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Black Students Perceptions of their Access to Precollege Counseling Practices

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Abstract

Despite an increase in college enrollment for all racial groups over the past three decades, the rate at which Black students attend college continues to significantly trail that of White students. A contributor to this gap includes Black students inadequate access to college-going and financial aid information. The purpose of this study was to understand how access to school counseling activities impacted Black high school students college choice decisions. this study included, seventeen 12 th Participants for grade Black male and female students who attended two high schools in an urban school district in New York state. Eight of the participants were non college-bound while nine were college-bound. Utilizing a counter-narrative methodology, data were collected triangularly through interviews, demographic questionnaires, field notes, and school district documents. Data were analyzed using multiple rounds of coding and findings were considered in relation to Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three phase conceptual model of college choice and the critical race theoretical framework (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Findings revealed three major themes. The first suggest that Black students perceive having decreased access to college-going information. Second colorblind college-going messages communicate to students of color that they have less collegegoing potential than their White peers, and the final theme indicated that the level of access which Black students had to college-going information depended upon their level of initiative in the process. Implications for school counseling and administrative practices as well as for future research are addressed.

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Dedication

I must begin my thanking God for this opportunity. This study is dedicated to: my mother, (Elizabeth Benson), my father, (Anthony Benson, Jr.), my two daughters, (Desiree L. Williams and Kelly M. Williams), and my sister, (Michelle Salhudinn) who have each gone through this journey with me every step of the way. I want to thank you. This dissertation is a product of your love and support.

To my husband, (Charles A. Williams), the love and support that you have given me throughout this process has been the wind beneath my wings. You have been my pillar of strength, my silent partner in this process. Your un-yielding belief in this endeavor means more than you will ever know. This accomplishment would not have been possible with you.

To my dear cousin, Angelique R. Fisher, my biggest cheerleader who was so excited for me as I began this journey, but who unfortunately was called home too soon to see me cross the finish line, I feel your love, strength and support every day. For all of my really good sister-girlfriends (too numerous to name, but you all know who you are) thank you for praying for me, listening to me, and putting up with me while lovingly reassuring me that I would complete this journey.

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May God continue to bless you all.

Biographical Sketch

Tonja M. Williams is currently the Director of Guidance and Counseling at the Buffalo Public School District. Mrs. Williams attended the State University of New York at Fredonia and Medaille College from 1982 to 1986 and graduated with a Bachelor of Sciences degree in 1986. She attended Canisius College from 1989 to 1990 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 1990, later enrolling in a post Master's program in Administrative Education at Canisius College to pursue advanced certifications as a School Building Leader and a School District Administrator, which she received in 1996. Mrs. Williams came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2008 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. She pursued her research in Black students' perceptions of access to college-going practices in high schools. Under the direction of Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason and Dr. Chinwe Ikpeze. Mrs. Williams received the Ed.D. degree in December 2010.

Abstract

Despite an increase in college enrollment for all racial groups over the past three decades, the rate at which Black students attend college continues to significantly trail that of White students. A contributor to this gap includes Black students inadequate access to college-going and financial aid information.

The purpose of this study was to understand how access to school counseling activities impacted Black high school students college choice decisions. Participants for this study included, seventeen 12th grade Black male and female students who attended two high schools in an urban school district in New York state. Eight of the participants were non college-bound while nine were college-bound.

Utilizing a counter-narrative methodology, data were collected triangularly through interviews, demographic questionnaires, field notes, and school district documents. Data were analyzed using multiple rounds of coding and findings were considered in relation to Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three phase conceptual model of college choice and the critical race theoretical framework (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Findings revealed three major themes. The first suggest that Black students perceive having decreased access to college-going information. Second colorblind college-going messages communicate to students of color that they have less college-going potential than their White peers, and the final theme indicated that the level of access which Black students had to college-going information depended upon their level

of initiative in the process. Implications for school counseling and administrative

practices as well as for future research are addressed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is a general contention that all students have access to college-going information in their high schools (Freeman, 2005; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Yet, research identifies that students who are Black are less likely than those who are White to have access to precollege counseling activities that will provide them with college choice information (Hippolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Perna, 2000; Perna et. al., 2007; Smith, 2000). Students of color lack access to even minimal levels of school sponsored precollege counseling activities that would help them to make their aspirations to attend college a reality (Espinoza, Bradshaw, & Hausman, 2002; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei 1996; Venezia & Kirst, 2005; Walpole, 2003). In fact, the college choice needs of Black students are likely to be under-served, under-resourced and under-valued in U.S. high schools (Brown, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Feagin, Vera, & Imani 1996; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Muhammad, 2008), leaving this student population with severely limited access to college-going information (Freeman, 2005).

Past research indicates that Black students desperately need basic information about college options (Braxton, 1990; Chapman, 1981; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Jackson, 1982). Moreover, they need equitable opportunities to obtain knowledge about appropriate classes and make other suitable college related decisions (McDonough, 2005a; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Solorzano, Villapando, & Oseguera, 2005; Venezia

& Kirst, 2005). Specifically, urban students need access to information about different types of post-secondary educational institutions in and out of state, admissions requirements, special programs which they may qualify for, and financial aid and scholarship assistance (McDonough, 1997). However, for many Black high school students obtaining such information is not easy.

One logical source of assistance associated with obtaining information about college is the high school counselor (Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003; Perna et. al., 2007). School counselors may be an especially important source of assistance for urban students of color who have limited access to college-going information outside of school (Perna, 2004; Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2004; Tornatzky, Cutler & Lee, 2002). In fact, the research shows that no professional staff in high schools is more important to improving college enrollments of Black students, in particular, than school counselors (Gandara & Bial, 2001; McDonough, 2005a; Oakes, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001).

A result of urban youth not having access to precollege counseling is lowered enrollment in college than their White peers in spite of Blacks having higher aspirations to attend college than students of other races (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009; Hearn, 1991; Mickelson, 1990; St. John, 1991). For example, in 2003, only 32% of Black students were enrolled in college compared with 42% of Whites even though between 1988 and 2008 the number of Black students in high schools across the nation increased from 6.8 million to 7.5 million (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009); meaning that although there were more Black K-12 school age students in high schools during that time, the numbers who graduated and enrolled into undergraduate college programs did not increase.

Amidst the realities of low college enrollment of Black students the sheer vitality of the American economy depends on a college educated society. The President of the United States, Barrack Obama has set a national goal that the United States will again lead the world in the rates of college completion by the year 2020 (Thewhitehouse.com, 2010). Increasing the number of Black students in college will be an important factor in achieving the goal that President Obama has set for the nation.

College enrollment and earning a degree has the potential to offer citizens of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Blacks, opportunities to achieve financial and social stability (Bowen, 1977; Ikenberry & Hartle, 1998; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Individuals who earn a bachelor's degree will earn almost 2.1 million dollars over a lifetime compared with earnings of 1.2 million earned over a lifetime by persons possessing a high school diploma (Earnmydegree.com, 2010). There is research which reports that participation in higher education is an optimal route to not only one's professional and personal success but is even linked to the overall physical and emotional well-being of an individual (Berlin, G.L. 2007; Dew-Becker & Gordan, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Perna, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Thus, studying and understanding ways to support improving Black students' participation in higher education is critical.

Current research does not address precollege counseling from the perspective of Black students in any appreciable way (Cabrera, Nora, Teranzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999; Freeman, 2005; McDonough, 2005a, 2005b Pope & Fermin, 2003). According to Ogbu (1988), perceptions are important to understand because individuals tend to act on what they perceive. Examining the perceptions of Black students' allows this population

of students, which is often unheard in the literature, an opportunity to address possible issues and to develop solutions which will help the research to bridge the gap for them between perception and reality (Freeman, 2005).

Problem Statement

Blacks in the U.S. suffer from intensely low enrollment at undergraduate colleges and universities (Mickelson, 1990). Conversely, Blacks report higher aspirations to attend college than do students of other racial ethnicities (Hearn, 1991; McDonough, 2005a; Mickelson, 1990; St. John, 1991). A daily routine in Americas' high schools for Black students, in particular, involves negotiating the hardships of discriminatory beliefs and practices which hinder them in the college choice process (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Freeman & Thomas, 2002). Students of color are faced with school counselors who: have lowered expectations of them going to college, schedule them into less rigorous, non college-preparatory courses, and fewer opportunities to access relevant college-going information from school counselors on the array of diverse opportunities which available to them (Gandara & Bial, 2001; Hippolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; McDonough, 2005a; Oakes, 2004; Potts, 2003; Smith, 2000; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). In other words, Black students in high schools across the nation, experience challenges participating in the college choice process (Plank & Jordan, 2001).

The process of college choice is complex and involves students navigating through three phases (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). It is generally agreed upon, by college choice researchers (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Venezia & Kirst, 2005) that the decision-making process of not only whether or not to participate in higher education but also which post-secondary institution to attend falls

into three phases. The first phase is called predisposition and it generally takes place when students are in the ninth grade. Predisposition involves students' aspirations to attend college. The second phase, titled Search, takes place in tenth and eleventh grades. During the Search phase, students investigate college admissions criteria and they begin to engage in ways to meet criteria by enrolling in college preparatory classes and taking college entrance tests. Finally, the third phase named Choice identifies that youth in grade 12 participate in narrowing down their higher education options to make final decisions about where to actually enroll in colleges (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990). The research consist of mainly quantitative work which attest to Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model's reliability when considering and explaining the college choice decisions of White, suburban, male students with a high to mid socioeconomic status (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004; Muhammad, 2008).

The model of college choice views students universally, minimizing their cultural and racial backgrounds. Furthermore, it assumes that students' progress through each of the three phases in a generalized manner (Muhammad, 2008). In essence, the model does not consider that racially diverse groups of students, namely Blacks, bring different schematic processes to the ways in which they aspire, search, and choose to enroll in college (Freeman, 2005; Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Anmatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). There continues to be great concern about students' of color enrollment into college (Freeman, 2005; Reid, 2008), because although college enrollment rates have increased for all racial groups over the last 30 years significant gaps continue to exist between Black and White students (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Percentage of Undergraduate College Enrollees

Ethnicity	Year	Percentage of Enrollees
White	2001-02	68%
	2007-08	65%
	2013-14	56%
Hispanic	2001-02	11%
	2007-08	15%
	2013-14	19%
Black	2001-02	12%
	2007-08	14%
	2013-14	13%
Asian	2001-02	7%
	2007-08	8%
	2013-14	10%
American Indian	2001-02	1%
	2007-08	1%
	2013-14	1%

Source: NCES, 2009

Table 1.1 depicts that close to a decade ago a college enrollment gap of 56% existed between White and Black students. Specifically, in 2002 sixty-eight percent of all undergraduate college students in the U.S. were White while a mere 12% were Black. Six years later, in 2008, the percentage of White students enrolled in college decreased slightly from 68% to 65%, while increasing for Blacks from 12% to 14%, however an enrollment gap of 51% remained. The table projects that the rate of White students in undergraduate college will decrease to 56% by the year 2014. However, the percentage of Black students in undergraduate college is also expected to decrease to 13% by 2014. By the year 2014, the college enrollment gap between White and Black students is projected to be 43% which is the lowest between 2002 and 2014, yet it is important to note that this decrease is not attributed to more Blacks enrolling in college. Rather, the narrowed gap is due to a decrease in the number of Whites who will enroll in college (NCES, 2009).

Researchers point to the lack of information that Black students are exposed to regarding college admissions and financial aid as an explanation for enrollment gaps between White and Black students (Freeman, 2005; Venezia, Kirst & Antonio, 2003; Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, 2009). A logical source of providing college-going assistance to students in high schools is the high school counselor (Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003). The college plans of Black students are influenced by how they perceive significant others, such as school counselors, view their college-going potential (Trusty, 2002). School counselors' beliefs and practices can largely marginalize the college aspirations of Black students. Moreover, counselors are identified as the single most influential group of professionals in high schools who are

able to help increase the college enrollment rates of Black students (Gandara & Bial, 2001; Hamrick & Hossler, 1996; McDonough, 2005a; Pope & Fermin, 2003).

School counseling practices that hinder students' ability to access precollege counseling services may be extremely detrimental for Black students, for whom the counselor is often a primary source of college information (Muller, Schiller, 2000; Perna et. al., 2007). Furthermore, if and when school counselors conform to status quo school policies and practices which discriminate against students of color, such actions serve to oppress Black students' ability to successfully engage in the college choice process and to ultimately enroll into college (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009). Precollege counseling practices which do not demonstrate cultural responsiveness for students of various racial and cultural backgrounds (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Schmidt, 2003) may constrain the college-going decisions of Black students.

Theoretical Rationale

This study is theoretically driven and framed by Critical Race Theory (CRT), which serves to expose the continuing significance of race and racism in American society (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995a). This race- based epistemology is useful for this particular study because it provides a lens through which it is possible to question, critique, and challenge the manner in which race and racist school counseling practices shape and undermine the efforts of Black students in their attempts to access precollege counseling (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009).

Although CRT is interdisciplinary, the theory originated in the legal scholarship as a means to confront laws, practices, and policies that disadvantage people of color while advancing Whites (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 1992). CRT was later

expanded to the field of education as a means of also exploring and addressing practices and policies which disadvantage students of color in educational institutions while benefitting Whites (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Black students suffer significant inequities in schools which are attributed to race and racist practices which hinder their levels of educational attainment. Such inequities are often rationalized, marginalized and muted (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993). This study attempts to move beyond current large scale quantitative studies which identify that Black high school students do not access the college choice services of their school counselors as often as their White peers to exploring this topic more deeply from the perceptions of Black students.

Specifically, this study uses CRT to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to accessing precollege counseling. CRT reveals deficit-informed research that has silenced or distorted Black students ability to access precollege counseling which could assist them with the college choice process. Four basic tenets of CRT were selected to frame this study (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000), as these four hold more salience to the argument that is presented.

The first tenet stipulates that issues stemming from race and racism are so much a part of normal life in American society that they are often difficult to recognize, eliminate, or address (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefanic, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Students of color encounter both covert and overt occurrences, in schools, which constrain their abilities to obtain college-going information (Freeman, 1995). A social

activist, Jonathon Kozol (1991), explained that great inequities exist in the schooling experiences of Black and White students. Black students are more likely to be academically tracked into lowered level remedial classes which do not prepare them for college (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McDonough, 2005a; Potts, 2003).

The second CRT tenet speaks to rejecting the notion of colorblindness in educational institutions. Allowing beliefs that color is not a factor in educational attainment allows misconceptions that fairness and equality are present in schools, while ignoring the reality that schools have long-standing practices which privilege White students while marginalizing those of color (Harper & Patton, 2007). Colorblind practices allow subtle forms of racism to go unaddressed making it easy to overlook. CRT confronts and critiques ideas, practices, and policies that camouflage racism by not addressing if and how they advantage Whites (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1998; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009), while disadvantaging Blacks (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Critical Race Theory's third tenet recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is critically valuable to gaining an understanding of and analyzing issues of racial subordination in the field of education (Freeman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). Engaging Black students to tell their realities empowers them. This population is silenced in the literature, thus the experiential knowledge of people of color is critical in explaining how perceptions of racial subordination in the field of education affects students of color (Solorzano, 1998). Acknowledging the validity of lived experiences of people of color, allows CRT scholars to place racism in a realistic context which is necessary to begin to work to eliminate it.

Critical Race Theory embraces the use of counter-narratives as a way of highlighting discrimination. Counter-narratives offer real life stories from persons of color to be told which often reveal unique interpretations of universal practices and challenge commonly held assumptions reported about people of color (Bernal, 2000; Ceja, 2006; Knight, Norton, Bentley & Dixon, 2004; Nakagawa, 2000).

