Giving Voice to Black and Latino Men: First-Year Students' Perceptions of the Relative Impact of Family Support and College Aspirations on their Decisions to Enroll and Actual College Enrollment

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GIVING VOICE TO BLACK AND LATINO MEN: FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIVE IMPACT OF FAMILY SUPPORT AND COLLEGE ASPIRATIONS ON THEIR DECISIONS TO ENROLL AND ACTUAL COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Dissertation
by

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submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Black and Latino men have the lowest college enrollment rates among traditional college-aged students. Using a qualitative method, this study examined first-year students' perceptions of factors that influenced their plans to pursue a college education and actual enrollment. The factors this study explored were family support activities as defined by the Hossler college choice model and college aspirationss factors. Currently, the experiences of first-year black and Latino men enrolled at four-year postsecondary institutions have been limited. These firsthand accounts will provide useful information to guidance counselors, school and university administrators, and policy makers interested in increasing the number of black and Latino men at four-year colleges and universities.

The literature on college enrollment shows that black and Latino men have the lowest enrollment rates of all college-aged students. The college choice literature suggests that family support activities such as saving for college, visiting colleges, and attending a financial aid workshop all are influential in students' decision to enroll at a postsecondary institution. In addition, the literature on college aspirationss shows that factors such as family encouragement, peers, and schools can either aid or hinder a student's plans to go to college. Yet, Hossler's college choice model and the college aspirationss literature usually do not explain the college enrollment decisions of black and Latino men. In particular, a specific aim of this study is to investigate whether the college choice and college aspirationss literatures' conclusions hold true for black and Latino men. In addition, this study explores whether participants' decisions to

enroll are influenced by gender expectations. The results of this study were examined using a critical theory lens.

The study's findings reveal that black and Latino men's college enrollment decisions are influenced in much the same ways as those of other high-school students. Parents provided the foundation along with early academic success that instilled ideas about the benefits of a college education and supported the attainment of that goal. Furthermore, participants rejected negative stereotypes associated with men of color and saw the pursuit of a postsecondary education as a challenge to these common beliefs. These findings show that men of color's college enrollment decisions are impacted by parents as well as multivariate factors that work to sustain their college enrollment goals. This information can provide school and college administrators as well as policymakers with strategies that could successfully address the problem of college transition and access for this population.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Over the last 20 years, the need for education beyond the high-school level has become clearly evident. A college education provides societal and individual benefits. At the societal level, college graduates contribute to a higher productivity level within the economy: higher earnings for college graduates than for workers without college degrees, lower rates of unemployment, and higher tax revenues to local, state, and federal governments (Baum & Ma, 2007). In addition, 78 percent of persons 25 years or older with a bachelor's degree participated in the labor force in 2004 (Snyder, Tan & Hoffman, 2006). At the individual level, students who attain at least a bachelor's degree can potentially earn 62 percent more in median lifetime earnings than high-school graduates (Baum & Ma, 2007). They enjoy social and economic benefits such as an improved quality of health, increased civic participation (Baum & Ma, 2007), and cultural capital (McDonough, 1997). In light of the economic benefits attached to postsecondary education, it is not surprising that many middle- and high-school students aspire to attain a postsecondary degree. Adelman (2006) states, "92.6% of National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS):88/2000 students who graduated from high school whether on time in 1992 or later, expected to continue their education in a postsecondary setting" (p. 25). Education beyond high school is now considered a natural continuation of the schooling process. However, many of these high-school students who aspire to a postsecondary education do not enroll in postsecondary institutions.

Among traditional college-aged students, African-American men and Latinos have the lowest college enrollment rates in postsecondary institutions. Currently, 37 percent of African American men and 31 percent of Latinos of college age are enrolled at U.S. postsecondary

institutions compared to 44.1 percent of white men (American Council on Education, 2006). Furthermore, in comparison to their African American and Latino male counterparts, 44.8 percent of African-American women and 39 percent of Latinas participated in postsecondary education in 2004 (American Council on Education, 2006).

Since the 1970's, female college enrollment has steadily increased, and since 1980, women have surpassed male college enrollment across all ethnic and racial categories. According to Baum & Ma (2007), 45 percent of male high-school graduates compared to 49 percent of female high-school graduates between 18 and 24 years of age were enrolled in a postsecondary institution in 2005. The growing gap in the college enrollment numbers among men and women has received much attention and has been more evident in the African-American and Latino student groups. Cook & Cordova (2006) report, "despite making substantial increases in enrollment, African Americans and Hispanics continue to tail whites in the percentage of 18-24 year-old high school graduates enrolled in college" (p.2), as noted above. Moreover, even though college enrollments of black men increased to 37 percent in 2000, women continue to outpace them by approximately a two-to-one margin (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Furthermore, low college enrollment rates suggest that African-American and Latino men are not attaining bachelor's degrees at the same rates as women. For example, in 2004, black men earned 33 percent of all black bachelor's degrees while Latinos earned 39 percent of all Latino bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2006). These numbers are a cause for concern across both ethnic groups and in particular for the Latino ethnic group, because as the group that makes up a larger percentage of the total U.S. population in comparison to African Americans, Latinos are earning fewer bachelor's degrees (Snyder, Tan & Hoffman, 2006).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a description of first-year black and Latino men's perceptions of the relative impact of family support and college aspirations factors (defined later) on their decision to enroll and actual college enrollment as a consequence of being men of color. The literature on college choice and college aspirations has focused on a number of factors such as socioeconomic status and parents' educational level (Terenzini, Cabrera & Bernal, 2001; Sewell & Shah, 1967), which suggest that students who have parents who are college educated and have high incomes are more likely to pursue a college education. In addition, first-generation status (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Terenzini et al., 2001) negatively affects the likelihood of college attendance. Schools' (McDonough, 1997; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, Franke, Quartz & Rogers, 2002) influence on college aspirations and enrollment suggests that the more resources schools have available, the better able they are to prepare students academically and in supporting their college enrollment goals. Studies focusing on peer influence, for example, Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown's (1992) study, concluded that peers exert a high degree of influence (whether negative or positive) on their peers' behaviors. Finally, gender (Hubbard, 1999) as a factor in college enrollment suggests that men and women pursue a college education for different reasons. These studies examined how these factors might influence positively or negatively high-school students' plans to pursue postsecondary education and actual college enrollment. Research has shown some of these factors to be highly influential in the decisions students make about their post-high-school plans and college enrollment, yet the results of the research on how these factors influence the college enrollment of black men and Latinos has been inconsistent.

Most studies on college choice and college enrollment factors lack significant numbers of men of color to make strong conclusions about whether these factors impact participants' college enrollment plans and decisions (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Stage, 1992). While the large volume of studies that focus on men of color usually focus on their academic underachievement, which is mostly apparent during elementary and secondary school years, there is a gap in the literature on successful high-school men of color and their transition to postsecondary education (Epstein, Elwood, Hey & May, 1998; Majors & Billson, 1992; Parry, 2000). Furthermore, many of these studies do not focus on the role that gender may play in the decisions men of color make about the pursuit of education beyond the secondary level. For example, Smith & Fleming's (2006) study showed that parents had a different set of postsecondary plans for their sons, as compared to their daughters, and although the study's participants are parents and not students, it still shows that gender affects parents' plans for their child based on the child's gender. They concluded that parents' postsecondary plans for girls included college enrollment only at a four-year institution while postsecondary plans for boys were more varied and included options such as enrollment at two-year colleges and full-time work. In addition, a recent National Center for Education Statistics (2008) report on parents' expectations and college planning found that 64 percent of both black and Hispanic students' parents expected them to complete college.

Thus, my study presents the perspectives of successfully enrolled black men and Latinos to describe the factors that impacted their college enrollment decisions and ultimate matriculation at a four-year postsecondary institution. I will describe these students' perceptions of the relative impact of family support and college aspirations factors on their decisions to enroll and actual enrollment in college. Finally, my study seeks to understand whether gender

plays a role in the college enrollment plans of participants. As black and Latino men, their ideas of being a man may be influenced by society's definition of what a man is, for example, an image of an independent, confident, strong man. Yet, for black and Latino men, the definition of what a man is may include ethnic and cultural notions such as the protector and decision-maker of the family, as well as negative connotations of aloofness and womanizer. There is little known about the role gender may play within these two racial/ethnic groups on college enrollment plans and decisions. Therefore, the research questions center on the role of gender, family support, and college aspirations factors as defined later in the chapter.

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual frameworks for this study were developed and informed by Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model with an emphasis on parent/family support, the literature on college aspirationss, and the literature on masculinity with a focus on black and Latino men. The college choice model outlines a three-stage process (predisposition, search, and choice) that high-school students undertake during the college application process. Within the model's predisposition and search stages, family support plays a strong role in developing the educational pursuits of the child. Similarly, the literature on college aspirationss informs this study by identifying factors that influence the college-going decisions of most high-school students. The literature on masculinity, in particular being a man and more specifically a man of African-American and/or Latino background, provides the final concept for the study.

Masculinity

In understanding the college enrollment decisions of black and Latino men, this study also explores the notion of whether concepts of masculinity from a black or Latino man's frame of reference impact these decisions. The literature on masculinity suggests that black men and

Latinos are pressured to conform to socially accepted norms of how black and Latino men should act. As Ferguson (2000) writes "Two representations of black masculinity are widespread in society and school today. They are the images of the African American male as a criminal and as an endangered species. These images are routinely used as resources to interpret and explain behavior" (p. 77). These notions include ideas such as the "cool pose" (Majors & Billson, 1992) or the Latino concept of "Machismo"—connoting images of the suave man of color, cool and collected, unemployed and adored by women. This research attempted to assess whether these negative images play any role in the decisions participants make about college and college enrollment.

College Choice Model

As stated previously, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student college choice model presents a three-stage process (predisposition, search, and choice) that high-school students undertake in order to arrive at a decision to attend a particular postsecondary institution. In the predisposition stage, students develop an interest in pursuing a college education based on social, economic, and cultural factors. In the search stage, students get information about colleges, go on college visits, and make decisions about where to apply. Finally, in the choice stage, students make a final decision on where to matriculate. This model has been widely used to understand and determine the process by which high-school students aspire to, search for, and ultimately choose a particular postsecondary institution. The college choice model posits that family support is most influential at the search stage of the college application process, during which parents' involvement in a variety of activities either directly or indirectly sends a signal to their children of their support and encouragement of their pursuit of a postsecondary education. Cabrera and LaNasa (2000) define parent/family support as having motivational and proactive

dimensions. Parents, in the motivational level, "maintain high educational expectations for their children," and in the proactive level, "parents become involved in school matters, discuss college plans with their children, and save for college" (p. 8). In addition to activities such as checking homework and attending parent-teacher conferences, parents go on college visits and attend financial aid and college application workshops.

The model, moreover, has been modified to address factors that may impact student plans and decisions such as student background differences such as low-income status (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Stage, 1992), first-generation status (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000), and gender differences (Smith & Fleming, 2006). Much of the evidence on the role of parents and family support in the college choice literature has consistently demonstrated that parent encouragement and support are important to successful postsecondary enrollment. Whether students come from low or high socioeconomic backgrounds, family support is a strong indicator of academic success (Gandara, 1995; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Sewell & Shah, 1967) and postsecondary enrollment. However, in their study of Indiana high-school students and the college choice process, Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) concluded "we were repeatedly less successful in predicting the factors that influence the post-secondary aspirations of black 9th grade students" (p. 27). Furthermore, as shown in the college enrollment data, there are many black and Latino students who are still not enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

While research on the college choice of high-school students is extensive, the results are limited to the definition of family support used in studies. The variety of activities that define family support and the difficulty of measuring these concepts present a lack of consistency in the meaning of the term. Moreover, the results that show family support as a key factor in college

enrollment may be compromised by the different levels of family support a student may perceive or actually receive. The evidence often cannot be generalized to capture the distinct individual background characteristics of students, such as race together with gender. Furthermore, the studies often use mixed samples of students in terms of gender and/or ethnic/racial backgrounds and many times do not have sufficient numbers of ethnic minority students to generalize their findings in relation to these ethnicities and specific gender.

Due to the varied forms of parent/family support, this research study will define family support by three specific activities that signal parents' desire for their child to pursue a postsecondary education. These activities are: college savings, college visits, and attendance at a financial aid workshop. These activities were addressed to surmise whether they individually or collectively impacted the college enrollment decisions of the study's participants. This study focuses on black and Latino men addressed the lack of information that currently is available regarding the experiences of these two populations.

College Aspirations

Although there are similarities to the college choice model, the college aspirations literature explores specific factors that directly influence college-going decisions and includes, for example, the role of parents (Hamrick & Stage, 2004), peers (Tinklin, 2003), and schools (Oakes, et al., 2002) on the development of college aspirations, or plans for the future as defined by Kao & Tienda (1998). Approximately 90 percent of students have aspirations to attend a postsecondary institution. Yet, according to the College Board's *Education Pays* (2007) report, "in 2005, 49% of all white high school graduates ages 18-24 were enrolled in postsecondary institutions, compared to about 41% of black and 38% of Hispanic high school graduates in the same age group" (p. 30). Furthermore, according to the *Minorities in Higher Education Annual*

Report (2006), the ten-year rise in minority enrollment from 22 percent in 1993 to 28 percent in 2003 is mainly attributed to women, who made up two-thirds of the increase. It has also been documented that students' college aspirations diminish as they progress through the academic pipeline (Perna, 2000).

Numerous studies have explored the reasons why students' aspirations or plans to go to college are not achieved. The literature on college aspirations has examined factors such as race and gender (Hubbard, 1999), socioeconomic status (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Terenzini, et al., 2001), first-generation students (Choy, 2002; Horn & Chen, 1998), peers (Gandara, 1995; Tinklin, 2003), family (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler, et al.,1999; Sewell & Shah, 1967), and schools (McDonough, 1997; Oakes, 1985) to provide a better understanding of how these factors impacted students' college aspirations and how some students persisted through four years of high school in maintaining this goal. For example, Kao and Tienda's (1998) study examined the college aspirations of ethnic minority groups and found that "while blacks and Hispanics have high aspirations at any given point, they are less likely to have maintained these high aspirations from 8^{th} to 12^{th} grade" (p. 375). This suggests that there are other sources of influence that are competing against the college aspirations of black and Hispanic students.

Therefore, in this study, college aspirations as a determining factor of college enrollment was examined to understand how black men and Latinos may be affected by college aspirations factors defined as parents, peers, and/or schools in their decisions to enroll and their actual enrollment. Within this definition, the study's participants reflected and discussed whether parents, peers, or schools impacted their decision to enroll and actual college enrollment as a consequence of being men of color.

Significance of Study

Today's technologically and globally driven economy demands that many more citizens are well educated. The need for a postsecondary education can no longer be taken as a luxury but as a necessity for the continued growth and development of the economy both nationally and individually. A college degree provides individuals with measurable outcomes such as higher rates of employment and higher salaries as well as immeasurable outcomes such as longer life expectancy, better standard of living, and improved health. Currently, many of these benefits are not enjoyed by many black men and Latinos because they are not enrolling in significant numbers in postsecondary institutions and attaining college degrees. Unfortunately, African Americans and Latinos make up over 50 percent of men in prison. Harrison & Beck (2006) report that "nearly 6 in 10 persons in local jails were racial or ethnic minorities…blacks [made up] 38.9% and Hispanics, 15%" (p. 8). These percentages refer mainly to men because 87 percent of inmates are male. In addition, Sabol, Couture & Harrison (2007) report that black and Hispanic men make up the largest percentages of sentenced prisoners, with 19 percent of black men and 21 percent of Hispanic men ages 25 to 29 in prisons. These alarming figures suggest a bleak future for most black and Latino men.

Furthermore, black and Latino men drop out of high school at higher rates and are enrolled in remedial or learning-disabled classes in larger proportions than other ethnic/racial groups. Editorial Projects in Education Research Center's (2008) report, *Cities in Crisis*, highlights the dismal high-school graduation rates of students in the nation's largest 50 cities, where a little over half of the high-school students enrolled graduate. The report lists a 53.4 percent graduation rate for blacks and 57.8 percent for Hispanics in the 2003-2004 entering high-school freshman class. In addition, Swanson (2008) writes, "male students, on average, have

graduation rates eight points lower than females" (Swanson, 2008, p. 8). These figures forecast an unpromising future for most black and Hispanic students, who are often the majority at these large city public school systems. Moreover, the low college enrollment and low attainment of bachelor's degrees among black and Latino men signal a continued lack of progress among these groups and a continued or larger burden on society. As Gibbs (1994) acknowledges:

> [Y]oung Black males in America find themselves in an increasingly marginalized position, the unwitting heirs of over 370 years of slavery, segregation, and discrimination; the helpless victims of poverty, social injustice and economic inequality…the cumulative impact of these forces has resulted in a hostile and unpredictable environment for young Black males in every major institution of this society—the education system, the social welfare system, the health-care system, the criminal system, and the economic system (p. 128).

Although there is a plethora of literature about men and the problem of educating men at all academic levels (Majors & Billson, 1992; Parry, 2000), there is a lack of literature that provides a perspective from black and Latino men who have been able to attain college enrollment status. This study is unique in that it focuses not only on successfully enrolled black and Latino men but it also highlights high-school and college transition issues that are important to postsecondary retention and completion. Our current society is constantly reminding us of the lack of achievement among black and Latino men, who do not progress—academically or socially. This study seeks to highlight those whose achievement is often neglected. In the interest of improving the conditions of young black and Latino men, it is imperative to understand how successful college enrolled men of color make meaning of their lived experiences and understand themselves in light of these experiences. Finally, population figures

suggest that the continued rise in the number of people in these two ethnic/racial groups, in particular within the Latino population, signals a sense of urgency in their educational success. Therefore, it becomes ever so critical to cultivate a pipeline of successfully educated and trained individuals who will continue to develop innovative strategies to compete in the global economic market of the future and maintain the nation's status in the world.

Research Design

This was a phenomenological study that gave voice to first-year black and Latino men enrolled at four-year postsecondary institutions concerning their experiences and perceptions of the relative impact of family support (saving for college, college visits, and attending financial aid workshops) and college aspirations (family encouragement, peers, school) factors that impacted their decision as men of color to enroll and their actual college enrollment. This study sought to understand how the research participants' perceptions of college aspirations and family support factors helped them attain college enrollment status as well as how they made meaning of the college application/decision process as a consequence of being men of color.

A purposeful criterion sampling strategy was used to identify potential participants. Participants met specific criteria in order to be considered for the study. The prospective participants self-identified as black or Latino ethnic/racial background and were enrolled at a public or private four-year postsecondary institution at the time of the study.

The research questions for this research study included:

- Among family support factors, what do currently enrolled first-year African-American men and Latinos identify as primary factors that influenced their college enrollment?

- Among college aspirations factors, what do currently enrolled first year African-American men and Latinos identify as primary factors that influenced their college enrollment?
- What kinds of influences on college enrollment do black men and Latinos attribute to gender?

A semi-structured interview protocol was used in order to best engage the participants in a discussion about their perceptions of the relative impact of family support (saving for college, college visits, and attending financial aid workshops) and college aspirations (family encouragement, peers, school) factors on their college enrollment. Questions regarding family support and college aspirations factors were asked so that students were able to reflect and elaborate on their perspectives of the impact one or more of these factors may have had on their decision to enroll and their actual college enrollment. More specifically, some of the questions that were addressed were: How did your gender help to form your college aspirations? What influenced you to develop college aspirations? What role did your race and gender play in your decision to enroll at a four-year institution? What did your family do that influenced your actual enrollment?

Theoretical Framework

A critical theory lens was used to analyze the data and gain insight into how black men and Latinos were influenced by family support and college aspirations factors. Critical theory allows the researcher to investigate the social aspects of life. Kincheloe & McLaren (2003) state "a social critical theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (p. 436).

The focus on gender and race and the social institutions that encourage these black men and Latinos to succeed is at the heart of critical theory. Critical theory allows the researcher to analyze the dichotomy between groups and institutions with a particular focus on "who gains and who loses in specific situations" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 437). The inequalities that have historically been associated with African Americans, in particular, and to a certain extent with Latinos, called for the use of critical theory to unmask how these groups are affected by today's structure of family support and the factors that influence college attendance.

Using a qualitative method, the researcher explored how black men and Latinos make plans to pursue a postsecondary education and whether family support factors as defined by the Hossler college choice model, and college aspirations factors, were important to their college enrollment. Currently, the literature on the experiences of first-year black and Latino men enrolled at four-year postsecondary institutions has been silent. These first-hand responses will be useful to guidance counselors, school administrators, university administrators, and policy makers as the need to increase the number of black men and Latinos enrolled in college becomes ever more important.

Researcher

Although there is a clear limitation of gender differences in this study, my interest in this area was sparked by my career within the college access/transition field. For over 15 years, I have worked in non-traditional settings that promote and provide skills to low-income, first-generation students who most often are students of color (black and Latino in particular). The academic progression of this group of students motivates the work that I do on their behalf. To provide avenues for access and achievement to students who otherwise would not have been able to succeed in high school and college has been the work that I have been most proud of. Yet in

those 15 years, there were other students who were not as successful, mainly boys of black and Latino backgrounds who had great academic potential, but along the way were sidetracked and never found their way back to education.

This topic further fuels my interest because although I am not black, I am a first-generation Latina immigrant who by all academic standards has succeeded in attaining bachelor's and master's degrees. I grew up in a mixed neighborhood of mainly low-income black and Latino residents and I see myself as a mixture of both cultures. Although many people feel that the issues of African Americans and Latinos are different, I tend to see these two groups facing similar challenges to educational opportunity. Beyond the fact that I am passionate about providing educational opportunities to those of marginalized backgrounds, the fact that men of black and Latino backgrounds are both underrepresented at four-year colleges and universities throughout the United States is a great cause for concern and the main focus of this study. Understanding how those who have successfully managed to transition to the postsecondary arena and find educational success provides a great opportunity to share their stories and provide hope to those who are still struggling.

Definitions

The ethnic/racial labels used in this study are consistent with the U.S. designation of ethnic/racial groups. However, the term "Latinos" can refer to two different groups—the male population or the entire Spanish-speaking population. For the purposes of this study, the term "Latinos" refers to Hispanic or Spanish-speaking men, as the focus of this study is on men. In addition, the ethnic/racial designations of African American, black, Latino, and Hispanic will be used in accordance to authors' and participants' preferences.

The Hossler & Gallagher (1987) college choice model outlines the three stages of the college application process: predisposition, search, and choice stages. In the predisposition stage, family plays an important role in instilling ideas about furthering education beyond high school through abstract and concrete activities. Furthermore, Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) college choice model emphasizes the role of parents/family mainly in the predisposition and search stages. Within this study, I examine the role of parents/family in supporting students' college aspirations through concrete activities. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) conclude that parents are most active in their child's college choice process in the search stage. However, the role of family or family support is quite varied and encompasses a number of activities. Therefore, I chose three specific activities (college savings, college visits, and attendance at a financial aid workshop) as they are concrete and clearly defined. It is worth mentioning that although my study does not focus on financial aid, it is an important component of the college-going decision-making process, and including an aspect of financing college attendance can provide useful information about how the study's participants make early decisions about college enrollment and address some of the common concerns that students have about college attendance.

