

JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS: COLLEGE CHOICE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN MALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLUB BASKETBALL PLAYERS

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## Dedication

“The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before. The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.” ~  
Bhaqwan Shree Raineesh

This dissertation is dedicated to my only son, Dillon Leemar. I am sorry to admit that I have held your hand, kissed your scars, rocked you to sleep, and been “mom” with you for only 30 days of the past 2 years. I regret not being there on your first day of kindergarten or when you had your first field trip. I have missed you every day and every night. One day you will grow up to be a man, “with a beard and can drink beer,” and understand why we have been apart. I know my sacrifices have not been in vain.

Mommy has never stopped loving you. I know my sacrifices have not been in vain.

I dedicate my life to my parents, Pearl and Lamar.

Mom, your quiet support throughout this process was heard loud and clear. I truly appreciate all that you have done for me.

Dad, thank you for stepping up and raising my toddler so I could finish school. He has learned so much from you and I am grateful that you love him like I know you love me.

To my extended family: Uncle David and my cousins: Darrell, Devon, Courtney, Mae Lisa, Carla, and Kimada always remember nothing is impossible. To my family who watch over me from the heavens: Nany, Granny Bert, Granddaddy David, Uncle Son, Marsha, and Uncle Lee.

“Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something, and that this thing, at whatever cost, must be attained.” ~ Marie Curie

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To my favorite lil sisters who look to me for advice: Toni, Telicia, Kim, Rachel, Natalie, Jacquelyn, and Damali. Reach for the stars.

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To the special people who have crossed my path for a reason, a season or a lifetime – always remember “Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace amid the storm”. ~ Unknown

Everyone who knows me knows that I am not a religious person but oftentimes very spiritual. So, I end with this:

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, IF we faint not” Galatians 6:9

With a humble heart,

Kimberly

## **Abstract of Dissertation**

### **Jumping Through Hoops: College Choice Experiences of African American Male Community College Club Basketball Players**

This study aimed to learn what factors influenced the college choice decision-making process of African American male club basketball players in the community college. To understand how the participants determined their educational path, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 21 African American male students who were enrolled in at least six credits and were members of the club basketball team at two community colleges in Virginia.

The study was framed by two college choice theoretical constructs: Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase model of college choice and Freeman's (2005) model of college choice for African American students. The interview data were collected to answer the guiding research question: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice? In addition, three subquestions were answered:

1. How does athletic identity influence college choice?
2. What role do support networks take in the decision-making process?
3. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice decision-making process?

The major themes that emerged from the textual data in this study were the following:(a) value of experience; (b) escape; (c) a caring and academic-focused coach; (d) support network, including self; (e) discounted hoop dreams; (f) He got game?; (g) stepping stone; and (h) second chance.

The findings of the study reveal that basketball is the saving grace for a bad childhood or lack of positive role models in their cultural environments for the 21 African American males studied. They took a passive role in the college choice process and relied on the advice of others for college selection. Their strong desire to play collegiate basketball overshadowed their dedication to academics in high school and in previous colleges. Moreover, the interviews revealed that the participants relied on self for motivation to attend, to enroll, and to persist in college. Results of the study created a profile of African American club basketball players in the community college. Recommendations for early intervention programs in high schools will help African American male athletes develop realistic college choice plans that complement their academic ability and athletic talent.



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## Chapter I

“The choice of a college is vital. So many young people go to the wrong institution, not knowing that there are almost as many kinds of colleges and there are individual character and needs” (Halle, 1928, p. 5).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn what factors influence the college choice decision-making process of African American male club basketball players in the community college. The community college was unique in this study because most student athletes or nonstudent athletes do not consider enrollment in the community college as a first-choice institution. To understand how African American club basketball players determine their educational path, it was important to identify the support networks that influence enrollment, the institutional factors that encourage enrollment, and the athletic characteristics of the college that positively impact enrollment. The study contributes to the literature on student athletes and college choice through descriptive semistructured interviews that capture the participants’ experiences during the college choice decision-making phases outlined in Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) study. This study focuses only on the final stage, which is choice.