The fourth tenet of the Critical Race Theory supports a theory of interest-convergence (Delgado, 1995a). This term interprets that educational institutions will only tolerate the educational advances of Black students when such advances also benefit White students' self-interests (Bell, 1995). Issues of racism continue to exists because there is an insufficient convergence of interests by White elites and African Americans (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Framing this study with CRT provided a lens which conceded rather ignored that high schools often operate from a standpoint of interest-convergence, and furthermore that this stance drives the operation and maintenance of college-related policies and practices influencing Black students in Americas' high schools (Bell, 1992).

While the tenets listed are not new in and of themselves individually, together they represent a means for exploring how educational practices and counselors' beliefs contribute to racial subordination in the college choice process (Harper & Patton, 2007; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). The significance of race in the college choice process has not been a top priority in previous college choice studies (Muhammad, 2008). The collective use of CRT tenets acknowledges that race-based disparities including: colorblind practices and marginalizing beliefs exists for Blacks in schools (Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Reporting the counter-narratives of students of color

supports the notion that their experiences will not be simplified or made to fit into traditional, universal models (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Muhammad, 2008).

Research Questions

A qualitative methodology of counter-narrative inquiry (Bernal, 2002; Knight, Norton, Bentley & Dixon, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) was used to address a primary and a secondary research question:

1. How do Black students' perceive their ability to access precollege counseling activities impacts their college choice decisions?

2. What expectations do Black students have concerning their ability to access precollege counseling activities?

Summary

The present study is organized around five chapters. The first chapter discusses the background related to the research topic. Chapter Two examines empirical studies focusing on college choice and school counseling as they relate to Black students. Research methodology and data collection are discussed in Chapter Three and data analysis are addressed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses study implications and provides recommendations for future research and practice.

Glossary of Terms

The following is a listing of key terms that are used throughout this study:

Advanced Placement (AP): Courses offered in high schools that are developed by the College Board. AP courses are taught by high school faculty. The curricula are standardized, and exams are administered in May of each year. Students with passing

scores of three or better, out of a possible five, are able to earn credit from colleges (College Board, 2005).

Black Students: The African Diaspora was a movement of Africans and their descendents to places throughout the world, predominately to America. The term Black is applied to the descendents of Black Africans and includes people who indicate their race as "Black, African American, or Negro" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

College Choice: In this study, the Hossler and Gallagher model of college choice conceptualizes a three-stage (predisposition, search, and choice) developmental model which identifys the decision making process that high school students participate in when deciding whether to pursue a postsecondary education or not (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

College-Going: Plans and activities which indicate college attendance (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).

College, Postsecondary or University: For the purpose of this study, the three terms are used inter-changeably to refer to higher education institutions.

Precollege Counseling: Counseling, advisement and activities provided by school counselors which inform students about higher education. (McDonough, 2005a; Hossler & Palmer, 2008).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of the second chapter is to present an overview of empirically researched studies that focus on college choice and school counseling as they relate to Black students. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, a selective review of college choice literature which examined the results of research studies was conducted. The second section highlighted empirical studies that researched school counseling. The chapter concludes with a summary.

College Choice

College choice for high school students focuses on factors that influence students' ultimate decisions to attend college. The decision of whether or not to go to college is one of the first major noncompulsory decisions made by adolescents and has a lasting impact on their careers, livelihoods and lifestyles. Building on the work of Jackson (1982), Litten (1982) and others, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed a linear three-stage model to describe the college decision-making process: predisposition, search and choice.

College-going aspirations are similar between parents and their children. Stage and Hossler (1989) analyzed the educational expectations of high school students and families and their background characteristics. This quantitative study reported findings supporting Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. Specifics of this study consisted of two surveys being issued to 2,497 ninth grade students and their parents. It took place in

Indiana. Respondents completing both surveys were compared to those who did not to see if there were differing outcomes between the two groups. Specifically, 68% of the parents in the total sample and 69% in the subsample expected their children to earn at least a bachelor's degree; compared with 63% of students in the total sample and 64% in the subsample. An additional finding identified that students' mother's level of education in particular, had an effect on the postsecondary plans of male and female students of color.

The college-going aspirations of Black mothers' was also found to have a positive influence on the college choice decisions of their children, in an earlier study conducted by Manski and Wise (1983). Students in the study who had parents with less than a high school education were compared with the college attendance rate of students who had parents with at least one college degree. The findings reported that when students had parents possessing a college degree they were more than twice as likely to apply to college, as were students whose parents only had a high school education. Moreover, Manski and Wise's (1983) study found that Black parents reported higher educational expectations for their children than did parents of White students even when the students of color in the study had lower grade point averages.

The paradox of "consistently positive attitudes toward education, coupled with frequently poor academic achievement" among Black students is studied in Mickelson's (1990) research. Data for the study was collected from 1,193 high school seniors attending eight schools in the Los Angeles area. A questionnaire tool was developed asking student respondents for specific information to their abstract and concrete attitudes

toward education, their peers, leisure time and work histories. Academic achievement data, for the study, were taken directly from students' school records.

The findings revealed that a key to explaining the attitude-achievement paradox among Blacks hinged on the coexistence of concrete and abstract attitudes towards education. A major difference between the attitudes of Black and Whites was that Black students' embraced a dominant ideology about the positive links between education and mobility, even more strongly than did White students. However, the study identified that, students' developed their perceptions of academic efforts and accomplishments from the larger society. The information conveyed to students about potential returns on education is not only what parents, counselors and the dominant ideology expound, but also what the students' daily realities show them. In other words, the students in the study reported not being easily swayed by the rhetoric of equal opportunity through education, especially when they heard other realities at their dinner tables (Mickelson, 1990).

Despite the increase of Black students enrolled in high schools throughout the nation their successful transition into four year colleges remains limited. A quantitative study conducted by Hamrick and Stage (2004) examined how Black students and low income students face structural obstacles in education which impedes their participation in the college choice process. Students of color and low income students as well as the teachers and parents in the study reported having too few school counselors in their high schools. In addition, the respondents reported that the high school counselors spent a majority of their time working with students and families exhibiting mental health and social problems, rather than on college related information and preparation which could assist students' with their college choice processes. Baseline data were collected from

the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS): 88. The data included information from some 25,000 students, teachers and parents. A significant finding from Hamrick and Stage's (2004) study reinforced the influential role of parents in the predisposition phase of Black students.

Black parents' are a valuable source of motivation to their children in helping them to develop aspirations to pursue college regardless of the educational level of the parents. A qualitative study that King conducted in 1996 provided an analysis of students of color and low-income students who planned to attend college. The students were identified for the study from the 1995 Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Specifically the study sought to investigate what factors contributed to Black and Hispanic students' post-secondary plans (King, 1996).

Crucial outcomes identified as significant to Black students' college choice process included that parents must be prepared to assist their children in identifying resources to help their children identify ways to fund a postsecondary education. Next, students of color need to develop high academic standards for themselves as well as post-secondary educational aspirations and school counselors need to proactively advise students of color about the importance of taking rigorous high school academic curriculums, including AP and honors courses. Finally, school counselors need to provide students with quality precollege counseling which will be relevant to their needs when working with Black and Hispanic students.

When Black students are able to see themselves represented racially at post-secondary educational institutions, the reality of their enrollment becomes more of a real possibility. A qualitative ethnographic study that explored how the academic lives of

students' and their access to college was influenced by race and class (Horvat, 1996). Over a ninth month period data were collected from 53 Black female students attending one of three different urban high schools in the state of California. All of the student participants in the study were identified as college-bound. The diverse high school types that the students attended included a: (1) public high school that was predominately populated with Black students from families reporting low socioeconomic statuses (SES); (2) racially mixed secondary school with mixed socioeconomic compositions; and (3) private 9-12 educational institution with a predominately White population of students from families with high SES levels. Students along with their parents, friends, schools counselors, teachers and other school staff including principals were interviewed for Horvat's (1996) study. The results of the study indicated that Black students, in particular, were more likely to choose to attend higher education institutions where they saw themselves in the form of other students who they felt were like them and who were already attending certain colleges or universities.

The influences on the college choice decisions of ninth students are different from the influences on twelfth grade students. A nine year longitudinal study using quantitative and qualitative methods, served as the foundation for a research study that was conducted by Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999). The study took place in the state of Indiana between 1986 and 1994. The study examined how individual students and parents progressed through Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three stage model of college choice. The size of the study was 4,993 ninth grade students and their parents, all of whom were surveyed. In addition, a sub-sample of 56 of the students and their parents were interviewed a total of nine times.

It was found that parents had the most influence on students' college choice decisions when they were in the ninth grade. However, by grade twelve, peers and school counselors play a larger role on whether they would attend college or not. One of the strengths of the Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) study was the magnitude of the data set that was used including the numbers of students and parents surveyed and interviewed and the number of years over which the study was conducted.

The type of high school that Black students attend impacts their pathway to college. In two similar, but separate empirical quantitative studies that were conducted within three years of each other this was studied. One study was conducted by Berkner and Chavez (1997) and the other by Perna (2000). Both studies used data from the NELS: 88. Berkner and Chavez examined how students of different races experienced the college choice process. A crucial finding from Berkner and Chavez's (1997) study was when Black students were enrolled in secondary schools where a majority of the students went on to four-year colleges after high school there was a tendency for these students to also graduate enrolled into four-year college programs. The level of academic preparatory coursework that secondary schools offered to Black students, such as higher level math courses or Advanced Placement (AP) courses influenced not only if students aspired to attend college, but further impacted if they actually applied and got accepted into a college or university. Finally, the study identified that when Black students had access to consistent and effective precollege counseling services in their high schools, it had a positive impact on their college choice decisions because students were able to access college-going knowledge, information and assistance. Berkner and Chavez's (1997) research further identified that Black students were not likely to be exposed to

academic courses that would allow them to meet college's prerequisite admissions

qualifications for acceptance. However; the study also found that in cases where Black

students did meet college's admissions requirements there were no differences in the

college enrollment rates between them and their White peers. In measuring college

admissions requirements Berkner and Chavez (1997) developed a College Qualification

Index (CQI), which measured four student factors: (1) Grade Point Average (GPA); (2)

student's rank listing in their school; (3) college entrance test scores; and (4) standardized

test scores. The composite CQI score placed students in one of five levels for college

admissions: (a) very highly qualified; (b) highly qualified; (c) somewhat qualified; (d)

minimally qualified; or (e) not qualified.

An analysis of CQI data from students' scores revealed a direct relationship

between students' college enrollment and their race/ ethnicity, family income, parent's

level of education and the college-related activities that were offered in their high

schools. Student from families with mid to high SES levels were found to be 30% more

likely to graduate from high school and to have higher scores on the CQI than their low-

income peers. Thus, it was induced that students with a mid to high SES were able to

meet college admissions requirements more often than their lower income peers. In an

interesting twist, when Black and Latino students with low SES levels received high CQI

scores there were virtually no differences in their access to college. Additionally, the

study noted that when Black and Latino students were accepted into at least one private

postsecondary college institution, they were just as likely to enroll into these institutions

as their higher income peers of different races (Berkner & Chavez, 1997).

In Black families it is the mother who tends to have the most influence on their children's college aspirations of children, whereas in White families the father has the most significant influence. A quantitative study conducted by Perna (2000) collected data from 11,933 high school participants. The high school students who participated in Perna's (1998) study were: 42% White, 35.1% Black, and 25.6% Latino/a. The findings of Perna's (2000) research study contrasted the results of earlier studies which revealed that the father of White and Black students was the most influential factor in students' college choice decisions.

Students of color are more likely to demonstrate academic talent loss than are their White peers. Academic talent loss occurs when high school students' demonstrate the potential to experience high academic achievement yet make decisions to not to pursue higher education. A quantitative study by Plank and Jordan (2001) examined issues surrounding academic talent loss. Data were collected from close to 25,000 tenth grade students using the NELS: 88 data base. The students were surveyed at two year intervals between 1990 and 1994.

Specifically, the researchers for this study investigated how students' race and socioeconomic status impacted their college choice decisions. Findings revealed the impact of Black and poor students' socioeconomic levels on their college plans lessened when they had the ability to access accurate and consistent information about college programs. In other words, there was a link between the SES levels of students and their level of engagement in the college choice process. Specifically, as students' SES levels decreased, so too did their chances of enrolling into four-year postsecondary institutions.

School-sponsored activities designed to provide effective guidance and information required a desire on the part of secondary schools to be transformative rather than reproductive. Further, school-based strategies had the potential to have a profound impact on the college choice decisions of students of color. Such strategies were found to be most effective when counselors possessed specifically skills and knowledge to help students of color with navigating the complexities of college choice and how to effectively communicate with not only with adolescents but also with parents (Plank & Jordan, 2001). One finding from the study that broke away from traditional findings in the college choice literature identified that when Black and White students shared were at the same academic levels, Blacks were more likely than Whites to pursue and enroll into four year postsecondary institutions.

The findings from Plank and Jordan's (2001) research confirmed Berkner and Chavez (1997) as well as Perna's (2000) earlier studies which both identified that Black high school students' lag behind Whites in their likelihood to enroll into four year colleges and universities. However, when Black students exhibit high levels of academic achievement they are just as likely to enroll into four year colleges as their White peers. In essence, each of these studies provides evidence that when Black students are allowed to be scheduled and to access rigorous academic programs they are as likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college as their White counterparts.

Access to College-Going Information

Participation in higher education has the potential to provide many opportunities to Black students however this population often faces structural inequities in schools which make it challenging for them to access college preparatory information. Empirical

research conducted by Pope and Fermin (2003) examined educational and social factors which influenced Black students' decisions to attend college. The study was quantitative and collected data from 219 college students attending a large research 1 institution located in the Midwest. The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire with 21 demographic questions and 28 items that were related specifically to college choice experiences during high school years.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents were female and 39% were male. Ethnic representation of the respondents for the survey included: 38.3% White Americans; 37.4% Black; 6% Native American; 5% Hispanic; 3% Asian/ Pacific Islanders; and finally 8% were in a category identified as "other." The study revealed that when college admissions representatives provided them with college information they had a positive desire to pursue college. Moreover, the study highlighted that college admissions' counselors visiting high schools proved to be a resource valued more highly by Blacks than Whites. In fact, Black students in the study shared that the expert knowledge and the brochures and college advertisements booklets shared by college recruiters were an important indicator in their decisions to go to college. Thus, Pope and Fermin's (2003) study proved that it was imperative for high schools to structure visitations from college admissions representatives into their precollege counseling programs.

Precollege counseling supports need to be explicitly targeted towards students and parents of color and those with low SES levels. Partially, because Black high school students who are in the lowest SES quartile are more likely to also have parents with substantially lower levels of education who do not have access to college choice information and resources. Further, parents of Black and poor children also have less

exposure to college admissions criteria and to have less knowledge on the college choice process than White students who were more likely to have parents in the highest SES quartile (99%). A quantitative study conducted by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) asserted that secondary school counselors provide valuable college-going assistance to parents and students of color. The study highlighted that precollege counseling has the ability to help these vulnerable populations to understand the connection between the economic and societal benefits of earning a college degree with developing the knowledge needed to successfully apply and enroll into college. There is a need for Black and low income students and parents to be educated on: (1) the cost of attending four-year colleges; (2) understanding how to locate financial aid opportunities; and (3) developing a financial strategy to pay for a college education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

School counselors play an important role in helping to motivate students to enroll in college preparatory courses. This was found to be especially true for students of color as they may be less knowledgeable about ways to access college preparatory coursework (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). The study also implied that counselors need to be knowledgeable of ways to effectively inform under-represented students and their parents of the rationale behind taking challenging, more difficult coursework.