In addition, the concept of college aspirations was adopted from Kao & Tienda's (1998) definition of aspirations, "as plans for the future" (p. 356). The college aspirations factors that were utilized for the purposes of this study are parents, peers, and schools, and these factors are analyzed as to whether they influenced (or not) the college enrollment plans and decisions of participants. Finally, the definition of "success" will mean academic achievement as defined by participants' secondary school graduation as well as actual college enrollment status at the time of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents the current and foundational literatures on masculinity with a particular focus on black and Latino men and the literatures on the college choice model and college aspirations. This literature review explores issues of masculinity to understand whether college choice factors impact the college enrollment decisions of men of color. Furthermore, the literature on the choice model and college aspirations highlights supporting evidence for the role of parents as instrumental factors in helping to develop college aspirations of their child as well as their critical role within the college choice model. In addition, I will distinguish these two components, as they are closely related and have similar goals, in order to understand the college choices high-school students make as well as the factors that most impact their decisions. Finally, this information will be useful for policy makers and college advocates so that they can better address issues of access and persistence for those populations that are not achieving in large numbers, such as the black and Latino male population of this study.

Masculinity: A Historical Perspective

The focus on men and male issues took center stage in the 1980's and 1990's, as a response to the feminist movement of the 1960's. The men's movement began, in part, to promote the traditional patriarchal role. Early scholars of the men's movement saw a void in the men's literature that discussed issues that affected men's daily lives, including issues relating to the traditional male role and its impact on men (Clatterbaugh, 2000). This conservative stance believed that because men and women are biologically different, their roles are also different (Clatterbaugh, 2000). However, this standpoint was most applicable to white men and was used to justify the male subjugation of women and men's glorified place in society at that time. Since

then, much has been written about men from a variety of sociopolitical perspectives. These writings most often highlight the experiences and perspectives of the mainstream middle-class white male, providing little insight into the African-American and Latino male experience. Moreover, some of these middle-class white men did not fully subscribe to the traditional idea of masculinity, which therefore spurred the liberal men's movement.

The liberal men's movement, or the feminist movement, was founded on a "loosely held set of beliefs that favor one or more of the feminist ideologies" (Clatterbaugh, 2000, p. 884). Feminism is grounded on three basic assumptions: Sex is different from gender; gender is socially constructed; and women are constrained by gender role (Clatterbaugh, 2000, p. 884). These assumptions have continually been challenged by the distinctions between sex, gender, and gender roles. The lack of clarification on the definitions of sex, gender, and gender roles has provided an unstable foundation for the feminists and has allowed critics such as Connell (1995) to challenge the notion of the hegemonic masculinity which Kenway and FitzClarence (1997) defined as "the standard bearer of what it means to be a real man or boy and many males draw inspiration from its cultural library of resources" (p. 5). Unlike the conservative patriarchal definition of masculinity, Connell (1995) believes that there is more than one masculinity. Connell (1995) further contends that men of color experience masculinities in different ways than straight white men. Levant (1996) agrees, stating that, "because masculinity is a social construction, ideals of manhood may differ for men from different social classes, races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, lifestages and historical eras" (p. 260). Franklin II (1994) concurs with Connell (1995) and Levant (1996) and states that "black masculinity and the different ways of being a man that are open to differently situated black men" (Clatterbaugh , 2000, p. 885).

Black men experience masculinity in different forms and relative to their social and economic status.

Some feminists believe that masculinity is a "social role that is allowed to men by a patriarchal system of values and priorities" (Clatterbaugh, 2000, p. 887), with costs such as stress and pressure to be successful. Yet Clatterbaugh (2000) references others such as Goldberg (1976) who believed that men are not privileged relative to women (p. 888). These divisive stances are largely responsible for the lack of impact of the men's movement. Furthermore, these stances are often centered on the middle-class white male experience, which is contradictory to the experiences of other men. Franklin II (1994) states, "for a variety of reasons, basic tenets of what would become known as "American masculinity" evolved beyond the grasp of Black men," (p. 5). The historical denigration of black people adds to the complexity of what it means to be black and a man. Franklin II (1994) acknowledges, "the Black man recognized by mainstream society today is fearsome, threatening, unemployed, irresponsible, potentially dangerous and generally socially pathological" (p. 11). Franklin II (1994) also adds that black men's masculinity is influenced by three primary groups: family, peers, and society, each of which provides conflicting messages about being a black male. The research literature, further, suggests that the construction of black men's masculinity is negatively affected by peer groups, mass media and popular culture and music. As Ferguson (2000) acknowledges:

> The image of the black male criminal is more familiar because of its prevalence in the print and electronic media as well as scholarly work. The second image, that of the black male as an endangered species, is one which is largely emanated from African American social scientists, and journalists who are

> deeply concerned about the criminalization and high mortality rate among African American youth. These two representations are rooted in material conditions and reflect existing social conditions and relations that they appear to sum up for us. They are lodged in theories, in commonsense understandings of self in relation to others in the world as well as popular culture and media (p. 78).

Black men are both victims and victimizers; these images are commonly used to make assessments about their behavior and their future as African-American men, oftentimes ignoring the historical past and its relevance in today's world. The research also suggests that these negative representations can potentially be barriers to some black men as they pursue positive endeavors.

Machismo

Latino men's experiences have also been neglected within the masculinity literature, and, as Delgado (2000) asserts, "in the U.S. Latino brownness fits somewhere between the traditional, and overly simplistic, continuum of black and white" (p. 389). Furthermore, much of the early literature on Latino masculinity was conducted by white men, who often lacked knowledge and understanding of Latino culture (Mirande, 1997). Therefore, Latino masculinity or machismo has suffered from contradictory and negative meanings and representations. Ramirez (1993) states, "we find the term used in multiple ways: sometimes as a set of attitudes, other times as a configuration of traits and still other times as a syndrome" (p. 8). De La Cancela (1986) also notes the negative images of the "macho" man which is seen "as sick, primitive, and in need of reform and subscribes to single causality and deficit models of behavior" (p. 292). Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom (2002) concur, noting that "researchers defining machismo from an

exclusively intra-psychic and ethnic-cultural perspective primarily emphasize the negative connotations of machismo as dysfunctional patterns of behaviors linked to compensation and passive-aggressive syndrome that are associated with various power relations in the construction of masculinity" (p. 166). Machismo therefore is defined as a hyper-masculine set of behaviors that includes aggression and promiscuity while at the same time the individual is independent, protective, and responsible (De La Cancela, 1986; Ramirez, 1993; Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002). These definitions add to the confusion for many Latino men of what it means to be a man (Connell, 1995). In addition, these definitions are blurred by the different sub-populations of the Latino ethnic category and often are synonymous with Mexican-American men or Chicanos. Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom (2002) concluded from their study of Latinos' perceptions of machismo "that cultural and ethnic differences regarding machismo exist among the study's Latino group, particularly Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans" (p. 174).

Moreover, De La Cancela (1986), Ramirez (1993), and Torres et al. (2002) agree with Franklyn II's (1994) claim that masculinity is a social construction influenced by a person's power and economic status. Torres et al. (2002) state, "changing socio-economic conditions and labor market conditions among Latinos in the U.S. indicate that Latino men are often confronted with the male gender role demands of the dominant culture yet are denied economic and political access to its resources" (p. 167). Although there are different conceptions of macho based on economic status (macho was viewed more positively with higher income), Mirande's (1997) study, however, did not find that, "socio-economic status is a critical determinant of gender role attitudes and behaviors or the related assumption that traditional masculinity is somehow more prevalent in the working class" (p. 146), which suggests that masculinity is constructed by specific cultural definitions.

In addition to the patriarchal notion of being male, meaning "to be responsible and a good provider to self and family" (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 30), black men experience their masculinity in relation to "racism and discrimination, negative self-image, guilt, shame, and fear" (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 31). Black men have devised ways in which they can become manly in the face of the social structures that deny them full access to achieve their masculine potential. Pierre, Mahalik, and Woodland (2001) conclude that "there is little discussion on how Black men conceptualize masculinity within their cultural group based on their worldview or beyond conventional notions of masculinity. African-American men are expected to conform to the dominant culture's gender role expectations—success, competition and aggression—as well as culturally specific requirements of the African American community that may often conflict" (p. 20). These contradictory messages enable black men to develop shields that protect them from the harsh realities of society but also to celebrate their manhood. Black men use what Majors and Billson (1992) call the "cool pose" to enact an air of disinterest, aloofness, and distance.

In similar ways, Latinos develop a set of attitudes that defines them as men. Abalos (2002) describes Latino men's façade as "machismo, an inherited understanding of being in charge and taking command" (p. 3). For example, macho or machismo connotes an air of patriarchy and womanizing, while the cool pose suggests that men take unnecessary risks and are often detached and unexpressive. De La Cancela (1986) writes "machismo is a socially constructed, learned, and reinforced set of behaviors comprising the content of male gender roles in Latino society" (p. 291). Both "cool pose" and "machismo," unfortunately, provide a destructive element for both black men and Latinos. Young men may use violence, drugs, and

promiscuity as celebrated acts of manhood and social acceptance (Abalos, 2002; Majors & Billson, 1992).

Boys and Early Schooling

These notions of masculinities are juxtaposed by a lack of academic progress that a large number of black and Latino boys are experiencing early in their academic careers. Research on the underachievement of boys, boys' disappearing role in schools and the education field, as well as the considerable effects it has on society, has received much attention. Although research on boys has more recently focused not only on identifying the problem but also on finding viable solutions, the literature often suggests that boys are battling two ideals of what it means to be a man (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Pollack, 1998). As Jha & Kelleher (2006) state "the definition of masculinity has proved [to be] problematic, and has been caught between dominant power perceptions of masculinity within societies on the one hand and a reality of masculinities on the other" (p. 16). Furthermore, research has shown that boys or men, no matter what their ethnic/racial backgrounds, are juxtaposed between these ideals, especially within institutional structures such as schools (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Gurian, 1998; Parry, 2000; Pollack, 1998). These and other studies show that boys are twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed as learning disabled; four times more likely to drop out of school, and account for more than 90 percent of disciplinary problems (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Gurian, 1998; Pollack, 1998). These disturbing figures add to the pressures boys of all ethnic/racial backgrounds must confront on a daily basis.

The academic performance of black and Latino boys is evaluated against the backdrop of contradictory masculine messages most often provided by the media. Studies have focused on aspects of schools and schooling to understand why boys in particular are not progressing as well academically as girls. One of the main arguments for this underachievement is that schools and

therefore educational institutions are considered a feminine enterprise. For example, the lack of male role models in schools (Parry, 2000); curriculum irrelevancy (Jha & Kelleher, 2006), and gender stereotyping (Jha & Kelleher, 2006) by teachers add to the reasons why men may believe that education is a feminine activity, or is "uncool" (Majors & Billson, 1992; Parry, 2000). Furthermore, Epstein (1998) notes that "one of the dominant notions of masculinity in many schools is, indeed, the avoidance of academic work (or of the appearance of working)" (p. 98).

However, numerous studies (Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davidson, 2003; Gorard, Rees, & Salisbury, 1999; Smith, 2003) dispute that boys are academically behind girls and acknowledge that boys have historically performed academically less well than girls since the seventeenth century, when John Locke expressed concerns over boys' lack of language acquisition. Furthermore, these authors contend that there is a great inconsistency in the way in which assessment scores are calculated, which fuels this misconception of a gender gap (Gorard et al., 1999; Smith, 2003). Finally, researchers such as Martino and Berrill (2003) call for a need to explore how gender is constructed in order to better understand how different masculinities are developed. As stated by Frank et al. (2003), "representations of boys as a cohesive group enables a particular reading that highlights injustices assumed to impact on all boys, without acknowledging the privileged elements of masculinities that advantage some boys over other boys" (p. 120). This suggests that there are different masculinities at play and more importantly that not all boys are the same.

The above studies suggest that the male experience is unique to their gender. The literature on socialization has explored how boys as early as newborns are directly and indirectly being shaped by the social norm of what it is to be a man. These messages of manhood appear in schools, with teachers rating boys lower in academic ability and assigning them to special

education classes, and among peers, who pressure each other to develop behaviors such as disinterest in school and absenteeism. Taylor and Graham's (2007) study concluded that by the seventh grade African-American and Latino boys were more likely to admire and respect other students who were low academic achievers. Porsche, Ross, and Snow (2004) concur that by middle school most of the boys, even the ones who were academically capable, were either in special education classes or seeking other interests that were outside of the realm of school.

Furthermore, these studies highlight some important considerations in understanding men and their disposition in the academic arena. There is an increased pressure to prove one's masculinity as boys get older, particularly in schools and with peer groups. Porsche et al. (2004) state that "expectations of conformity to gender roles increase as children enter school" (p. 340). Moreover, the socialization of male gender roles did not seem to coincide with academic achievement. Porsche et al. (2004) noted that "boys' socialization toward male gender roles also appeared to influence their literacy engagement and achievement in middle school" (p. 349). These studies reveal the need for this research to examine black and Latino men's experiences in relation to their masculinity and whether they perceived that being a man impacted (or not) their decisions about college enrollment.

Men and Higher Education

Over forty years ago, men were the majority of students on most U.S. college campuses and were more successful than females in attending and graduating from college. In the 1960's and early 1970's, men were enrolled in college at higher rates than women. Research on the differences in academic achievement between men and women, such as in Marini and Greenberger's (1978) study, found that men were more predisposed to plan for and to attend college than women. However, this finding is contradictory to the current status of men's and

women's participation in the postsecondary arena. Due to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 and Title IX, which allowed women to play varsity sports on college campuses, women slowly increased their college enrollment numbers and are now the majority on most college campuses. Currently, 51 percent of women enter postsecondary education compared to 41 percent of men (NCES, 2005). This disparity is even more pronounced among African-American and Latino ethnic groups, among whom the college enrollment is at an all-time low. Schmidt (2008) writes "Throughout American education, black boys and men, on the whole, have struggled for years. They graduate from high school and attend and complete college at disproportionately low rates. Even many of those at well-to-do suburban schools emerge unprepared for college-level work. In higher education, they are outnumbered by black women by a ratio of nearly two to one—the highest level of gender imbalance for any race (retrieved from http://www.chronicle.com/weekly/v55/i07/07a00101.htm on Oct. 10, 2008).

In understanding the problem of low college enrollment for this population, studies often focus on the activities undertaken during the high-school years such as academic performance and completion of college applications as prerequisites for college matriculation. These studies provide an important look at how students experience high school and the factors that may or may not influence their college enrollment. The Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) study, for example, applied the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model to investigate the likelihood of college attendance by racial/ethnic groups. They found that African Americans and Latinos had the lowest percentage of students applying to college. Hurtado et al. (1997) state, "Approximately 90% or more of some racial/ethnic groups expect to have at least some college, trade school, or graduate education, yet by senior year, 45% of African Americans and 47% of Latinos had not submitted a college application" (p. 50). However, this study's data can

be applied only to ethnic/racial groups, making it difficult to compare the likelihood of submitting college applications by gender.

The Hanson (1994) and Hubbard (1999) studies explored gender differences in college aspirations and the factors that may influence students' decisions to enroll. Both studies found that male students had different reasons for pursuing educational options than females. In addition, Hanson (1994) indicates that gender indirectly affects academic performance, suggesting that there are other variables that affect the aspirations of male and female students. For example, she found that the male participants' low aspirations were influenced by their grade point averages, age when they had their first child, and their parents' educational expectations of them. In addition, Hanson (1994) found socioeconomic status to be the major factor, no matter what the racial category, that most affects the loss of educational talent.

Moreover, Hubbard's (1999) ethnographic study of a group of African-American high-school students investigated the level of influence of community, school, and family factors in students' educational aspirations and whether there were any differences in relation to gender. The results support previous findings that show there are other factors that influence the college-going plans of female and male students (Hanson, 1994). The study also found that although family support was a strong contributor to educational success for both men and women, there were other factors that also impacted students' aspirations for college enrollment. For example, playing college and professional sports was a significant factor for men's continued participation in high school and college, while academic achievement, economic independence, and attainment of a college degree were among the most influential for women's continued commitment to their education. Hubbard (1999) states "the African-American men were committed to getting good grades because that was the way they would remain eligible to

participate on athletic teams" (p. 376). The above conclusions demonstrate that men's academic aspirations are often grounded in unrealistic goals—ideals of grandeur and gaining status as an athlete spur the academic interest of male students although many may not perform well academically.

College Choice

The college choice model developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1989) describes a three-stage process that students follow in order to make decisions about their postsecondary options. The steps are defined as follows: Predisposition is defined as "an inclination toward postsecondary education" (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007, p. 6). Search is defined as information gathering, including visiting colleges and universities; this stage ends once a student has developed a list of preferred colleges. Choice is defined as decision-making "about whether to apply to college, which colleges to apply to, and which college to attend" (NPEC, 2007, p. 6).

The college choice model was developed as a way to better understand how high-school students made decisions about their postsecondary options. Since its development, the model has been used to better understand the college choice decisions of students from many different economic and social backgrounds. The model has also been modified to address student background differences such as low-income status (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Stage, 1992), first-generation status (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000), and gender differences (Smith & Fleming, 2006). However, little is known about how male African-American and Latino students make decisions about postsecondary options, and in particular the influence of college aspirations on college enrollment. Research has found that students are influenced by personal, familial, cultural, and environmental factors (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). Furthermore, the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2007) study notes "that for

traditional-aged students sociocultural factors appear to be the main drivers of the college decision making process" (p. 20).

Additionally, the evidence of the role of parents in the college choice model has consistently shown that parental encouragement and support are important to successful postsecondary enrollment (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler et al., 1999; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Parental support as defined by the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model includes activities such as saving for college, attending a financial aid workshop, and visiting college campuses. The authors suggest that parental involvement is more pronounced in the predisposition and search stages of the college process, and that students rely on other sources of information such as guidance counselors and friends at the choice stage of the model. However, Smith and Fleming (2006) found that for African-American students, parental support was strong even at the choice stage of the model.

No matter what students' socioeconomic status, research has shown parental support as a strong factor in academic achievement (Gandara, 1995;; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Sewell & Shah, 1967). Yet, Hossler et al. (1999) also concluded that African-American male students are in dire need of guidance and attention in their development of postsecondary educational plans and goal attainment. The authors state, "[W]e were repeatedly less successful in predicting the factors that influence the post-secondary aspirations of black 9th grade students" (p. 27). There is lack of information about how black men develop educational goals beyond high school and the extent to which they sustain their aspirations from year to year. Furthermore, there are large numbers of low-income students (who are often African American or Latino) who still do not enroll in postsecondary institutions, as suggested by the Hurtado et al.

(1997) study. Researchers have found that low-income students are the least likely group to graduate high school (Choy, 2002; Terenzini, et al., 2001) and that only "one in three expect to enroll [in college]" (Bedsworth, Colby, & Doctor, 2006, p. 2).

Parents who have a college degree, have high incomes, and who provide mechanisms to inform their child of the benefits and rewards of a college education plant the seed for their child's development of educational goals beyond high school graduation. Although the Hossler et al. (1999) study supports previous research findings on the role of family support in postsecondary plans, it also highlighted that students, even highly qualified ones, showed a degree of uncertainty about their postsecondary plans. Hossler et al. (1999) point out that even some of the students in the sample who showed clear goals still were uncertain in their senior year about their plans to go to college. Moreover, students who "lack goals, lack a sense of self-efficacy, and lack…strong parent support and guidance," (p. 50) were most at risk of not developing or attaining educational goals beyond high school. The Hossler et al. (1999) study supports previous findings from the Hurtado et al. (1997) study that examined the college choice of racial/ethnic groups. Hurtado et al.'s (1997) study found that among high academic achievers there was a great discrepancy in the number of students who took college entrance exams as well as submitted college applications. Hurtado et al. (1997) note, "[I]t is surprising to find that 28% of Latinos and 19% of African Americans (compared to 10% of Asians and 16% of white students) had not applied to college by the end of the 12th grade" (p. 54). The larger percentage of black and Latino students not applying to college further supports their low college enrollment rates.

While the literature on the role of parents in the college choice of high-school students is extensive, the results are limited to the researchers' definitions of family support. For example,

family support may be defined by a myriad of activities including paying for college preparatory activities, paying for summer programs, assisting children with homework, saving for college, and talking with children about college and its benefits. Studies, therefore, choose to limit the definition of parental/family support to one or more of these activities. Thus, the findings need to be interpreted in light of the definition of family support used in the study. Zarate and Gallimore's (2005) study cautions that a study's results might be influenced by the definition of family support. Moreover, the results that show family support as a key factor in college enrollment may be compromised by the different levels of family support that students may perceive themselves to receive or actually receive. Also, the evidence often cannot be generalized to capture the distinct individual background characteristics of students and their families. Furthermore, the studies often use mixed samples of students in terms of gender and/or ethnic/racial backgrounds and often do not have sufficient numbers of ethnic minority students to generalize their findings in relation to these ethnicities and/or gender. Due to the myriad definitions that could encompass family support and the lack of adequate measures that quantifies levels of support, this study employed three specific activities to define the concept of family support.

Furthermore, the literature on the college choice model and how men of African-American and Latino backgrounds maneuver this three-stage process is very limited. Smith and Fleming's (2006) study examined how parents of African-American students may be signaling different educational options for men and women. They concluded that parents were more open to other educational options for boys that did not include a four-year college education. Smith and Fleming (2006) write, "for 11th and 12th grade sons, 4-year college was certainly an option, but only one of many acceptable post-high school choices" (p. 83). In addition, the study also

showed that African-American parents were also involved at the choice stage of the college choice model, contrary to Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) finding.

Other literature focusing on family support does not employ the college choice model as a framework, yet provides a wide array of perspectives that examine parents' role as an influential factor in their child(ren)'s decision to pursue postsecondary educational options. Zarate and Gallimore (2005), for example, present a mixed methods longitudinal study of the factors that influence college enrollment for Latino men and women. One of the few studies that focuses on Latinos and provides gender comparisons, they conclude that for Latinos, "parental expectations and their ratings of students' interests were consistently related to college enrollment outcomes" (p. 395). High parental expectations of college enrollment proved to be a significant factor for Latino boys' college enrollment. The Zarate and Gallimore (2005) study also shows that parents of Latinos supported education as a means of economic improvement and stability whereas for Latinas, parents used education as a deterrent to dependency on men. This study supports Smith and Fleming's (2006) and Fry's (2002) conclusions that parents voice different expectations for boys and girls. In addition, African-American and Latino parents encourage college enrollment for their girls for the same reasons, to avoid dependence on males and gain financial independence. Finally, the Zarate and Gallimore (2006) findings reveal that there are different factors that influence the college enrollment of Latino men and women and contradict previous research findings that show no significant gender differences among these racial/ethnic groups.

Finally, Perna and Titus' (2005) study examined parental support as a form of social capital to determine whether or not it influences the enrollment decisions of racially/ethnically diverse students. This quantitative study used an odds ratio to determine the likelihood of

college enrollment based on whether parental involvement in school was due to positive or negative interactions. For example, positive parental involvement interactions were volunteering, contacting schools about academic issues, and talking with children about school, and negative interactions included being called in due to behavior problems. The study found that students' chances of enrolling in college were increased when parents were positively involved in school activities. In addition, it concluded that African-American students benefited the most from this type of parental involvement and that their chances of college enrollment increased more than for other groups (Perna & Titus, 2005). However, this study looked at college enrollment for both two- and four-year colleges. It also contained a small sample of African-American and Latino students as it used the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and Beyond Post-Secondary (BPS) databases to generate its findings. Although both databases provide a wealth of information about students, they do not contain a significant number of students of color.