### **Problem of Practice**

The African American struggle to attain formal education on any level is well documented in America’s past. Postslavery America afforded African Americans improved access to education, although schools were often segregated by race—separate, but certainly not equal. Segregation was formally denounced just 60 years ago in the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In fact, urban schools are unofficially segregated to this day as a result of white flight and the proliferation of private, parochial, and charter schools in the wake of the *Brown* decision. Hundreds of



years of lack of access to formal education and lack of equality in school rigor and resources have contributed to a racial achievement gap that is still evident in current higher education attainment levels (Figure 1).

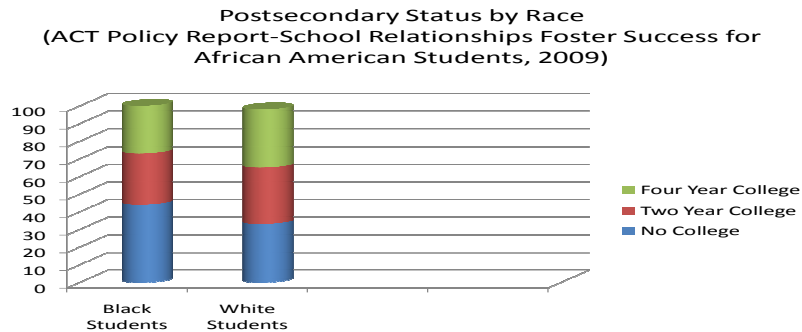


Figure 1. Postsecondary status by race.

Historically, higher education for White students was a rite of passage or privilege of the elite as a mechanism to *maintain* their economic and social status (Cuyjet, 2006; McDonough, 1997; Styles-Hughes, 1987). Education for African Americans, however, was a means to *acquire* social capital and an attempt to level the education, political, and economic playing fields.

When education became available for all students in nonsegregated school systems, men and women were given distinct social cues regarding their pursuit of higher education. Women were encouraged to pursue higher education, particularly the teaching field. African American males, however, were encouraged to secure jobs to financially support their families. As a result, the higher education attainment gap is most pronounced amongst African American males. A report from the Digest of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010) highlighted the discrepancy within higher

education completion rates for African American male and female students (Graph 1).

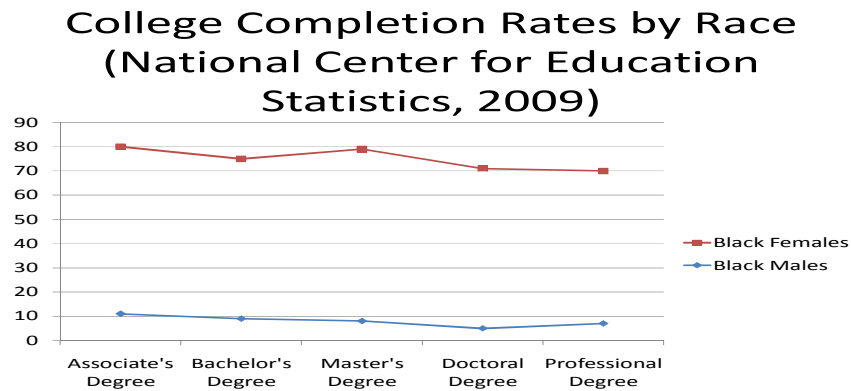


Figure 2. College completion rates by race.