Two empirical studies, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) as well as Berkner and Chavez's (1997), each found that White students and students from families with high income levels are more likely to graduate from high school and to enroll in higher education institutions. On the other hand, these two studies revealed that students from families with low SES levels are not likely to enroll in college and for the most part, racially these students are Black and Latino/a. Students representing these ethnic

backgrounds are likely to experience diminished rates of meeting high school graduation requirements and lowered rates of successfully enrolling into postsecondary educational institutions.

The study conducted by Cabrera and La Nasa's (2001), found that 56% of students coming from families with high SES levels, graduated from high school and reported plans to enroll into higher education institutions. A mere 15% of students' falling into the lower income quartile graduated from high school or planned to go on to college. An analysis of the data illustrated a gap of 41% between White, affluent students and Black poor students meeting the standards required for high school graduation and sharing plans to go to college. The study found that when Blacks in the lowest SES quartile receive academic and counseling support to meet high school graduation requirements the possibilities of them graduating greatly improve. This support would allow them to be consistent with their higher SES peers who were White. School counselors providing Black and poor students' with college-related information prior to high school was found to be useful.

When Black high school students do not report having college aspirations by grade 10 they are at risk for not enrolling in college upon graduating from high school. In a study conducted by Choy, Horn, Nunez and Chen (2000) the college-going rates of Black high students were analyzed. The qualitative study explored Black students' participation in higher level math courses and their exposure to in school college preparatory activities. Another finding demonstrated that when precollege counseling services were provided to students of color, especially those with parents who did not attend college, their chances for pursuing enrollment into a four year college or university

were greatly increased. The research also found that Blacks with educated parents are more likely to take additional high school math courses, than were Black students with parents who did not attend college. Empirical research conducted by Adelman (2006) supported the findings from the Choy, Horn, Nunez and Chen (2000) study. Adelman's study also revealed that when Black students' take more math courses and rigorous academic classes they are more likely to enroll into four-year undergraduate college directly from high school.

Exposure to mathematics beyond the level of Algebra II significantly increases students' likelihood of earning an undergraduate degree. Using data information from both the NELS:88 and the NELS:2000, Adelman (2006) investigated the correlation between the highest level of mathematics that Black students' took in high school and the completion of college for these students. Results of the study were consistent with an earlier quantitative study that Adelman (1999) conducted. In Adelman's earlier study (1999) it was found that the intensity of the high school curriculum was the best indicator of whether or not students of color successfully completed four-year college programs.

Low resource urban public high schools oftentimes do not offer advanced levels of mathematics coursework, to their students. Such schools are likely to serve higher populations of students of color and their families who live in marginalized, low-income communities. Explicit academic supports and precollege counseling guidance are a means for helping under-represented students successfully enroll in rigorous college preparatory courses (Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000). The study focused on a pre-collegiate high school based program which focuses on helping to motivate underachieving students from underrepresented, ethnic minority backgrounds to prepare

for and pursue a college education, the Advancement Via Individual Determination
(AVID) program. The academic and counseling supports offered in AVID programs take
place in secondary schools and help all students, but especially Black students who often
do not have access to such information outside of school.

The curriculum for the AVID program involves an elective class that high school
students take which focuses on improving critical writing abilities. Academic tutors are
also made available to students participating in the program. The academic expectations
held for students in the AVID program are high (Mehan, Hubbard & Villaneuva, 1994).
Research conducted on the AVID program examined its impact on the actual college
enrollment rates of ethnic minority students' exhibiting low academic achievement in the
San Diego, California public school district. High school graduation rates and the college
enrollment rates were measured for the students' respondents.

Outcomes of the study proved that Black students are helped in schools when they
are "academically un-tracked." The research found that advocates for the AVID program
believe that it helps to place Black students even those who may have demonstrated low
academic achievement into college preparatory courses. Students of color, were shown
to benefit greatly from the supports offered through participation in the AVID program
(Mehan, Hubbard, & Villaneuva, 1994). Furthermore, the students' in this study reported
that participation in AVID helped them to see and understand the value of obtaining a
higher education. The rates of high school completion and college enrollment in the San
Diego area for students participating in AVID exceeded both local and national college
enrollment rates, proving that the success of the AVID program are noteworthy.

Another empirical study gaining insight into the college choice decisions of Black students was conducted by Cooper (2009). The quantitative research design collected data from the Educational Longitudinal Studies of 2002 and 2004 (ELS: 2002/04), while students were in the 10th grade (2002) and again in 2004, when the same group of students was in the 12th grade. Questionnaires were used to examine Black students development of postsecondary educational aspirations between 10th and 12th grades. The study's sample size included 12,530 students. Differences across racial groups as well as the stability of students' college-going aspirations were investigated. Cooper's (2009) findings supported the earlier work of Choy, Horn, Nunez and Chen (2000) by finding that seventy-five percent of 10th grade students reported expecting to earn at least a bachelor's degree. Fifteen percent aspired to earn less than a bachelor's degree and 9% were undecided about their college-going expectations. More than half of the students who aspired to earn less than a bachelor's degree in grade 10 maintained this same aspiration well into their senior year of high school. One third of the students who aspired to earn at least a bachelor's degree in 10th grade reported actually decreasing their postsecondary educational expectations by the time they reached grade 12. This was especially true of Black male students. Specifically, 33% of the Black male students' in this study had decreased their college-going aspirations between grades 10 and 12. White and Asian male students demonstrated fewer rates of decreasing their college-going aspirations than did Blacks. The study concluded that it was particularly critical for precollege counseling interventions to be offered to Black students, especially males to support them with maintaining and possibly increasing their postsecondary educational aspirations throughout their high school career.

A wide array of personal, educational, and societal circumstances propels Black high school students not only into pursuing four year postsecondary formal education but also towards pursuing enrollment into diverse types of postsecondary institutions, such as Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). A qualitative college choice study conducted by Freeman (2005) grappled with understanding the roles that families and schools play in the college-going aspirations of Black students. Focus group interviews with 70 male and female high school students were used to collect data. The students in Freeman's study resided in one of five differing metropolitan cities in the U.S. and were in grades 10, 11 and 12. The students attended public, private, charter and Catholic schools. Although, student participants attended different school types and lived in different geographical regions their responses in the focus group interviews did not vary much.

The literature reports that Freeman's (2005) study gave voice to a group that has historically has been silent in research studies. The research further illustrated that the more often that Black students interacted with White students or attended high schools which were predominately White, the more likely they were to desire "going back to their roots," and pursuing enrollment at an HBCU. On the other hand, when Black students reported having little to no opportunity to interact with or attend high school with White youth they expressed a desire to pursue college attendance at more ethnically diverse post secondary educational institutions, such as PWIs. Freeman's (2005) study, informed the research that eleven variables predisposition Black students' to pursue a postsecondary education and influences the type of college they will apply to including: (a) the size and location of the high school attended; (b) college expectations of secondary school

teachers and counselors; (c) relationships with high school staff members; (d) the college-going aspirations of peer groups or friends; (e) the racial makeup of students and faculty at the high school attended; (f) parents' postsecondary desires for their children; (g) exposure to the benefits of attending a PWI or an HBCU through conversations with significant adults; (h) college visits; (i) participation in civic and church or community groups; (j) level of rigor of the high school curriculum; and (k) exposure to quality precollege counseling (Freeman, 2005).

The study also revealed that even when Black parents have not attended college themselves they are still profoundly important in helping their children aspire to attend college. Extending and supporting Freeman's research was a study conducted by Venezia and Kirst (2005) which identifying the critical role that parents play in the college aspirations of their children. In addition Venezia and Kirst's research found that inequitable practices and policies exist in K-12 educational systems which tend to undermine the college aspirations which parents hold for their children and contribute to severely decreasing postsecondary opportunities that students of color are exposed to.

Muhammad's (2008) study investigating and analyzing the influence of cultural support on college choice for Black high school students, expanded on Freeman's (2005) research. The quantitative study conducted by Muhammad's (2008) study used data from both Freeman's study in 2005 and from a large national U.S. Department of Education database: National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS): 88. Findings from the study identified five variables that influence the college choice process of Black students: (a) demographics; (b) number and level of high school math courses taken and their grades in courses; (c) reading comprehension levels; (d) participation in extracurricular

activities, both in and out of school; and (e) levels of support from significant others,

identified as: family members, teachers and school counselors. Her work additionally

revealed that Black male and female students received different levels of support in their

high schools, regarding their desires to pursue or not pursue postsecondary education.

Specifically, it was found that school counselors were more likely to offer higher levels

of support and encouragement to Black female students to pursue a postsecondary

education, than was offered to Black male students.

School Counselors

The literature offers diverse findings on how school counselors' influence

students' college choice decisions through precollege counseling. A qualitative study

utilizing interviews with 27 school counselors working in eight highly diverse Chicago

high schools was conducted by Rosenbaum, Miller and Krei (1996). The rationale for

using interviews in this study was to allow counselors' opportunities to explain their

professional roles as well as to capture a more expansive picture of their role. The

researchers identified that quantitative methods would have attained prescriptive

responses to questions. Results of the study demonstrated how the role of high school

counselors has changed from the 1960s to current times. The study revealed that in the

1960's school counselors had a major influence over not only which groups of students

went to college, but also which type of colleges they pursued (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963;

Schafer & Olexa, 1971; Rosenbaum, 1976). In fact, during the era of the 60's, directing

certain students to proper postsecondary educational institutions was expected of school

counselors. However, the study revealed that some thirty years later, during the 1990's

high school counselors reported not feeling that they possessed the authority to channel

students into or away from college. The perceptions of counselors that were expressed in Rosenbaum, Miller and Krei's (1996) study revealed a profound paradigm shift in the role of school counselors. Counselors further reported not liking to give students bad news about their postsecondary educational prospects. The counselors in the study expressed perceptions that the parents of students have been empowered to override their college-going advice. Thus there was concern with providing students with honest precollege advisement on viable postsecondary educational options. The perception expressed by school counselors reflects a belief that their role of offering college-related guidance to students has been greatly diminished. The outcome is that school counselors reported implementing a "college for all" strategy, encouraging all students to pursue college whether the students were college ready or not.

In fact, Rosenbaum, Miller, and Krei's (1996) study identified that even when students had low academic grades and they expressed to counselors a desire to go to highly competitive, elite postsecondary educational institutions counselors reported not discouraging their college-going plans. The study found that school counselors not providing students of color with accurate college advisement hindered them because they were less likely to obtain college-going information at home or elsewhere (Rosenbaum, Miller & Krei, 1996). High school precollege counseling structures across the U.S. are inadequate to prepare Black students to attend college (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson & Li, 2007; Venezia & Kirst, 2005).

School counselors in urban high schools report experiencing conflicting professional work responsibilities which tend to affect their ability to effectively manage the varied host of responsibilities associated with precollege counseling. Inequities exist

within high school guidance practices. A study conducted by Martinez and Kloppett (2003), revealed that students of color often experience detrimental school counseling inequities.

The quality of precollege counseling services in secondary schools is impacted greatly by the schools' administrative leadership and district office administrative teams. Studies conducted by McDonough (1997) and Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez and Colyar (2004), identified that school counselors perceived that their job duties were dependent on factors that were both within and outside of their control. Reportedly, variables that influence the quality of high school precollege counseling services range from student to counselor ratios, to the value that is given to the counseling offices' in schools by the district level leaders. Students attending large urban public high schools are likely to encounter high student to counselor ratios. The studies illustrated that in urban high schools student to counselor ratios tended to exceed the recommended 100 to 1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2009).

The outcomes of Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, and Colyar's (2004) study identified that students of color suffer when their high schools have high counselor to student ratios. The study also revealed that when high school counselors have high student caseloads there is the risk that students and families end up losing confidence in the counselors who, in essence are very professionals cited as being the most knowledgeable professionals in high schools with helping students pursue enrollment into college (McDonough, 2005a). Lastly, the study found that when school districts elected to reduce the number of counselors usually due to budgetary constraints, the result had a

negative impact on the numbers of students electing to attend college (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez & Colyar, 2004).

Higher student to counselor ratios tend to exist in secondary schools where more a vast majority of the students are minority (National Association of College Admissions' Counselors [NACAC], 2009). In 2005, the average student to counselor ratio in high schools in the U.S. was 478 to 1 (U.S. Department of Education, Conditions of Education, 2005). NACAC (2009) conducted a large scale quantitative study which attested to findings that higher student to counselor ratios existed in schools where there were large groupings of underrepresented populations enrolled. Results from NACAC's research further established that a vast majority of the school counselors participating in the study reported that the counseling staff at high minority schools remained constant in size with the prior year with little to no consideration for increases in student population sizes. Over half of the counselors participating in the NACAC survey reported that the high schools that they worked in did not afford them with an adequate amount of resources to support students' increasing precollege counseling needs. On the other hand, when schools have smaller student to counselor ratios there is often an increase in the college-going rate of students in high schools (Plank & Jordan, 2001).

Two reports focusing on school counselors and college choice discussed a need to collect qualitative data to add to the literature. Qualitative research allows for in-depth follow-up dialogues discussing how structural constraints in urban public schools impact Black students' college choice experiences (U.S. Department of Education's Conditions of Education, 2005; NACAC, 2006). Results of the reports further suggest that an

informal college-going information pipeline from parents and extended family members who have attended college to students of color is of great benefit.

The literature is consistent that students' ability to access college-going information during their high school years influences students' postsecondary journeys. The literature is further consistent that within the professional field of school counseling there are structural barriers in high schools populated with predominately Black students (Ceja, 2006; Freeman, 2005; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, Antonio & Trent, 1997; Muhammad, 2008). Most of the research studies that focus on school counseling report that most high school students have varying forms of contact with their high school counselors.

The college-going expectations that school counselors have for their students' influences the amount of college advisement that they provided for students. A research study examining which racial groups of students were more likely to access precollege counseling was conducted by Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines, (2009). Data were collected from the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) that followed a national sample of 10th grade students biennially. The same groups of students were again surveyed in 2004, as high school seniors. The quantitative study's sample size was comprised of 4,924 students. Although, the students in the study attended various high school types including: public, private and catholic high schools, the vast majority (90%), attended public schools. Six point two percent of the students attended Catholic schools and 3.3% attended private schools. By the time the students were resurveyed as 12th graders 53.9% were female and 46.1% were male. Twelve point two percent of the students were Black or biracial. The results of Bryan, Holcomb-

McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines' (2009) research study were consistent with a majority of the school counseling literature (Farmer- Hinton & Adams, 2006; McDonough, 1997), which revealed that the number of precollege counseling sessions students had with high school counselors differed amongst high school types.

As the size of a high school increases there is a tendency for the percentages of Black students receiving effective precollege counseling to decrease. Further findings revealed that students' who believed that their school counselors had postsecondary expectations for them other than college were less likely to report counselor to student contact for college information. In addition, students attending higher- poverty schools (i.e. schools with high concentrations of students of color and/ low income students), were found to have less counselor contact for college information. In fact, Black students attending large high schools reported being less likely to initiate visits to their school's counseling offices to gather college related information. Furthermore, in larger high schools Black students were more likely to seek out college information from school counselors than were the White students at these schools. Finally, the results of Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines' (2008) study offers insight into understanding how critical it is for school counselors, principals, and district administrators' to be knowledgeable about the academic and social development of Black students' within the context of the college choice process.