College Aspirations

As stated earlier, the term "college aspirations" is defined as plans for the future (Kao & Tienda, 1998). The literature on college aspirations, like the college choice literature, has been well documented. The research literature on college aspirations indicates that students are influenced by certain factors to develop aspirations or make plans about their future. Researchers have explored the influence of parents, peers, schools, and academic achievement, for example, on the development of college aspirations. Approximately 90 percent of students have aspirations to attend a postsecondary institution. Yet, according to the *Education Pays* (2007) report, "in 2005, 49% of all white high school graduates ages 18-24 were enrolled in postsecondary institutions, compared to about 41% of black and 38% of Hispanic high school

graduates in the same age group" (p. 30). It has also been documented that students' college aspirations diminish as they progress through the academic pipeline. Numerous studies have explored the reasons why students' aspirations or plans to go to college are not achieved. The literature on college aspirationss has examined factors such as race and gender (Hubbard, 1999), socioeconomic status (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001), first-generation students (Choy, 2002; Horn & Chen, 1998; Terenzini, et al., 2001), peers (Gandara, 1995; Tinklin, 2003), family (Gandara, 1995; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Sewell & Shah, 1967), and schools (Oakes, 1985; McDonough, 1997) to provide a better understanding of how these factors affect students' levels of aspirations for a college education and how students persist through four years of high school in maintaining this goal. For example, Kao and Tienda (1998) found that blacks and Hispanics had higher college aspirations than other high school students but did not maintain them as they moved through the academic pipeline. This suggests that there are other sources of influences that are competing against the college aspirations of black and Hispanic students.

College aspirations as a determining factor of college enrollment was explored to understand how black men and Latinos were affected by college aspirations influences—parents, peers, and schools—in their decisions to enroll and their actual college enrollment. The study's participants discussed and examined their college aspirations in relation to the influences stated above during high school and discussed their perceptions of the relative impact these college aspirations factors had on their decision to enroll and their actual college enrollment.

College Aspirations and Parental Impact

As a factor, "parents" have proven to be the most influential factor in developing the college aspirations of students (Gandara, 1995; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler, Schmit, &

Vesper, 1999; Sewell & Shah, 1967) and are a key component to college enrollment. Research shows that strong family support along with activities that promote ideas and information about colleges affect a student's plan to pursue a postsecondary education (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Hossler, Schmidt & Vesper, 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992; McDonough, 1997; Sewell & Shah, 1967). In their 1999 study, Hossler et al. found that parental support, including encouragement and financial support, is the most influential aspect in a student's development of postsecondary plans and achievement. Yet, their study was not as successful in understanding the college decisions of African-American men.

The research literature on parental impact has continually agreed on the high level of influence parents have on their child's education. Studies have found that a strong connection with one or both parents who encourage academic achievement influences the college planning of students. For example, Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, et al.'s (2002) study found that maternal attachment is significantly correlated to academic achievement. In addition, a follow-up study also showed that strong family support as well as stability contributes to students' academic success (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, et al., 2003). Furthermore, siblings can also play an important role in the academic achievement goals of their brothers and/or sisters. Mendoza-MacGregor's (1999) study found that having siblings who either attained or did not attain academic success influenced the level of achievement in younger siblings. Mendoza-MacGregor (1999) states, "an individual's likelihood of attending college is increased when they have siblings that have also attended college" (p. 51).

Family income also influences college planning. Having more resources available allows parents to engage in activities such as saving for college and taking trips to visit college campuses, and this has a strong impact on the college enrollment of their child (Hamrick &

Stage, 2004; McDonough, 1997) compared to students who come from low-income families who may not have the same benefits or be impacted in similar ways. The Hamrick and Stage (2004) study showed the effects of parental influence across racial groups on college aspirations and enrollment. They found that family income was a stronger indicator of college aspirations than were parental expectations. Finally, Terenzini et al. (2001) showed that low-income students go to college at a lower rate than high-income students, mostly due to a lack of knowledge about and access to postsecondary education. The literature on college aspirations shows that parental encouragement, high parental expectations, and activities such as college visits enable students to plan to pursue postsecondary educational options. However, the low numbers of black men and Latinos enrolled at four-year colleges and universities suggest that high parental expectations and encouragement may not always result in actual college enrollment.

Parental Impact on Black and Latino Men

As stated above, parental support and income are strong influential factors in the academic achievement and aspirations for students, even for black students (Davies & Kandel, 1981; Hubbard, 1999; Kenny et al., 2002). Hamrick and Stage (2004) found that for African Americans, parental expectations have a strong effect on their children's college aspirations. Hamrick and Stage (2004) also point out that for African-American students "the only two factors that affected predisposition were parent education and parental expectations for student educational attainment" (p. 163). Unfortunately, the participants of the study were mostly women, making conclusions regarding black men precarious. Although black students experienced strong family influence, Hubbard's (1999) study of African-American men and women also found that men were influenced by other factors such as the prospects of playing

sports and economic independence. Hubbard (1999) states, "they too saw college as the way to get what they wanted, and for them that meant the opportunity to play sports" (p. 369).

Furthermore, families who place a strong value on education influence their children to strive for high academic achievement no matter what their socioeconomic status. In their study of parental support differences between girls and boys, Smith and Fleming (2006) revealed that parents', and in particular mothers' expectations for a college education differed for their daughters and sons. The sample, which was mostly mothers, expected higher academic pursuits for their girls in comparison to their boys. Moreover, unlike the Hossler model, where parents are most critically involved in the predisposition/aspirations stage, Smith and Fleming (2006) posit that parents remain and are "most heavily involved in the college choice stage" (p. 95). Finally, in their study comparing the differences in academic achievement of African-American students, Ford and Harris (1996) found that parental achievement orientation was highly correlated to students' academic achievement. Yet, their study also found performance differences between students enrolled in the regular education curriculum versus the advanced track curriculum, Ford and Harris (1996) note that "while supporting strongly ideals of the achievement ideology and valuing school success, [regular education students] do not report working to their potential in school" (p. 1149). Mickelson's (1990) study also examined students' attitudes about academic achievement and performance and found a gap between participants' beliefs of achievement and their actual performance levels. This dissonance between wanting to achieve and not performing to potential is a topic that has been baffling researchers. It becomes ever more important to understand the underpinnings of this gap in order to understand and develop strategies to counter the low college enrollment of black men. These

studies suggest that factors other than family support may explain the college aspirations of black students and particularly men.

Within the Latino population parents are also highly influential in the development of students' college aspirations (Gandara, 1995; Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). In her study of high-achieving Latinos, Gandara (1995) found that mothers were great sources of support for their children's goals. Parents' participation in the academic life of children has been found to have a positive relationship with the academic achievement of students (Gandara, 1995). However, Zarate and Gallimore (2005) found that parents expressed different educational expectations for low- and high-achieving boys, whereas for girls, parental expectations were the same for low and high achievers. Furthermore, she found that siblings played an important part in students' success. Gandara (1995) states that "siblings served as role models, and counselors and even when similar opportunities had been closed to older brothers and sisters, they supported and encouraged the subject's aspirations" (p. 48). Moreover, Gandara's (1995) study contradicts research that unfairly classifies Latino families as unsupportive of their child's education based on their lack of participation in school-sponsored activities. Gandara (1995) notes, "Nonetheless, they supported the goals of the school at home, helped with homework when they could, and instilled high standards in their children" (p. 49).

In addition, another factor that needs consideration within the Latino ethnic group is the length of time in the United States. Many Latinos emigrate, and their transition to a new culture and language can influence their plans for postsecondary education. Many recent immigrants may not be able to speak or read in English, which adds another level of complexity to their academic goals. Although this issue is very contentious and important to the Latino community, it is beyond the scope of this research project. Of importance to this project is the limited

research on other Latino subgroups, such as Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Colombians (to name a few). Most research on Latinos is heavily concentrated on Mexican Americans and lacks a high number of other Latino subpopulations as well as recent immigrants. Moreover, literature on Latinos' academic achievement, many times does not focus solely on Latino men.

The literature on family influence on college aspirations points to several family characteristics that support the academic achievement of students. Black and Latino students are affected by their parents' support for educational expectation and parents' income and available resources. However, there are other factors that also influence students, in particular black men and Latinos. Factors such as language, participation in sports, and achievement orientation have been shown to also influence the college aspirations of black men and Latinos. Providing black men and Latinos a space to voice their perceptions of parental/family support in their decisions to enroll and actual college enrollment will add to the discussion about the influences that most impact these students as they make decisions about college and college enrollment.

Peers and College Aspirations

Peer influence is also considered to be an important factor in the development of college aspirations; however, there is considerable debate as to whether peers have a high degree of influence on the college aspirations of other peers. The level of influence that friends have on one another may affect a certain type of behavior. Many times, friends apply pressure on each other to behave in positive ways, such as participating in community service projects, and they also influence each other to behave in negative ways, such as using drugs or skipping school. Davies and Kandel (1981) claim that peers do not influence the college plans of their friends, yet Tinklin's (2003) and Horn and Chen's (1998) conclusions contradict previous research. These studies found that peers who have similar goals influence one another to achieve their goals.

Furthermore, the Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown (1992) study demonstrated that students of color were more susceptible to being influenced by their peers. Although the overall literature on peer influence is inconclusive, there is also much debate about the degree of peer influence in comparison to parental influence in the college-going plans of students and in particular the level of influence on black and Latino men.

Impact of Peers on Black and Latino Men's College Aspirations

Research studies have found that students who were exposed to other high-achieving students were more likely to be successful (Gandara, 1995; Horn & Chen, 1998). Friends who support the college plans of one another ensure that they each achieve their college enrollment goals. However, Tinklin (2003) found that boys of color were more apt to be negatively influenced by their peers. For men, peers sometimes act as deterrents to academic success. As noted by Hanson (1994) and Tinklin (2003), African-American boys must create a persona of non-academic interest if they want to be popular among their peers. Black male students battle two competing worlds—one where education is valued (family) and the other where it may not be (peers). In addition, Washington and Newman's (1991) study concurs with the above conclusions and states "Black men tend to have higher peer self-esteem and higher concern for social abilities than Black women" (p. 24). The above conclusions suggest that black men concern themselves more about what their peers think about them and can be more influenced to engage in non-academic behaviors.

Furthermore, research on the college aspirations of Latinos and the impact of peer influence provides contradictory conclusions. Alforo, Umana-Taylor, and Bamaca's (2006) study found that peers do not influence the academic success of Latinos. However, Gandara (1995) contradicts Alforo et al.'s (2006) finding, in that her study found that Chicanos were

influenced by their peers to perform poorly at some point in their educational careers. Furthermore, in their study of African-American and Latino students, Taylor and Graham (2007) concur with Gandara's (1995) and Tinklin's (2003) conclusions. Their study found that by the seventh grade African-American and Latino boys were more likely to admire and respect other students who were low academic achievers. The study compared, separately by ethnicity, gender, and grade, the responses of second-, fourth-, and seventh-grade African-American and Latino boys and girls. The study showed that in the lower grade levels (second and fourth) within both genders, students admired and respected high-achieving students, while by the seventh grade, boys showed a different pattern. Taylor and Graham (2007) state "It is not until boys reach middle school that they appear to look more admiringly on less academically inclined peers" (p. 60). Thus, Latino boys, like African-American boys, are susceptible to the influence of their peers, although it is uncertain the extent to which peers impact the decisions of both of these groups.

As shown above, there are contradictory conclusions about peer influence on the college aspirations of black men and Latinos. The literature suggests that the effects of peer influence are even more contradictory because African-American men are more predisposed to be negatively influenced by their peers (Steinberg et al. 1992; Tinklin, 2003), while for Latinos the literature is inconclusive as to the effect of peer influence on their college aspirations and achievement. Since both of these groups, however, have low performance levels and many do not enroll at postsecondary institutions, information on the influences that affect their college aspirations is critically needed. We need more information on how peers influence the college aspirations of black men and Latinos to develop strategies that will promote more academic success among these groups. In addition, these differences between ethnic groups suggest that

students are juggling various contexts, each of which plays into the development of their academic success. It is necessary to look at students separately within ethnic/racial and gender groups in order to understand the roles students are managing on a daily basis and the factors that influence these roles that they take on. These studies suggest that the role of peers in the development of educational aspirations is still undetermined. There is a critical need to study those successfully enrolled black and Latino first-year college students to give voice to their experiences with their peers in relation to their college aspirations and their decisions to enroll and actual college enrollment.

Schools' Impact on College Aspirations

The literature on college aspirations and the influence of schools is a broad topic that includes many different aspects of schooling, from climate and structure to teachers and the curriculum. Factors within and outside of the school setting impact students' capacity to succeed academically, such as the school's overall structure, both physically and its locality, the management, the role of teachers and their interaction with students, and the school's resources, such as extracurricular activities, student government, and community service opportunities. Each factor shapes students academically and socially to prepare them for postsecondary education. McDonough's (1997) research is an example of the strong impact that highly resourced schools can have on the college enrollment plans of students.

Furthermore, the relationships that students and teachers develop can also influence how students perceive educational pursuits and their enthusiasm for school-related activities. These interactions between teachers and students can either encourage or discourage them from taking academic risks. Teachers not only provide students with academic skills, they also provide support and encouragement that enable students who may be on the fringe of success. This

requires that teachers have a high level of teaching skills including a high degree of confidence and social skills to engender changes in students' academic and social spheres (Duran, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, not all teachers have the necessary skills to provide their students with the confidence and skills to be successful. In addition, this lack of teaching skill is most prevalent in urban school districts, as highlighted by Oakes, Franke, Quartz, and Rogers' (2002) study, which found that urban districts have not been successful in finding well-qualified teachers. The authors state, "Nowhere has the rush to boost supply and de-skill teaching been more acutely felt than in urban schools. Urban students who face the challenges of poverty, immigration, limited capacity of English, and/or racial discrimination have the least access to a qualified teaching force" (p. 228). Sometimes inferior schooling for the neediest student population leads to the lack of educational achievement we see especially among African-American and Latino students. Teachers are critical components not only in motivating students to succeed academically, but also in ensuring that they are making progress toward graduation and college matriculation.

Moreover, urban schools reflect their geographical location. They are located in the poorest sections of a city, where many times education is not valued. This is reflected by the lack of funding schools receive and by the social atmosphere that permeates these areas. Urban schools are extensions of their communities and "are inextricably linked to the communities they serve through social, political, economic and cultural interests…. The community influence on schools often reflects the economic depression of inner cities and the milieu of hopelessness and despair" (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994, p. ix). In their analysis of Boston's school system, Berger, Smith, and Coelen (2004) state "Even more than the national average, segregated minority schools in Metro Boston are also high-poverty schools. Ninety-seven percent of the intensely-

segregated-minority-schools (those over 90 percent minority) have a majority of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch, compared to only one percent of the low-minority schools (those over 90 percent white). Almost one in five black and Latino students attend a school that is both 90 percent or more minority and where over half of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch" (Berger, Smith, & Coelen, 2004, executive summary). As a result, students enrolled in urban schools are also, for the most part, of low economic status, which further compounds the problems that are associated with urban schools and their students. Furthermore, McDonough's (1997) study found that a school's surroundings and available resources influence a student's college choices. Her study showed that wealthy school districts are able to provide students with large amounts of resources to ensure that they receive the necessary information to plan and achieve their goal of attending college. However, many poor families and low-income school districts do not have sufficient resources to provide their students with the necessary information to promote college-going plans and the necessary steps to achieve those plans.

Schools' Impact on Black and Latino Men's College Enrollment

For African-American men, schools prove to be difficult places. As noted earlier, a disproportionately high number of black and Latino male students are enrolled in special education classes. Teachers most often do not support African-American men's educational goals, and many give messages that negatively influence this already high-risk group of students. Ford & Harris (1996) note "for Black students, in particular, educational outcomes and disengagement are influenced by classroom environments, especially student-teacher relations" (p. 1142). Furthermore, Davis (2003) points out, "schools are critical sites for young Black men, as they make meaning of who they are, what they are supposed to do and how others perceive them" (p. 520). African-American men often suffer at the hands of school administrators and

teachers who do not take the time to understand them and may label them unfairly. Successful students, however, attribute their success to teachers who were fair and had high expectations of them (Ford & Harris, 1996; Kao & Tienda, 1998). Thus, input from teachers plays a strong role in the success or failure of students.

In addition, academic tracking, which enables schools to place students of similar abilities together to reap the benefits of differentiated learning, oftentimes classifies students, in particular black boys, in classrooms that do not encourage aspirations for academic success, never mind college. Woodruff (1999) states, "students identified as exhibiting behavioral and/or learning problems in and out of classrooms are typically male, come from low income backgrounds and are disproportionately ethnic minority" (p. 420). Because of the disproportionate numbers of black boys in the lower academic tracks, their future is already jeopardized by the lack of acquired knowledge.

Moreover, the level of influence of schools on the college aspirations and school outcomes of Latinos presents similar results as those for black boys. Latinos experience the same types of treatment that black boys do at the hands of teachers and school administrators. In general, schools do not provide a supportive atmosphere for them. Taylor and Graham (2007) state "there is growing evidence that Latino boys often perceive their relationships with teachers as unsupportive and the school climate as hostile and unfair" (p. 61). Teachers are critical to the success of students. As found in the Alfaro et al. (2006) study, they state "teachers' academic support was significantly and positively related to boys' academic motivation" (p. 285). Teachers can play an influential role in the academic success and college enrollment plans of students. Teachers who are supportive of students and their academic pursuits oftentimes engage and challenge students to achieve academically, as found in the Gandara (1995) study. She

concludes that 60 percent of the Chicano men cited a teacher as having a major impact on setting their educational goals.

Students who are placed in low-level tracks or classrooms that do not engender a high level of achievement do not learn useful skills. Teachers, due to their lack of teaching skills, often exacerbate the problems encountered in these low-level classrooms. In addition, their lack of understanding of students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds further disengages these students from the curriculum (Oakes, 1985). Language also is an important component to consider for Latinos, who may be recent immigrants and are learning to speak English. Moreover, interaction between student and teacher is further strained by the lack of common goals. Duran (1983) states, "adequate high school resources, a hospitable high school social climate, and sensitivity of high school staff to Hispanics' background characteristics may be critical in optimizing Hispanic students' school achievements and preparation for college" (p. 57). Finally, few studies focus specifically on Latinos and schools' influences on their aspirations to college. This highlights the need to understand how successfully enrolled Latinos perceive that their schools impacted their college aspirations and actual college enrollment.

The influence of schools on the college aspirations of black men and Latinos is not clear. Although there are many studies that find schools and, in particular, urban schools exacerbate the difficulties in the educational progression of all black and Latino students, many do not focus solely on black men and Latinos. Many studies find that black and Latino students have higher educational aspirations than white students (Kao & Tienda, 1998), yet these aspirations diminish as students progress through each academic year. Many students, in particular men, are not even graduating from high school. There is a great need to understand what happens in the lives of

black men and Latinos that is different from the experiences of other high-school students and accounts for the low college enrollment of these students.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature as it pertains to the postsecondary decision-making process of black and Latino men is fragmented. The studies discussed above and their findings about the college choice process of this population can be best described as inconclusive and often contradictory from each other. In addition, the representations of black and Latino men and their masculine ideals are found to be in opposition to educational endeavors.

Studies using the college choice model to explain how students make decisions about college and college attendance depict a clear picture of steps most students complete in order to achieve enrollment. The literature concludes that for most students who consider enrolling in a postsecondary institution parents play a key role in the first stage, the predisposition stage of the model, while in the search and choice stages students rely more on other sources such as friends and teachers. Yet, the Hossler et al. (1999) study could not make conclusions about what influences black men's college plans and decisions. Furthermore, Hamrick and Stage's (2004) study of Indiana low-income high-school students concurred with previous studies that found parents to be influential in the college decisions of students. However, the participants in this study were mostly girls, and the lack of a significant number of male participants does not substantiate the findings for this population. The Hurtado et al. (1997) study found that a large number of this population was not completing college applications by the end of the twelfth grade, suggesting that this population does not enroll in postsecondary institutions in the same numbers as white and Asian students. Unfortunately, the Hurtado et al. (1997) study, like many studies that focus on high-school students, did not disaggregate the study's participants by

gender, and therefore we cannot speculate about differences between black and Latino boys and girls.

Family support as a construct of the college choice model carries a variety of activities that define aspects of family support. The Hossler college choice model lists numerous activities that fall under the definition of family support. Many studies have used the college choice model and have adopted concepts and components such as family support. In addition, the definition of family support has been changed and may pose difficulties when assessing the level of influence of one aspect of the model. The level of influence is dependent upon the activities that define family support, and these various activities are not mutually exclusive. In addition, Smith and Fleming's (2006) study contradicts the findings of the Hossler et al. (1999) study suggesting that parents are not involved in the choice stage of the model. Furthermore, the Zarate and Gallimore (2005) study found gender differences in the reason for college enrollment that Latino parents had for their children.

Aspirations or plans for the future are influenced by parents, peers, and schools. Although the levels of influence of parents versus peers are often debated, most studies conclude that parents are more influential than peer influence on the development of the college aspirations of Latinos and signal the same for black men. Yet, seminal studies such as Hubbard (1999) and Tinklin (2003) conclude that even though parents play a role in the college decisions of black men, these students also are influenced by other significant factors such as playing college sports. In addition, the Ford and Harris (1996) study of black student achievement orientation showed that students' performance does not coincide with their achievement ideals. The literature on peers and schools and how they might influence the college aspirations of black men and Latinos is mixed. Peers are said to be supportive as well as unsupportive of educational

goals. Most studies on peer influence conclude that students seek peers who have similar goals and support academic achievement. Schools' level of influence is often mitigated through teachers, and studies find that they play an important role in developing students' college aspirations. However, the literature also contends that black and Latino men often do not have positive experiences in schools and have difficult and tense relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, they are labeled as troublemakers and usually enrolled in special education classes.

Need for Study

Considering the literature presented above, there remain many questions that are still unanswered about how black men and Latinos make college enrollment decisions. The literature often makes conclusions that do not represent this population due to their lack of participation in many studies. In addition, studies that do contain representation from these two minority groups usually do not have a significant number of male participants. The inconsistency of findings in studies related to black and Latino men, in particular the importance of peer influence and the role schools play in developing the college aspirations of black and Latino men, supports the need for my study and its focus on the impact factors may have on the college enrollment of this population. Furthermore, college transition experiences and the meaning that black and Latino men make of these experiences have not been explored.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This is phenomenological study aimed to capture the unique experiences of the research participants. Participants gave voice to their "lived experiences." The first-hand accounts of how the study participants were able to navigate an educational system that at times discounted their educational ability and aspirations highlighted high-school transition issues as well as college enrollment factors. In addition, I wanted to understand how the research participants' perceptions of college aspirations and family support factors helped them attain college enrollment status as well as how they made meaning of the college application/decision process as a consequence of being men of black and/or Latino backgrounds. The goal of phenomenology is to give voice to participants' perceptions, as men of color, of the relative impact of family support (saving for college, college visits, and attending financial aid workshops) and college aspirations (family encouragement, peers, school) factors on their decisions to enroll and their actual college enrollment.

Using qualitative methods, the researcher explored how black men and Latinos made plans to pursue a postsecondary education and whether family support factors, as defined by the Hossler college choice model, and college aspirations factors were important in participants' decision to enroll and actual college enrollment. Currently, the college transition experiences and the meaning that black and Latino men make of these experiences have been missing from the literature. These firsthand reflections will be useful information to guidance counselors, school administrators, university administrators and policy makers to gain insight into how best to serve the needs of this population and ensure their educational success.

Based on the current literature on college choice and aspirations, I used qualitative interviewing to gather data. I interviewed twelve first-year black men and/or Latinos enrolled at a four-year

college or university at the time of the study. This chapter also describes in more detail qualitative research, data collection including the interview process, and participant recruitment and selection, data coding, and analysis.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study for a number of reasons. First, qualitative research as a naturalistic inquiry provides a unique alignment with the particular focus of the study: to understand the perceptions of first-year students that influenced their college enrollment decisions, as a consequence of being men of color. As acknowledged by Maxwell (2004), "the investigation of the interpretive dimension of social phenomena normally requires qualitative methods, which are particularly well suited for elucidating participants' actual perspectives and interpretations" (p. 7). The social phenomenon in the case of this study is black and Latino men's experience of college enrollment. At issue is how the target population perceived the impact of factors supported by the research literature to influence the college decisions of most high-school students. Thus, qualitative research is the best method to examine what factors influence the college enrollment decisions of men of color. A focus on how participants made decisions about postsecondary education options from a gendered point of view is the primary goal of the study.