### Problem of Research

Historically, there has been controversy over the role of African American males in collegiate sports. Some researchers believe that athletes are primed by colleges to compete for athletic scholarships in hopes of increasing the revenue for their sports programs and schools at large (Edwards, 1973; Parmer, not in ref 1994; Sailes, 1998; Wiggington, not in ref 2006; Wiggins, 1986). Because they are recruited for their athletic, not academic, prowess, African American student athletes often lack the required skills to endure the academic rigors of college compared to other students. Although African American athletes acquire the social benefits of belonging to a team, including the development of interpersonal skills, team-building skills, camaraderie, and the pursuit of a common goal, they often lag behind their nonathlete peers academically. The reality is that only select college athletes benefit financially from sports participation, as very few are drafted to professional sports teams with lucrative contracts. As a result,

numerous aspiring professional athletes leave college each year, both unsigned and without a college degree (Ferrell, not in ref 1986; George, 1999; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Lederman, 1992).

African American males are the least represented population in higher education and degree attainment according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2010). According to that report, there were 17.3 million students enrolled in higher education, with 7.387 million males and 9.885 million females. White students represented the largest percentage of the undergraduate population totaling 66.1%; African American students represented 12.5%, Hispanic students 10.5%, Asian 6.4%, and American Indian 1.0%. Of African American students enrolled in higher education, 37% were males and 63% were females. The data reveal that African American males represented a very low percentage of all students for degree attainment (Figure 3). Although African American males were underrepresented overall, they did attain associate degrees at a higher rate than any other higher education program (NCES, 2010). Therefore, it was important to explore the educational aspirations of African American male athletes who choose to pursue higher education at the community college.

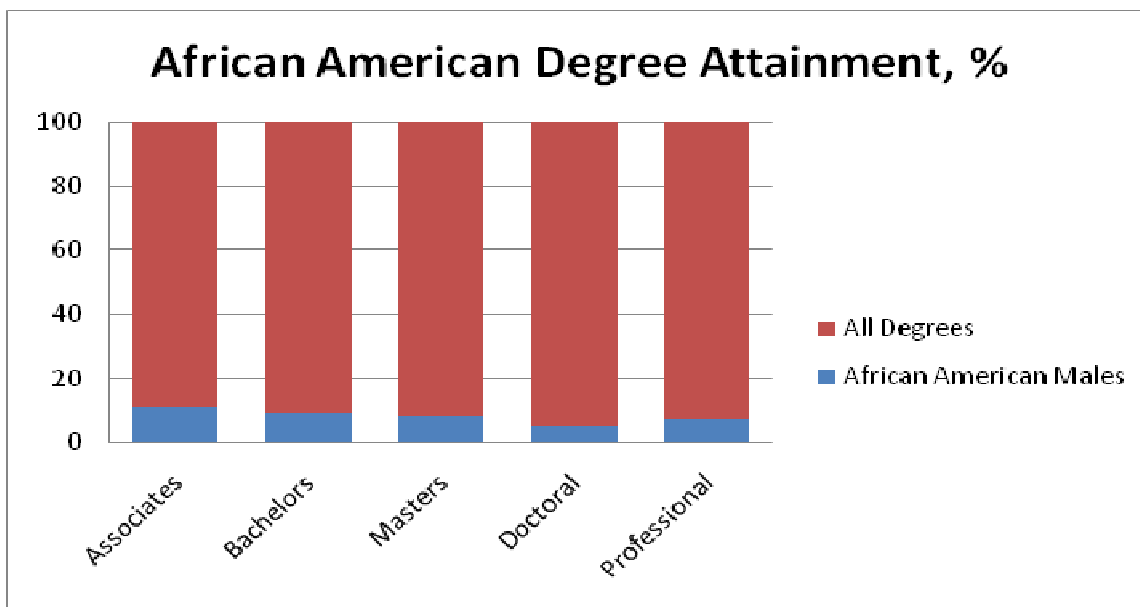


Figure 3. African American degree attainment.