Parental encouragement and high college-going expectations alone do not cause students to apply to and enroll into postsecondary institutions. In a qualitative study conducted by Howard (2003) 20 low-income, Black students from mid-western and western areas of the U. S., were purposefully selected from two urban high schools to

explore their college-going aspirations. Ten of the student participants were female and 10 were male. The students demonstrated varying levels of academic achievement ranging from low or challenging; medium or middle of the road; and high or college-bound achievement. A consistent theme emerged from students' perceptions identifying that their development of college aspirations were influenced by their school counselors. Students revealed that their high school counselors played a major role in if and how they perceived that they would go to college. Data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. During the focus group interviews, the topic of race was injected into conversations and students across groups offered explicit accounts of how they perceived that their school counselors' college expectations and behaviors towards them were connected to their race. One student in the study reportedly discussed how her school counselor discouraged her from enrolling in college preparatory courses.

The study further identified that students need to have opportunities to access school counselors who have high college-going expectations for them. Their parent's educational expectations also greatly influenced their predisposition towards attending college. Ironically, parental encouragement alone was not enough to help students overcome the challenges associated with developing a predisposition towards college nor was this factor alone enough for students to elect engaging in a rigorous college search process or enrolling into college. This study proved that access to quality precollege counseling services helped to increase student participants' likelihood to successfully complete the college choice process. Moreover, Howard's (2003) study found that when high schools do not provide Black students with opportunities to access precollege counseling their pursuit of higher education is lowered. Educators also need to be

mindful of their attitudes, words and behaviors when interacting with students because whether intentional or unintentional they have serious implications on the manner of how students view their college bound capabilities. Overall, Howard's (2003) research confirmed earlier research conducted by King (1996) which suggested that precollege counseling efforts targeting low SES and Black students as well as their parents, understand how and why obtaining a college degree were important and worthwhile.

The college-going culture of high schools impacts how and if students' access precollege counseling and their choice decisions. A qualitative research study conducted by De Le Rosa (2006) with high school juniors and seniors sought to understand how if at all, the college-going culture in a high school influences the college choice decisions of the students who attend those high schools. The study's participants' were enrolled at one of seven low-income high schools in Southern California.

An outcome of the study revealed that when large numbers of students in high schools pursue and attend college it increases the college aspiration levels of other students in those high schools. Furthermore, the type of postsecondary institution that students' aspired to attend was directly linked to the type of colleges that students from the high schools pursued. De Le Rosa's (2006) empirical study further identified that when students attended a high school with a positive college-going culture students were more likely to access precollege counseling and be well-informed about college admissions' requirements. Students at these schools also tended to participate in college preparatory coursework and to have goals of attending four-year postsecondary institutions. When the culture of a school boasts a common language on the college-

going expectations for students, the study confirmed that Black students experience higher rates of college attendance.

School counselor biases about certain colleges have the potential to influence the how they counsel students and families about those colleges. A quantitative study conducted during the winter of 1997 gathered data from professional school counselors in a western state (Espinoza, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2002). Three-hundred and thirty-two surveys were mailed to counselors in 124 high schools throughout the state. Forty-one percent of the school counselors responded, resulting in 138 of the surveys being returned. Among the counselor respondents, 57 % were female and 43 % were male. The 43 question survey included two sections: the first listed 22 questions dealt with identifying and rating the importance of various college factors while the last section had 21 questions that specifically dealt with school counselors' perceptions of a Research 1 University in the state that the study took place in compared to other colleges and universities in that state. All questions on the survey used a Likert Scale to rate responses. The five areas of preference that school counselors rated as most important when advising students and families on pursuing higher education at a Research 1 University were: (a) quality of the undergraduate programs and the faculty members as well as the accessibility and helpfulness of the faculty and staff at the university; (b) economic considerations which included college work study opportunities while in college, as well as the location of the campus and cost of attendance; (c) size of classes and campuses; (d) variety of academic majors as well as the national reputation of the university, research opportunities; and (e) diversity of the student population, and the prestige of the degree. The factors that school counselors rated as the least important on

the survey, were those associated with extra-curricular and social opportunities for students. These factors also included those opportunities for students to participate in leadership and extracurricular activities, social life and athletic programs in college.

Summary

Qualitative studies exploring the perceptions of Black high school students in the college choice process are very scarce. More specifically the literature does not adequately address Black students perceptions of their ability to access precollege counseling practices. If high school counselors are a significant gateway to Black students obtaining college-related information, then it is critical to study how Black students' perceive school sponsored precollege counseling activities and to learn what their expectations are for receiving precollege counseling.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Chapter Three begins with a description of the epistemology and methodology that were the foundation of this study. The chapter then describes the study's setting, participant selection, data collection methods and data analysis procedures used. The chapter concludes with a summary section.

A counter-narrative inquiry methodology was used to understand how Black students describe their perceptions of access to precollege counseling activities in their schools. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black students' perceive their ability to access precollege counseling activities impacts their college choice decisions?

2. What expectations do Black students have concerning their ability to access precollege counseling activities?

Methodology

Epistemology

This study is based in a phenomenological epistemology. Identification of an epistemology is significant because it situates the study by influencing the way that research is conducted and reported (Crotty, 1998). An explicit epistemology helps with supporting the trustworthiness and the credibility of the study's findings (Crotty, 1998).

A phenomenological epistemology allows for a deep exploration into the phenomena of Black students' perceptions about precollege counseling (Bolton, 1979;

Moustakas, 1994). This epistemology presumes that reality is multiple and complex and that the researcher's and the participant's relationship is interactive (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Furthermore, this epistemology is identified as appropriate when the research centers on a little known phenomena, because it illuminates gathering deep information about participant's perceptions through interviews. Based on this epistemology, participants in this study were considered to be the experts on describing their perceptions and lived experiences with their ability to access precollege counseling activities and expressing the impact that it had on their college choice decisions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The counter-narrative stories of participants were listened to, in line with the phenomenological epistemology, to understand the Black students' perceptions of accessing precollege counseling services from a first-hand perspective (Dilley, 2004). The goal was to analyze, interpret, construct and reconstruct the participant's realities in order to address the research questions that guided this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). The foundation of the counter-narrative inquiry methodology that was used is well aligned with the phenomenological epistemology (Moustakas, 1994).

Counter-Narrative Inquiry

A counter-narrative inquiry was used to possibly reveal gaps for Black students in the college choice process. To explore if traditionally told stories and satires adequately describe their experiences or if in fact, this population is able to provide another version which describes their realities. Although counter-narratives are often told for members of

marginalized groups, they can be used to reveal contradictions in the dominant cultural

ideology that argument cannot (Gandara, 1999; 2002).

In describing counter-narrative inquiries, different experiences, which are not of

the dominant culture are able to participate in creating the possibility of a new narrative

that is visible to all and perhaps, alters perceptions in their communities and the larger

culture (Hubbard, 1999). Delgado (2000) posits that counter-narrative inquires are

valuable, especially when engaging in a critique which supports a dominant cultural

discourse which seems to reflect consensus and common sense.

Using counter-narrative inquiries was particularly appropriate for this study

because the methodology has been useful at illustrating and representing the lives and

experiences of groups in society who have experienced marginalization and

discrimination on the basis of race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This methodology

allows for the telling of different stories (Prendergast, 1998). In other words, the point of

counter-narrative inquiry is not to merely replace one narrative with another. Rather, it is

to hear from populations that have been silenced in dominant discourse dialogues in ways

that will highlight connections and reveal conflicts.

Study Setting

This study took place in a large urban district in upstate New York. In 2008, the

overall four-year graduation rate for students in New York State was listed at 71% (NYS

Report Card, 2009). That same year, while eighty-two percent of all four-year high

school graduates in NYS were White, Black high school graduates lagged behind with a

rate of 54%. The gap in NYS between White and Black high school graduates in 2008

was 28%. Specifically, this study was situated in the Stone City School District (SCSD),

which serves approximately 34,000 racially and ethnically diverse students. Within the SCSD, 57% of the students are Black, 25% are White, 14% are Hispanic and 4% are listed as other minorities. The overall four-year high school graduation rate for students in the SCSD was 46% in June 2008. This percentage reflects a 25% decrease below the states' rate. The rate of SCSD high school graduates who were White was 57% compared with 41% who were Black. A mere 31% of the June 2008 graduates were Black males (NYS Report Card, 2009).

There are 3,017 full-time teachers and 86 school counselors employed in the SCSD. Forty-two counselors are assigned amongst the districts' 16 secondary schools of varying types including: magnet, alternative, gifted and talented, career and technical, College Board sponsored, and, comprehensive district high schools.

Two very different high school types were included in this study. Littleton Magnet School (LMS) has a total of 520 students of which 25% are Black. The other high school in the study, Large City School (LCS), has a student population was 956 and 66% of the total student body was Black, as is indicated in Table 3.1. A goal of studying Black students' perceptions at LCS and LMS was to deeply explore similarities and differences in their experiences.

LMS was founded thirty-five years ago in 1975 with the purpose of educating and meeting the needs of students deemed as academically gifted. As Table 3.1 illustrates there are stringent admissions requirements that students seeking admittance to LMS must satisfy prior to acceptance into the school including: a high score on a comprehensive entry test and teacher recommendations. Additionally, to gain entrance to

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LMS, students must construct personal statements and have high standardized test scores
on state assessments.

Table 3.1

Study Sites Information

School	# of Counselors	# of Students	% of Blacks	Admissions Requirements	% Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch
LMS	3	520	25%	Written Test, Recommendations, Personal Statement Standardized Test Scores	28%
LCS	3	956	66%	None	77%

New York State Education School Report Card (2009)

Table 3.1 identifies that no such requirements for entry exist at LCS. Large City
School is quite a bit older than Littleton Magnet School, having been in operation for
some 80 years. Although significantly more high school students are enrolled at LCS
than LMS, the number of school counselors assigned to each high school is equal.

The official measure of poverty in K-12 schools is the number of students who enroll in the free or reduced lunch program. To qualify for the free and reduced lunch program, students' families must meet strict poverty or low income guidelines that are set by the U.S. Federal Government. More than 80% of students in the SCSD meet federal guidelines which make them eligible to receive a free or a reduced price school lunch. More than one-fourth or 28% of the students enrolled at LMS met the financial guidelines for the free and reduced school lunch program (Table 3.1), while at LCS, a reportedly higher percentage of 77% of students met Federal guidelines for a free & reduced lunch (NYS Report Card, 2009).

The College Board (2009) explains that scores for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) range from 200 to 800 points in each of the three sections of the test: (1) critical reading; (2) mathematics; and (3) writing. The lowest total score that may be obtained by a student taking the test is 600 points and the highest is 2,400. The average total score, nationally, is 1,500 with a score of 500 points in each of the three sections (College Board, 2009). Black students at Littleton Magnet School and those enrolled at Large City School score drastically different on the SAT. An official College Board report which shares students' scores reflected that in 2009 the mean score for students at LMS was 1,761, while at LCS it was 1,110. In other words, the students at LMS outscored those at LCS by over 650 points on the SAT.

When comparing the administrative and school counseling staff at LMS and LCS there were racial similarities. At both LMS and LCS, the building principals were both White males. At LMS, the principal held a Ph.D, while at LCS the principal had a

Master's Degree in Educational Administration. At each school the counseling staff consists of three White females.

<center>*Participant Selection*</center>

The participants chosen for this study were all in grade 12. A rationale for focusing on seniors was that the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice indicated that by the time students reach the 12th grade, they should have already progressed through the predisposition and search phases of the model. By students' senior year of high school, they are likely to have lived experiences and have formed perceptions about accessing precollege counseling.

In addition to the grade level status of students, the other criteria used to identify students' participation in the study included: enrollment at LMS and LCS, racial identification as Black (African American; African; West Indian; and bi-racial), and students needed to be at least 18 years old. The participants included students who planned to attend college (college-bound) and students not planning to attend college (non college-bound).

Professional networking contacts with administrators at LMS and LCS were used to purposefully identify the participants for this study. The researcher is an inside administrator with the SCSD, and as such, had accessibility to the email addresses of the school administrators and counselors at LMS and LCS. Principals at LMS and LCS were sent separate email communications (Appendix A) requesting their assistance with identifying prospective participants who met the criteria identified for the study along with possible dates to meet with participants. The emails briefly explained the criteria for participation and requested that each principal identify the names of 12 to 16 possible

students to participate in the study, within five business days of the date that the email was sent. The email communication also requested that each principal share dates and times that the researcher could meet with the prospective participants to provide them with an overview of the study and to secure a signature on the informed consent form (Appendix B) for the study. Principals were also asked to provide a date to conduct actual interview sessions with the students.

The initial interview session with college bound participants lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. During the sessions the researcher provided participants with an overview of the study and detailed that participation would be confidential and voluntary. Each of the participants received a letter of introductions explaining details of the focus group sessions (Appendix C) and a one-page informational form (Appendix D) to take home and share with their parents or guardians. Participants were encouraged to take informational forms home and to share the contents with their parents or guardians, as a point of informing them of their participation in the study. Specific dates, times, and locations for the actual interview sessions were included on the informational form. A total of seventeen male and female Black, twelfth grade participants were identified for the study. Eight of the students who participated in the study attended LMS and were identified as college-bound (CB). The data reported in Table 3.2 provides summary information for each college-bound participant. The table further illustrates a gender breakdown of CB students, which included five female and three male participants. CB and NCB students' were separated and pseudonyms were given to the students in this study to protect their identity. The post-secondary educational plans

Table 3.2

College Plans of the Participants from Lincoln Magnet School (LMS)

Pseudonym	Gender	Post-secondary Plans
Curtis	Male	Accepted into Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on a partial scholarship with plans to major in Journalism.
Daria	Female	Accepted into Lincoln University (an HBCU) in Pennsylvania on a partial scholarship with an undeclared major.
Jermaine	Male	Accepted into the University of New Mexico on a full four-year scholarship with plans to major in Biology.
Kelli	Female	Accepted into the University of Pennsylvania (an Ivy League institution) and plans to major in Biology on a partial scholarship.
LaTonya	Female	Accepted into the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, North Carolina with no declared major on a partial scholarship.
Marie	Female	Accepted into the State University of New York at Buffalo on a full four year scholarship, with plans to major in Psychology.
Nicki	Female	Accepted into Canisius College in Buffalo, New York with a full four year scholarship with an undeclared major.
Shamar	Male	Accepted into the Rochester Institute of Technology on a partial scholarship with plans to major in Electrical Engineering.

column reveals that each participant had been accepted into a college or university at the time of the study.

Nine additional students participating in the study were deemed as non college-bound (NCB). Non college-bound students indicated that they did not plan to enroll in college directly after high school. NCB students, six male and three female students, attended Large City School and all were in their senior year. Table 3.3 shares the pseudonym of each NCB, their gender and their post-secondary plans. The same format that was used with the CB students was used during the initial meeting with NCB participants.

Data Collection Methods

A triangulated method of data collection was used for this study. The purpose of using a triangulated method of data collection was to increase the credibility of the results and to help ensure that an account of the data was rich and comprehensive. One method for collecting data in this study was the use of focus groups. Secondly, student demographic forms (Appendix E) were completed by participants and finally, the researcher utilized field notes as method of data collection.