Second, the focus on understanding how family support and college aspirations factors impact college enrollment forces an examination of a key component of qualitative research, "the lived experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 12). A view from the perspectives of black and Latino men as they make sense of their world allows for a look into their "lived experiences." In addition, the intricate relationship of the family support and college aspirations factors that may have impacted enrollment decisions is also an important component of this study. As part of the

male culture, this population contends with messages not only about being male but also about what men of African-American or Latino backgrounds should be. As such, black and Latino men may deal with a variety of obstacles and challenges to postsecondary enrollment. As previously noted in Chapter Two, the research literature's conclusions on the impact level of family support factors as presented in the college choice model and influences that most impact the college aspirations of black and Latino men are often inconclusive and contradictory.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is described as "knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). In addition, an assumption made under the phenomenological perspective is that individuals' perceived experience has value (Moustakas, 1994). As such, this study seeks to "understand unique individuals and their meanings and interactions with others and their environment" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 726). This study of black and Latino first-year male college students sought to understand their perceptions of the relative impact that certain factors may have had on their college enrollment. Participants recalled their "lived experiences" in relation to how they perceived that college aspirations and family support factors shaped their decisions to go to college, as a consequence of being males of color.

This study highlights two important phenomenological components—perceptions and experiences. It seeks to understand the study's participants' "perceptions" of family support and college aspirations factors as they "experienced" the college decision and enrollment process. Moreover, how these perceptions and experiences manifested themselves in relation to their gender and ethnic/racial categories is central to this phenomenological study. Furthermore, the study sought to describe the research participants' experiences as men of black and Latino

backgrounds, as participants "look[ed] for meanings embedded in common life practices" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.728). I sought to describe the obstacles to college enrollment from black men's and Latinos' perspectives, which can provide important information about how men of color view education and educational pursuits. The recent focus on boys and their lack of educational attainment provided the backdrop to this study. Although, in general, men, regardless of their ethnic background, are graduating high school at lower rates than women, black and Latino men have the lowest college enrollment rates of all recent high-school graduates. At the societal level, this means that this group of men will not progress through the educational and economic ladders as fast as those groups who attain a college education. They are more likely to become a financial drain to society because they will be more likely to become unemployed, need public assistance or be incarcerated. At the core of this study was the question of how these black and Latino men perceived and made meaning of these experiences and how each might have affected their future educational goals.

Finally, this study embraced the critical hermeneutic approach of phenomenology "Because socially accepted worldviews reflect the values of privileged individuals within any given social context, the lived experiences and personal voices of persons who are not members of privileged groups are often discounted" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). At the root of hermeneutic phenomenology was "to make these voices heard" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). Investigating the factors that impact the college enrollment decisions of black men and Latinos, the hermeneutic approach requires the researcher to "critique the historical bases of dominant ideologies and analyze in detail how these ideologies shape and organize the daily lives of study participants" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 731) in order "to bring out the essential components of the lived experiences specific to [this] group of people" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.727).

Furthermore, this approach "captures how meanings influence the choices people make (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729).

This study captured the perspectives of a variety of black and Latino men from different educational and economic backgrounds. As such, their experiences can highlight common issues for this population as well as how they maneuvered as men of color through the educational pipeline and how they made decisions about postsecondary educational options. The research literature overwhelmingly contains reasons why students drop out of high school and do not go to college. These two minority groups have been identified as the highest-risk populations within high school student cohorts. Oftentimes black and Latino men are cited as having the highest drop-out rates and not transitioning to college. As the *Cities in Crisis* (2008) report reveals, black and Hispanic students graduate at 54 percent and 58 percent respectively of high-school students enrolled in the largest fifty cities in the United States. Furthermore, these two populations are often typecast with certain characteristics that overlap with the concept of being a man and at the same time are unique to their racial/ethnic meaning of what it means to be male of African American or Latino descent. The literature review in Chapter Two shows the inconsistencies in many studies' conclusions relative to men of color and the college enrollment process. In addition, studies often have an insufficient number of male participants to be able to draw meaningful results.

This study required that participants reflect on their past educational experiences, most recently (one to two years after high-school graduation) in high-school, to discuss how their decisions of college enrollment were shaped by college aspirationss and family support factors. Furthermore, it emphasized participants' perceptions of college enrollment factors and the connection to their actual college enrollment. This study provided a space for successfully

enrolled men of color to voice their experiences in relation to their college enrollment from a point of view that is seldom heard.

Research Questions

The following are research questions of the study:

- Among family support factors, what do currently enrolled first-year black men and Latinos identify as primary influences to their college enrollment?
- Among college aspirations factors, what do currently enrolled first-year black men and Latinos identify as primary influences to their college enrollment?
- What kinds of influences on college enrollment do black men and Latinos attribute to gender?

Data Collection

Qualitative Interviewing

This study used qualitative interviewing as its tool for data collection. Qualitative interviewing served the purposes of this study because it is "non directive, unstructured, non standardized, and open-ended" (Taylor & Bodgan, 1998, p. 88). A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed and used in order to best engage the participants in a discussion about how they perceived the relative impact of family support (saving for college, college visits, and attending financial aid workshops) and college aspirations (family encouragement, peers, school) factors on their college enrollment as men of color. Using a digital voice recorder, the face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Through the qualitative interviewing, participants reflected on their decision-making experiences around college enrollment decisions as well as aspects of the college application

process, which for most students, occurs during the senior year. Participants were able to express themselves, their thoughts and opinions freely and provided useful data. The open-ended questions were used "to understand the world as would be seen by the respondents" (Patton, 2002, p. 21). Open-ended questions allow for the best possible way to engage participants and provide the best technique for collecting rich data. The use of qualitative procedures stresses the socially constructed nature of reality and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). At the heart of this study are the perceptions, meanings and views of black and Latino men.

Interview Questions

The interview protocol questions reflected the current research literature as presented in the literature review. Questions regarding family support and college aspirations factors were discussed so that students were better able to reflect and elaborate on their views as a consequence of being men of color and on the impact one or more of these perceived factors had on their decision to enroll and their actual college enrollment. Fetterman (1998) states "a retrospective interview provides useful information about the individual. The manner in which individuals shape the past highlights their values and reveals the configuration of their worldviews" (p. 40). More specifically, some of the questions addressed were: Describe how your family influenced you in your decision to enroll in college? What role did your family, friends, school, gender, and/or ethnicity play in your decision to pursue a college education? As a male, what kind of messages did you receive about pursuing a college education? In what specific ways did your family influence your decision to enroll and/or actual college enrollment?

In order to ensure the sound and clear articulation of the interview protocol questions, I conducted two mock interviews with a black man and a Latino, both of whom were enrolled at a

four-year college. The participants both agreed that the questions were clear as to meaning and articulation. In addition, the interviewees answered some questions that provided additional feedback to the researcher about the questions and the type of answer to expect from participants. In addition to the mock interview sessions, six men of color who had also matriculated at a four-year college read the interview questions and gave their first impressions of each question. The majority of the participants agreed that the questions were clear. Some felt that the wording of some questions was unclear and I revised those questions to ensure clarity.

Sampling

Participants

A purposeful criterion sampling strategy was implemented to identify potential first-year college men who self-identified as being of black or Latino ethnic/racial background and who were enrolled at a public or private four-year postsecondary institution. As a phenomenological study, first-year college students were the ideal subjects for my study. As recent high-school graduates (one or two years after high school graduation), their ability to recollect high school and specific high-school experiences such as the college application process are key aspects of this research study. I ensured that they were recent high-school graduates by asking them their year of high-school graduation. However, due to the fact that participants were referred to me by college administrators and faculty, one of the study's participants had recently transferred to the institution and had graduated a year earlier than the rest of the study's participants.

Moreover, the unique focus on black and Latino men and their enrollment status at four-year postsecondary institutions called for a purposeful sample. They are "information-rich" cases because their experiences can enhance our understanding of black and Latino men's college enrollment decision-making process. Participants were interviewed at their enrolled

institution or an agreed upon site that was familiar to them, as Patton (2002) notes, "people are interviewed with open-ended questions in place and conditions that are comfortable and familiar to them" (p. 39).

Colleges' and Universities' Identification and Selection

The researcher identified five institutions that had been chosen based on the following: private or public status, acceptance rates or selectivity, and their feeder locations. In general, the research location contained a large number of diverse postsecondary institutions and provided me with the opportunity to use different types of four-year postsecondary institutions to understand whether or not there were differences among participants who enrolled at highly selective versus moderately selective institutions. In addition, I explored whether students were impacted differently by the type of institution at which they were enrolled, as well as to what extent their decisions to enroll were based on the school's status and their ability to pay. Although socioeconomic status is not a primary focus of this study, I sought to recognize the variety in socioeconomic status that the participants could potentially bring. Finally, the feeder locations of these institutions were known to have concentrations of black and Hispanic families and the high potential to identify participants at these postsecondary institutions was also taken into consideration.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Once the project received Institutional Review Board approval from designated sites, the researcher began to recruit participants by seeking references from faculty and staff who worked at the designated four-year postsecondary institutions. I prepared recruitment flyers (Appendix B) for my contacts to post in high-visibility areas. Recruitment focused on identifying areas within the selected postsecondary institutions where groups of black and Latino men most often

gathered and engaging them about their interest in participating in my study. For example, university departments such as multicultural affairs, which focus on working with students of color and university faculty and staff were contacted to provide access to black and Latino men who might be eligible to participate in the study.

Table # 1

Name	**Age**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**College Type and Enrollment Status**	**High School Type**
JB	19	Black/Latino (Dominican)	Public/FT	Public
Luis	18	Black/Cape Verdean	Public/FT	Public
Nick	18	Black/White	Public/FT	Public
LeBron	18	Black/Haitian	Public/FT	Public
Richard	19	Latino/Puerto Rican	Private/FT	Private
Mr. Parker	19	Black/African American	Private/FT	Public
Dominic	18	Black/African American	Private/FT	Public
Gio	19	Latino/Colombian	Private/FT	Public
Steven	20	Latino/Colombian	Public/FT	Public
Carlos	18	Latino/Puerto Rican	Private/FT	Public
Chris	19	Latino/Puerto Rican	Public/FT	Public
Brandon	18	Black/African American	Private/FT	Public

My research study proposed to interview twenty (20) male participants of color however, I reached saturation at twelve (12). Twelve (12) participants enrolled at four-year public and private colleges and universities in the Northeastern section of the United States were interviewed for my study. Interviews lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. Participants self-identified as black and/or Latino men and first-year, matriculated college students. In regard to the self-identified racial designations, my study uses these terms in their broadest sense and encompasses any subpopulations that fit one of the two categories. For example, the term Latino encompasses a number of subpopulations classified under this term and the term black includes people from Haiti. Therefore, both of these racial designations were

used in their broadest sense. In addition, although racial designation is an important part of this study, being a man is the most salient issue for this study.

Once potential participants met the criteria and were interested in participating, they were then formally asked to participate in the study and its purpose fully disclosed. The informed consent form (Appendices C and D) was presented and outlined the participants' rights including their informed consent, which stated that the participants voluntary participation and agreement to participate was "based on full and open information" (Christians, 2003, p. 217). In addition, the consent outlined the researcher's responsibility and assurance of privacy, confidentiality, and accuracy of data. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to use pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two steps. The first step was to generate themes out of the data. The second step was to analyze the data through a critical theory lens. I read and manually assigned codes to one of the interviews. This exercise provided me with possible ideas for initial codes. I used HyperRESEARCH software program to facilitate organization of the data, assign codes, and generate themes. In addition, it facilitated the comparison of ideas and themes. The data was then broken up into segments to identify patterns or themes. After conducting several interviews, I made notes about the important aspects of each interview. I then carefully read each interview and assigned codes to each line. A total of 27 master codes were generated from the interviews. I then reviewed the interviews with the assigned codes to generate themes and synthesize any codes that were similar. In this review, eleven themes were identified from these overarching themes, and subordinate themes emerged. In the final analysis, five major themes were generated. In addition, memo writing allowed for the opportunity to

reflect and develop meanings out of the data. I also member checked the data to ensure its accuracy.

Critical Theory

Second, the data was analyzed through a critical theory lens in order to gain meaningful insight into how black men and Latinos made decisions about college enrollment. The study also served as a reflective process for participants as they examined the perceived level of impact that family support (attendance at a financial aid workshop, college savings, and college visits) and college aspirations (family encouragement, peers, and school) factors had on their decision-making process. Within the critical theory framework, I analyzed whether these variables carried messages that informed these decisions within the context of power. Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) state:

> [A] social critical theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (p. 436).

Parents, peers and schools are considered social institutions that may or may not promote the construction of masculinity within an ethnic/racial background. Furthermore, in discussing the numerous elements that a "reconceptualized critical theory" embodies, Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) remark, "[O]ur conception of a reconceptualized critical theory is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex ways that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness" (p. 439). From a historical perspective, the issue of race has important implications for this study. Although slavery and overt racism and prejudices are not prevalent, the history of inequality and oppression due to race is not to be ignored and plays a role when

issues of power are discussed. This conception is connected to Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony which is essential to critical theory. Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) write:

> Gramsci understood that dominant power in the 20th century is not always exercised simply by physical force but also through social psychological attempts to win people's consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family and the church (p. 439).

The perceived level of influence of family support and college aspirations factors on the college enrollment decisions of the study's participants are at the core of a critical analysis. For example, family, peers and schools carry ideological messages about what it means to be a man and in particular what it means to be a man of color. What messages did these variables transmit, whether directly or indirectly, about black men and Latinos and the pursuit of a postsecondary education? In looking at maleness from a black or Latino perspective, critical theory examined the role of "what it means to be a man" from the participants' point of view and how this informs decisions about college attendance. Does the power hegemony that is associated with being of the male gender carry over to black and Latino men? In addition, what ideological messages were transmitted about what it means to be a male of black or Latino descent through family support and/or college aspirations factors? Finally, what strategies did participants implement in order to achieve their college enrollment status? These questions are at the core of a critical theory analysis.

In addition to the power hegemony, ideological hegemony connects to the way in which power shapes how people understand their culture and everyday meanings. Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) conclude, "if hegemony is the larger effort of the powerful to win consent of their 'subordinates' then ideological hegemony involves the cultural forms, the meanings, the

rituals, and the representations that produce consent to the status quo and the individuals' particular places within it" (p. 440). Studying how parents, peers, and schools influence college enrollment decisions of black men and Latinos is closely connected to the critical theory of power and ideological hegemony stated above, because messages are carried through these systems that inform and acknowledge the status quo and that often shape how students view their world and the possibilities for them contained therein. Parents, schools, and peers are important "cultural institutions" that transmit messages about how black and Latino male students should behave, socially and academically, as they move through these systems. These factors also affect whether students see themselves as productive members of society and develop high aspirations for the future. Brookfield (2005) states, "[P]ower works in much more subtle ways than previously acknowledged, and it should be understood as a circulation or flow around society rather than as something statistically imposed from above" (p. 45). For black men and Latinos, accepting the status quo confirms "the broadly accepted set of values, beliefs, myths, explanations, and justifications that appears self-evidently true" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 41). For example, African-American men and Latinos in educational settings are often portrayed as uninterested participants and emitting an air of coolness or machismo that conflicts with the pursuit of educational endeavors.

Thus, groups such as peers can exert power over their members, schools over their students, and families over their family members. Critical theory helps "to recognize the play of power in our lives and the ways it is used and abused" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 47). However, Brookfield (2005) also asserts that power is not only negative: [A] sense of possessing power—of having the energy, intelligence, resources, and opportunities to act on the world—is a precondition of intentional social change (p. 47). These participants not only reflected on the

influences that may or may not have impacted their enrollment status, but also I examined, within the critical theory lens, how they used power for their own benefit in achieving their college enrollment goals.

The inequalities that have historically been associated with African Americans, in particular, and to a certain extent with Latinos, call for the use of critical theory to unmask how these groups are affected by today's structure of family support and college aspirationss factors that influenced their college attendance. The focus on gender, in particular on black men and Latinos, provided an opportunity to explore how social institutions may or may not have encouraged them to overcome or accept the ideological portrayals of the black or Latino men that can often lead to self-imposed barriers by accepting the status quo. Critical theory allows the researcher to analyze the dichotomy between groups and institutions such as schools, for example, with a particular focus on "who gains and who loses in specific situations" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 437). Research literature on the college transition and enrollment process for men of African-American and Latino background often times does not provide definitive conclusions about how these students make decisions about college enrollment. In addition, studies often do not have sufficient men of color as participants in order to make strong assertions about this specific group of men (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1998). Furthermore, Hossler et al.'s (1999) study concluded that there was not sufficient evidence about how black men make decisions about college. In focusing on black and Latino men, this study contributes to the literature on how men of color make college enrollment decisions and highlights the factors that impact these decisions. The use of a critical theory lens was appropriate because this study explored whether black and Latino masculinities affect how participants made decisions about postsecondary education and enrollment. Peters, Lanklear and

Olssen (2003) acknowledged that "critical theory incorporates a constructivist dimension not only in that it sees itself as part and parcel of the social reality it seeks to comprehend, but also in that social actors and realities are produced and shaped by historical forces and processes" (p. 4). In addition, issues of race and gender are still very important in today's society. Although there has been progress in these relations within the last forty years, groups such as black men and Latinos continue to be at the bottom of the economic and educational achievement levels. Critical theory, therefore, concerns itself with achieving a "fairer, less alienated and more democratic world" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 14). Black men and Latinos are often more visible in reports of violence, incarceration, and low academic achievement levels. Understanding how college-enrolled men of color were impacted by factors that the research literature has shown to be influential provided a much needed understanding about the experiences of this group and aided in the promotion of greater equity in society. In achieving a fairer democracy, critical issues to black and Latino men must be addressed to ensure their increased progression in the academic and economic life of society. Thus, this research explored a number of issues of race/ethnicity, gender, family support factors and college aspirations factors in order to understand the college enrollment decisions of African American men and Latinos.

Within the definition of critical theory, I analyzed the data collected through individual interviews of black men and Latinos enrolled at public or private four-year institutions to better understand the influences that helped them achieve their college enrollment goals. Moreover, the interpretation of the data under the rubric of critical theory "involves at its most elemental articulation making sense of what has been observed in a way that communicates understanding. Not only is all research merely an act of interpretation, but…perception itself is an act of interpretation" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 443). As such, thick descriptions set the stage

for interpretation. The interpretation and data analysis was grounded in this theoretical perspective to shed light on the dynamics that may be at hand as black and Latino men made decisions about their postsecondary options as a consequence of their masculinity and the structures of school and family in particular that either encouraged or hindered the achievement of their educational goals. In addition, this interpretation took into account the researcher's and subjects' construction in relation to their time and place as well as the assumptions that the researcher brings to the project (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Furthermore, Brookfield (2005) states: "Ideology is the system of ideas and values that reflects and supports the established order and that manifests itself in our everyday actions, decisions, and practices, usually without our being aware of its pressure" (p. 67). The portrayals of black and Latino men as violent and racialized images of inferiority and poverty that has been connected to most people of black and Latino backgrounds are at core of this study. Critical theory was the best methodology to explore and understand participants' paths to achieving college enrollment as they challenged commonly accepted notions.

Limitations

As with most studies, this study has a number of limitations. First, in-depth interviewing requires that the researcher and participant meet for more than one interview. The one-time interview can pose a problem with the data as most researchers caution about the authenticity of the participants information. There may be a lack of trust and participants may not provide insightful information. Second, since I am a female, participants could have restricted their responses or might not have felt comfortable with me in sharing issues of a sensitive nature that may have affected their decision-making process. Third, this study's goal is to present the voices of successfully enrolled male students, and I found it very difficult to find willing participants for

this study. Although I had some personal contact with some university staff and administrators, recruitment of black and Latino men proved more challenging than I had originally thought. I emailed and called contacts at the selected institutions with the hope that they would assist in identifying potential participants. I offered incentives and made myself available at the participants' convenience. In addition to the participant recruitment difficulties, the five selected postsecondary institutions were not equally represented. I visited one institution for the sole purpose of recruiting eligible participants and made a presentation about my study. I then followed up with my contact at that institution, yet this effort did not provide a successful result. As the research timeline neared, I, therefore, relied heavily on two contacts (one at a private and one at a public college), where I recruited most of the participants for this study. Out of the five institutions, there is one with no participant representation, two institutions each have one participant and two institutions each have five participants.

Finally, this study is not generalizable. As a qualitative study focused on the college enrollment decisions of black and Latino men, the study gathered personal experiences that are unique to each individual and influence the way he perceives his world. Therefore, this study is an interpretation of the perceptions of the participants who chose to share their experiences and discuss how they made meaning of these experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from my study of black and Latino men and their perceptions of the relative impact of family support and college aspirations factors on their college enrollment decision-making process. Through one-on-one interviews participants shared their experiences and reflected on the support structures within their families, peers, and schools to achieve college enrollment status. The interviews generated five major themes: (1) high-profile student; (2) parental/family impact; (3) peer impact; (4) school impact; and (5) gender and race impact. The first theme, high-profile student, refers to the high achievements of participants within the academic and/or athletic arena. The second theme, parental/family impact, details the way in which parents and other family members support students through words of encouragement, assistance in their early schooling with homework, and attendance at school events, as well as parents' expectations for their children's educational future. The third theme, peer impact, describes peers' role in supporting or not supporting the educational goals of the participants and those related activities that encourage college enrollment. The fourth theme, school impact, describes how schools and school administrators work to instill ideas of pursuing postsecondary educational endeavors and successfully transition students from high school to college. The last theme, gender and race impact, explains the role of gender and ethnicity/race and their impact on the enrollment decisions of the study's participants.

The major themes have been delineated below and are further detailed by the sub-themes associated with each of the categories. In identifying the five themes, it is worth noting that the study's findings are not mutually exclusive and can potentially overlap. Due to the interdependency of the themes, there are additional ways to organize the data.

High-Profile Student

As stated previously, the major theme of "high-profile student" refers to students' ability to stand out among their peers through high academic achievement or through their athletic prowess. Early in their school careers, participants excelled in one or both of these areas. The "high-profile student" theme encompasses several sub-themes, which include academic ability, athletic ability, and personal motivation.

Academic Ability

The participants of the study all seemed to be "high-profile" students, meaning that they distinguished themselves through academic excellence, athletic ability, or both. Most seemed to have strong academic credentials and achieved and maintained high grades from early on in their academic careers, as noted by participant interviews, which make reference to attaining high academic grades, making the honor roll, and being enrolled in honors-level classes.

Luis's early academic achievements proved to him that achieving high grades is an important indicator of academic ability and planning for his future educational goals. He perceived that maintaining a high academic record would enable him to have more options when applying to college and to be able to compete for acceptance at "good colleges."

> Luis: Grades, I always did well. I always did well in school. I knew that if I kept [my grades] up I'd [be] in a good college.

Luis's comment shows that grades were important to his college career and that he was capable of performing at a high academic level. Lebron's comment, below, also attests to his own differentiation among his friends, as the only one enrolled in honors-level classes and showing an interest in his academic performance. He perceived that his friends were not interested in academic pursuits because of their lack of academic achievements.

> Lebron: Out of my friends, I was the only one that was in all honors classes. Everybody else was not, [they were] just trying to get out but I was, like, the only one trying to [do well].