Examination of higher education trends and options for African American males requires an understanding of the internal and external factors that influence college choice and matriculation. For example, African American males are more likely to attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Overall, however, they are less academically prepared for the academic rigors of any college (Foley, not in ref 1996; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997). A study by the American College Testing Program (ACT) reported student data indicating that African American students did not take college entrance exams until their junior year, thereby delaying their ability to identify and rectify their academic deficiencies before college enrollment (ACT, 2009). Conversely, students with college aspirations at an early age plan and prepare academically before their senior year. Another ACT study of high school aspirations showed that African American students aspired to attain an associate degree at 7%, a bachelor's degree at 34%, and a professional degree at 48%, which equaled aspirations of

other races (ACT, 2009). This finding indicates that African American students aspire to attend college but they are underprepared academically to compete with other students on college entrance exams, obtain admittance to selective colleges and universities, and complete a program in higher education.

When an African American high school student begins to engage in the college choice process, financial aid is the most decisive factor in determining where the student will attend school (Hearn, not in ref 1984; Kuykendall, not in ref 2008; Levine & Nidiffer, 1973; Maxey, Lee, & McLure, 1995; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Family influences, academic preparation, SAT scores, and geographic location are important factors for African American prospective college students to consider as well (Alexander, Bozick, & Entwisle, 2008; Bui, not in ref 2002; Kuykendall, 2008; Lasker, not in ref 1994; McDonough et al., 1997; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). The literature has showed that African American students engage in the college choice decision-making process differently than other students because they often have more factors to consider while engaging in the college choice process, such as family support, academic preparation, and adequate finances to attend college (Freeman, 1999; Freeman, 2005; Kinzie et al., 2004; Levine & Nidiffer, 1973; Paulsen, 1990). Additionally, African American male athletes make college choices quite differently from nonathletes because they focus on the athletic tradition, the coach, and scholarship offers as factors for choice consideration (Abdur-Rahman, 1993; Bartee, 2008; Croft, 2008; Loudermilk, 1983; Smith, 2006; Teeples, 2005;). Therefore, it is equally important to discuss and understand the college choice decision-making process for African

American student athletes and to determine if they experience the same challenges [as their nonathlete African American peers do] when selecting a college for enrollment.

Prospective student athletes consider the following factors in choosing a college: the coach, the athletic facilities, the school's athletic reputation and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) status, and their opportunity to play (Bartee, 2008; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Loudermilk, 1983; Ryan, Groves, & Schneider, 2007). Athletes considering a lower tiered NCAA Division focus on the academic reputation and the opportunity to play as the key factors in the decision-making process when scholarships are not offered (Faulkner, not in ref 2005; Finey, 2005; Snow, 2006).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) governs the athletic participation and competitions of member 4-year colleges and universities to ensure fair play. The NCAA is made up of three membership classifications that are known as Division I, II, and III. Each division creates its own rules governing personnel, amateurism, recruiting, eligibility, benefits, financial aid, and playing and practice seasons (NCAA, n.d.). Division I comprises 335 member institutions, which must offer 14 sports and must sponsor at least two team sports for each gender. This division is composed of 66% public and 34% private institutions. Division II comprises 288 members, which must offer 10 sports, with two team sports for each gender in fall, spring, and summer, and must offer financial aid. This division is composed of 53% public and 47% private institutions. Division III comprises 447 members. It is composed of 20% public and 80% private institutions. The division members must offer 10 sports for both genders. The division championship seasons aim to minimize conflict between

academic responsibilities and the sports competition schedule for the student athletes. Also, Division III emphasizes that the student athletes are subject to the same admission standards, academic standards, housing, and support services as the general student body (NCAA, n.d.). The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) governs athletic programs at member 2-year colleges and universities that are accredited by the appropriate state or regional accrediting agency. Junior colleges that are members of the NJCAA are commonly referred to with the term “juco” by coaches, athletic personnel, and students (NJCAA, n.d.). Schools that do not have the financial resources to offer competitive athletic programs and scholarships may offer intramural or club sports. Intramural sports programs vary by institution and type and offer competitive sports programs for students as extracurricular activities.

The NCAA reports that approximately 3 in 100 high school basketball players will play at the collegiate level, and 1 in 100 college players will go on to play professionally; only 3 in 10,000 high school basketball players will play professionally (NCAA, n.d.). Despite the grim reality, many African American male athletes still aspire to become professional athletes (Ryan et al., 2007; Sowa & Gressard, 1983).