Focus Group Sessions

In order to gain insights from the student participants, focus group sessions were conducted. Four focus group sessions were conducted in total; two at each of the secondary schools in this study. The first two focus group sessions were held in late April 2010 at LMS with two different groups of CB participants. The third and fourth groups were with NCB students at LCS in early May 2010. Interviewing students who were CB and NCB provided differing perspectives of how precollege counseling activities

Table 3.3

College Plans of the Participants from Large City School (LCS)

Pseudonym	Gender	Post- secondary Plans
Al	Male	Plans to find employment after graduation with the hope of providing financial assistance to his mother.
Derrick	Male	Plans to take a year off after graduating from high school before pursuing college. However, when he does go to college he is interested in the field of nursing.
Dionne	Female	Plans to go to the Navy after high school to pursue medical nursing, however at the time of the interview session she had not yet spoken with a Navy Recruiter.
Jody	Female	Plans to go to college a few years after her high school graduation to pursue a two-business institute. She has an aunt who attended one and now she is "successful."
Mike	Male	Plans to get a job after high school rather than to go to college because of the expense of college.
Otis	Male	Plans to get a job with his uncle in the field of construction after his high school graduation.
Rickie	Male	Unsure of plans after high school, but wanted to go to college to play soccer.
Rob	Male	Plans to move to New York City, after graduation to pursue becoming a professional rapper.
Zoe	Female	Plans to go to cosmetology school a few years after graduating from high school.

influenced their college choice decisions. Focus group sessions, at LMS and LCS, were held in private rooms during the school day.

The focus group interviews that were conducted involved a three-tiered approach whereby the researcher built a rapport with the participants by ensuring that their participation in the study would be confidential and by further explaining that their participation was voluntary. Open ended questions were posed to solicit rich dialogue amongst the participants on topics related to college choice and precollege counseling practices. Five to six interview protocol questions (Appendix F) were asked during focus group interview sessions that encouraged discussion about points of view from Black students about their beliefs surrounding access and expectations of college-related school counseling activities and their impact on their decisions to pursue or not to pursue a postsecondary education. Finally, participants were asked to provide summarizing statements at the conclusion of the interview sessions.

Two tape recorders were used during focus group sessions: one was a high quality IC MP3 Sony recorder run by batteries, the other was a cassette tape recorder that plugged into an electrical socket. The rationale for using two tape recorders was to have a back- up measure in the event of a mishap such as one recorder malfunctioning or not vocal recordings. Immediately following each focus group session the tape recordings were professionally transcribed.

As participants arrived for the interview sessions the researcher greeted each with a smile and a hand shake welcoming them into the room. At the designated start time, the topic of the study and the purpose of conducting focus group interviews were briefly shared by the researcher. The protocol for the interview sessions was also discussed with

participants including, measures of confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the interview and asking participants to respond openly to questions. The researcher also added that participants should feel free to discuss not only their experiences but also the experiences of other students. After sharing the expectations, the researcher gave participants a brightly colored sheet of paper with their assigned pseudonym on it to place in front of them to help ensure confidentiality. The measure allowed the student as well as others in the focus group and the researcher to easily identify the student by the pseudonym.

After distributing sheets with pre-printed pseudonyms to participants, the researcher conducted a quick ice breaker as a mechanism to further establish rapport with the group participants. A question about students' personal post-secondary plans was posed to participants to solicit discussion from group members. After several participants had an opportunity to respond, the researcher quickly refocused the group by handing out the demographic sheets and allowing participants a few minutes to complete them. Once all demographic sheets were completed and collected, the remainder of time was spent asking participants to respond to the focus group interview questions.

Once all of the interview questions were asked and responded to participants were asked to share a summarizing statement, if they would like, thus allowing participants to clarify responses and to emphasize points of view that they felt were important. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation and assistance with the study. As a display of the researcher's appreciation for participants' assistance each was given a complimentary movie ticket to a local movie theater. In addition, refreshments were offered to participants at the conclusion of the interview session.

Student Demographic Forms

A student demographic form was used to solicit biographical information not captured during the focus group interview sessions. The two-page demographic forms requested that participants share information about family members' college experiences and about visits to the school's guidance and counseling offices. Each participant completed a student demographic form prior to the start of focus group sessions. Once completed, forms were collected, and analyzed immediately at the conclusion of the focus group session.

Document Collection

Two forms of pre-existing documents were collected from the SCSD. One of the documents was a district report illustrating how many Black students from LMS and LCCS were college-bound in June 2009. In addition, the academic transcripts of the participants in the study were collected to provide an in-depth view into the college preparatory courses offered at each of the schools. In addition, college entrance test scores were listed on students' academic transcripts.

Field Notes

Field notes included hand-written notes that the researcher collected throughout the data collection process. These personalized notes recorded participants' non-verbal gestures, facial and body expressions, as well as physical descriptions of participants' that were witnessed during the focus group interview sessions. The researcher took notes on clothing that communicated messages related to the topic and that added to the richness of the information that was shared. Additionally, field notes were taken on visible symbolic items that the researcher saw in the schools' hallways that communicated

messages about the college culture of the schools. Such items included: college-related flyers, bulletin boards, posters, photographs, daily bulletins and announcements that were noticed while in the schools.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was interwoven with the collection of data to continuously refine voluminous and complex data as the study proceeded (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analytic procedures of data analysis for this study included: organizing and being immersed in the data; developing categories and themes in three cycles of coding the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Each of these procedures allowed the researcher to engage in a process whereby the data was reduced and sharpened by bringing meaning to what was heard, seen, and read. To effectively organize the data collected, a log of activities were developed and maintained on the researcher's personal computer. The log listed five categories to track data: (a) who was involved in the data collected; (b) date(s) that data were collected; (c) methods of data collected, i.e. telephone, email, in person; (d) place that the data were collected from; and (e) what specific data were collected. The log was continuously updated as new data were collected.

To assist with organizing data, the researcher purchased binders and notebooks to file and organize all hard copies of collected data. Copies of emails, participant's demographic forms, educational transcripts for participants, documents collected, as well as the professionally typed transcriptions of each interview session were kept in the binders.

The first cycle of coding served to gain familiarity with the data. Names of codes were developed, abbreviated, and listed in a notebook in pencil. During the second and third cycles of coding the data, major codes were expanded into various sub-codes (Creswell, 2007). All coding was completed manually rather than utilizing software to code, in an effort to intimately gain an understanding of the data.

Codes were blended over and over as the data continued to be read, reread, interpreted, and reinterpreted. The codes that were identified early in the process underwent changes as new understandings of the data emerged. Codes that were common across focus groups were identified as themes. Recurring ideas shared by the participants and the patterns of beliefs that were commonly discussed were linked together to create themes. Additionally, the actual words spoken by participants (*in vivo)* were used to develop theme titles so as not to impose the researcher's meaning onto the participants' spoken words and actions (Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Summary

This chapter described the methodology, data collection methods and data analysis that were used to understand the perceptions Black students had regarding their abilities to access precollege counseling. The chapter also detailed the rationale for a qualitative study, selection of participants, justification for the site selection, data collection methods, interview protocol, document analysis, overview of interview questions, and concerns through the use of triangulation. The next chapter will discuss the data collection and its analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Chapter Four reports the findings of the study, which are presented and formulated by three major themes. The first theme that is discussed is titled, Perceptions of Counseling from the Margins. The second theme is, Racialized Messages about College Attendance and, "A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed" is the third and final theme. Each theme is related to the study's research questions which specifically centered on the perceptions of Black students about their ability or inability to access precollege counseling services and their expectations for precollege counseling practices. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Study Findings

The first theme, Perceptions of Counseling from the Margins, explored perceptions expressed by students of color that they did not believe that they had equitable access to college-going information. Specifically, the participants in this study described feeling that they had decreased access to college-going activities in their schools. Furthermore, students' descriptions revealed that when they were able to access precollege counseling services it was not relevant and served to marginalize them in the college choice process.

The second theme, Racialized Messages about College Attendance identified participants' beliefs about overt and overt college-going messages which they received from school counselors. Participants reported feeling that college-going communications

and practices held subtle messages that Blacks were less likely to go to college than were their White peers. Additionally, the theme captured how school counselors failed to present HBCUs as a viable post-secondary option to the participants.

A reoccurring statement that was spoken directly from the mouths of the participants in the study was, "A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed." This phrase served as the third theme for the study. The theme demonstrated how students' believed that the level of precollege counseling services received was directly aligned to how much initiative they exhibited in the college choice process.

Perceptions of Counseling from the Margins

The first theme identifies how college-bound (CB) and non college-bound (NCB) Black students perceived that in some cases high school counseling practices served to limit or marginalize the type of college-going information they were able to access and how much they were able to obtain. Students' reported perceptions that school counselors possessed power over their ability to access college-going entry points that would assist them with obtaining college-going and financial aid information. They further expressed realities which they disclosed identified experiences which left them feeling unacknowledged and ignored when attempting to access college-going information. Students further reported noticing the lack of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) college-going artifacts in guidance offices which they expressed demonstrated a lack of cultural competence. The scarcity of information about HBCUs served to confirm their feelings of marginalization. Students reported a belief that they received precollege counseling from the margins. Although, beliefs of not being in the mainstream of precollege counseling activities in their schools served to hinder the

participants in the study it also allowed them see what privileged racial groups received and to from this view, develop strategies which in some cases allowed them to advocate for the receipt of such services. Three sub-themes are included under this theme: (a) College-going entry points; (b) Coffee Klatch Meetings; and (c) Cultural competence.

College-going entry points. Enrolling in rigorous college preparatory level courses in high school serves as an entry point for students ultimately aligned with college attendance. The students in this study across school types, reported feelings of challenges with accessing college preparatory courses. At Littleton Magnet School (LMS), CB participants acknowledged experiencing challenges with accessing in-school college preparatory programs such as International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) programs. Students were aware that participation in college preparatory courses and programs could provide them with greater opportunities to access higher educational programs. Marie, a college-bound participant at LMS reported, "Everybody here knows that the kids in the IB program get tops." Her statement acknowledges that her awareness of how participation in higher level, more rigorous academic programming advantages students.

Kelly, another college-bound, student at LMS, discussed her beliefs that accessing the IB Program was an entry point into post-secondary schooling. She conveyed,

> What they don't tell you about is how to get into the IB program. I am in the program but I had to like force my way in. I knew that I had the grades to do the work, but they weren't talking to me about the program, so I went to them and told them that I wanted to be in the program.

The multi-phase Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice and research on the model suggest that one of the most important predictors of college enrollment is secondary students' ability to access to college preparatory courses. The participants at LCS, who were all non college-bound, also expressed beliefs that they were not positioned to access rigorous classes at their school. While participants at LMS perceived that they were not encouraged, by counselors to participate in the IB program, at LCS the IB program was not even offered to students. A review of academic transcripts revealed that the offering of AP courses were at LCS were limited to two courses. However, LCS does offer some upper level math and science classes which could assist students to realize their college-going aspirations.

Rob, an LCS non college-bound student discussed that the courses which his school counselor scheduled and placed him into, were not geared towards college attendance. Rob shared that when he first entered high school he wanted to go to college, but because of the lower level academic courses that he has taken, he feels that his chances for acceptance have been greatly diminished. Rob shared,

College, college, college, that's all they talked about at my old school. But when we moved here (into the city from the suburbs) it was different. Like, here they put me in this English class that wasn't even a real class. It was like a tutoring class. The guidance counselor here told me that it because of my grades from 8th grade, but that ain't make no sense. It was stupid. I passed 8th grade came here and got put back in an 8th grade class. No college is going to take that. It don't make sense. Now I'm all behind, I can't go to college.

The comments above demonstrate Rob's awareness that he was not enrolled in a college preparatory academic program and as such, he believed that his chances of going to college were hindered. Another LCS, non college-bound student Ricky expressed similar feelings about planning to pursue college when he first went to high school, but he changed his decision partly because of non college preparatory classes that he perceives he was placed in.

I wanted to go to college, you know, but I don't know, they put me in all of the fundie classes. Like, I haven't taken no computer classes since I been here. Peep this, the school don't even offer physics. Can you believe it?

The researcher asked Ricky to clarify what the term, "fundie classes" meant. Ricky explained, "…easier classes. Like you don't really have a lot of homework or nothing in fundie classes. They're easier." His explanation further articulated with clarity his conscious perception that he was taking classes that were not preparing him for college. In the next section, a different sub-theme is discussed which details the perceptions of two students at LMS. The students reported their lived experience with learning that a college-going support that could benefit them existed in their school that their White peers knew about, but which they believed students of color were not aware of.

Coffee klatch meetings. LMS students reported feeling marginalized in their attempts to access precollege counseling. One participant, Daria, spoke of her difficulties with accessing precollege counseling services. Daria commented,

This is considered a really good school…but I had all kinds of problems meeting with my guidance counselor when I needed her. When I would go to find her, I

swear she was never available for me. It was really discouraging. I started to think it was personal, especially when I talked to one of my friends who happened to be White and told her I could never find her (school counselor) anywhere. My friend told me that the best time to find her is before school hours. So I came in early one day and there are all of these White kids in her office. Everybody was laughing and talking and I'm asking myself, "why do they all know that is the time to meet with her and I don't?" So whenever, I needed stuff filled out or whatever, so I just started coming in early too. She was nice and everything but 'til today I wonder "why didn't I know about this?" It wasn't just me. I have other Black friends who were also like, "Where is she?" They also could never find her anywhere until I told them about the Breakfast Coffee Klatch. That's what the kids who go in early call it.

Daria expressed recognizing that she learned of the Coffee Klatch from a student who was White. She further identifies taking note that upon going to the Coffee Klatch, there were no students of color present and that other Black students at LMS felt that the counselor was not available to them. The experience that Daria described articulates that even amongst high achieving Black students learning about the Coffee Klatch gave them reason to pause and to challenge the idea that high academic achievement would garner better college-related counseling services regardless of race. Nikki, who was in the same focus group as Daria, expressed similar concerns about her discovery of Coffee Klatch meetings. Nikki first learned of the Coffee Klatch through Daria.

Oh yeah, the Coffee Klatch. I remember when you first told me about that. Remember us talking about never being able to find her? When I first started

going to that, the kids in there would look at me like I had two heads or something, but I was like I'm here for the same thing that you are. You know. Man, I forgot about that. I like totally appreciate you telling me about the Coffee Klatch. Had to diversify that situation. I haven't been in a while. It's probably all ethnic up in there and everything, now. But see, there are all of these little rules that no one talks about or tells you about that the Caucasian kids just seem to know about.

Nikki's comments reveal that when she went to the Coffee Klatch meeting, she felt excluded like she didn't belong, which emphasized her perception of marginalization. Both Daria and Nikki expressed a belief counseling practices at LMS supported a hidden agenda which seemed to privilege White students while disadvantaging Blacks. The respondents expressed awareness that only students of a single racial group were informed and benefitting from the Coffee Klatch meetings.

As Nikki astutely points out, Black students not considered when decisions were made to create Coffee Klatch Meetings. Thus, feelings were fueled by students of color that they mattered less in the college choice process. Students expressed appreciation at the gesture of school counselors creating a time to meet with students before school, but by not being informed of the opportunity feelings of marginalization persisted. In other words, the participants expressed beliefs that seemed to reveal that counselors had disregarded the racial make-up of the students who were and who were not participating in Coffee Klatch meetings.

The next sub-theme reflects students' perceptions that school counselors lacked awareness of their specific college-going needs. The title of the next sub-theme is

Cultural Competence. Students discussed observations and lived experiences that reinforced their feelings of being counseled from the margins.