After attaining low grades during his freshman year in high school and being taken off the basketball team by his dad, Lebron maintained high grades so that he could be able to play. He perceived that this experience demonstrated the important role his parents played in motivating him to do well academically.

Athletic Ability

In addition to having good grades, some participants were athletes who stood out as potential college recruits to their friends, coaches, and even some college scouts. Even though playing sports was a way to be popular, it may have also played a detrimental role in the development of strong academic skills, as stated below by JB and Nick. JB expresses some frustration at the double standard showed to athletes at his high school. Although he may have benefited from this special treatment, he perceived the lack of high academic expectations as a set-up for failure. He further reflected on the current status of some of his teammates, who are not actively playing sports and are involved in negative behavior.

> JB: I think it was because I was being an athlete and being a little more popular. Most people I [think] would be treated differently than other people. If you play a sport, they are not really that demanding with grades, they help you push and slide to get on the team. I don't think they push the kids [academically] on the athletic side.

JB felt that his high school treated athletes differently from other students by allowing athletes to qualify to play sports when they were not meeting the necessary academic requirements. Nick's

case illustrates the special treatment accorded to athletes. Nick accepted his role as the "star athlete" and did not concern himself with the academic demands of a high-school education. As his comment illustrates, he was well aware of his academic performance as "mediocre."

> Nick: Well, I am the star athlete of the group so they knew where I could go. The team, mostly everyone knows I come to school to play basketball so the education is there and they pushed me to play basketball 'cause I am the mediocre [academic performer] of the group, always getting bad grades and stuff.

Academic achievement and grades were second to his sport. Nick strongly perceived that his athletic ability would have him recruited to a Division 1 college or university, where top athletes are enrolled to play on their sports teams. At the same time, peers and school personnel encouraged students, like Nick, with ideas of highly selective postsecondary institutions, often ignoring the development of strong academic skills necessary for acceptance and limiting their college choices.

Personal Motivation

Participants further distinguished themselves through their own personal motivation and defined educational goals that required the attainment of a college degree. Many had a track record of high academic performance and balanced that with sports and even work. Participants' motivation was sparked by a variety of sources including family, socioeconomic status, and the unrealized benefits of a college education. The excerpts below show participants taking charge of their education and committing themselves to strive in the academic arena. This suggests that students understand the connection between high academic performance and college enrollment. In addition, JB understood his unique experience and opportunities available to him. As the son of an immigrant, he was aware of the lack of opportunity available in countries outside of the

United States. This propelled even more his motivation to succeed. He challenged himself early in his educational career to attain high grades and saw the benefits of his hard work by being on the honor roll.

> JB: Since middle school, I [have been] basically working hard, getting my grades up, trying to be on honor roll. And, the message that they [parents] sent me was that even after high school, there is more education that you can get, there [are] more opportunities that are here that you would not get anywhere else.

The combination of his parents' high expectations and being in a country where the "American Dream" can be achieved provided JB with strong beliefs about the benefits of education, especially a college education.

Chris's personal motivation was his father's lack of a college education. He felt pressured by his family to do well in school and pursue a college education. Their high expectations motivated Chris to strive for high academic performance, yet he also wanted to prove that he had the desire to attain a college education.

> Chris: I've always wanted to do better than him [father] and since my family was always on me about education, I always wanted to show that you don't have to be on me 'cause I always felt that it was so pressured but I wanted to do it anyway.

Chris perceived his family's expectations as a challenge to prove that he was committed to his education. He was motivated to prove to them that he was independent enough to achieve his goals of enrolling in a postsecondary institution. In addition, the lack of success among many of his extended family members and cousins close to his own age further assisted Chris in making decisions about his post-high-school plans.

Luis also showed an early commitment to pursuing a college education. His personal motivation was sparked by the prospect of attaining a better life and improved economic status. He was aware of the connection between good academic grades and the postsecondary options available to students who showed high academic achievement.

> Luis: Entering as a freshman, right off the bat, I knew I had to do well so I can do better for myself. I knew that I was going to college no matter what college, but I knew that I was going to college.

His goal was to finish high school and enroll in a postsecondary institution, as he states, "no matter what college." He just wanted to attain a college education and perceived this as the way to improve his economic status. Finally, Lebron's case shows that students are aware that some careers require a college education. This knowledge served as his personal motivator as he strived for high academic performance in high school and ultimately college enrollment.

> Lebron: I always wanted to be a doctor so I knew I had to go to college.

Many of the study's participants were motivated by the attention they received due to their high academic achievements and/or athleticism. In addition, participants felt challenged by the lack of academic achievement within their families. These participants showed a high level of tenacity and commitment to their education and used their academic and/or athletic ability to help them achieve their college enrollment goals. These students were also carrying a heavy burden for their parents who had not gone to college—they were going to college for themselves and for the unfulfilled wishes of their parents. Participants were motivated by parents' high expectations and their role modeling as responsible adults.

Parental Impact

The second major theme is parental impact. Parents' explicit and implicit activities send messages of encouragement and expectations for their children's education beyond high school. Under this theme, the sub-themes also considered are: family encouragement, economic benefits of education, students as role models, and family support factors. In addition, due to the intricate relationship between parents and the activities within the family support component of this study, the findings of whether college savings, college visits, and/or attendance at financial aid workshop impacted college enrollment decisions will also be presented in this section.

These sub-themes show that parents and key family members played a strong and prominent role in the college enrollment decisions of the study's participants. From participants' early educational careers, family members provided an important foundation for the necessity for a college education. Parents served as role models through their tenacity and hard work in providing the basic necessities for their families. Parents were also very active, during elementary- and middle-school years, in helping and checking homework, yet they also provided advice and words of encouragement to their children throughout their education. In addition, there was always one particular parent or family member who took the primary role of "educational advocate," ensuring that their sons were keeping on track of their high-school academic requirements while at the same time allowing them to take added responsibility for the completion of homework assignments.

Family Encouragement

Parents and their words of encouragement to pursue an improved lifestyle are one of the most instrumental factors that influenced the college enrollment of these participants. Participants attributed their educational success to parents and other family members such as

grandmothers and uncles. These figures pushed participants to think beyond the prospect of just attaining a high-school diploma and helped them to attain a college education. This is highlighted by the following comments:

> Lebron: All my life I grew up and I saw how my parents were struggling—always struggling. As soon as my mom went to school for, like, a year, for two years, she did a two [year] nursing program and all of a sudden everything was good [financially]. Like, you know, what I'm saying, she showed me how, how she basically was an example, showing me 'cause she went to school for those two years, she started making more money and showed how [education can improve your life] and my dad always told me that "you are a black kid, all you have is school, if you don't have a degree you're nothing basically."

The desire of Lebron's parents for his college enrollment was supported by his mother's example in her attainment of an associate's degree and his father's continuous advice about the importance of a college education, especially as a black man. His father strongly believed that a college education would provide his son the necessary qualifications to be successful in his desired career. A college degree would certify him as an educated black man, which would differentiate him from many black men who do not have a college education. Moreover, the family's early economic struggles and their subsequent improvement upon his mother's completion of an associate's degree were proof of the advantages a college education can make in one's life. In addition, his father's strong demands in support of his son's pursuit of a college degree played key roles in his college enrollment decision.

Brandon's comments also show the prominent role fathers played in the encouragement of their sons' pursuit of a college education.

> Brandon: Well, my dad probably influenced me the most because he is a small-business owner and also he knew how important college would be because he went to [a two-year] college and he knew that if he wouldn't have gone to college, he wouldn't have been as successful as he is today so he was always, like, forcing me, pushing me like in the beginning of high school to think about college.

Again, Brandon's dad's advice had strong messages about the need for a college education and, more importantly, the need of a college degree as a black man. Brandon's father's own success as a small-business owner was also a concrete example of the advantages of a college education and further confirmed his own decisions about going to college. The fathers' awareness of the plight of most black men spurred their desire for their sons to achieve higher educational levels than they (the fathers) had achieved.

In Richard's case, his mother and the Boys and Girls club provided him with the support he needed to nurture his goals and encourage his success.

> Richard: I will definitely say my mother was a major source in my college enrollment because she always pushed me to go beyond what, whatever was going on around me, be it gangs or things associated with gangs such as drugs and alcohol. My second source of influence was the Boys and Girls Club. Both of those sources really pushed me beyond whatever was going on around me—whether it was drop-outs in grammar [school] or students participating in or associating themselves with negativity and downfalls—that organization and my mother pushed me forward and made sure that I was on the right path.

Living in a low-income neighborhood and witnessing at a young age his peers involved in illicit activities provided the backdrop to his own and his mother's motivation to seek places that

nurtured and encouraged academic excellence and educational pursuit. His mother was very active in ensuring that her son was enrolled in a good high school that would increase his chances of enrolling at a postsecondary institution. These examples strongly suggest that parents and key family members provided both negative and positive role models that motivated them further in their decisions to pursue a college education.

Economic Benefits of Education

As stated previously, Lebron's comments clearly alluded to how his family moved up the socioeconomic ladder upon his mother's completion of an associate's degree in nursing. Parents' encouragement is also associated with strong messages about the close connection between the attainment of a college education and improved economic growth and prosperity. Chris's example of his uncle's economic trajectory confirmed for him that a college education does, in fact, improve one's economic status.

> Chris: The only [person] I've seen was my uncle Mike. From the beginning, I've seen Mike go through his progression to UMass and [get his college degree], and he actually went another two years after UMass to get other diplomas or certificates. I've always viewed that all his accomplishments [like] being the first person to purchase a house out of his whole family [and] owning nice new cars [as an example of the benefits of college.]

Coming from a low-income, single-parent household, Chris notes his uncle's improved economic status due to his completion of a college education. Furthermore, Chris refers to the educational success that has allowed his uncle have financial stability and freedom. His uncle's success is a direct outcome of the advantages of a college education, and he believes that if he follows his uncle's example he can be just as successful.

While, for Chris, his uncle's success affirms his college enrollment decision, Gio's affirmation of the need to pursue a college degree is due to his family members' lack of college educations. As recent immigrants, many members of his family, including his father, held jobs as janitors and dishwashers. These images, which are closely linked with the limited opportunities available without college education, are the catalysts to Gio's decision to pursue education beyond a high-school degree. In addition, a college degree can provide the benefits of attaining a high-paying job and the affordability of life in a high-income neighborhood.

> Gio: They [family] all had jobs like in maintenance or the dining halls, but over time, I realized that if I really wanted to have a well-paying job and live in a nice neighborhood my assumption was that I had to go to college.

Richard's family outings allowed him to see the differences in socioeconomic status from their own neighborhood. His family associated these nicer neighborhoods with residents who were college educated and had financial security. These outings showed a clear contrast of how people with a college education and a higher socioeconomic status lived. These outings provided another motivating factor for Richard's commitment to his higher education goals.

> Richard: They [parents] always took me to places, nicer places outside the community, outside of the neighborhood that would show me that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that getting through that, getting through the hard times would actually lead you to this, whether it's success, money, whatever makes you happy. And it was really, it was really seeing it, first hand that, you know, going outside of where I live with all the negativity around me, that there is something else out there and knowing that there is a way to get there, it just made me want to push harder and get through my struggles.

The participants were impacted by the potential advantages of a college education. They were impacted by examples of family members who had achieved a college education and the benefits they now enjoyed, while other participants were impacted by the lack of achievement and the limited opportunities that it brought to those members of their families. These differences in lifestyles motivated them to make decisions about the type of future they wanted for themselves.

Students as Role Models

Students' success allowed them to become role models either for their immediate families or for their communities or neighborhoods. Participants made themselves available to those who needed help and were active within their communities through community service projects. JB was proud to be a role model to his family members, and even to an older uncle.

> JB: They kinda looked up to me, even my uncle who is older than me, even looked up to me.

JB perceived himself as a role model and took this role very seriously. His greatest recognition of his accomplishment was his uncle's admiration for his commitment to his education and achieving his current college enrollment status. Richard was also motivated to be a role model to his younger siblings and to other students who also came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Richard felt strongly about being a role model and even became a "recruiter" and spoke to students from a similar background about the benefits of attending one of the local private high-schools in the area.

> Richard: I started to become a peer minister and also a full-time staff to help other kids besides my brothers who wanted change and [to] do something different because I made connections with people [who] wanted more students [like myself]. They wanted people who wanted to learn who don't necessarily have the resources

> available to them so I was a liaison between the school and other [private] schools in the area.

Mr. Parker's academic success put him in the spotlight. His achievements were highly celebrated in his community due to the high number of males who were not succeeding and pursuing positive lifestyles.

> Mr. Parker: So being a male at school and a black male at that, I stood out a lot. I am still trying to be successful; most people looked at me like I was going to be the leader. I actually opened up a lot of doors for people in my city so I had to step forward to be successful in college.

Coming from a neighborhood with a high level of black male drop-outs, Mr. Parker felt a strong sense of responsibility to achieve academically. His accomplishments in high school singled him out as a future leader in his community. His example gave community members hope that black men can pursue educational goals beyond high school. As a role model, Mr. Parker's success showed that young black men can choose to pursue educational endeavors and be successful.

Family Support Factors

Under the theme of parental impact, I present the findings of the family support component because parents play a critical role in each of these college-going activities. The college choice literature concludes that parents and what the college choice model calls "family support" play an important role in developing the aspirations of their sons and daughters. For the purposes of this study I have chosen to define family support by the three specific activities, as previously stated: college savings, college visits, and attendance at a financial aid workshop. The participants' parents seemed to strongly support their children's enrollment in college and were able to successfully complete most of the three activities defined within family support.

Many participants' parents were active in the college and financial aid application processes by going on college visits, attending financial aid workshops, and assisting in the completion of the financial aid forms.

College Savings

Participants perceived that their parents desired for them to pursue a postsecondary education whether or not they had a college savings plan. Since most participants did not have a college savings plan, they seemed to depend on financial assistance to help finance their college educations. Many attended financial aid workshops in order to understand the financial aid process and be able to complete the financial aid application. However, participants did not feel that their lack of savings was a deterrent to college enrollment. Finally, some parents had an employment benefit that covered the cost of tuition and their child's college enrollment, thus becoming a type of college savings plan. Gio's comment illustrates the critical role of his mom's employment at a postsecondary institution to his actual college enrollment.

> Gio: We grew up [as] a very poor family, always having just enough for food and shelter. My savings bond was my mom working here; basically you can say she put in her life's work to give me $38,000 each year.

From an early age, Gio's parents strongly desired for him to be the first in their family to pursue a four-year college education, their employment on a college campus allowed this low-income family to plan for their son's academic future. Gio felt a strong responsibility to go to college. Additionally, he felt that he needed to enroll where his mother worked in order to be able to afford his college education and receive the tuition remission benefit. Moreover, it seemed that Gio's college enrollment was a direct result of his parents' employment at a postsecondary institution.

Chris, on the other hand, did not have college savings, but this did not prevent him from pursuing his goal of college enrollment. His participation in a college preparatory program allowed him to get necessary information about the college and financial aid application processes and provided him with further support to reach his goal.

> Chris: My mom had some college funding for me but she actually went through a lot of economic troubles so she ended up not being able to use it on me.

In Carlos's case, his parents' college savings further motivated him to pursue a college education. In addition, Carlos felt that knowing about these savings increased his level of commitment to his education for both his and his parents' sake.

> Carlos: They [parents] did inform me at an early age that, "yes, we do have a college savings for you and we do really see this in your future." I really felt like that also was a big part of me going to school 'cause like as much as I look at me going to school just for me and just suiting my needs it's also because of my parents' hard work in the past and what they have been looking forward to.

Carlos was encouraged by knowing that his parents had a college savings plan for his college education, perceiving that his parents' efforts to save for his college education proved their level of confidence in his academic ability. Moreover, since his parents were both college graduates, it showed that their hard work and achievements enabled them to provide him with this benefit, and he felt that his college education was a shared family goal.

The study's participants did not perceive a lack of savings as a deterrent to their plans for college enrollment. The knowledge of having a savings plan further motivated Carlos in his college enrollment goals, but other participants had alternative strategies to fund their educations, including athletic scholarships and tuition remission benefits of parents' employment. This

suggests that although participants may not have had a college savings plan, they and their parents were aware of the costs of a college education and some had alternative ways of ensuring that they could afford to pay for their child's education.

College Visits

College visits served different purposes for the study's participants. All of the participants visited at least one college with one or both parents. College visits helped participants to envision themselves as college students on the campus, as well as allowing them the opportunity to talk to currently enrolled students about their academic and social experiences, and it helped some students make decisions about where they were actually going to enroll. In addition, college visits seemed to help participants' parents, as it helped calm fears about college life and living away from home. Carlos's college visits reaffirmed for him his decision to enroll at a four-year postsecondary institution. He was able to visualize himself on these campuses. For Carlos, the concrete experience of being on the college campus became even more important than his parents' influence on his college enrollment decision.

> Carlos: Yes, we did. We were resourceful enough to visit all the schools I was applying to; I really feel that the schools I picked out [were] reflective of what I saw, what people had told me, what my parents had seen. The second I went on those tours, I wanted to get into these schools and attend these places. I mean some of the campuses I saw just dropped my jaw and I just felt like I really [could] see myself there and I [could] see myself being happy and it was so new and breathtaking and I really could enjoy it. The family influence can only take you so far but the second you see what you are striving for that's a big part.

Carlos had a distinct advantage from most of the study's participants. Both of his parents were college graduates, and he attended an upper-income high school with a strong focus on its college preparatory program. Yet these advantages did not replace the experiences that Carlos had once he visited the college campuses. Carlos perceived that the college visits further solidified his plans of college enrollment by helping him make a personal connection with the colleges. In addition, JB's college visits helped him to evaluate colleges based on the experiences of enrolled students.

> JB: I think it helped [mom] seeing the atmosphere. My mom is a worry wart [and the college visit] helped [be at] ease so it was good for her to know where I would be. I went during the academic year [and] I was able to get people's opinion about the school. [I was able to see] people going to the cafeteria. I met a lot of people. I liked the environment.

JB's college visits provided him with an insider's view. In addition, he perceived that they helped calm his mother's concerns about the college experience and living on campus. Generally college visits played different roles for the study's participants, although the visits seemed to have a relatively small degree of impact on the participants' college enrollment decisions.

Financial Aid Workshop

Most of the participants and/or their parents attended financial aid workshops provided at their high schools or during college visits. This process was important to their college enrollment because parents and students wanted to ensure receipt of the most financial aid and scholarships available. However, the prominent issue in funding a college education was

whether students would receive an adequate amount of aid. Even for those with alternative plans of savings for a college education, affordability was an important issue in actual enrollment.

Although Richard was strongly committed to attending a postsecondary institution, his enrollment was heavily dependent on the amount of financial aid that he would receive, and he was concerned about the amount of debt he would incur by the end of his college career. Richard's example shows that some students make actual college enrollment decisions based on the amount of financial aid they receive and their ability to pay.

> Richard: Actually, yes. Financial aid played a pivotal role on where I attended. In fact, I didn't think I was going to YC even if I got in, because I didn't think I'd get the [award] I needed to attend the college. And I stressed in all of my interviews with the colleges that in order to for me to attend [that particular school] I need a really hefty financial aid package. I couldn't just take those hefty loans, hefty amounts of loans; I mean, how was I going to pay them back? So, it really came down to which school gave me the most [aid], and it really came down to HU and YC; they both gave me almost all the tuition paid.

Once participants were accepted, critical decisions regarding costs and affordability heavily influenced where students actually enrolled. Actual college enrollment decisions also impacted participants by concerns of future debt, and high tuition costs, for some participants, shifted their original college application choices. In addition, Carlos's example shows that even as his family prepared to cover some of the cost of his college education, affordability was a critical component of his actual college enrollment decision.

> Carlos: There were some schools that when making the final decision, that enrollment and college tuition would go hand in hand. Even though I do feel that

> we still made the right decision for me and what I wanted, there was still that time I really had to sit down and speak with my parents [about] what would be the best for me and for them financially and personally.

Although Carlos' parents did have a college savings plan, they still had to consider the costs associated with his college enrollment at the various postsecondary institutions where he had been accepted and how much they were actually able to afford. Even for those who did plan to pay a sizeable amount for college, final college enrollment decisions were made based on affordability. Chris's example also shows how participants narrow their postsecondary choices based on affordability and the amount of financial aid offered.

> Chris: I thought about it [cost] more when I was picking the college. I am going to college but I want to make sure that [if] I am going to a college that I am going to get a good education and not be in debt. I mean everyone's going to be in debt but not as much debt as other people. And I feel that college is college.

Financing a college education is an important issue for both students and parents, and it impacts the type of postsecondary institutions students consider.

> Chris continues: I applied to six [colleges]; after a while I didn't want to go to a private college, for some reason, I think it was more of money, but through MCAS, I got a scholarship so I had to go to a state school and I figured I might as well use that scholarship and, you know, everything is a college, private or public. I am not losing out on anything and take advantage of free tuition. I mainly looked at state colleges and public colleges.

Chris felt that he would be successful no matter what type of institution he graduated from and did not want to carry a heavy student loan burden once he graduated.

These findings demonstrate that parents and family members highly impacted participants' college enrollment decisions. These findings corroborate the conclusions of most studies, which highlight parents' role in the college decisions of their children (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Kao & Tienda, 1998). The primary impacts that families provided were high academic expectations and encouragement that motivated their sons to perform well academically and instilled ideas about the benefits of a postsecondary education. These findings support the conclusions of Ford and Harris (1996) and Zarate and Gallimore (2005) regarding the influence of achievement orientations and parents' expectations. Parents were active in having discussions about the importance of education, participating in students' educational activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences and volunteering at schools, and most importantly, emphasizing the opportunities that a college education makes available. Although parents had high expectations, students became more independent from their parents as they progressed in high-school and were more responsible for their school work and school life. Participants took it upon themselves to ensure that they maintained high academic grades, as highlighted by JB's comment: "Bringing home a good report card, it kinda made my mom happy." In addition, many in the sample were first-generation college students, and therefore their college attendance was a more significant achievement as their college enrollment set new family traditions that included the pursuit of a college education.

Furthermore, family support activities had varying degrees of impact on these participants' college enrollment decisions. Lack of college savings did not seem to negatively influence students' decisions about college enrollment. Some participants had other means to pay for college including their parents' tuition remission benefits and scholarships. College visits solidified many of the participants' plans for college matriculation. They used the college

visits to envision themselves on the campus and explore the different aspects of the campus. Finally, attendance at a financial aid workshop did not seem to influence students' decisions; most felt that it was part of the financial aid process and did not affect their decisions to enroll. However, when considering actual enrollment, participants were highly impacted by the costs and affordability of the institution. The amount of financial aid received impacted some of the participants' college choices and, importantly, where they actually enrolled. Due to the financial implications of the college enrollment process, this study suggests that parents play a role in the decisions made about actual college enrollment. This study corroborates Smith and Fleming's (2006) finding that parents play a role in the choice stage of the college choice model, but it contradicts the findings in the Hossler et al. (1999) study.

Peer Impact

The theme of peer impact describes peers' role in supporting (or not) the college enrollment goals of the study's participants. Under this theme, sub-themes that will also be presented are: resistance to negative behaviors and sports as a way of fitting in at school. Participants did not perceive that peers and friendship groups negatively influenced their decisions to pursue a college education. Some participants felt that their peer groups showed neutrality or some level of support for their goals. Most participants perceived a high level of support from peers who had similar goals of going to college and maintaining a high academic performance. In addition, a number of the study's participants were athletes, and they and their peers sought college enrollment for the specific purpose of playing college sports and supported one another in this common goal. Peers also influenced these participants to reject negative behaviors. Participants did not want to be involved in the negative activities that they witnessed either within their own families or in their neighborhoods. Friends who were involved in illicit

activities and did not value school were relegated to distant relationships once these students made the decisions about their college enrollment. Participants made conscious decisions about whom they wanted to associate with and have as friends. Luis's comment demonstrates the choices he made about his groups of peers.