In a given year, there are more than 157,000 high school seniors competing for approximately 4,800 collegiate freshman slots in a NCAA basketball program (NCAA, 2009). College admissions at Division I and II schools are competitive both academically and athletically, and athletic scholarships at these schools are equally scarce. Not surprisingly, then, many aspiring collegiate athletes also consider both enrolling in athletic programs in community college and playing in intramural or club sports programs.

Community college plays a unique role in higher education. Two-year colleges provide a low-cost education to a diverse population of students taking courses for enrichment, in preparation for 4-year colleges or universities, or to receive associate's degrees and enter the workforce (Byrd & Williams, 2007; Cohen, not in ref 2003; Kissinger & Miller, 2007). Since its inception, community college has provided educational access to underrepresented and underserved students who have been disenfranchised from other types of higher education institutions.

African American students have enrolled disproportionately in community college for a variety of reasons, including lower costs, decreased rigor in admissions, and the opportunity for academic remediation (Barnes-Teamer, 2003; Cyprian-Deandrews, 2004; Glenn, 2003-2004; "Vital Signs," 2006; "Vital Signs," 2007). Additionally, community college administrators hope to increase enrollment by offering competitive sports programs (Ashburn, not in ref 2007; Byrd & Williams, 2007), which can help African American athletes transition to 4-year colleges or the NBA (Bradley, 2007; Fryer, not in ref 2000; Kissinger & Miller, 2007). Community colleges have developed into an accessible higher education option for African Americans, especially for athletes.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American male club basketball players. Specifically, how do members of this group make meaning of their college choice decision-making process? The study examined the use of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model of college choice, which was initially researched and tested with predominantly White students in 4-year colleges and universities and students in middle schools (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Hossler & Schmit, 1995; Stage & Hossler, 1989). The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model was used as a



framework with the Freeman (2005) African American model of college choice to provide a more robust view of the decision-making process for the population being studied. The in-depth semistructured interviews with approximately 25 club basketball players contributed to the understanding of the college choice process for student athletes in a nontraditional athletic program. Additionally, these subquestions were answered:

1. In what ways are African American males influenced by athletic identity when choosing a college?
2. What roles do support networks take in the college choice decision-making process?
3. In what ways do institutional factors contribute to African American student athletes' choice to attend a community college?

### **Significance of Study**

Athletes are the most visible of all college students. When athletes are recruited without getting a scholarship, they have special status from the first day they arrive on campus, before doing anything as a student. The student grapevine identifies which students are athletes, and athletes often can't escape this identity, even if they wanted to. (Figler & Figler, 1984, pp. xii-xiii)

For participation in sports, passion and commitment are noncognitive variables that can facilitate success (Edwards, 1973; Figler & Figler, 1984; Sailes, 1998). Good grades, commitment, and physical ability are the requirements for participating in high school sports that can help prepare an athlete for a potential collegiate athletic career. In college sports, academic ability, NCAA eligibility, and physical talents allow an athlete to remain competitive with his or her teammates and rivals. Exposure and athletic prowess

at the collegiate level may help the aspiring professional athlete to become noticed by professional scouts (Edwards, 1973; Figler & Figler, 1984; Sailes, 1998; Wiggington, 2006). The stark reality is that many young men will never become professional athletes regardless of their college choice.

As a collegiate student affairs practitioner, the researcher has interacted with many African American males who seek enrollment in higher education every registration cycle. Although they aspire to graduate from a 4-year college or university, oftentimes they must begin higher education matriculation at the community college, which does not require students to submit high school transcripts, SAT scores, or ACT scores. This “open enrollment policy” allows a student to matriculate at a community college with a GED, low high school grades, and low or no college entrance test scores. Typically, the only enrollment requirement for degree-seeking community college students is that they take English and mathematics placement exams. Many students’ placement test scores require them to enroll in developmental English and math courses. The reality sets in that these students may spend 2 or more years at a community college before they can transfer to a 4-year institution because they must first take multiple developmental English and math courses before enrolling in college-level transferable courses. Most entering community college students are anxious to graduate or transfer to a 4-year college or university in a short amount of time.

