from the past and traditional racial stereotypes (Squire & Mobley, 2005: Van Camp, 2010). Culturally affirming attributes of HBCUs have positively affected the college choice decisions of Blacks students for many years (Awokoya & Mann, 2011; Freeman, 2002).

In this study, students reflected on their experience with issues of race in high school and asserted that their racialized experiences served as a major factor that led them to choose to attend Harmony University, an HBCU. Institutional fit, or a sense of belonging was stressed by the majority of participants in this study. Students articulated their need to be in an environment where they could be themselves. They further articulated their desire or need to be comfortable and with "likeminded" individuals. The racialized experience of Black students and parents, as Beneke (2011) has asserted, necessitates that students and parents consider whether or not the institution of higher education has a history of taking steps to reduce the risks associated with racial discord. The findings related to institutional factors that motivate high-achieving Black students to choose HBCUs, are similarly aligned with existing research related to high-achieving Black students (Chapman et al, 2018; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; Freeman 1999); however, these findings also indicate that the high-achieving Black students in this study chose to attend Harmony University because they

wanted to be engaged in employment and leadership opportunities that they believed were unique to Harmony University.

Personal Factors

In this study, when participants were asked to reflect upon the personal factors that led them to choose a prestigious HBCU instead of a PWI, two themes emerged across the interview data. They included (1) family support, and (2) scholarships and financial aid. Participants identified the support and engagement of family and having enough scholarships and financial aid to cover their college expenses as the personal factors that most influenced their college choice decisions. Participants consistently mentioned their parents, siblings, and extended family as individuals who most influenced their respective college choice decisions. As participants reflected, they recalled that their parents assisted them in each of the five stages of the college choice process.

Students also reflected upon the precollege activities of their parents that caused them to be engaged on college campuses at very young ages and helped to shape their college choice experiences. By enrolling them in private schools; select charter schools; and prep schools that encouraged students to prepare for and think about college at very young ages, parents were shaping the participant's predisposition stage, as found in existing research (NPEC, 2007). Some participants also recalled trips to college campuses while they were very young, for various events. Past and present college researchers have consistently found that parents play a major role in the college choice process of their students (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Freeman, 2002; Goings, 2016; Hughes, et al; 2006; Kinzie, et al., 2004). Finding in this study are similarly aligned with past and present research.

In the context of Toutkoushian and Paulsen's college choice model, participants in this study made decisions to attend HBCUs after calculating the personal, non-monetary costs

associated with racial climates; their desires to be in predominantly Black environments; and their beliefs that going to an HBCU would provide them with the greatest utility.

Implications for Further Research

This study contributes to a somewhat limited, but growing body of literature (Chapman et al, 2018; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Blacknall & Johnson, 2011; St. John et al, 2009; Freeman, 2002) that focuses on the college choice experience of high-achieving Black males, the most underrepresented group in higher education in the United States (Beaudry, 2015). Findings suggest that high-achieving Black males seek environments that allow them to escape racial stereotypes and low expectations while they pursue opportunities that will provide them with the tools to become leaders in their families, communities, and society. Most importantly, findings from this study suggest a deep commitment to family and community as a major factor that motivates high-achieving Black students to choose HBCUs. Finally, findings further suggest that high-achieving Black males choose HBCUs with the expectation that they will gain social and economic opportunities through Harmony University's alumni and professional network.

There is ample room for future research on high-achieving Black males and their experience navigating the difficult and rewarding aspects of the college choice process. Greater understanding of the stages of the college choice process and how actions taken within each stage can serve to simplify or impede the college choice process may have implications that can serve to increase Black male participation in higher education and inform policymakers. Though this study has provided important and useful information about how high-achieving Black males experience the college choice process, additional scholarship in this limited area of research is needed (Bonner, 2015; Goings, 2015) In particular, the network as a significant finding represents a point of departure from other studies on high-

achieving Black males and college choice. More research is suggested in this area to determine if the networks at HBCUs constitute a new factor that is emerging, or if these networks are only prevalent among the nation's most prestigious HBCUs.

In this study, participants provided interesting perspectives about high-achieving Black males and their perceptions about the potential roles and responsibilities they had to advance their families, communities, and societies. Further research on how these perceptions might impact the college choice process of both high-achieving Black men and women is warranted. Learning more about high-achieving Black males who choose HBCUs would be useful for PWIs as they look to develop services and establish programs designed to foster student success for Black men and other students of color.