> Luis: Some of my friends did influence me to go to college and some didn't [influence me]. Some kinda fell off and stopped going to school, stopped going to class and started doing other things and I just kinda cut them off, I didn't chill with them no more. And so the friends that I still have they all are in college and they're doing their thing trying to make it better for themselves. All of my friends had the same goal of going to college. You know, experiencing the college life so we all had the same set of mind, I guess, same point of view.

Brandon, too, made decisions about what type of people he wanted to be associated with. Many of the peers he had previously associated with did not value their education and just wanted to play ball.

> Brandon: At the beginning of high school, I played football, so a lot of the kids I was around, they weren't as motivated as I was. I mean, I had one best friend in high school that was really motivated, really wanted to go to college. Besides that, a lot of the kids that [I] hung out [with] in the beginning in high school, they weren't as motivated as I was, school was not their first priority, they'd rather just hang out, play sports. As high school went along I started hanging out with different people; I decided that if I wanted to be, if I wanted to have the right influence around me then I should hang around with the right kind of people. So,

> my junior year, I started, you know, to meet new people, you know, find people which I could surround myself and just as motivated as I was.

Brandon's example shows that by junior year he wanted a different set of friends—ones who were interested in academic endeavors. Participants' choice of friendship groups suggests that parental influence has far-reaching effects. In Brandon's case, his parents' early work in instilling a high value for educational pursuits and providing him with a structure to ensure he completed his homework assignments helped Brandon as he grew older to develop his ability to critically assess the lack of achievement among his athlete friends. In addition, this also helped participants of this study to make sound judgments about their peers and the influence they may or may not have on participants' actions.

Mr. Parker's experience also shows the conscious choices made around peers and friendship groups. The transfer to a new high school allowed Mr. Parker the opportunity to be more discriminating about with whom he chose to spend time at school, taking into consideration their educational and life goals.

> Mr. Parker: Once I started high school, I started selecting my friends who had their goals right who wanted to go to a four-year college and actually pursue a degree. The friends that I hung with were friends that you know actually had goals in life and actually wanted to come back and help the community.

Finally, the example of Chris shows that he wanted to stimulate his academic curiosity and be around peers who were intellectually curious and high achievers. Like many in the sample, Chris also maintained his friendships with students who did not have the same goals as he did, but these relationships were often kept at a distance.

> Chris: I would try to get around people that were more studious and closer to what I was trying to do because I did not want any roadblocks. You know, I made a lot of friends. I was still cool with everyone around me, no matter what they did (if they did bad things or if they got straight A's or whatever); I just, I just was all-around but I didn't let anything block what I was trying to do.

Although the above examples show participants making choices about their peer groups, some did experience taunting from their peers because they were not participating in the same types of activities, but, rather, were pursuing loftier goals. Richard's perceptions of his peers contained a high level of stress and peer pressure. His peers, from a young age, exhibited a disdain for education and mocked Richard's decision to enroll in a private high school in order to fulfill his goal of college enrollment.

> Richard: Well, the thing is I was very, very self-conscious to talk to them about anything to do with the fact of something they don't want [to hear about]. There was a lot of peer pressure, a lot of peer pressure and, you know, you always find yourself talking about stuff they want to hear. They manipulated you in a way that you would do anything to be their friends, and just to seem cool, you feel like you're in the crowd. When the cat came out of the bag that I was going to a private high school, everyone was, like, "Oh, you are not coming to Eastie high school?" [I said], "No, I am not going to public high school. I am going to try something better." It was at that point when they made fun of me, stopped talking to me.

Richard's mixed Hispanic and white ethnicity also caused problems with his peers. Since most of his peers were Latinos, they taunted him for not acting "Latino" but also for aspiring to attend

a private high school and ultimately pursue a college education. Peers in his low-income neighborhood often did not pursue education beyond a high-school degree. Once Richard enrolled in the college preparatory high school, his peer group automatically changed and all had similar goals of going to college and achieving professional careers. Mr. Parker also experienced some alienation from his peers. However, unlike Richard, he was able to overcome his peers' teasing because he shared other common interests such as playing basketball. In addition, their common race and gender allowed Mr. Parker and his peers to empathize and build a relationship based on their commonality as black men.

> Mr. Parker: At first, [the kids at school said], "He is going to college, he doesn't want to hang with us, he thinks he is better than us." Then, they started accepting me more because I was a black male, even though I am going to college and doing something different from them.

His neighborhood peers also showed little support at first for his goal of pursuing a college education.

> Mr. Parker: Well, they, at first they [kids in neighborhood] didn't know, they reacted and asked why I didn't hang outside. You know, hanging out with them or hanging out in the yard. And I explained to them that I was studying because I want to go to a four-year university. Once they took that knowledge in, they were like, "He knows what he needs to do." They respected what I was doing, they went their way and I went my way, but we always looked out for each other.

His non-participation in the typical activities that his school and neighborhood peers engaged in made his peers reserved in their interactions with Mr. Parker. However, they were able to come to respect him for his commitment to his education and his future, as well as find a common

bond as black men. The choices these participants made regarding their peers were impacted by the peers' lack of interest in educational goals. In addition, participants of this study began to critically evaluate the type of peers they wanted to have around them.

Resistance to Negative Behaviors

Participants' current enrollment in a four-year postsecondary institution already attests to their strong commitment and determination to pursue a college education. Furthermore, during those uncertain high-school years, participants made decisions about their friends and peer groups and the behaviors that they would and would not engage in. This was especially difficult for some participants, whose older siblings were the ones behaving negatively. On discussing his older brother's dropping out of high school, JB comments:

> JB: It, it just made me realize that umm, you know it's, I **don't** wanna be in that situation—I don't wanna run into the wall like he ran into—so, I think, I think it made me work harder, for my parents 'cause they did not go to college.

JB confirmed his educational commitment because he saw, through his brother's experience, the very limited opportunities that were available without a high-school education. In addition, it confirmed his parents' emphasis on educational achievement.

Some participants had difficulties maintaining peer relationships due to the differences in academic, career, and life goals. In addition, participants reflected on the lack of progress of their peers or family members and rejected their negative behaviors. For example, the lack of educational and personal progress among some of Chris's family members provided him with clear images of limited personal and professional advancement and served to motivate him to excel.

> Chris: I look [at] my cousins [who] are around my age and, a lot of them, were doing bad things and weren't doing what everyone else thought they should be doing, and that also pushed me because I didn't want to fall into that type of category where kids were having kids and people were doing bad things and going to jail. I wanted to distance myself from that as far as possible and I felt that if I kept to my own and what I wanted to do, I wouldn't fall into that [situation]. That was a lot of influence on myself from the things that I viewed from other people that I grew up with.

For Gio, his cousin's bleak future proves that his decision to enroll in a four-year postsecondary institution is the path that will ultimately provide him with a future full of opportunities and improved economic status.

> Gio: We [his cousin and himself] had the same kind of childhood, but he grew up so differently because I'm going to one of the best colleges in the world, getting a four-year degree, and he, already he has a daughter and he is only 19, no job. I think that that's what people think of Latinos growing up in Boston 'cause, like, it's just like, I don't know, expectations; he could be in college, [but] he will end up taking a double-shift job.

His cousin's current status as an unemployed father impacts Gio further and proves that his decision to enroll will provide him with a stable future. In addition, as the first in his family to go to college, Gio represents all the hopes and sacrifices of his parents and other family members that provided him with the opportunity to pursue a college education. In evaluating his cousin's circumstance, Gio is saddened by the loss of opportunity when both benefitted from strong family support.

Brandon also compares his current life and the opportunities it presents with the lives of his peers who did not pursue a college education. This lack of opportunity experienced by some of his peers motivates Brandon to pursue his educational goals.

> Brandon: Yeah, I felt that especially for myself…motivation; I looked at other things that I could be doing if I didn't go to college and, like I would see a lot of kids I used to hang out with doing the wrong things…doing stuff that I would not even want to catch myself doing like…[I ask myself] like do I want to end up like this or do I want to end up like that? So I mean I use my past experiences to motivate me so if I don't go to college life is going to be a lot harder for me.

The opportunities that a college education can bring are stimuli for many of the participants. They reject the negative behaviors and activities that their peer groups, oftentimes including family members, are involved in. Parents' support for a better life and lifestyle fueled participants' own desire to achieve and attain a college education. In addition, parents' strong demands that their sons not fall into the common stereotypes of the unproductive, unaccomplished black or Latino man, along with strong support for their educational goals, were vividly apparent in the choices participants made about their peer groups.

School Sports as a Way to Fit In

Sports played a large role in the lives of many of the study's participants. Some made decisions based on goals of becoming professional sports players, and playing at the college level was the next step in achieving their goals. However, playing sports was also a strategy for fitting into school. Some students were able to maintain high grades and also play a sport. In addition, sports provided a level of popularity for some of the participants. JB felt that because

he was an athlete, he was treated differently from other students and that he benefited from his popularity.

> JB: I think it was because I was being an athlete and being a little more popular. Most people I [think] would be treated differently than other people.

JB alludes to the fact that his friends did not treat him differently because he wanted to get a college education. However, he felt that if he were of another race or ethnic group, he might be teased or treated differently by his peer group. In addition, Brandon perceived that his involvement in sports allowed him to fit into his school. Sports provided the space for him to feel that he was a part of his large high school, as his comment illustrates.

> Brandon: I did as many sports as I could; freshman year, I played football and then I played lacrosse; and I met a lot of kids doing that. Sophomore year came along, and I [did] football, I did volleyball…I really didn't do a lot of academic stuff but I definitely try to use sports as a way to feel comfortable in the school.

Peers did have some level of influence on participants' college enrollment decisions. In particular, peers acted as support groups to achieve a common goal as well as deterrents to negative behaviors. The study's participants showed strong convictions about their educational decisions and did not lose sight of their goal of attaining a college education even when close siblings were rejecting educational endeavors and the benefits of a successful future. Participants did not want to be associated with negative behaviors to which some friends and family members had been drawn and which signaled a bleak and unpromising future. These convictions about their educational future were influenced by participants' parental support. Parents' continual support and encouragement for participants' educational endeavors, including playing sports, helped them develop a strong commitment to their education. In addition, they

were selective about the types of peers they wanted within their close-knit circle of friends. The selectivity that these participants developed in choosing their peer groups suggests the effects of their parents' influence as they encouraged their children to develop positive life choices.

School Impact

The theme of school impact refers to the work that schools, and school administrators in particular, do to instill ideas of the benefits of a college education and to successfully transition students from high school to college. The sub-theme of college sports is also presented.

Teachers played a pivotal role in helping students attain high academic skills and encouraged many to pursue a college education. For example, one former teacher played a critical role in a participant's college application process as she helped him plan and implement a college visitation tour. Schools also encouraged students to pursue postsecondary education including enrollment at a two-year postsecondary institution. Overall, participants perceived that schools were supportive of all students' goals of enrolling in a postsecondary institution. Like parents, most school personnel referenced the economic and career benefits of a college degree. Within the school setting, teachers and coaches (for athletes) were found to be most influential in helping participants make decisions about college and actual college enrollment. Teachers' support of educational pursuits mirrored that of parents, and participants easily embraced their help in order to achieve their goals. JB's comment illustrates the messages that his school was sending to students during assemblies. Schools invested time to promote the benefits of a postsecondary education and to explain the limited career options that students would have without a college education.

> JB: They kinda made it seem like it was required, everybody should do it, and I mean, if you don't do it then you basically, you not going get anywhere; that's how they made it seem by like the big assemblies they had.

Lebron perceived that his school and the school personnel really cared for him and his education. He felt that teachers and guidance counselors provided him with a high level of support and helped him achieve his college enrollment. He felt that everyone was working to help him achieve his educational goals.

> Lebron: Every single person that I got in contact with like my teacher, my principal, my coach, they all made sure, you know, they influenced and made sure that I got into college. My counselors, they [helped me with] everything I had to get done for school, my SAT's, my financial aid. My teachers, they all helped me especially because I was trying to get into nursing and they always helped me, like what types of books to read and stuff, like my sophomore English teacher, I remember she always helped me.

Mr. Parker's experience also shows the impact of teachers in encouraging and helping students achieve college enrollment status.

> Mr. Parker: Well, the teachers that really cared for us would tell us that even if you get an A, you need to study harder because there is always someone else working twice as hard, trying to pursue the same goals as you.

Teachers also motivated students by challenging them not to be satisfied with their academic performance and to continue to strive for higher academic excellence. Teachers showed students that they cared by pushing them to excel even higher than they were currently performing. In

Chris's case, teachers were instrumental as they kept him motivated by their teaching style, the topics covered, and the prospect of learning something new and interesting.

> Chris: There are certain teachers, in every year that I went, that actually encouraged me. They helped me; they just made me feel like going to school was not a waste of time, which a lot of high schoolers feel that high school is a waste of time so why would they even go to college? So considering that I wanted to go to school and wanting to go to college, it just made it easier.

The relationships that Chris developed with some of his teachers encouraged his enthusiasm for learning and provided him with other examples of successful college graduates. These relationships encouraged his pursuit of a college education. Carlos' experience in a suburban, predominantly white high school also shows the strong roles teachers play in students' college-going decisions. He perceived an overwhelming amount of support from not only teachers but also administrators and guidance counselors. His school environment, unlike urban high school environments, focused on ensuring that all students are prepared to go to college. All aspects of schooling were related to attaining a college education.

> Carlos: From the beginning, they feel that no matter what, whether it's extra help, programs or just student activities, the different classes, courses, stuff like that, they collectively, they really feel that college is the next step. Of course, that's provided because of a successful town and a successful atmosphere, but anybody who was a part of that community in high school, the support was overwhelming. The administration, the teachers, my guidance counselors, really, my teachers, I have to give full credit just because I could talk to them about anything and they

> provided us with any answers we ever needed, whether it was college or life after high school.

The above comments show the important role that teachers play in influencing their students to consider education beyond high school. Participants were encouraged by the relationships that they developed with teachers, while others were influenced by the interest that teachers took in them. These relationships showed students the successful outcomes of a college educated person. Although some parents may not have had an understanding of the college application process, their efforts at home in instilling a high academic standard worked in conjunction with the efforts teachers and schools were making as they developed the academic skills of their students and provided needed resources and information about postsecondary education and the application process.

College Sports

Many of the participants were high-school athletes who were singled out by coaches because of their athletic ability. College enrollment was a means to achieve their goal of playing professional-level sports. In particular, two of the participants chose to go to college in order to play college sports and be drafted into the professional league of their sport. Parents also supported their athletic dreams of playing at the professional level. For some of the participants, playing at the Division 1 level college sports was the stepping stone that would lead to a future of playing professional sports. Thus, their decisions about college enrollment were clearly based on achieving a future goal in the professional sports arena. This is shown by Dominic's comment.

> Dominic: Well, my family, my mother always wanted me to go to college and my brother did too, but mainly to play football and go to the next level and play professional football for the NFL, so that was the main focus.

Dominic's purpose for a college education is to be drafted into the National Football League like his older brother has been. His college enrollment was based solely on the strength of the college sports program that the particular colleges had and their potential to develop him as a player. In Nick's case, his coach played a key role in his college enrollment.

> Nick: Honestly, I think it was my high-school basketball coach 'cause I play basketball here so I didn't really have that good of grades in high school but, so I wasn't thinking about college much. But my family, my mom was telling me to go to college and play basketball, you know. My coach ended up talking to the financial office and he actually was the one who actually got me in here so if it weren't for him, so he is the one that inspired me to go to school.

His coach played an instrumental role in Nick's college enrollment decision and process. Nick is strongly committed to his sport and sees this as a stepping stone to being drafted into the professional sport circuit. LeBron's comment illustrates the influence that friends and coaches in particular have with respect to students' college enrollment decisions.

> Lebron: Well, some of my friends, some of my friends, all of my friends, they all pushed me to go because they all wanted me to play basketball in college; ever since freshman year they all, my coach and my friends would tell me how I could be a Division 1 basketball player.

Steven's experience also shows the role that coaches play in participants' college enrollment. Steven perceived that his coaches were the only ones who showed a level of support to student-athletes who wanted to pursue a college education. They provided these students with the necessary information they needed about the college application process. However, it seems that coaches' role as "college advisors" was interrelated with students' recruitment to play in college.

In addition, Steven perceived that his guidance counselor did not provide him with the necessary support he needed to make a successful transition to college. Interestingly, this suggests that guidance counselors are not always involved in the college decisions and ultimate enrollment of student athletes.

> Steven: Actually the only way that you heard about college was when your coach talked about college. If you wanted to go to college, you have to perform at this level and this level, so really like, I heard more about college when I was playing sports.

While some participants saw sports as a way to college enrollment, other high-school athletes, such as Brandon and JB, rejected their opportunities to play college sports. They wanted to go to college purely for its educational benefits and did not want to be distracted by the demands of playing sports. They wanted to be able to devote most of their time to their academic responsibilities. JB's comment highlights how athletes are influenced in their college enrollment decisions by the prospect of playing at highly competitive colleges and universities.

> JB: The people who I usually hang with are athletes; I played basketball in high school, so those were basically my friends. And umm, you know, like during the basketball season, we'd always be together. And when I was with them, it wasn't really like, they wouldn't like talk about school or anything. Most of them didn't even think about going college, and if it wasn't for basketball, they probably would not be in college.

JB's comments support one of the findings that many athletes use sports as the only reason for college enrollment—athletics and college enrollment go hand in hand. Brandon also did not want to jeopardize his academic career by the demands of playing a college-level sport.

> Brandon: Yeah, my volleyball coach, she would ask me if I would possibly like to play college volleyball. I knew that college sports was not something that I wanted to do because it's a big commitment and I don't know if I'd be able to balance both, but she was definitely one of the top influences in my college application process because she motivated me a lot through sports.

Although heavily involved in sports, Brandon did not see his college enrollment to be dependent upon his athleticism. He did not want to play college sports because he felt it was too much of a commitment that could potentially pull him away from his academic work. However, sports also provided participants with a strong sense of accomplishment and drive for achievement.

Coaches play a strong role in influencing their players in their decisions to enroll in postsecondary institutions. As JB stated, many of his former high-school teammates enrolled in college in order to play sports. However, there is a need to examine the likelihood of success, for example, in athletes' academic preparation and ability to do college-level work and meet the responsibilities of being on a college athletic team.

Overall, most participants perceived that their teachers and coaches, along with parents, impacted their college enrollment. The support of both teachers and coaches for participants' educational goals was also supported by their parents' high academic expectations. Teachers' support was an important component that instilled students with confidence and the drive to attain the necessary skills to successfully complete high school and pursue a college education. Additionally, coaches also influenced athletes in their decisions to pursue a college education and use their experiences in college sports as their foundation to play in professional sports leagues.

However, upon contacting one of the study's participants for member checking, he commented that although his high school was very supportive and provided him with the necessary tools to enroll in college, he felt that they did not prepare him enough academically to do the high-level college work that he since has found is required at his current institution. This is especially true in the concerns expressed by JB and the lack of attention athletes receive in the development of their academic skills. This concern points to some of the problems highlighted in the literature review regarding the inferior education that students receive at urban or low-resourced schools, which can lead to a lack of high level academic preparation, in contrast to the experiences of students in suburban and high-resourced schools.

Gender and Ethnicity/Racial Impact

Gender in College Enrollment

The study's participants perceived that their gender was a strong factor in their college enrollment decisions. Some participants felt that they were debunking commonly accepted beliefs about men of color and references about men's underachievement in education. These representations seemed to further motivate students' decisions about their college enrollment and their academic success. In addition, participants seemed to be motivated by the negative representations commonly associated with black and Latino men. Participants had mixed perceptions of parental and peer support based on their gender. Furthermore, it became even more difficult to differentiate between being a man specifically and their ethnic/racial background. Latino participants, in particular, felt strongly that they needed to prepare and acquire necessary skills to fulfill a man's responsibilities as a provider and protector of his family. Participants were motivated by their own fathers' examples and societal images of men's irresponsible behaviors. Gio's comment highlights the new level of responsibility he felt

after his parents' divorce. He felt from a young age that he needed to fill the role of "the man of the house."

> Gio: My dad was always working. I knew that I always had to work. I grew up with that expectation that the man always had to work. When they divorced, when my dad left, [he said], "You are now the man of the house." I always took that to heart; I tried, I always tried helping around 'cause of the expectations [that] in order to do good, I expected that I needed to go to college and get a four-year degree.

Richard also perceived his father's absence as a call to be "the man of the house," as his dad worked many double-shift job opportunities so that he could provide his family with their basic necessities. This example was a vivid reminder to Richard of the sacrifices his father had to continually make in order to make ends meet. It also reinforced his decision to pursue a college education so that he would be able to have a better future both financially and personally. The role modeling, in particular, played by fathers, showed through their strong work ethics and their responsibilities to their families. These images strongly impacted participants' decisions about college enrollment and the future benefits that it provides.

> Richard: I felt that my father was never around because he was always working. I was kinda the man of the house because he was never really home because he had to work so many hours because he had to make sure the family had enough income coming in to pay the bills. So I felt that being a male figure in my house, where it was really dominated by younger children and women, I needed to step up and take charge.

Richard, like Gio, felt that since his father was not at home he needed to ensure that there was a male figure who could fill his father's place while he was at work. Personal experiences and examples of their fathers' high work ethics to provide for their families influenced Richard's and Gio's decisions about their college enrollment. Steven's comment also illustrates the sense of responsibility that comes from being "the man of the house." He perceived that being a man required that he be the provider and protector of his family. In addition, he felt that it is the man's responsibility to work and bring home the money in order to support his family, the example his father provided at home.

> Steven: I think because I am a man and the first [child], 'cause there is a lot of girls in my family, to feel like a man you have to strive for, you gotta be strong like, and if you want to make that money, you gotta go to college; that's what they say and like, you have to support your family. Making more money, that [is the] way to be a man; you got to show that you are strong and that you are not a quitter. Say, for example, [if I weren't in school my] mom would be like, she would probably be mad at me but at the same time she'd be like you're a man, you have to find a job and you have to work.

This image of the man as the provider and protector of his family is a common white middle-class definition and shows that these participants also defined their role as men in the same way.

In addition, participants were motivated by the common representations of men of color's lack of success. Coming from a small town where there was an obvious absence of black men striving for positive accomplishments, Mr. Parker perceived that his academic success was directly tied to his gender and race. He perceived that the attention he received had to do with

the fact that he is a black man and he was doing something that was not typical of most of the black men in his community.

Mr. Parker: So being a male at school and a black male at that, I stood out a lot.

In addition, Chris' motivation to pursue a college degree was influenced by examples of men's plight in society, in particular, men within the Latino community and his own family.

> Chris: Well, right now, [in] society overall, men are looked at bad. They are looked at [as] having kids young, you know, especially Latinos, having kids young and not being able to support [their] family, guys paying child support and stuff like that. I looked at my cousins who are guys and they didn't do the right thing and growing up in the city, there [are] a lot of guys that are not doing the right thing. So I've always felt that, I mean, I don't want to fall in that category and I wanted to push myself more, so that was a big motivation but a lot has to do with me wanting to better myself for my future, my career and for my family.

Chris is influenced by the societal images that are commonly associated with men of color, and Latino men specifically. The constant reminders of statistics highlighting the demise of young black and Latino men influenced many of the study's participants to pursue educational goals in order to challenge these negative representations. In addition, they wanted to be positive role models for their gender and their ethnic and racial backgrounds.