When basketball players have consulted the researcher for academic advice or answers to registration questions or issues, she has questioned their decision to enroll at the community college instead of a 4-year college to play basketball. Their reasons vary for enrolling in community college and for participating in club basketball. The

researcher has witnessed them registering for the minimal academic load for playing eligibility while attempting to qualify for financial aid. Often, their class schedules are changed within 2 weeks after the beginning of the semester due to a lack of or inadequate financial resources to maintain academic and athletic ability. The African American club basketball players are making every attempt to remain eligible but without the perks associated with Division I, II, or III participation, their academic persistence and athletic eligibility may be in jeopardy. The student athletes must follow the same registration and athletic eligibility requirements as other athletes in the NCAA or NJCAA but oftentimes without the traditional benefits of athletic participation: a strong athletic culture on campus, state of the art practice and exercise facilities, matching uniforms, athletic housing, team buses, athletic scholarships, or even cheerleaders. Therefore, the researcher was interested in understanding what factors enticed African American male athletes to enroll in the community college and play club basketball.

Club basketball, for the purpose of this study, refers to a community college basketball team that does not hold membership in the National Junior Collegiate Athletic Association (NJCAA). To participate in club basketball, a student must have the requisite interest and athletic talent, be a currently enrolled student taking a minimum number of course credits, and maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA).

This study expanded the current research on student athletes and college choice by highlighting the experiences of club basketball players in community colleges, which were not included in the original Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice. The literature about college choice and student athletes suggests that these athletes attend

a Division I or II college or university because of the coach, athletic program, and the athletic facilities. This study examined whether or not the matriculation choices of club basketball players mirrored that of athletes in revenue-generating sports programs (Figler & Figler, 1984; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). This study is significant because the research was focused on the college choice decision-making process for African American student athletes not attending a Division I or II college or university after graduating from high school. The findings of this study have created a general profile of the characteristics of African American male club basketball players to complement Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and Freeman's (2005) model of college choice for African American students by using the models to understand the factors that influence African American male athlete enrollment in the community college.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for the research study was Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice. The model of college choice has been used frequently by researchers in assessing student characteristics and college choice to understand the college choice decision-making process of diverse student populations (Anzai, not in ref 2008; Coneal, not in ref 2002; Lee, 2008; Olsen, not in ref 2007; Pitre, not in ref 2002; Smith-Vosper, not in ref 1997; Coneal).

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model of predisposition, search, and choice addresses students in the postsecondary education college choice process.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) described the three phases as follows:

Predisposition is the formation of educational aspirations; search is the acquisition and examination of information about colleges to identify a limited set of institutions to

apply; and choice is the evaluation of alternatives to make a final college selection for matriculation. Each stage involves a specific set of activities for the prospective college student that allows the student to move “forward in the process, back in the process, or out of the process” (Adams, 2009, p. ?).

The first phase, predisposition, typically occurs in elementary school and describes influences that shape a student’s decision about whether or not he or she is going to attend college. The key characteristics that influence this stage are socioeconomic status, academic ability, parental influence, and peer influence. Parents are the dominant influence in promoting educational aspirations for students at this stage (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The student can be influenced not only to attend college but also to attend a particular college based on information from parents, siblings, and other relatives who have first-hand experience with a specific college (Adams, 2009; Hossler & Maple, not in ref 1993).