Further understanding and utilization of Toutkoushian and Paulsen's (2016) five-stage college choice model may provide opportunities for greater analysis of the essence of the college choice process from predisposition to enrollment. Greater knowledge of the college choice process in each stage will provide greater insight on the lives of Black males and their experiences in secondary education and higher education. By paying close attention to actions that occur in the predisposition stage that contribute to the likelihood that Black males will attend college, researchers can offer solutions that contribute to increased Black male college enrollment. Finally, attention should also be placed on other stages within the Toutkoushian and Paulsen college choice model that provide information about how decisions are made as students compare institutions within their college choice sets and weigh options based on a variety of factors that may affect their futures economically and socially. Attention to occurrences in each stage may also provide information relative to actions that can be replicated to promote college attainment by Black males. Goings (2015) and Harper (2009) have suggested that as we learn from the stories of successful Black males, we can create

opportunities that provide useful information that may serve to greater inform policies and programs that can support Black males at HBCUs, PWIs and other higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The findings in this study substantiates much of the literature on college choice that pertains to HBCUs and high-achieving Black males. Though many high-achieving Black males experience difficulties in high school and in higher education, there is much to learn by further exploring their experiences (Harper, 2015). The participants in this study exhibited a high degree of understanding as it pertains to the college choice process and their respective roles within it. Though they had multiple college choices, with assistance and support of valued family members, and a supporting and an encouraging environment, participants in this study were able to successfully maneuver though the multi-year college choice process and persist after choosing and enrolling at a prestigious HBCU.

This study also substantiates that Toutkoushian and Paulsen's econometric college choice model is well-suited theoretical framework for studies that involve high-achieving students. This study also adds to the body of knowledge about how an HBCU provides a supportive and encouraging environment that prepares and supports high-achieving Black men to aspire to make meaningful contributions in ways that contribute to their families, the Black community, and society.

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APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

High-Achieving African American Males Needed!

Participate in a doctoral research study about HBCUs

To understand the college choice decisions of African American males who choose to attend prestigious HBCUs

Share your unique HBCU experience.

Who can participate?

- African American men
- Took the SAT or ACT
- Received an academic scholarship
- Was admitted to a PWI (predominately White Institution)
- 3.4 GPA

(other criteria apply)

What does the study involve?

- You answer questions about your college choice process, and how you made your final decision in a one hour interview.

You should also know:

- All information is kept confidential.
- We can find a mutually convenient place to meet or meet via Skype.

Participants receive $20 at the end of a 1 hour interview.

For more information please call (404) 603-6131 or send an email to art.malloy@uga.edu

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello (Insert Student Name)

Thank you for your email. I wanted to follow up with you to verify your participation in my research project. I would like to schedule a brief meeting with you to discuss the interview process. I would like to meet with you via WebEx. At that time, we will schedule our meeting time to conduct a one-hour interview. As I mentioned, I am conducting research to explore the factors that influenced the college choice decisions of high-achieving Black males who chose to attend a prestigious HBCU instead of a predominantly White institution (PWI). Thank you for agreeing to be a participant.

I look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please contact me at 404.603.6131. so we can reschedule. Thank you, and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Art R. Malloy

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Choosing HBCUs: Exploring the College Choice of High-Achieving Black Students

Opening remarks*: You are begin asked to participate as interviewee in my research study investigating the college choice process for first generation college students. The purpose of the study is to investigate the factors that influence the college choice process for first generation college students. During the interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve audiotaping the interview and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. Your results will be confidential and you will not be identified individually. Before we get started, I ask you to review and sign this consent form.*

1. Tell me a little bit about your parent's education. What were the highest education levels completed?

2. Do you remember when you first thought about going to college?

   a. Did your parent(s) talk about you attending college during your childhood?

   b. How instrumental were your parents in encouraging you to attend college?

   c. How early did their encouragement begin?

3. Who were the people who had the most influence in your decision-making process to pursue a college education?

4. Who helped you make your final decision on where you would attend college?

5. What motivated you to attend college? Who helped you gather information about college?

6. Were they any colleges your parents did not want you to attend? If so, what rationale did they give? Was cost ever mentioned? Tell me about what you discussed regarding costs.