In addition to challenging the societal images of men of color, participants felt frustrated by these images and the stereotypes that were associated with men within their ethnic/racial backgrounds. JB's and LeBron's comments illustrate this:

> JB: Yeah, I think [I] did [it] to differentiate myself as a group, especially being a minority male, a lot of people stereotype because of where you came [from]. I think it motivated me.

Lebron concurs:

> Lebron: I just wanted to make a difference; just because I am tall and black and want to play basketball doesn't mean that I can't pursue a career as a doctor, you know what I mean? That [is] the only thing [that] always like pissed me off. It was an honors English class my senior year and one of the kids there gave me a look like, what are you doing here? and I said, I am in this class, and I did not want to think of it as a racist comment, but then that was the only thing I could think of. That only made me mad, and I went through that all my life, and I just want to show that just because I dress the way I dress and everything, the way I conduct myself, people would never think that I am in the nursing program; I just want to show them that just because you think I can't, I could do it; that's what pushes me a lot.

Both JB and LeBron felt motivated by the fact that within their own neighborhoods and schools, they were one of a small group of men and, in particular, men of color who strived to achieve high academic standards and wanted to pursue a college education. They perceived that they were challenging stereotypical ideas about black and Latino men's academic skills and abilities.

"Being a man" for many participants was an important factor in their college enrollment decisions because they wanted to stand out and be different from other black and/or Latino men who were not pursuing academic endeavors or positive life choices. Many were sparked by the lack of black and Latino men who are pursuing a postsecondary education. In addition, some

participants were motivated by the prospects of attaining a financially stable future and becoming leaders in their communities and in their own families. Moreover, this study's participants were heavily influenced by the roles their parents and, in particular, their fathers played in their educational life. Many fathers were involved early on in the academic life of participants, such as by helping with and checking homework. They had high expectations for their sons' futures and strongly believed that a college education would provide the necessary skills to ensure a financially stable future and an improved lifestyle.

Ethnicity/Race in College Enrollment

The findings from this research on ethnic and racial influences on decisions of college enrollment received mixed responses from the study's participants. Similarly to the study's findings on the affects of gender on college enrollment, some participants strongly perceived that they were setting good examples for people in general, and men of black and Latino backgrounds specifically. Parents' influence was also evident in how participants perceived the impact of their ethnic/racial backgrounds on their college enrollment decisions. Parents instilled a sense of pride in their ethnic heritage. Yet they also recognized the lack of success within these racial groups and challenged their sons to strive to achieve a higher educational and economic status through the pursuit of education. Steven's motivation for his college enrollment was to be a role model for other Latinos and demonstrate that Latinos can engage in educational endeavors and be successful. In addition, the sacrifices of parents, and particularly immigrant parents who left their native countries for a better life in the United States, spark some of the participants in their commitment to improve their socioeconomic status through the pursuit of a postsecondary degree.

> Steven: You should be better than the person that raised you, and I think being Hispanic you can do it, you have to represent; you gotta be better than those white kids, or you gotta be more proud; you can't be part of the statistics like the kids that don't make it into college. So if I thought I represented Spanish people or Colombians I should say that makes me kind of proud, makes me stay in college.

Steven perceived a great sense of responsibility to represent his ethnic/racial background in the most positive way. His college enrollment challenges racial stereotypes about Latinos and challenges the lack of educational success within the Latino community, in particular Latino men. Gio also felt that his current accomplishments represented a positive role model to other Latino men. His educational success and his pursuit of a science degree are recognized because of the lack of Latino men who are pursuing these types of activities.

> Gio: Definitely, because any time I mentioned that I was going to college to study a science, 'cause I'm Colombian, my friends' mothers would always mention that that was good because we don't have a lot of Latinos pursuing a science career, or any time I mention it to an advisor or something, they are like that's great because we need some; even when I mention it to other Latinos they say we need Latinos in science.

Gio also felt that he was positively representing his race and all Colombians. Participants seemed to have a lot of pressure to represent their ethnic/racial backgrounds due to the low numbers enrolled in colleges and universities. Lebron clearly states that he was influenced to pursue a college education due to his race.

> Lebron: That's how I think only because that's how my father raised me I guess, I have to go to school because of my race.

Ethnic and racial backgrounds, for some participants, impacted their college enrollment decisions. The lack of black and Latino men enrolled in colleges and universities or pursuing other positive means of earning a living are vivid reminders to these successfully enrolled men of color. Their college enrollment challenges images of the plight of the black and Latino man. However, some participants did not perceive that their ethnic/racial backgrounds influenced their college enrollment. For example, although Latino, Chris felt that his lack of fluency with the Spanish language prevents him from fully embracing his racial heritage and does not feel that his ethnicity influenced his college enrollment decisions.

> Chris: It doesn't play a huge role; I think that being a man plays a bit more of a role than being Latino. The only thing I wish is 'cause I am Latino but I don't speak fluent Spanish and I have always felt that that was a weakness.

Similarly, Luis also felt that his ethnicity/racial category did not influence his college enrollment. His academic performance and charismatic personality were more important in fostering the relationships that helped him gain access to a college education.

> Luis: I don't know if it really played a factor. I'm a cool guy, laid back, funny, you know what I am saying. I don't think my ethnicity or my gender… [they] really didn't play a part in any of it, in my decision to go to college.

Finally, Nick also did not perceive his ethnicity/race as influential in his college enrollment decisions. As a biracial man, Nick's African-American ethnicity is not easily apparent, as he could easily be mistaken as white. This could impact the way in which he views his ethnic/racial background and the role that it may play in his decisions about postsecondary education.

> Nick: I wouldn't say too much, I mean I don't really look dark. I don't really know if it played much of a role on me coming to school.

Gender and ethnicity/race played varying roles for participants of this study. Most perceived that their gender was a critical factor in their pursuit of a postsecondary education, primarily due to the lack of representation of men at higher levels in the academic pipeline and images of unproductive men of color in their communities and their families. For most Latino participants, their ethnicity/race was also a major factor because they felt a sense of pride to serve as role models of their particular ethnicity/racial group. Finally, being a man of color (black or Latino) was an important factor due to a lack of educational and career success found within these communities. Ethnicity as an individual factor had mixed levels of impact on participants' college enrollment decisions. Some participants had strong ethnic/racial connections and felt that they were representing their race, while other did not feel that ethnicity/race impacted their decisions.

Within this theme, the role that parents played in instilling ideas about participants' ethnic/racial backgrounds also proved to be influential as participants made decisions about college enrollment and its significance to their ethnic/racial backgrounds. For some participants whose parents were immigrants, a college education was an opportunity that was not always available in other countries. In addition, participants took pride in their ethnic/racial category and perceived themselves as role models to others within their own ethnic/racial groups who wanted to pursue a college education. They also strongly felt that they were challenging ethnic/racial stereotypes by pursuing a postsecondary education.

Summary

Although parents' influence is difficult to measure and its far-reaching effects even more challenging to trace, the perceptions of this study's participants can help to capture the depth of impact parental support has on many aspects of their children's lives. This study has

demonstrated that through parents' nurturing and support of educational endeavors, participants were positively impacted by the lessons they learned at home. Parents' high academic expectations influenced participants' value of education and the choices they ultimately made regarding their schooling. The findings clearly show parents' influence in participants' decision-making. Whether directly or indirectly, parents impacted participants' college enrollment decisions through their work ethics, high expectations, and role modeling. This study further demonstrates how the efforts of parents to care for, nurture, and be role models for their children quietly work to instill in their children perseverance, strength, determination, and independence.

These assets informed participants' experiences and perceptions of their world. Furthermore, participants in this study were impacted, in particular, by their fathers' examples as they met their responsibilities as men. In addition, the high expectations that were emphasized regarding the value of a college education were undeniably an important factor in participants' decisions on their college enrollment. Furthermore, these expectations also influenced students' decisions about their peers and their choices to be around like-minded peers who encouraged the pursuit of a college education. Schools also worked to instill ideas of academic achievement and the economic prosperity that a college education makes possible. Moreover, the findings suggest that black and Latino men are not influenced differently from other high-school students when making decisions about college enrollment (Hanson, 1994; Tinklin, 2003).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study examined black and Latino men's perceptions of the relative impact of family support (college savings, college visits, and attendance at a financial aid workshop) and college aspirations (parents, peers, and schools) on their decision to enroll and actual college enrollment as a consequence of being men of color. The study sought to identify the factors that are most influential in the participants' decision to pursue a college education. The study addressed the following three questions: Among family support factors, what do first-year enrolled black and Latino men identify as a primary factor of influence in their college enrollment? Among college aspirations factors, what do first-year enrolled black and Latino men identify as a primary factor in their college enrollment? What kinds of influences on college enrollment do black and Latino men attribute to gender?

The qualitative interviews generated a wealth of data about how men of color made decisions about postsecondary education. This chapter will present a summary of the study's findings and conclusions, supported by the research literature. In addition, this chapter will analyze the conclusions with a critical theory lens in order to understand participants' college enrollment decision-making processes. Finally, this chapter will outline research implications and suggestions for future research.

As presented in Chapter Four, five major themes were derived from the interviews of twelve black and/or Latino men enrolled in four-year postsecondary institutions. These themes were: high-profile student; parent and family impact; peer impact; school impact; and gender and ethnicity/race impact. The first theme, high-profile student, described a student who distinguished himself through his academic work and/or athletic ability. Students generally

attained high grades, were enrolled in honors-level courses, and at times were the only male or the only male of color in these courses. Their high academic performance fostered participants' increased confidence and skills to do college-level work. In addition, research has shown that students who perform at a high academic level are more likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution (Adelman, 2006). This suggests that academic achievement highly impacts college enrollment decisions. Moreover, almost half of the study participants played at least one sport. They distinguished themselves through their superior athletic ability, which may have influenced these participants' decisions about attending a postsecondary institution as a means of playing college- and professional-level sports.

The second theme, parent and family impact, details the ways in which parents and family members expressed their expectations and support for their children's academic achievement. Parents not only voiced their support for the pursuit of an education beyond high school, but their participation in college-going activities also reinforced this support. Parents strongly impacted participants' decisions to enroll and actual college enrollment and exhibited in a variety of direct and indirect ways their expectations and support for their child's educational future. For example, words of encouragement, the prospect for a better future, as well as family support activities defined earlier as college savings, going on college visits, and attending a financial aid workshop all signaled parents' desire for their child to continue his education beyond the secondary level. These activities worked, albeit at varying levels, to encourage these participants in their decisions about a college education. Therefore, this study corroborates the literature on parent/family support in the college choice process and supports the findings and conclusions of Hamrick and Stage (2004), Kenny et al. (2002), Hossler et al. (1999), and

Gandara (1995) regarding parents' influence on students' academic achievement and college enrollment.

The third theme, peer impact, described peers' support or lack of support of the postsecondary goals of their friends and those related activities that encouraged college enrollment. Although most participants' time was spent with peers who had similar educational goals, they also balanced and managed relationships with those who did not have the same educational goals. For some participants, the peers with dissimilar goals included close family members. However, these relationships did not deter plans for a postsecondary education.

The fourth theme, school impact, described how high schools and, in particular, school administrators worked to instill ideas for pursuing postsecondary educational endeavors and successfully transitioning from high school to college. Most participants felt that schools, in general, were supportive of their goals and encouraged all students to think about pursuing a college education. Teachers and team coaches were individuals within school settings who most influenced participants' college enrollment decisions because they developed caring relationships with students.

The fifth and final theme, gender and ethnicity/race impact, explained how gender and ethnicity/race individually and collectively impacted the college enrollment decisions of the study's participants. As an individual factor, gender impacted most of the participants' decisions to enroll in a postsecondary institution. They perceived a high degree of pressure to be a man and strived to gain skills that would ultimately allow for a successful career and access to the necessary resources to provide for a family. Participants perceived a man to be someone who could protect and provide for his family, meaning that a man is not only the primary income earner but also ensures his family's safety and well-being. In addition, as men of color, some

participants felt that they needed to represent their ethnic/racial backgrounds and debunk commonly accepted derogatory notions of what a black or Latino man is. The five themes presented above will be analyzed using the literature on college choice and aspirationss and form the basis for this study's conclusions (presented later in the chapter).

Impact of College Aspirations Factors

As previously stated college aspirations are influenced by a wide network of factors, however for the purposes of this study, college aspirations were considered as a result of parents, peers, and schools support of participants' goals of going to college. Parents strongly influence the college enrollment decisions of black and Latino men. The study's findings support previous research on parental influence and its role in the college enrollment decisions of their child (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Smith & Fleming, 2006). This study's participants were greatly influenced by their parents, especially by their fathers. From an early age, parents showed an interest in school-related activities such as helping with and checking homework assignments. In addition, parents had high expectations and high achievement orientations. In one particular case, a parent pulled one of the study's participants out of a sports team when grades did not meet his expectations. Parents also had discussions that focused on maintaining high academic standards and information about the importance and benefits of a college education. In addition, the pursuit of a college degree was closely linked to an improved economic status and lifestyle.

Peers did positively impact participants' college enrollment decisions. This contradicts previous research (Alforo et al., 2006; Gandara, 1995; Hanson, 1994; Tinklin, 2003) that concluded that peers influenced students to behave negatively. Conversely, this study's conclusion suggests that although peers were important to these participants they, however, chose to be with ambitious

and like-minded peers. Some participants made conscious decisions about the type of peers with which they would surround themselves, a finding that contradicts conclusions by Taylor and Graham (2007) that suggest that as early as the seventh grade males of color admire low-achieving students. However, participants in this study chose friends who had similar goals, which supports previous findings on peer influence (Gandara, 1995; Horn & Chen, 1998; Tinklin, 2003). Furthermore, participants balanced and managed different sets of relationships with those who had similar goals and those who did not. Participants tended to keep peers with dissimilar goals at a distance and were cautious about what activities they engaged in with this set of peers. This suggests that peers were important to the study's participants; however, they were highly selective of whom they included in their peer groups. In general, most participants perceived that peers, whether they had similar goals or not, were supportive of participants' postsecondary educational goals. Participants became public figures among their peers, who recognized their aspirations to go to college.

Schools were also perceived as supportive places by this study's participants. Many identified with at least one person within the school setting who encouraged them to prepare and have high academic goals including college-going plans. In particular, teachers were important in providing students with the confidence and skills that enabled them to succeed. This supports findings from the Ford and Harris (1996) and the Kao and Tienda (1998) studies, which found that teachers of successful students had high expectations and were fair. One of the participants, Chris, commented that throughout his high-school career, there was always one teacher whose enthusiasm motivated him to go to school. He looked forward to learning a new skill each day. Another participant credited a former teacher who helped him plan an out-of-state college tour trip. Additionally for some, guidance counselors as well as coaches were instrumental. Overall,

schools were places where students felt comfortable and were able to express themselves. Participants also felt that their schools provided them with the necessary skills to be successful. Schools had a supportive atmosphere and offered high-level courses such as Advanced Placement courses and activities such as school assemblies that promoted the pursuit of a postsecondary education. Although peers and schools were perceived to be supportive of students' educational goals, they did not have a direct level of impact on the college enrollment decisions of this study's participants. Parental support was perceived to be the most important and influential factor in the college enrollment decisions of these men of color.

Impact of Family Support Factors

College savings, college visits, and attendance at a financial aid workshop had varying degrees of impact on the college enrollment decisions of these men of color. First, most participants acknowledged that their parents did not have a college savings plan, yet the lack of savings for college was not perceived to have deterred any of the participants' plans for college matriculation and actual enrollment. However, the lack of savings did strongly impact participants' need for financial aid and their decisions regarding their actual postsecondary enrollment choice. Although unstated, participants may have perceived that they would be eligible for financial aid based on affirmative action programs or parents' financial status, as inferred by a few participants. Athletic talent and, parents' employment at postsecondary institutions were alternative ways that participants financed their education. Participants' athletic ability qualified them to be selected to play in college sports and to receive athletic scholarships based on their sport. The employment of some participants' parents at postsecondary institutions served as their "savings," due to the employer's tuition remission benefits.

Similar to a lack of college savings, attendance at financial aid workshops had little impact on students' college enrollment plans and decisions. Most parents attended and assisted in the financial aid application process because it is a critical part of the college and financial aid processes. Most participants noted that their decision to enroll in a four-year postsecondary institution was not based on need or lack of need for financial aid, possibly due to their assumption that they would receive sufficient financial aid. Most participants perceived that the benefits of a college education had greater value to their personal and economic future. However, when it came to actual college enrollment, the amount of financial aid participants received did have a significant impact on their actual matriculation. For example, Chris and Carlos both discussed the role of financial aid on their actual college choices. Chris admitted to narrowing down his initial college choices because he did not want a large college debt and was eligible to receive a full-tuition scholarship if he enrolled in a public postsecondary institution. While Carlos discussed his selection, he and his parents made the final enrollment decision based on "personal and financial considerations." Final enrollment decisions were made together with parents and were based on the amount of financial aid offered and overall affordability.

Finally, college visits were not perceived by most of the study's participants to have a major impact on college enrollment decisions. However, for Carlos, college visits did strongly impact his college enrollment decision; he states, "The family influence can only take you so far, but the second you see what you are striving for, that's a big part." College visits provided the opportunity for participants to learn about specific colleges and universities and see the campus culture. As stated previously, parents did visit at least one college with the study's participants and showed their support of their child's postsecondary education, an activity that, according to Bedsworth et al. (2006), significantly impacts college attendance. In addition, visiting college

campuses served to calm hidden fears about living away from home for parents and participants. Participants also felt good about visiting campuses and being able to talk to currently enrolled students about their experiences at college.

Impact of Gender and Ethnicity/Race Factors

Gender was perceived to impact the college enrollment decisions for these participants. The majority of participants recognized the under-enrollment of males in postsecondary institutions and men of color's overrepresentation in low-paying jobs, prisons, and drug addiction centers. Participants felt that they were debunking commonly held views regarding men of color's lack of academic progress and educational attainment. Participants in this study rejected the concepts of "cool pose" (Majors & Billson, 1992) and "machismo" (Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002) that portray black and Latino men as suave men of color, cool and collected, adored by women and often out of work or uninterested participants in educational endeavors. Being a man was not perceived by the study's participants to have presented any undue obstacles to their college enrollment decisions, contradicting findings from the Taylor and Graham (2007) study, which found that African Americans and Latinos perceived a high level of barriers to their educational goals. In addition, half of the study's participants were high-school athletes and seriously considered playing in college-level sports (or were currently playing). For some of these participants, college enrollment decisions were based on the likelihood of playing college-level sports, which support Hubbard's (1999) study's conclusions about the reasons her African-American participants enrolled in college. However, within this study's sample, JB and Brandon, who were student-athletes, rejected offers to play college sports, suggesting that playing college sports may not always influence the decisions of black and Latino male athletes.

Finally, ethnicity/race had varying degrees of impact on participants' college enrollment decisions. Some of the study participants perceived that their ethnicity/racial backgrounds strongly impacted their college enrollment decisions, corroborating findings in the Zarate and Gallimore (2005) study, which focused on Latinos; as well as Smith and Fleming's (2006) study, which focused on African Americans. In addition, the findings of these studies suggest that ethnicity/race does play a role in the college enrollment decisions of students of color. However, some participants did not perceive that their ethnicity/race influenced their college enrollment decisions.

Three conclusions were generated from these findings. First, parents and/or close family members are the most influential factors in the college enrollment decisions of these men of color. Parents and/or close family members who instill ideas and actively participate in activities that either explicitly or inexplicitly transmit messages of their aspirations for their child or family member to plan for and pursue a postsecondary education play an important role in the attainment of that goal. In addition, many in the study's participants recalled early academic achievements such as being on the honor roll and setting high academic goals in order to make their parents proud. Participants also recalled parents being involved in their early schooling experiences, often checking homework and helping them study for spelling tests. These findings suggest that for these young men of color, early academic success coupled with strong parental involvement had a positive impact on their aspirations and choices about going to college.

Furthermore, the presence of fathers in the lives of these participants is an important factor for these men of color. Oftentimes, fathers of black and Latino children are absent from their lives and therefore the sons do not benefit from the influence of a positive male figure. However, these participants' fathers were very active in their lives, especially their educational

lives. They took a leading role of ensuring that their sons completed homework assignments and were involved in positive and engaging activities such as sports. Fathers constantly reminded the study's participants of their high expectations and took any available opportunity to talk about the benefits and importance of a college education. At times, fathers sent strong messages about the pursuit of a college education. For example, Lebron's father took him out of the basketball team due to Lebron's low academic performance. In addition, his father reinforced the idea that as a black male, he needed to pursue a college education in order to be successful. Experiences such as these demonstrated that parents' first priority was the academic preparation of their children so that they could achieve success in the future.

Second, family support factors (college savings, college visits, and attending a financial aid workshop) impacted at varying levels the college-going decisions of the study's participants. Parents' engagement in these activities showed support of their child's college plans. However, many participants seemed to have made plans to pursue a college education at an early age and, unlike many students in the Perna (2000) study, persisted in their plans for college enrollment. The findings, therefore, suggest that the concept of family support should include other forms of family support that are more culturally sensitive to the demands that parents' non-dominant cultures must contend with. As demonstrated in Gandara's (1995) study, parents showed support for their children's education in different ways that did not conform to the white-middle-class definition.

The family support activities highlighted in this study demonstrated some degree of impact in students' college-going decisions. Upon a closer look, the study found that college savings highly impacted the college decisions of those students who had a savings plan. This finding supports Cabrera and LaNasa's (2000) study's conclusion about the effects of college

savings plans. However, it also contradicts Cabrera and LaNasa's (2000) conclusion because the college decisions of those participants who lacked a college savings plan were not negatively impacted. In addition, college visits did impact participants' college enrollment decisions. This supports Bedsworth et al.'s (2006) report that found college visits with at least one parent to be statistically significant. Participants used these visits to gain useful information about the campus culture and the perspectives of currently enrolled students. For example, for Carlos, the college visits made the reality of going to college more realistically possible. Lastly, attendance at a financial aid workshop did not impact participants' decisions. However, financial aid packages and colleges' affordability did impact decisions concerning actual college enrollment. Students and their parents made actual enrollment decisions based on affordability and the amount of financial aid they received. This finding concurs with Cabrera and LaNasa's (2000) study, which suggests that students' final choice depends on financial considerations. In addition, Cabrera and LaNasa's (2000) and Bedsworth et al.'s (2006) conclusions that students are enrolling at less-selective colleges due to their ability to afford them were corroborated in this study's findings. Many of the participants of the study perceived that they would receive the amount of aid they needed in order to afford their college attendance. College affordability is an issue that both parents and students are aware of—their attendance at financial aid workshops and seminars demonstrated that they wanted to be knowledgeable and informed about how to best financially support their children.

Finally, the third conclusion highlights the impact of gender and race. Being a man highly encouraged these participants in their plans because they wanted a good education and career and in the future to be able to provide for their own families. The study's participants perceived that their gender impacted their college enrollment decisions. Fathers' involvement in

these participants' lives and their active participation in their school-related activities provided participants with tangible examples of the responsibilities of a man. In addition, participants perceived that being a man did not pose any additional challenges or obstacles to their college-going plans. However, there were mixed perceptions about the degree of impact ethnicity/race had on their college enrollment decisions. Furthermore, even though being black or Latino did not have much of an impact on their college enrollment decisions, a few participants took special pride in the fact that they were involved in positive endeavors and making choices that excluded them from participating in negative behaviors that are often associated with men of color.