When the student has determined that he or she will indeed attend college, the next phase is identified as search. The search phase typically occurs in a student’s junior year of high school, culminating in the application process at the beginning of a student’s senior year. The tangible activities associated with this stage include the following: the student consults source, source recommends new school, source provides information on new school, student evaluates source’s information, student adds or drops school, student adds search factor(s), student evaluates schools according to refined search criteria, and, finally, student applies to school(s). Parents still play a critical role in helping the student narrow college options based on the financial costs of school(s) weighed against parents’ income, college savings, and students’ scholarship opportunities (Bouse & Hossler, 1991;

Hossler, Bouse, Schmit, & Vesper, 1991). Institutional characteristics that typically influence selection include financial aid, fields of study, academic reputation, location, social atmosphere, faculty teaching reputation, academic standards, and sports careers to which college might lead. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) determined that during this stage institutions play a pivotal role in highlighting the characteristics that are most important in helping the student determine a “choice set.” The choice set is the list of institutions to which the student is likely to be admitted based on academic achievement and college entrance examination scores and that meet the student’s criteria, including factors such as geographic location, cost of attendance, and availability of preferred major.

The third phase is labeled as choice. This phase showcases a clearer distinction of the institutional characteristics that are most important to the student to finalize a choice. During this phase, the student has identified colleges to which to submit an application for admission and must ultimately decide which of the schools by which he or she is accepted to attend. This phase represents the matching of student and school from the student’s perspective. Once students are accepted, institutions are also heavily recruiting students to meet their enrollment targets (Adams, 2009).

In addition to the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model, this study utilized Freeman’s (2005) model of college choice for African Americans because it provides specific factors consistent with the population being studied, African American students. Freeman expanded Hossler and Gallagher’s three-stage model of college choice to determine if African American students progress through the same stages, with similar influential factors, as White students in the original study. Freeman studied African

American students' college choice process but focused only on the predisposition stage including the role that family, church, and college aspirations play in decision making. Freeman contended that the church was a major catalyst in raising the funds to establish schools for African American children during slavery and segregation.

A further examination of the family and individual influences by Freeman (2005) disclosed several other factors to examine, including economic influence, internal influences, external influences, high school curriculum, and potential perceived barriers to higher education. Freeman identified internal influences as family, extended family, the church, the community, automatic expectations of family to attend college, influence to go beyond the family economic level, self-motivation, and avoidance of "what I don't want to be" (p. 15). The external influences were identified as the economy, geographic location, high school counselor or teacher recommendations, quality of high school attended, and high school academic curriculum (p. 41). One limitation of Freeman's work is that it focused only on the predisposition stage of college choice. The factors Freeman identified should be examined also to determine the reliability for the choice stage.

A combination of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and Freeman's (2005) model of college choice for African Americans was the best combination of theories to utilize to develop a better understanding of how African American male club basketball players select a college. The models address both internal and external factors that contribute to the overall college decision-making process. In addition, Freeman's model provides a cultural lens regarding the factors that are

important in the college decision-making process for African American students, which Hossler and Gallagher did not address.

### **Overview of Methodology**

Freeman's (2005) and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice models served as the theoretical framework to guide the study and develop appropriate research questions to determine the factors that lead to college choice for African American male club basketball players in the community college. A qualitative approach was utilized to understand the experiences of African American male club basketball players through in-depth semistructured interviews resulting in a rich description of the college choice experience of each participant (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The constructivist philosophy helped the researcher understand the individual reality of the club basketball players to construct meaning of their college choice experiences.

The researcher conducted interviews with 21 African American club basketball participants that were purposefully selected from two community colleges, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and Germanna Community College (GCC). Both colleges were multicampus in nature, but the club basketball program was offered at only one campus at each school. Both community colleges were within a 50-mile radius of Washington, DC and attracted a diverse student population. The selection criteria for participation in the study were that all participants self-selected as African American male students enrolled in at least six credits in one of the two aforementioned community colleges and were members of the school's 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 club basketball



team. The researcher followed the interview and protocol guide to ensure that every participant had the opportunity to respond to the same questions in a similar setting.