Cultural competence. Across focus groups participants' reported perceptions that there was a sense of normalcy and acceptance that Black students were not represented in college-going artifacts in school counseling offices. A college-going student at LMS, Jermaine articulated how he pretended to not notice the lack of cultural information available to him. Jermaine said,

> I don't have an issue with people of different races, but it would be nice to see things in their office that are multicultural. It's all so White. The counselors, the pictures, the books, everything, and basically we just have to adjust. You know pretend like we don't see it.

Jermaine believed that the lack of multicultural posters and pictures of people of color indicated that his school counselors' favored White students and that addressing this would not be to his benefit. Another LMS college-bound participant, Curtis, shared a similar observation of his counselor's office décor. He said,

> My guidance counselor has pictures, like photos of students, in her office on the wall. They're directly behind her desk so you can't miss seeing them. They're mostly prom pictures. What struck me is that out of all of the pictures that she has up on her wall, not one is an African American student. That bothers me. I don't say anything because, what is there to say? It's not going to change anything, but every time I see it, it bothers me. I don't believe that my guidance counselor is racist or anything, but it's weird that she has not gotten any photos of African

Americans for her wall. I don't know if anybody pays attention to it, but I sure

enough see it and they should notice it too. Maybe they do.

The responses shared by the two participants above highlight how profoundly

colorblind operations serve to marginalize students of color while privileging White

students. The responses reveal Black students beliefs about how counselors' messages

communicated to them who was welcome in the counseling offices.

Curtis' comments reflect an awareness of the college-going messages that the

displays in the school's counseling office sent to Black students. Jermaine, a college-

bound respondent at LMS, provided follow- up comments to Curtis' statement. Jermaine

added, "I've seen them too. She probably helped the Caucasian students more, so they

gave her those pictures to remember them by." These statements identify a perception

about who is privileged to receive college-going assistance and who is not. Students at

LCS shared similar experiences.

A participant who was non college-bound and who attended LCS Rob, reported

that at his school, he also observed that the guidance office lacked any semblance of

culturally competent resources. He stated, "Okay, so the office has nothing in there that

makes me feel like, hey come on in. Stay a while, so I don't." Another LCS non college-

bound participant, Dionne also reported that the lack of race specific materials in the

guidance and counseling office emphasized Whiteness. Dionne stated,

Caucasians should feel very welcome in the guidance office. There are all kind of

little things that say to them, "you're in the right place if you are going to

college." For instance, there are these college flags all around the office. There

must be like a hundred of them. They have the names of a bunch of different

colleges on them. Like from Seton Hall and Rutgers and stuff, but I don't believe

there is one flag that represents any of the Black colleges hanging up. If there are

I haven't seen them. There are calendars and flyers and stuff but once again,

there's nothing from the Black colleges. I can't explain it, but it's kind of

reinforcing when you go in there and see a flag with your schools name on it.

The comments above identify that when students visit guidance offices and see

information on post-secondary schools and the types of colleges that they are interested

in it serves to reinforce or validate that they are on the right path. When groupings of

colleges are excluded, such as HBCUs, students reported concerns that perhaps these

schools are not viable options for them.

In addition to perceptions of being counseled from the margins respondents

discussed that they received messages from their school counselors that identified that

they were less valued in the college choice process. The second major theme will discuss

students' perceptions that counselors sent racialized messages to them about college

attendance.

Racialized Messages about College Attendance

The second theme discusses that students of color believed that various school

counseling operations and actions contributed to their marginalization in accessing

college-going information. A marginalizing action identified by CB and NCB students

was that their school counselors' had limited knowledgeable about college types that

could serve to meet their specific needs. Specifically, participants reported that

counselors demonstrated under-awareness that Historically Black Colleges and

Universities (HBCUs) could be viable post-secondary options for students of color, which they might be interested in pursuing.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Each of the seventeen students in the study admitted to believing that their high school counselors possessed an entrenched knowledge about existing opportunities at Predominately White Institutions' (PWIs). As Nikki, a college-bound participant at LMS reported, "The guidance counselors at this school have lots of connections with the people at local colleges. So, they are much more helpful with getting people into colleges here than in other places. They got connections here."

Nikki's statement reflects a perception that the counselors at her high school have the ability to help students with getting accepted into PWIs. Thus, students of color identify that when they apply to PWIs they are in fact, better positioned to obtain assistance from school counselors. The information obtained from Nikki further indicated a belief that school counselors are able to network and advocate supportively on behalf of students when they aspire to attend a PWI because the counselors have a familiarity with the staff and programs at these postsecondary educational institutions.

On the other hand, a different picture was painted, when participants described their perceptions of counselors' knowledge and awareness of HBCUs. In spite of HBCUs historical commitment to fulfilling a mission to Black students that PWIs do not. In fact, HBCUs have a long standing and proven track record of providing Black students with a high quality education that is consistent with Black values in a nurturing social environment. When specifically sharing perceptions about counselors ability to them access information about applying to HBCUs, Black students felt that their counselors

were far less knowledgeable about HBCUs and that these colleges were held in lower regard than were PWIs. A college-bound student at LMS, Shamar, expressed:

They don't push those schools (HBCUs). They're actually kind of shunned, like they're not looked at as high as some of the other colleges. If students want to go to Black schools it is probably going to be harder to get information on them, because there is no information in the guidance counselor's office about them.

One of Shamar's peers named Daria shared statements that mirrored Shamars. Daria is enrolled at LMS and has plans to attend an HBCU in the fall. Daria perceived that her schools' counselor was not particularly helpful to her in her quest to obtain information and apply to HBCUs. She further reported noticing a scarcity of information on HBCUs in her high school's counseling office. Daria said,

It seemed like the guidance counselor didn't really take Black schools as serious as she did the White schools. She kept on trying to get me to apply to White colleges. She had done the very same thing with my brother and he ended up giving up and just going to a local college that is almost all White. It felt like every time I went in her office, I always had to justify and defend my decision to go to a Black College.

When Daria engaged in the search phase of the college choice process she made applications to HBCUs. She expressed concern that her high school counselor mailed her college applications to HBCU institutions at a slower pace than her applications to PWIs. She stated,

I applied to like four Black schools and a local college (PWI), and I swear it would take forever for her to send my stuff off to the Black schools. My dad

would check with the Black schools over and over, because of what happened

with my brother. It would take weeks for them to get it. But yet, my paperwork

was mailed to the local college right away. I know because the college sent us a

postcard letting us know that they received everything. The whole experience

was incredibly frustrating.

Daria's comments reflect that she felt that her counselor lacked understanding and

respect for her decision to pursue her post-secondary education at an HBCU. Her

statements also reveal that her father also had cause to implement a strategy of checking

the status of her admissions' applications at HBCUs to minimize the possibility that

delayed counseling actions could hinder Daria's opportunity to be accepted into an

HBCU.

Another college-bound student at LMS, Nikki, expressed that she also was

interested in attending an HBCU. In fact, she applied to and was accepted into an

HBCU, but was unable to attend due to an inability to obtain viable financial aid

information to assist her with paying to attend an HBCU. Nikki reported that her family

could not afford the cost of attending an HBCU. Ultimately Nikki identified that she

chose to enroll in a local PWI because her counselor helped her to identify and secure a

full four year scholarship at the PWI. Nikki said,

I had my heart set on going to a Black college. It had been my dream forever. I

applied and got in, but it was so expensive. I went to my guidance counselor to

see if maybe she had information about scholarships. She told me to look in this

huge book in the office, but I didn't see anything that was just for African

American students. You always hear about there being so many scholarships for

African Americans, but I didn't see many and my counselor didn't seem like she

was really aware of any.

The above statement reflects that in spite of the participant successfully applying

to an HBCU, she was unable to attend because she perceived that her school counselor's

lack of knowledge about scholarships at HBCUs marginalized her college choice

opportunities. Non college-bound students at LCS expressed regrets at not having the

opportunity to obtain admissions and/ or scholarship information pertinent to HBCUs

from their guidance and counseling office. Specifically, Derrick and Zoe expressed that

they would have been interested in learning about and possibly applying to HBCUs but

were not afforded information about these schools. Derrick said, "I would definitely

have been interested in going. I think it would have been good, but I don't know a lot

about them." Zoe shared, "I have heard of colleges for African Americans but I don't

really know anything about them. It's too bad that there wasn't stuff here to learn about

them. I did ask but they didn't have nothing."

The above statements indicate that even when students sought out information on

HBCUs they were met with obstacles, which made it difficult to obtain what they were

looking for. Another non college-bound participant, Otis further shared that he was

unable to locate scholarship information, view books, brochures, or pamphlets that

focused on HBCUs. Otis reported,

The thing that makes me mad is it probably might be scholarships and stuff out

there to help you go to these types of schools, but who knows? They need to tell

kids about those opportunities at Black schools. Personally, I would have loved

going to one. It's hard to believe that are even colleges out there that are just for

Black students.

The responses embedded within the theme of Historically Black Colleges and

Universities details that non college-bound students perceived that HBCUs might have

been a viable option for them. Furthermore, the statements identify that if students who

were non college-bound had knowledge of the opportunities at HBCUs it may have

served as motivation to improve their levels of school engagement and academic grades.

The students in the study across focus groups, reported that applying to PWIs was

emphasized in their high schools, while applying to HBCUs was minimized.

A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed (ACMDGF)

The third and final theme emerging from the data was a verbatim phrase used by

respondents in the study, "A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed" (ACMDGF). The quote was

articulated by participants across high school types and postsecondary educational plans.

ACMDGF indicated students' perceptions that in order for them to receive high quality,

effective precollege counseling services they needed to vocalize their needs.

Kelly, a college-bound student at LMS, described how she had been forewarned

by older cousins who had also attended LMS that she was at risk for encountering

challenges in the college choice process. Kelly said,

> My cousins laid the foundation for me. They told me to make sure that the
>
> guidance counselors got to know me. I basically forced my guidance counselor to
>
> get to know me by speaking and asking questions about what I wanted. Being
>
> meek would not get me what I needed. If you don't ask you don't get. In other

words, a closed mouth don't get fed. You'd better speak up or you won't get what you need.

Kelly believed that her school counselor would not offer her the necessary guidance to help her with her college choice needs unless she "forced" such service. Directly following Kelly's comments, it was obvious that each of the other members who were in the same focus group not only understood the meaning of the quote, but that they also agreed with her statements. The participants demonstrated this by nodding their heads up and down, and smiling after Kelly had spoken. A college-bound participant who was in the same focus group as Kelly named Marie, gave Kelly a high-five and said, "You know!" indicating agreement. Later on in the conversation, Marie expanded on how Black students had to demonstrate self-advocacy by saying:

> I went to a really bad elementary school in a poor neighborhood. I learned that you have to do two things if you want to get help in school. Number one, you have to do good in school. You know, get good grades and number two you have to ask questions about what you don't understand. A closed mouth don't get fed. You can't be afraid to ask for what you want or tell people when stuff ain't right.

Marie's statements about going to a "bad" elementary school highlight that she developed strengths in terms of resiliency and advocating for herself through her experiences at the elementary school. Marie further elaborated on her point by describing her college application experience with her school counselor:

> For instance, when I was applying to college, I took my applications to the guidance counselor's office. Then I got notified by one school that my application was incomplete because it was missing a transcript. Of course, I'm

like, "incomplete? Huh what?" I went to the guidance office to check into it. My

counselor ended up sending another copy but what if I hadn't checked into it, or

spoken up? How would she have known that they didn't get it?

Furthermore, Marie's experiences allowed her to engage in strength-based college

choice methods which emphasized holding her school counselor accountable for assisting

her. A college-bound student at LMS, Daria, supported her peers' perceptions of

implementing self-advocacy techniques in the college choice process. The statements

below express a perception that in order to overcome obstacles it is necessary to stay

focused on the larger picture of college attendance. Daria stated,

When I first went in their office, I was a little uncomfortable. But, hey I knew

that I had to get over it to get what I needed. After a while, I started not caring

what other people thought. I was there to get help with my financial aid

application just like everybody else.

Data from demographic forms that were completed by students reported that the

college-bound students at LMS visited their school's guidance and counseling office

more than four times during the school year. Participants reported that their visits to the

guidance and counseling office were for the most part, at the urging of their immediate

and extended family members. As one student, Curtis articulated his parents constantly

reinforced to him that it was important for him to visit the guidance office. Curtis said,

Neither of my parents went to college but they made sure that each of us had got

the help we needed to go. My dad's motto is: "you do what you gotta do, getting

good grades and let me and your mother do what we gotta do." That means,

they're willing to work different jobs and come to school to meet with my

teachers and guidance counselors so I can't be walking around here with a closed

mouth. You know, "A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed." I have to do my part.

It is evident from Curtis' quote that despite his parents' inability to pursue a

postsecondary education, they made conscious decisions to be active in helping guide his

pathway to college. Through his parents' articulating their college-going beliefs to him,

Curtis developed a high degree of self-efficacy. Specifically, his statement revealed that

Curtis possessed a strong innate desire to attend college and demonstrated that he was

willing to advocate for himself to ensure that he reached his goal.

Another college-bound LMS student, Shamar, indicted that his mother played a

central role in his development of a belief that it was necessary to be actively involved in

his college choice process and not leave it up his school counselors. Shamar reported,

My mother has always instilled in us that education is everything. She tells us all

the time, "This is your education. Nobody is going to care about it like you,

because it's yours." They got theirs, I have to get mine. So I ask for help. You

have to if you don't ask questions, how are you going to get what you need?

Students at LCS revealed that students had similar values for speaking up in the

college choice process, however, their rationale for doing so differed from their peers at

LMS. Despite expressing a belief in, A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed, the demographic

forms completed by the LCS participants revealed the opposite. For example, Jody

reported, "You have to speak up and tell the guidance counselors if you want their help.

You can't depend on them just doing stuff. That's not going to happen." Her statements

strongly indicate that she believes in the ACMDGF mantra, yet her student demographic

form identified that she visited the guidance office rarely, less than two times during the school year.

While responding to questions about visiting his school counselor, Mike, a non college-bound student at LCS relayed the idea that students who are proactive in the college choice process were likely to receive quality precollege counseling services. Although he had made the decision to not pursue college, Mike still reported a belief that it is positive for students to be assertive in their college choice process. Mike described how his sister incurred high student loan debt because she did not adopt the ACMDGF philosophy. According to Mike, she did not ask questions about financial assistance.

> She ain't ask her counselor no questions when she was in high school, so she got all caught up in the student loan scam. She was just signing for everything offered. Now she in trouble and my parents in trouble trying to help her. One thing it taught me was, a closed mouth don't get fed. Everything that sounds good ain't good. You got to investigate and ask questions.

The focal point of ACMDGF is that across focus groups, students in the study reported feeling that they were up against obstacles which included having their college choice needs unrecognized or ignored. Thus, they deemed that it was necessary to verbally self-advocate to help ensure that they they their needs were heard.

Summary of Results

In summary, the three major themes emerged from the data. The initial theme was, Perceptions of Counseling from the Margins and it discussed how college-bound and non college-bound participants believed that they were under-privileged and under-served in their ability to access mainstreamed precollege college activities and

information. Specifically, participants identified perceptions that they were marginalized from accessing college preparatory classes and programs as well as opportunities to meet with their school counselors. The theme also addressed students' observations that their school's counseling offices demonstrated a lack of culturally competent resources.

The second theme detailed that students believed that school counseling practices communicated racialized messages about who had college-going potential and who did not. Students' revealed that they experienced challenges with obtaining information about Historically Black Colleges and Universities which hindered their ability to apply to these institutions. The final theme, was an *in-vivo* quote, A Closed Mouth Don't Get Fed, which discussed students' endorsement for engaging in advocating for themselves in the college choice process.