The above conclusions support the findings of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model, which demonstrates that student background characteristics and influential factors such as family have an important impact on going to college. In particular, students' academic achievement ability, for example, coupled with strong parental support, enables students to achieve their goals of college enrollment. This study further demonstrates that within this small sample there are a variety of individual student characteristics and degrees of influence that impact each participant differently when making decisions about college and college enrollment. This study demonstrates the multiplicity of factors that can and do impact students' college enrollment decisions. Hence, though academic performance and parental support are the most salient conditions that influence the college enrollment of men of color, these experiences are all unique instances working as a web of support factors that form a deliberate socialization for men of color to resist and transcend racial, cultural, and social stereotypes. This can be viewed as a "revolutionary" act by parents and other supportive adults in their lives. These conclusions will be further analyzed through a critical theory lens to understand the college enrollment decision-making process of these young men of color.

Critical Theory Data Analysis

Critical theory, as previously defined, is concerned with issues of power and ideological hegemony. At its center, critical theory challenges commonly held beliefs and ideas that favor one group over another. As a society, we hold certain beliefs about men and women, rich and poor, and black and white, and about one group's superiority to the other. Ideas that men are stronger than women, that the rich are more powerful than the poor, and that white people are better than black people have been held as commonly accepted beliefs in our society. Within social networks, critical theory posits, people are subtly being influenced by these ideas, beliefs, and even social institutions such as family and schools, to accept these notions. This analysis, therefore, will examine how ideas similar to the ones stated above may have influenced the actions of the study's participants.

Particular to this study, I will address whether the study's participants challenged or accepted commonly held ideas about "what it means to be a man," in a general sense, as the provider and protector of their families, and more specifically, ideas about black men and Latinos as unproductive members of society who are usually incarcerated, involved in criminal activities, and uninterested in school or work endeavors. In addition, I will examine whether the lingering effects of ethnic/racial differences may complicate how the study's participants view themselves as men. The participants' pursuit of education defies the negative stereotypes regarding men of color. Participants' academic achievements, for example, put them in direct challenge to some of the above stated beliefs. They, as Brookfield (2005) stated, used their power in a positive way to make an "intentional social change" in their individual lives. These young men of color accepted their roles as men—providers and protectors of their families—and embraced the notions of "what it means to be a man." In addition, they shouldered the great

responsibility of being the first in their families to be a college student and paving the way for other family members.

Family, peers, and schools also aided in the transmission of these messages, in particular messages about the benefits of a college education. The benefits of a college education are numerous, yet the economic benefit attached to the attainment of a postsecondary degree was continually referenced. Parents and schools emphasized this benefit, and many of the study's participants voiced these same reasons for their pursuit of a college education. Luis and Richard, for example, stated their desire to be able to support their families, while LeBron experienced being very poor at one time in his life and the improved changes that occurred once his mother completed an associate's degree in nursing.

Furthermore, participants in this study clearly rejected commonly held views of what black and Latino men should be. They rejected acts of violence and criminality and pursued educational endeavors in order to reap the benefits of a college education. They were influenced by the examples of their fathers as responsible, caring family men who took care of their families and their needs. They wanted to have options for their future; as stated by JB, "I don't want to struggle. I don't wanna run into a wall." These participants were investing in a future that would allow them to follow whatever career paths they chose without negative repercussions. Finally, participants also rejected the gender stereotypes of the "cool pose" and "machismo"—the suave man of color, cool and collected, unemployed and adored by women. In addition, participants' race/ethnicity, for some, proved to be another factor that spurred their college enrollment decisions. For some participants, their pursuit of a college education was further motivated by the negative associations associated with black and Latino people, particularly, men.

The study's participants showed great agency in choosing to pursue a college education. Although they embraced the ideological hegemony of the common concepts of what a man is, they exhibited excellent use of individual power to resist commonly accepted stereotypes about men of color and to reject notions of the "cool pose" and "machismo." They used power in order to effect change in their lives and in society. Moreover, parents and the support they gave to their children were critical in instilling ideas and values about the worth of a college education and how education can aid in attaining a positive and prosperous future as men of color.

Research Implications

This study's findings lead to several important implications. First, the study confirms previous research on parental and/or family influence and its impact on the educational endeavors of men of color. The study's participants were successful due to their parents' expectations and encouragement. From the earliest level in a child's school career, parents were involved in their child's education through visits, teacher conferences, and homework assignments. Parents' high expectations and desire for a better life attained through educational means had a strong effect on the decisions that students made. These parents, no matter what their level of resources, wanted their child to be successful in their academic and professional lives. Therefore, they strongly believed in and encouraged their sons to pursue a postsecondary education as the vehicle to achieve their career goals and an improved socioeconomic status.

However, as previously mentioned, the construct of parental/family support is often not clearly defined and often defined in terms of dominant middle-class social values. Parent involvement in its many forms must be recognized within the research literature to address non-dominant class definitions of parental support. Research must recognize that not all parents are able to save for college or even to go on college visits. This lack of participation does not mean

that they are unsupportive of their children's educational pursuits. Therefore, parent involvement theory must include a wider range of activities that defines parental support and involvement and takes into consideration cultural aspects that may impact how parents show their support for their children's educational endeavors. In addition, parents' efforts at home and their connection to the efforts of schools should be further examined to assess whether they impact students' post-high-school plans, in particular, as they relate to these populations who often have negative experiences in schools. Furthermore, identifying strategies that can better support the work of parents and schools will enable these students to achieve their educational goals and increase their college enrollment.

The second implication from this study's findings is that gender plays a positive role in most participants' college enrollment decisions. Aside from the positive examples provided by participants' fathers, they were also influenced by the negative images most often associated with men of color. The low number of positive male role models within the black and Latino populations and the negative and derogatory representations associated with men of color spurred many of the study's participants to challenge these notions and motivated them to pursue a college education. In addition, a better understanding of how these commonly referenced negative representations of black and Latino men affect their educational futures would assist in developing programming that diffuses its impact and creating positive strategies that challenge these images.

The third implication from this study is the role that coaches play in the college enrollment decisions of their student-athletes. Research on the academic development of these athletes is needed, due to looming concerns regarding their academic preparation for college-level work. As stated by a participant of this study, athletes were given preferential treatment in

order to enable them to meet the academic eligibility requirements of their high-school teams. A lack of academic preparation jeopardizes students' postsecondary academic and athletic careers.

The fourth implication is that financial aid plays a very important role in the actual college choice of men of color. This study did not focus on financial aid, yet participants clearly expressed their concerns about the affordability of a college education. Many participants expressed fear of leaving college with a high amount of debt. Therefore, many made decisions regarding final college choice based on the amount of financial aid and/or scholarships that they were able to receive. Financial aid and the cost of attendance have been prevalent issues in the college enrollment literature and, as suggested here, still concern most students. A continued focus on how financial aid impacts the college enrollment of men of color and its effect on their final choice is needed. In addition, an exploration of whether students' chose less selective postsecondary institutions due to the amount of their financial aid packages is also warranted.

Implications for Practice

Educational systems, school departments, and individual schools must value the role that parents play in the lives of most students. The efforts of parents and schools relative to the education of the children they serve are often isolated from each other. Due to the private sphere of the parent-child relationship and the public sphere of the school-student relationship, parents and schools frequently are juxtaposed against each other, although they work to achieve the same goals. Schools need to value parents' efforts at home to help with homework or just encourage their children. Although some families may lack resources to assist their children in the college enrollment process, they are aware of the value of education and the benefits it can potentially bring.

New partnerships need to be forged between parents and schools so that they are able to support each other in their quest to encourage students to pursue a postsecondary education. Furthermore, although college enrollment has been steadily rising over the last twenty years, there are still many first-generation students whose parents did not go to college or possibly may not have graduated from high school. These parents, in particular, need training in tacit knowledge such as information about high-school course selection and the meaning of grade point averages. Parents should have up-to-date information about educational and graduation requirements, as well as the many steps of the college application and financial aid processes. The more knowledgeable parents are, the better equipped they will be to understand the implications of their child's academic performance and continue their efforts in encouraging and motivating their child.

This study demonstrated that teachers can be effective role models. However, they need the appropriate support to make connections with their students and develop effective relationships. Smaller class sizes can aid in developing the teacher-student relationship. In addition, strategies such as having the same teachers for more than one academic year and/or allowing for "free time" where students and teachers share time together in non-academic subjects can assist teachers and students to develop genuine and respectful relationships. Recognizing that new teachers may not have the needed skills or knowledge of issues pertaining to first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color, in particular, men, they need to be provided with the necessary skills to address the problems of these high-risk populations. Finally, guidance counselors also play an important role in students' college application process, and many times their high workloads do not allow them to effectively support their students; therefore, an adequate workload per guidance counselor is needed so all

students can receive the necessary help. In addition, strategies such as a "college search" class, in which guidance counselors can meet with small groups of students and work with them as they complete each step of the college application process would enable all students to receive the needed attention that they deserve.

As successfully enrolled college students, these black and Latino men's success depended on strong parental support, academic success, and a set of multivariate factors that kept them focused on attaining a college education. However, recognizing that the college environment can be alienating, especially for students of color, college and university administrators must develop strategies to integrate this fragile population into the campus culture. The development of male support groups, in particular, could aid these students as they move through the academic pipeline, and also when they must deal with feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. They need to feel that they do belong in that postsecondary environment and that they are supported in their journey to attain a college education. In addition, as black and Latino men who are continually rejecting ethnic/racial stereotypes, university administrators must not tolerate racism and discriminatory practices in and outside of the classroom. Since many black and Latino men are athletes, university athletics department should ensure that their athletes are receiving the necessary assistance to gain the required academic skills for successful completion of a college degree. Finally, the rising cost of college attendance must be controlled. The impact of the cost of attendance limits students' college choices. Closely related to costs is financial aid; early financial aid counseling and planning must be provided by college and university administrators to ensure that potential students and their parents are informed about ways to finance a college education.

Policy Implications

This study's findings also have policy implications focused on college access and transition from high school. This population faces a myriad of college access issues; however, one particular issue that continues to be discussed within the education field is school funding. Schools, as the primary vehicle for students to acquire skills for postsecondary education and work, must be able to prepare students with the necessary skills that is required at the college or employment level. Therefore, all schools should have adequate funding to enable teachers and administrators to provide students with the same quality of instruction and an equal amount of resources to all students. Urban schools, in particular, need improvements to address the lack of quality and preparation that their students receive. As noted by one participant, he found he was not academically prepared to do the kind of college-level work his institution required.

In addition, early college planning and financial aid counseling activities need to be implemented to assist families in preparing and making realistic plans about the college application and financial aid processes. As the population of first-generation students continues to rise, they and their parents need information about the college application process. Oftentimes, the college application process is perceived to be confusing, in particular by first-generation students and their parents. Information that clearly outlines the steps of this process can aid in providing important knowledge and in assisting students and their parents to successfully complete all the required forms. Moreover, agencies and organizations such as TRIO, whose mission is to assist first-generation, low-income students pursue a postsecondary education, need additional funding to meet their projects' goals. In addition, sufficient financial aid is critical to ensuring that students receive the needed aid to cover the expenses of a college education. Need-, merit-, and athletic-based scholarships should be increased to ensure the

college enrollment of students as well as their successful completion. Finally, colleges need to become more affordable. The skyrocketing costs of tuition are limiting potential candidates' enrollment at postsecondary institutions due to their costs. Students should not have to foreclose on the great experiences of living on a college campus or attaining the highest quality of education that they can potentially receive due to costs.

Limitations of the Study

This study represents a small sample of men of color, mostly black and Latino, who were enrolled in four-year postsecondary institutions in the northeastern United States. As such, the findings of this study may not be applicable to other men of color. This study sought to achieve a high quality of research through the application of sound qualitative research strategies, as outlined in the methods section of this dissertation. However, as with many qualitative studies, there are limitations to the findings. Because participants were first-year students, I felt that their high-school experiences, in general, and, more specifically, the college application and enrollment process were more readily recollected. However, it could be that interviewing students in their second, third, or fourth years of college might have allowed for them to be more critical of their high-school experiences. In addition, this study focused on successfully enrolled students. However, there is a strong likelihood the same levels of parental support characterized parents' relationships with children who had not yet achieved college enrollment, and this possibility is not captured in this study.

The purposive sample limited the number of potential participants who satisfied the selection criteria. Moreover, the extensive participant recruitment yielded only twelve participants out of the twenty anticipated participants. The twelve participant interviews could be considered a limitation. However, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that twelve

interviews are enough to achieve data saturation. Guest et al. (2006) state: "[A]fter analysis of the twelve interviews, new themes emerged infrequently and progressively so as the analysis continued" (p. 73). In addition, Guest et al.'s (2006) research study identified the lack of definition attached to the term "data saturation." In reviewing the literature on research methods, they concluded, "[W]e rely on a more general notion of data saturation and operationalize the concept as the point in data saturation and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" (Guest, et al., 2006, p. 65). In the analysis of my data, codes and themes developed after the sixth interview, and no new information was produced between the seventh through twelfth interviews, supporting Guest et al.'s (2006) conclusions that a sample size of twelve is sufficient in order to achieve data saturation. They also conclude that purposive samples reach data saturation at lower participant numbers. Finally, since the purpose of this study was to describe participants' perceptions of factors that influenced their college enrollment decisions, it concurs with Guest et al.'s conclusion: If the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample size of twelve will likely be sufficient (p. 76).

Future Research

The findings of this study present areas of interest for future research. They are the following:

- Future research should explore the perceptions of men of color who did not enroll in four-year postsecondary institutions as well as those who enrolled at two-year postsecondary institutions and examine how the factors analyzed in this study may have impacted their college enrollment decisions. What role did the factors have on their non-enrollment decisions, if any? How influential were these factors to their decision-making process?

- A comparison cohort of enrolled and non-enrolled men of color could provide additional information about the impact of these factors on individual student decisions.
- Research on the intersection of gender, race, and class as it relates to men of color could be useful in understanding college enrollment decisions of these students.
- Valuable research could explore how parents, schools, and peers support students' plans for postsecondary enrollment based on differences in academic achievement ability, for example, which could provide more information about the role that academic achievement ability plays in black and Latino men's postsecondary decisions.
- Future research should also consider participants in their second, third, and fourth year of matriculation, because as college students mature they may be able to be more critical about their high-school experiences and how these experiences and college enrollment decisions may have impacted their college experiences.
- Future research should examine the "possible selves' theory" in relation to how black and Latino men may be affected by their "feared-for" and "hoped-for" selves as motivators for their achievements.

Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that a college education brings economic benefits to both the individual and society. College graduates enjoy other benefits, such as low unemployment, better health, and a more satisfying quality of life. The low college participation rates of African-American and Latino males profoundly affect many areas of society, including the nation's economic progress and improvement in the quality of life of individuals and society as a whole. However, according to Greene and Winters (2007), 48 percent of African-American males and 49 percent of Hispanic males graduate high school, compared to 59 percent of

African-American females and 58 percent of Hispanic females (executive summary). Furthermore, Latinos have the highest drop-out rates of all racial/ethnic groups. As shown earlier, many are also not enrolling in postsecondary institutions and therefore are not acquiring needed skills for upward mobility and economic stability.

As numbers in Latino and African-American populations continue to increase, the demographic profile of the United States will dramatically change. Garcia and Bayer (2005) state: "[B]y 2050, the Latino population is projected to represent almost one-fourth of the total U.S. population" (p. 511). Similarly, African Americans, the second largest minority group, will continue its upward rise. Currently, Latinos and African Americans make up the two largest minority groups of the U.S. population, with 15 percent and 14 percent respectively. From 2005 to 2006, Latinos increased by 3.4 percent and were the fastest-growing minority group (U.S. Census, 2007).

Unfortunately, the lack of academic achievement and transition to postsecondary education within black and Latino male populations will have a devastating impact on the level of productivity and economic progression for both individuals and society. A lack of acquired skills has an important effect on individuals' and the nation's economic well-being. African Americans and Latinos must be prepared to take on the jobs that require higher-order thinking, sophisticated skills, and technological training. The status of the United States, both economically and as a world leader, depends on citizens that are highly intelligent, highly educated, innovative, and creative in finding solutions to the problems of the country and the world.

APPENDIX A

Giving Voice to African American and Latino: First-Year Students' Perceptions of the Relative Impact of Family Support and College Aspirations on their Decision to Enroll and Actual Enrollment

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Name: Age: Date of Interview:

Pseudonym: College:

Enrollment Status: Date of Enrollment:

High School Attended: Year of HS Grad:

A. College Aspirations Variables

1. Thank you for your participation in my study. I am interested in the influences of family, peers and school on your college enrollment and how your race and gender affected theses influences and decisions. Tell me who influenced you to go to college? At what point in your school career, did your decide that you wanted a college education?

2. Follow-up if student does not elicit much information:

What role did your family, friends, school, gender, and/or ethnicity play in your decision to pursue a college education?

1. Parents/Family

1a. How do your define your family? Who do you live with?

1b. Describe how your family influenced you in your decision to enroll? What did they do or say to encourage your decision to enroll and actual enrollment?

2. Peers/Friends

2a. How did your friends/peers influence your decision to enroll in college? Can you give me some examples of how your friends encouraged your college enrollment?

2b. How were they supportive (or not) of your educational goal of enrolling in a college/university? Did you feel you friends treated you differently because you wanted to go to college? How did they treat you? Did they treat you differently at home versus at school or both?

2c. Did it seem to you that your friends wanted/did not want you to go to college? What did they do or not do to encourage your decision? Can you give some examples?

2d. In what ways do you think your ethnicity and/or gender was a factor in your friends support or lack of support of your decision to go to college?

3. School

3a. Describe your high school. What type of description would you give your school (college prep/not college prep)? What academic program or level were you enrolled in? Why?

3b. What messages did you receive from school about pursuing a college education? What kind of messages did you receive from teachers and/or counselors that either encouraged you or not to enroll in a four-year college/university? Can you give me some examples?

B. Family Support Variables

1. What activities did you and your family do that encouraged you to go to college? How did you feel about participating in these activities?

2. Did you family have a college education fund for you? Did they tell you that they had this fund for your education? When did they tell you? How did you feel about this?

3c. Did you and your family go on college visits? When did you visit colleges with your family? How many colleges did you visit? How did you feel about going to visit colleges with your family?

C. Gender

1. How did being a boy/guy help you to form your college aspirations? Prompt: What was it about you being a male that contributed to your desire to attend college?

2. As a boy/guy, what kind of messages did you receive about pursuing a college education? How were these messages delivered? From whom did you receive these messages? Can you give me some examples?

3. What role did your being a boy/guy play in your decision to enroll at a four-year institution?

4. What role do you think being African American/Latino play in your decision to enroll in college?

5. Did you and your family attend a financial aid workshop? When did you attend a financial aid workshop with your family? How did you feel about attending a financial aid workshop with your family? Was your college enrollment dependent on financial aid? How much? What did your parents think about the financial aid process? What did they say to you about financial aid?
6. How did they help you in the financial aid process? Was it sufficient help?
7. Do you think that your family's encouragement to attend college had anything to do with you being a guy?
8. What else would you like to tell me about how you felt about going to college as a young African American or Latino man?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Flyer

WANT A $5 DUNKIN' DONUTS CARD?

ARE YOU A FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENT?

ARE YOU MALE?

ARE YOU AFRICAN AMERICAN AND/OR LATINO?

GIVING VOICE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO MALES: FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIVE IMPACT OF FAMILY SUPPORT AND COLLEGE ASPIRATIONSS VARIABLES ON THEIR DECISION TO ENROLL AND ACTUAL ENROLLMENT

I am collecting data for my dissertation about college enrollment and African American males and Latinos. Participate in a 45 minute one-on-one interview to talk about your school experiences and family influence on your college enrollment. You will receive a $5 Dunkin' Donut card for participation!

INTERESTED? CALL ROSSANNA AT 617-828-4809 OR
YOU MAY EMAIL ME AT CONTRERA@BC.EDU

APPENDIX C

Boston College Consent Form
Boston College Lynch School of Education Higher Education Administration

Informed Consent for Participation as a Subject in Giving Voice to African American Males and Latinos: First-Year Students' Perceptions of the Relative Impact of Family Support and College Aspirations on their Decisions to Enroll and Actual College Enrollment

Investigator: Rossanna Contreras-Godfrey
Adult Consent Form
Date Created: 2/27/08

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study about the college enrollment decisions of African American males and Latinos.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are male; are of African American and/or Latino racial/ethnic background and you are a first-year student enrolled at a four-year higher education institution.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

- The purpose of this study is understand how African American males and Latinos make decisions about applying and enrolling at four-year higher education institutions and the role that gender plays in those decisions.
- Participants in this study are from either African American and/or Latino ethnic/racial backgrounds and are male students.

Description of the Study Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: participate in an one hour interview to discuss your high school academic experiences and the college application process; how your family, friends, teachers/school aided (or hindered) you in reaching your academic goals and how your gender may have played a part in the development of your academic goals and college enrollment.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:

- There are no reasonable foreseeable risks. There may be unknown risks.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

- The purpose of the study is to understand the reasons that some African American males and Latinos are able to successfully enroll at four-year colleges or universities.
- The benefits of participation are that mechanisms could be developed to help other African American males and Latinos make a successful transition from high school and college enrollment.

Payments:

- There will be a $5 Dunkin' Donuts card for your participation in this study to be given at the completion of the interview.

Costs:

- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Audiotape recordings will be accessed only by the Rossanna Contreras-Godfrey, the principal investigator and will be erased after the accuracy of the transcription has been confirmed by the participants of the study.
- Access to the records will be limited to the researchers; however, please note that regulatory agencies, and the Institutional Review Board and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University or with the institution in which you are enrolled.
- You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. The subject does not jeopardize grades nor risk loss of present of future school or University relationships.

*****You will be provided with any significant new findings that develop during the course of the research that may make you decide that you want to stop participating.

Contacts and Questions:

- The researcher conducting this study is Rossanna Contreras-Godfrey. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her/him/them at 617-828-4809 or email at contrera@bc.edu
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

- I have read the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name): _____
Participant or Legal Representative Signature: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Giving Voice to African American Males and Latinos: First-Year Students' Perceptions of the Relative Impact of Family Support and College Aspirations on their Decisions to Enroll and Actual College Enrollment

I, _____ agree to participate in the "Giving Voice to African American Males and Latinos: First-Year Students' Perceptions of the Relative Impact of Family Support and College Aspirations on their Decision to Enroll and Actual College Enrollment study" conducted by Rossanna Contreras-Godfrey, a graduate student in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. I understand this project is studying African American males and Latinos decisions to enroll at four-year colleges or universities.

As part of my participation in this study, I understand that I will be asked questions about my high school academic experiences and the college application process as well as my family's role in the college application process and that the researchers will contact me to ensure accuracy of the interview. My part of the study involves a one hour interview with the researcher, Rossanna Contreras-Godfrey in a public setting at my institution. This one hour interview will be audiotaped for research purposes only and will be erased after the accuracy of the transcription has been confirmed by the participants of the study. I understand that I will receive a $5 Dunkin' Donuts card at the end of my one hour interview session and that I should inform the researcher of any changes in my name, address or phone number. I understand that I may not receive any direct benefit from my participation in this study.

I understand my participation is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time from this study. I also understand that some people may find it troubling to participate in some or all of the research activities required and I may decline to participate in any portions with which I feel uncomfortable.

I understand that my name or identity will not be used in reports or presentations of the findings of this research. The information provided to the researchers will be kept confidential with the exception of the following, which must be reported under Massachusetts law.

1. Suspected cases of child or elder abuse
2. Information that individuals intend to harm themselves or others

I have read and understand this information and agree to participate in this study. I will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Signature_____ Date_____

Investigator's Signature_____ Date_____

For questions or concerns about the research, please contact Rossanna Contreras-Godfrey at 617-828-4809. For concerns about your treatment as a research participant, please contact the Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

A copy of this signed form is as good as the original.

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