7 How many colleges/universities did you consider? Which ones were they?

8. To which colleges did you submit applications?

8. What process did you use when you chose an HBCU over a PWI?

9. How important was funding and finances in determining whether or not to apply to those schools?

10. How does attending an HBCU help you with your plans for the future?

11. What are your top 3 or three most important considerations that led you to choose to attend an HBCU?

12.Where did your siblings attend college? Did they influence your college decisions?

13.When did your first spend time on a college campus? Was it an HBCU or a PWI?

14.Were there any people in your life (other than your family) who encouraged you to attend an HBCU? Who were they?

15. In choosing an HBCU, how important were personal conversations, personal relationships, emails, websites, catalogs, and social media?

16. How important was the availability of a specific major or academic program in your college decision-making process?

17. Tell me about parents and the major you chose. How much did they influence your decision?

18. Do you feel as though your college choice was yours to make? Was it a partnership? If so, with whom?

19. Tell me about your experience with completing your FAFSA. Did you have help? If so, from whom?

20. Do you think choosing an HBCU gives you any kind of an advantage over Black students who choice to attend an HBCU. Can we talk about them?

21. Tell me about your overall college choice process. Did you ever feel like you received any special treatment because of your high school grades or SAT/ACT scores?

22. Was there any part of the college choice process in which you wished you had more help?

23. Looking back at your college decision-making process, what stands out to you about the HBCU you chose? (proximity, price, amenities, etc.)

24. Since you have been in college, have you considered transferring to the PWI?

25. What benefits do you expect to get from choosing an HBCU over a PWI?

Closing remarks*: Thank you very much for participating in my college choice study. As I stated earlier, your responses will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be shared, and a pseudonym (fictitious name) will be used instead of your name. If you would like to see the transcript, I will provide you with a copy. I would also like your permission to follow up with you if needed. The interview is now over and here is your gift card. Thank you again and enjoy the rest of your day.*

APPENDIX D
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

Choosing HBCUs: Exploring the College Choice of High-Achieving Black Students

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

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University of Georgia
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Co-Principal Investigator: Art R. Malloy
University of Georgia Institute of Higher Education
Art.Malloy@uga.edu or 404.603.6131

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the process student utilize to choose one university or college over another. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the process students utilized to choose a selective historically Black college or university (HBCU) over a predominantly White institution (PWI). The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked take part in an audio-recorded interview via Skype to discuss the process you used to select which college you would attend. Your time commitment for the interview will be approximately 60 to 70 minutes. The audio-recording will be transcribed and you will be given a pseudonym at the point of transcription. You will have the opportunity to view the transcription for accuracy. The information you provide to me will be analyzed and compared to other at your college/university to identify common themes among participants.

Risks and discomforts

There are no anticipated risks from participating in this study. Although the information you will share are not sensitive in nature, you can still skip any questions that you are not comfortable responding to. You can also choose to end your participation at any time.

Benefits

Though you may not directly benefit from participating in this research study; others may benefit

because the study will explore, document, and analyze the college choice process of high-achieving Black students and make sense of how the process led to a final choice of an HBCU over a PWI.

Incentives for participation

Each participant will receive a small token of appreciation in the amount of $20 as for participation in this study.

Audio/Video Recording

Each interview will be audio-recorded. A small hand-held electronic device will be used to record responses. The audio-recording will be transcribed within one week of conducting the interview, at which point the researcher will assign a pseudonym to the participants. The audio recording will be kept for one year after the interview date.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio-recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

I plan to keep the individually identifiable information of this study for a period of one year. To protect your confidentiality, your real name will not be used in transcriptions or the written results. Instead, I will use a pseudonym to identify each participant. To keep your information safe, the audio file of your interview will be placed on an external drive that will be locked in a file cabinet that will

only be accessible to the researcher(s). The transcribed data will be encrypted, password-protected, and locked in a file cabinet that will only be accessible to the researcher. This research involves internet communication via Skype. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed. Though others may need to have access to the information provided by you, your name will not appear on any documents that may be shared. Researcher(s) will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. Information from this research will be used for purposes of this research only and will not be used in future studies or shared with other researchers outside of this specific project.

Voluntary Participation

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Though you have decided to participate now, you may change your mind and or discontinue your participation at any time. You may also choose to not answer any question for any reason. Should you withdraw your participation the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information, any data collected from you will be immediately destroyed.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Art R. Malloy, at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Art R. Malloy at art.malloy@uga.edu or at 404.603.6131. If

you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____ _____

Name of Researcher Date

_____

Signature

_____ _____

Name of Participant Date

_____

Signature

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.