The final chapter of this study is included in the next section, and will offer a detailed summary of the findings. Furthermore, implications and recommendations for practice and future research will be identified as well as a discussion of the study's limitations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the themes that emerged from this study in greater detail and to provide influences on the college choice process for college-bound (CB) and non college-bound (NCB) students, at different school types. Additionally, findings from the study relating specifically to the research questions, from the perspective of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) conceptual model of college choice and through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be highlighted. Conclusions aligning with the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two will be drawn and implications of such results for practice and future research will be suggested. Lastly, limitations of the study will be considered and presented.

The research for this study utilized the qualitative methodology of counter-narrative inquiry (Bernal, 2002; Knight, Norton, Bentley & Dixon, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000) to explore the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. How do Black students' perceive their ability to access precollege counseling activities impacts their college choice decisions?

2. What expectations do Black students have concerning their ability to access precollege counseling activities?

Findings

Through counter-narrative inquiry with Black high school seniors in urban high schools, findings revealed that the youth re-conceptualized traditional storied

perspectives concerning college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Their counter-narratives clearly stressed that there are persistent race-based inequities in the college choice process for all Black students. Despite increases in their rates of enrollment in higher education, the data from this study show that Black students still remain underrepresented on college campuses (Mickelson, 1990; Pathways to College Network, 2009; Nettles, Perna, & Freeman, 1991; Ogbu, 2003).

The findings of this study suggest that a re-conceptualization of college choice is needed for Black students to improve their opportunities to access to precollege counseling activities in their schools. Most school counseling programs in urban high schools are centered on outdated notions of alleged race-neutrality in students' opportunities to access college-going entry points (McDonough, 2005a). Current precollege counseling programs in urban secondary schools demonstrate a severe lack of culturally responsive practices that foster an understanding of the multi-faceted college choice needs of Black youth (Freeman, 2005; Muhammad, 2008; Oakes, 1985; Perna, 2000; Reid, 2008).

Twelfth graders in this study, attending higher and lower performing schools, named stories that described how when they were ninth grade they had aspirations to attend college. However, students' stories revealed perceptions that their ability or inability to access college-going information in their schools either nourished or diminished their dreams of pursuing entry into college (Perna, 2000). Overall, a common belief was expressed that Blacks were less likely to receive college-going information than were their White peers (Ogbu, 2003). Students told realities that revealed that

precollege counseling structures were under girded by deficit-based beliefs about the college-going desires and potential of Black students.

College-bound (CB) Black students, attending a high school for academically gifted students reported experiencing challenges with accessing information which would allow them to participate in highly competitive academic programs, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Although enrollment in such secondary school types clearly provided college-going benefits to the small trickle of Black students in them, the youth further reported that these precollege counseling practices in these schools also exercised practices that left them feeling devalued and on the margins (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Howard, 2003; Hurtado, Inkelas & Briggs, 1997; McDonough, Antonia & Trent, 1997). Critical Race Theory (CRT) points out how educational practices that only promote the progress of Black students when it also benefits the interests of Whites is referred to as interest-convergence (Bell 1995; Delgado, 1995).

However, NCB Black students attending less prestigious urban high schools are much more likely to find themselves disproportionately tracked into lower level non college preparatory academic classes. The findings suggest that despite a legal end of racial segregation in schools, urban high schools in America continue to reflect a state of de facto racial segregation for Black students (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado, 1995a; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The college-going resources in high schools often serve as an entry point for students having the opportunity to investigate and learn about various post-secondary educational programs. The students in the study reported that when visiting guidance offices they made informal assessments of the culturally responsive college-going

materials that were available to them (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Howard, 1999). Students reported an acute awareness of the absence of college-going materials reflecting cultural diversity. In other words, when students visit guidance counseling offices they notice if the posters on the walls, the books in the bookshelves, and the scholarship information posted reflects their racial and cultural needs (King, 1996).

When college-going materials in guidance counseling offices lack cultural responsiveness, it speaks to how racism and racist practices are maintained through hidden and not so hidden agenda that echo that college attainment does not include these students. However, when high school guidance offices post and promote college-going resources which demonstrate that the college-going needs of Black students are important it helps to re-conceptualize and expand traditional college choice stories (Adelman, 2006; Freeman, 2005; Gay, 2000). For years, such stories under the guise of color blindness have falsely portrayed ideologically that educational attainment is aligned racially and culturally to being White and affluent (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Posters, books and other educational resources render visual ways, deemed credible, to help student learn, know, and understand conceptual information (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). In core academic areas resources such as books and posters help to aid instruction. Within the supportive area of school sponsored precollege counseling these resources often serve to expose and reinforce for Black students that their college-going needs and possibilities are not only visible in the college choice process but furthermore, that they matter greatly to all in the school environment.

The development of culturally responsive precollege counseling practices further serve to ensure that high school guidance counseling offices provide Black students, specifically with information on diverse types of college. While many Black students elect to pursue enrollment at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), as this study revealed there is much interest in learning about what Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have to offer (Epps, 1975).

The students in this study, overwhelmingly identified that having opportunities to learn about and apply to HBCUs was important to them (Allen, 1992; Crenshaw, 1997; Epps, 1975). However, on many levels students reported that when they went looking for information pertaining to HBCUs, they were disappointed by the scarcity of the materials available and they were discomfited by the indifferent reactions from counselors which students expressed seemed to highlight that these historical institutions were not highly thought of. While there was much college-going information and support for applying to PWIs, there was little to nothing available on HBCUs (Wenglinsky, 1996). Some Black students have informal family and friend networks which allow them exposure to HBCU information there are many more who are unaware of the how these school types can be a viable post-secondary option for them (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996).

Connection of Findings to the College Choice Model

There are studies which providing detailed discussions about how access to precollege counseling impacts Black students in the three phase college choice process during Black students' high school years (Bryan et. al., 2009; Cooper, 2009; Freeman, 2005; King, 1996; Muhammad, 2008; Plank & Jordan, 2001). However, the utilization of CRT was particularly helpful to this study because it revealed and highlighted how Black

high school students perceived the issues of race and racism (Delpit, 1995; Reid, 2008), influenced their ability to access precollege counseling. The results of this study suggest that if, in fact, college entry rates for Black high school students are to be increased, then their ability to have access to culturally responsive precollege counseling practices must not be taken for granted.

On the one hand the findings of this study supported the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) of college choice. Black students, like all other youth, benefit from having access to precollege counseling practices which help them navigate the process of college choice. However, on the other hand this study's findings reveal that when specifically considering Black students there are disruptions and challenges with the application of the three phases of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model. Students in this study described a belief that they were constrained from accessing the same quality and quantity of precollege counseling supports as their White peers (Choy et. al., 2000; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Hamrick & Stage, 1998).

Supporting the College Choice Model. The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice suggests that school counselors play a significant role in helping students with navigating their decisions to attend college (Adelman, 1999; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). This study did not divert from this finding. In fact, the results illustrate that students believe that counselors hold positions of power and as such have the ability to help guide their paths towards college attendance. When students discussed accessing college-going entry points including participating in IB, AP or honors classes, the statements made overwhelmingly indicated

perceptions that counselors were a major vehicle to allowing them to obtain access to these class types (Hossler & Stage, 1992; Perna, 2000; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004).

Like other research, (McDonough, 2005; NACAC, 2009) the analysis of this research shows that Black students at differing school types, believe that the availability of their school counselors for college-related assistance is insufficient. Such perceptions support literature which stipulates that in urban school districts the ratio of students to counselors exceeds the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA, 2009) ratio of 100:1. Though the specific student to counselor ratios varied at the schools in this study, at each of the schools, the findings revealed that the ratios were more than double what was recommended

Disruptions to the College Choice Model. The analysis conducted on the data, exposed that when attempting to apply to college choice needs of urban students, such as those in this study, disruptions to the model are possible. One issue discovered was that the model is one-dimensional and as such identifies in a highly generalized manner how students enter and progress through each of the three phases in an almost linear fashion (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992). The problem with attempting to use the one size fits all is that Black students expressed that they have unique needs and experiences which do not necessarily mirror the needs of other ethnic groups of students (Freeman, 2005). For instance, Black students report a need to be seen and heard (Crenshaw, 1988; Reid, 2008) in the college choice process. The study points out that when counselors are unaware of this need and do not address it, there is are great risks that students of color will feel under-valued, misunderstood and invisible in the

process and may ultimately remove themselves from attempting to access college-going activities in school (Plank & Jordan, 2001).

The model assumes that all students are exposed to college-going information and support that will allow them to move through three phases (Freeman, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Mickelson, 1990; Muhammad, 2008; Perna, 2000). However, the study suggest that Black students may not perceive that they obtain the same levels of information as their non- Black peers and that this delays and even prohibits their ability to progress successfully through the phases (Perna et. al., 2007). An example of this became apparent when students discussed their interest in obtaining information on HBCUs, but reported detrimental experiences with counselors which limited the information that they accessed. In some cases counselors conveyed an unawareness about the specificities of academic offerings and financial supports offered at HBCUs (Freeman, 1997, 2005) and in others students' believed that counselors sent racialized messages that expressed that they did not support students' pursuit of information about HBCUs (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963).

The perceptions of the students proved to have an impact on their college-going realities. In some cases students reported changing their goals from attending an HBCU to going to a PWI, while in others students expressed not electing to pursue attendance at HBCUs because they were never informed about their existence (Epps & Jackson, 1987; Nettles, 1991; Nettles, Perna & Freeman, 1999). Black students' who were able to navigate their way to acceptance at an HBCU, reportedly did so with little support from their counselors (Freeman, 2005; Muhammad, 2008). Rather, they had access to outside resources to assist them with knowing what they needed to position the students to tell

counselors specifically what they needed and to develop strategies to ensure that their needs were met (Allen, 1992; Avis, 1982; Perna, 2000).

The findings further reject the notion that Black students interaction with the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model is colorblind. Because the model does not address the issue of race with the college choice process, it is easy to justify or rationalize that racist practices and beliefs disadvantages Blacks in their attempts to enter, progress and complete the three phases of college choice. In fact, ignoring the issue of race creates a lens through which the existence of race can be denied and the privileging of Whites in the process can be maintained without accountability (Harper & Patton, 2007; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

Students in the study identified entering, progressing and regressing through the model differently than the prescribed and scripted way that the model illustrates. Obstacles encountered in America's high schools, which the students attributed to race, caused them to engage in college choice differently than what the model states is the norm (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna et. al., 2007). The model articulates that by grade 12 students are expected to be engaged in the final phase of college choice, yet the findings from this study uncovered that it is not unusual for Black students attending urban high schools, to still be the initial college choice phase of predisposition while in 12th grade.

<div align="center">Implications for Practice</div>

School Counseling

Improving high school counselors' knowledge of cultural responsiveness could help to increase the quantity and quality of precollege counseling that Black students

obtain (Atkinson, Jennings & Livingston, 1990; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; McDonough, 2005a, 2005b). Cultural responsiveness entails more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. Rather, it involves actions which include having high expectations for students and furthermore ensuring that these expectations are realized (Gay, 2000).

Professional development training in cultural responsiveness is empowering. Such teachings do not involve incorporating traditional practices with respect to color (Gay, 2000). Rather, it would equip school counselors with tools which would allow them to develop an appreciation and an in-depth understanding of the strengths that Black students bring to the college choice process (Howard. 1999; Hugo, 2004; Winn Tutweiler, 2005). Training that is focused on cultural responsiveness can help counselors confront and examine their biases which could influence how they implement precollege counseling practices (Education Trust, 2005).

American educational systems operate from a standpoint where colorblindness is accepted and encouraged in secondary schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Within precollege counseling, colorblind practices tend to favor White students while marginalizing Blacks (Avis, 1982; Blumberg, Z. et. al., 2004; Potts, 2003). Creating equalized, universal opportunities that seem ideal in theory, may in reality contribute to highly inequitable outcomes which further marginalize under-represented populations. Without proper training that is consistent and focused solely to increasing the cultural competence of high school counselors it is likely that Black students, specifically, will continue to have deficit college choice experiences in schools where they perceive that they are under-valued and invisible (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007;

Howard, 1999; Hurtaldo, et. al., 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1996; McDonough, 2005a; Tate, 1997).

Secondly, closer collaboration with higher education staff in areas such as financial aid and admissions could help to enlighten under-represented students with detail information about programs and opportunities that they may qualify for (Kao & Thompson, 2003; McDonough, 2005a, 2005b). Partnerships with higher education staff members could provide urban Black students with the additional college-going support that they often need. There are gaps that higher education professionals in high schools could help to fill for Black students with college choice including, helping students with understanding the complexities of successfully qualifying for admissions and identifying financial support to fund a higher education (Cooper, 2002; Kao & Thompson, 2003; McDonough, 2005a, 2005b). A vast majority of high school counselors are not specifically trained or certified to provide advisement in the area of post-secondary educational financial aid (Cooper, 2002; Freeman, 2005; Kirst & Venezia, 2001; McDonough, 2005a; Perna et. al., 2008; Tierney, 2000; Tierney & Jun, 2001).

District Level and High School Administrators

Building level principals and key central office staff have the ability to establish a tone where students representing all races and cultures will have optimal opportunities to participate in the schools' college-going activities (Perna, et.al, 2007). Administrators guide what happens in schools and how practices are implemented. At the district level, administrators are often involved with bringing forth ideas for policies and regulations which are enacted on by boards of education. When creating policies and regulations that focus on college-going practices administrators can help to ensure that language is

infused that speaks to the necessity to engage all students in schools (Smith, 2000; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Language which specifies how the most vulnerable populations of students will be included in college-going practices must be clear and explicit in policies and regulations. By establishing a common language staff members are able to develop clear understanding of expectations.

Administrators are also able to set expectations that all students will have optimal opportunities to participate in college-going activities by modeling behaviors that counselors can learn from. The students and staff benefit from opportunities where they are able to see leaders promoting racial and cultural inclusiveness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Obdidah, Christie & McDonough, 2004). When the leaders take the time to deliberately acknowledge and build strong working relationships with the students of color in school, school counselors are able to visualize the effectiveness of such actions and to mimic such strategies (Martinez & Kloppett, 2003).

Improving precollege counseling practices so that they will effectively address the needs of Black students will likely take collaborative efforts of principals and central office administrators (Muhammad, 2008). Persons in these roles usually identify the professional areas of growth needed for their staff members. Data analysis can support if counselors in a school could benefit from training in cultural responsiveness. Consistently reviewing the numbers of students of color, including Blacks, who are taking part in college-going initiatives and how they are performing in such activities, will allow administrators an eye-opening idea of if Black students are being marginalized or not. If marginalization of Black students is found to be an issue, administrators are in an optimal role to help with addressing the issue (Pathways to College Network, 2009).

Principals and central office leaders have the ability to plan and implement professional development trainings that is research based, that which will help counselors develop ways to engage students of various racial and cultural backgrounds in the college choice process.

School and central office administrators are able to assist school counselors to comprehend that students of color, even those who are enrolled in higher performing schools or who have high academic grade point averages, often perceive feelings of marginalization (Delgado, 1995a; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009) from the mainstream college choice process. To empower students of color, administrators can lead the charge of promoting inclusiveness by establishing expectations that all of the resources in schools, i.e. books, posters, programs will be culturally and racially inclusive (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Matsuda et. al., 1993). Such measures serve to help students with visualizing and their significance within the school community (Freeman, 2005; Smith, 2000).

Limitations of Study

Several limitations were identified with the study. First, the participant selection process only engaged college-bound students from one high school, while all of the non college-bound students came from another high school. This unforeseen circumstance was due to the principal at one of the high schools informing the researcher that 100% of the graduating class was college-bound, thus there were no non college-bound seniors at the school, which removed the possibility of identifying and interviewing non college-bound students at the school. Even though this factor limited the range of experiences which were captured from the participants in each of the high schools, the rich cultural,

academic, gender and socio-economic differences that they brought to the study more than accounted for this limitation.

The study collected data from only twelfth grade students, but this could be deemed a limitation because the experiences of students representing other grade levels were excluded from the study. Although, twelfth grader participants reported on their remembrance of college choice experiences in prior high school grade levels it could be useful to engage students who are currently in those earlier grade levels. There may be a tendency to only partially remember previous occurrences that may have proved significant to the study. It is however, noteworthy to re-iterate that by students being at the height of their high school career they were able to discuss their experiences with college choice during previous grade levels. An understanding was able to be gained regarding their perceptions of access to precollege counseling during various points of their high school years.

This study also only sought to obtain the perceptions of students identified as Black. Since the racial category of Black is all encompassing and since the majority of the students were African-American this study did not consider differences that might have existed between varied Black ethnicities (such as, African, West Indian, Bi-racial and the like). It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study with students of other varied Black ethnicities, or students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds who are also underrepresented in higher education institutions, such as Latino/a students (Tornatzky, Cutler & Lee, 2002).

Data were collected from students at two high schools in Western New York State area. Both of the high schools were in the same school district. Therefore, the study did

not address potential regional or national differences that might exist in differing school districts and high schools, amongst Black high school seniors' beliefs about access to precollege counseling.

Although, the SES levels of the participants in this study were not taken into consideration, it must be acknowledged that students living in poverty often have differing abilities to access precollege counseling activities in schools than do students from families at middle and upper SES levels (Manski & Wise, 1983; Pope & Fermin, 2003). Consequently, this study was unable to differentiate if students from families at various SES levels had differing lived experiences with accessing precollege counseling activities.

Recommendations

Future Research

This study could be expanded to examine a larger sample of college-bound and non college-bound seniors that are not necessarily affiliated with the Stone City School District. A larger sample could provide greater depth about the role of ethnicity in accessing precollege counseling. A more in-depth qualitative study encompassing various high school types, including but not limited to: Catholic, public, private, suburban, and charter schools would allow for more insightful and comprehensive findings. This research study could also be modified to include other underrepresented student populations.

A qualitative study with the parents of Black high school students might also contribute to the college choice literature by offering parents perceptions and expectations of school sponsored precollege counseling for their children. The insights

gathered from these conversations could help schools with developing check points of what, how and when to share college-related information with parents and students. Furthermore, it would help with identifying the needs of the parents so that school counselors would be positioned to provide them with information relevant to their needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research drew on the tenets of the CRT framework to critique Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and to examine how Black students perceived their accessibility to precollege counseling affected their ability to complete the phases of the model. The findings of this study proved significant considering that there are scholarly works which asserts that Hossler and Gallagher's model could be universally applied to students in secondary school, with no regard to race or culture, to explain their progression towards college attendance (Paulsen, 1990).

To collect date, this study utilized the experiential knowledge of Black high school students as well as field notes (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In addition, school district documents and participant completed demographic forms were collected and analyzed. The findings emerging from the data revealed that urban Black students at varying school types, do in fact, aspire to attend college (Nakagawa, 2000). Black high school students value pursuing college (Jackson, 1990; McDonough, 2004; Nettles, Perna & Freeman, 1999). In other words, students of color enter high school fully expecting to graduate in four years and to transition into an institution of higher education. For the most part, the students in the study expressed that they developed aspirations to attend college from significant others in their lives, namely immediate and extended family members. The study further identified that underrepresented students

wholeheartedly believe that they encounter obstacles and barriers, in high school which disrupt and often re-direct their college-going aspirations.

The students in this study perceived that they were severely marginalized in their abilities to access college-going entry points in their schools (Muhammad, 2008; Perna, 2000; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Venezia & Kirst, 2003). Students reported noticing subtle racialized messages which communicated that students' of color were less important in the college choice process than were White students. The racialized messages were depicted by a lack of culturally responsive books, photos and posters in and around guidance counseling offices (Davis, 2007; Freeman, 1997; Reid, 2008). Moreover, Black students reported not receiving invites to participate in rigorous college preparatory classes as well as other college-going activities. Finally, students expressed wanting to access information about HBCUs, which they perceived were viable options for them (Freeman, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001).

Several of the students who perceived that they lacked access to quality precollege counseling activities elected to remove themselves from the college choice process (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000, 2001; Venezia & Kirst, 2005; Walpole, 2003). These students, identified as non college-bound for the purpose of this study, revealed that no one ever invited them back into the college choice process, confirming their feelings that their participation or non-participation in the process made little difference to counselors. Strategies to re-engage urban youth who have removed themselves from the college choice process could prove to be beneficial.

Finally, school counseling practices have the ability to positively or negatively influence the college choice decisions of Black students (Barton, 2004; Tierney & Jun,

2001). School counselors who are able to implement precollege counseling practices and activities that are culturally relevant can be vital resources, especially for students of color.

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Appendix A

Email Communication

To: (Name of Principal)

From: Tonja M. Williams

Subject: Dissertation Study Request for Information Needed by: (The date listed
               will be 5 business days after the date of this email)

CC: James A. Williams, Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools

Date: April 21, 2010

Greetings,

I hope all is well. I am pleased to share that I have been approved by St. John Fisher
College and the Buffalo Public Schools to collect data for my dissertation research study.
The study focuses on how Black 12th grade students' perceive the role of their school
counselors on their decisions to pursue or not to pursue a post secondary education. I
would like to interview two separate small groups of students from your school; one
group would be of 12th grade Black students who are college bound and the other would
be of 12th grade Black students who are not college bound.

I am requesting your assistance with three areas in my data collection efforts: (1)
identification of students for the study; (2) offering dates for me to meet with students;
and (3) providing copies of students' transcripts. Criteria for students to participate in the
study include: Black (African, African American, West African or Bi-racial), 12th
graders, and be at least 18 years old. Please note that students' participation in the study
is completely voluntary. In detail:

Identification of students:
- Please identify the names of 12-16 eighteen year old Black, twelfth grade students
  enrolled in your schools. Six to eight of the identified students' must include students
  accepted into college for the fall of 2010, the other six to eight seniors are to include
  12th graders with no immediate plans to enroll into a postsecondary institution.

- **Dates to meet with students:**

Initial Meeting:	A date and time to report to your school to meet with the two groups of students separately for 10 to 15 minutes each to discuss interview process. All students identified will be requested to sign an informed consent form because they will be 18 years old. A one page informational form will be given to each student discussing the study and interview protocol. Students will be informed that their participation in the study will be confidential and voluntary.
Focus Group Interviews:	Two additional dates will be needed during the week of (date will listed) for the focus group interviews to take place on school grounds for one hour each. One session will entail meeting with non-college bound students and the other will entail meeting with college bound students. Refreshments which include sandwiches and chips will be provided for the students. Each student will be given a small token of a Regal Cinema Theater movie ticket for their participation in the interview session.

Copies of Transcripts:
- I would like to have a copy of each student participating in the study's high school transcript.

In conclusion, please identify space on school grounds for me to meet with your students. As a re-cap I will need the names of the students who meet the criteria and who may participate in the study, as well as the 3 requested dates within 5 business days. I am most grateful for your support and will call you later in the week to answer any questions you may have.

As always thank you!

Appendix B

**St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Title of Study: **How Black high school seniors perceive the role of school counselors in the college choice process.**

Name(s) of the researcher(s): **Tonja M. Williams**

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jeannine Dingus- Eason   Phone for further information: 585-385-8002

Purpose of study:

The purpose of the research project is to develop an understanding of how school counselors influence the college choice process of Black high school students as they make decisions on whether or not to pursue a postsecondary education directly out of high school. The results of this study will allow a greater and more diverse number of Black students an opportunity to share their lived experiences with how school counselors influenced them in the college choice process, thus providing a deeper understanding into the counseling practices were useful to them and may also be useful to other students who are similar to them. The study described in this proposal will be used in partial fulfillment of a research dissertation project.

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: City Honors School and Riverside High School in Buffalo, NY

Length of Participation: 1 day for 1 hour

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are listed below:

Problems involving the identification of participants, recruitment efforts or data collections are not expected. Participation is voluntary. Participants who feel uncomfortable or who change their minds about participating will be told that they may stop participating at any time.

Knowledge that is gained from this research may be presented to others through published works and/or presentations and will be resourceful in future related scholarly work.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:

To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants and the schools involved in the study, pseudonyms will be used during the completion of all forms as well as in the interview sessions and in the typed transcriptions. Additionally, the names of the school settings where the study will take place will also be listed under a pseudonym.

Your rights: As a research participant you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant)   Signature   Date

Print name (Investigator)   Signature   Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 585-385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 585-385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction

St. John Fisher College
Ralph C. Wilson School of Education
 Doctoral Executive Leadership Program
3690 East Avenue
Rochester, New York 14618

April/ May 2010

Dear _____:

Hello, I would like to invite you consider being a participant for a study being conducted by Tonja M. Williams, a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College. This study seeks to explore the role of school counselors in the college choice decisions of Black high school 12th grade students. The research study is designed to learn about appropriate and effective college counseling practices for high school students, specifically Black 12th grade students. The title of this dissertation research study is: *How Black High School Seniors Perceive the Role of School Counselors in the College Choice Process.*

Participation benefits include contributing to an understanding of the topic, adding to the knowledge, and updating the research literature. A small token of appreciation which includes a Regal Cinema Theater movie ticket will be offered for study participation and a lunch of submarine sandwiches, potato chips, and soda will be served.

If you decide to participate in the study, by participating in a focus group interview session with 6 to 8 of your peers, the session will last for one hour you will need to sign an informed consent form. **The form may be signed today or I will return to the school to pick up your form on: (2 days after the date of this letter).** The criteria for participation in the study includes: Black; 12th grade; and 18 years old. Participants of the interview sessions may be in one of two groups; students planning to attend college and students not planning to attend college. The location, date and time for the focus group interview session is:

Location:	High School
Date:	April 2010 or May 2010
Time:	9 a.m. / 10:30 a.m.

A one-page informational form is being provided to you to share information about the study. **Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you will have the option of terminating your participation at any time without any penalty.** Additionally, your participation will be confidential. During all aspects of the study your identity will be protected with the use of pseudonyms. Your school will also be assigned a pseudonym as a further effort of protecting privacy.

All documents collected and/ or analyzed for this study will be kept in a secured and locked file cabinet that only researcher has access to. These documents will be maintained for two years after the completion of the study after which time, all information will be destroyed by erasure and shredding disposal.

For further information about the study or your role in it you may contact: Tonja M. Williams via email at Tmwilliams@buffaloschools.org or my Doctoral Advisor, Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason at Jdingus@sjfc.edu. The research study has been reviewed and approved by St. John Fisher College's IRB Review Committee and by the Buffalo Public School District.

I look forward to your participation in this worthy endeavor!

Tonja M. Williams, B.S., Ed.M., S.A.S., S.D.A.
Spring 2010

Appendix D

Informational Form

REGARDING DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

➢ The title of the dissertation study is "How Black High School Seniors Perceive the Role of School Counselors in the College Choice Process."

➢ The Researcher is Tonja M. Williams a full-time doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, N.Y. as well as the Director of Guidance & Counseling for the Buffalo Public School District.

➢ The purpose of the dissertation study is to explore how Black students perceive the role that School Counselors played in their decisions to pursue or not pursue a postsecondary education.

➢ The researcher will interview groups with 6 to 8 Black, 18 year old, twelfth grade students who fall into two categories: college-bound and non college-bound. The two groups of students will be interviewed separately.

➢ The identity of the students and schools participating in the study will be anonymous. Pseudonyms (in lieu of real names) will be applied and identifying attributes of the students (for instance hair color) will be changed to protect their identity.

➢ Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Students are able to withdraw their participation in the study at any point by simply informing the researcher that they no longer wish to participate. There will be no penalty for a student withdrawing from the study.

Appendix E

Student Demographic Form

Today's Date: _____

Student Participant's Name: _____

Student Participant's School Name and Grade Level: _____

1. Age: ___16   ___17   ___18   ___19 or older

2. Sex: ___M   ___F

3. Do you have others in your family who have graduated from college?

   ___Yes   ___No.

   If so, please list their relation to you and if known share the college they attended:

   Family Members Graduating from College: College Name:

   _____   _____
   _____   _____

4. What career do you see yourself in, in the next 10 years? _____

5. Grade Point Average (GPA):

   ___I am not sure   ___Less than 2.0   ___ 2.0- 2.5

   ___2.6- 3.0   ___Higher than 3.0

6. I have taken or am currently taking AP or Honors courses: ___Yes   ___No

7. This year how many times have you visited your school counselor's office:

   ___1-2   ___3-4   ___More than 4

8. At what grade level do you remember having your first conversation about college with a school counselor?

___before 9th   ___Gr. 9   ___Gr. 10

___Gr. 11   ___Gr. 12   ___Never

9. Have you ever visited a college campus?   ___Yes   ___No

If so, please list the colleges that you have visited:

_____

_____

10. Have you ever spoken with a college admissions' representative in school?
___Yes   ___No

11. Have you ever taken the ___SAT and/ or the ___ACT (please check)

SAT   ___Never   ___1-2 times   ___3 or more times

ACT   ___Never   ___1-2 times   ___3 or more times

If you have taken either or both of the SAT/ ACT please list your highest score(s)

SAT Highest Score: _____

ACT Highest Score: _____

12. Have you been accepted into a college?   ___Yes   ___No

13. Upon graduation, I plan to attend:

___4 year in state college or university   ___4 year out of state college or university

___2 year community college   ___Service with the military

___Participation in a trade school   ___Employment

___Not Sure

Appendix F

Guiding Focus Group Interview Questions

Awareness/Predisposition: Stage 1 (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

1.   I'd like to have you go back to a time that you may not have thought about

      for some time. Remember when you were first introduced to the idea of

      what college was.

      Who first told you about what college was? What were your thoughts about

      college?

2.   Think back to when you were in elementary school. During that time did

      you want to attend college? How if at all, have your plans changed now?

Search: Stage 2 (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

3.   In your opinion, how if at all do school guidance counselors provide services

      that help Black students, learn about different types of postsecondary

      institutions (HBCUs, 4 year, 2 year, trade schools in state, out of state)?

      Did these services expose you to different types of postsecondary

      institutions? Did they influence your decisions to pursue or not pursue

      college?

4.   Suppose I were present with you on a visit to your school's guidance office

      to identify information on the college admissions process. What would I

      likely see happening? What would be going on?

Describe for me what such a visit would be like. Who would be there? How would you be greeted? I'm going to ask you about your level of satisfaction with the college advisement you have gotten up to this point. Let's begin with the ways in which college counseling was helpful to you.

Now let's move into ways that the college counseling you have received has not been helpful to you? Take a few moments to think about and share if there are things that your school counselors could have done to make college counseling more meaningful for you.

Choice: Stage 3 (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

5. The final question, ask you to reflect based on your experiences as an urban high school Black student who is preparing to graduate, how you perceive that school counselors could provide college counseling services that would help to increase Black students awareness of college.