The participants were asked to read and sign the informed consent document as well as complete a brief demographic survey when they agreed to participate in the study. Each interview was expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes. Prior to the formal interviews, the researcher piloted the interview protocol. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for common themes that emerged from the responses using Freeman's (2005) model of college choice to frame the analysis. The data analysis included reading the transcripts, analyzing the transcripts, coding the data, examining field notes, and categorizing the data into themes (Maxwell, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2007; Yin, 2003). The data were stored in ATLAS ti, a qualitative database software program, for easy retrieval of the data, codebook, and other prevalent themes that emerged.

The results of the study created a robust picture of African American male club basketball players in the community college through a rich description of their experiences related to college choice. The study has added to the literature by creating an accurate depiction of how these students make meaning of their college choice decision.

### **Delimitations**

The researcher was interested in examining only a specific population in the community college. The following delimitations were identified for the research study:

This study was conducted at only 2 of the 23 colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS): Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and Germanna Community College (GCC). At the time of the study, Northern Virginia Community

College was the second largest community college in the nation, enrolling more than 30,000 students annually at six campuses. Three of the campuses were approximately 25 miles from the center of Washington, DC. Germanna Community College was also a multicampus community college in the state that attracted students in the region. GCC was the next closest community college in Virginia, located approximately 45 miles from the center of Washington, DC.

Second, 21 club basketball players were selected to be interviewed; they were African American, male, enrolled in at least six credits, and members of the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 club basketball team at NOVA or GCC.

Third, this study focused only on club basketball players in the community college and did not include other club sports such as rugby, baseball, tennis, or soccer.

An overarching delimitation of this study was the fact that the researcher was unable to study all African American male club basketball players in Virginia or across the United States. Therefore, two colleges were purposefully selected for participation because one was the second largest community college in the nation and the other was the community college nearest to the Washington DC metro area.

### **Limitations**

This study focused on two Virginia community colleges and a sample of their African American male student population. The study included the following research limitations.

First, community college students have different experiences from students in 4-year colleges and universities. The results of this study can be generalized only to club basketball players in a specific type of community college athletic program. Club sports,

defined by the VCCS, are designed for students to have opportunities to participate in recreational athletic activities. Intramural teams, defined by the VCCS, represent competitive sports between students, faculty, and staff that require no travel or practice. The club basketball players in the VCCS experiences may be different from student athletes in other community college systems.

Another limitation is that approximately 20 to 25 club basketball players were selected to be interviewed at two community colleges. Therefore, the club basketball players in other VCCS community college systems may or may not have the same experiences as the student athletes involved in this study.

Additional limitations occurred in trying to reach the approximate number of student athletes who met the selected criterion at each of the two colleges. The researcher utilized a snowball sampling method to achieve the targeted number of participants at each college.

All research studies have limitations in format and design. The main limitation is postulating a general conclusion based on data from a small sample set. Additionally, design weaknesses may cause an interviewer to not ask appropriate questions because of unfamiliarity with the language or cultural norms of the group being studied. As a result, conducting the pilot study assisted the researcher in making the necessary modifications to the interview protocol and questions prior to the commencement of the actual study interviews.

## **Assumptions of the Study**

One assumption of this study was that African American male club basketball players would be honest with the researcher regarding their college choice decision-making process.

The second assumption was that the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice would be applicable to African American male club basketball players and the factors that contribute to their final selection of a college.

Another assumption was that African American male club basketball players would feel comfortable interviewing and providing true and honest responses about their experiences playing sports in the community college setting.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

Athletic identity – A personal preference of identification that is specifically linked to sports, either through participation, play, or interest

African American – A group of people born in America who are of African descent. African American has become a politically correct term used to replace the use of the classification “Black”; literature prior to the year 2000 used the word Black but all references in the study use the term African American.

Club basketball player – A student athlete defined by the VCCS Intercollegiate Athletics guidelines: a student who is registered in a minimum of six credit hours at one of the member schools and who plays basketball for the school

Club sports – Intramural sports as distinguished from NJCAA or NCAA organized sports programs. All types of sports programs are used to provide

extracurricular activities for college students. Club basketball is similar to an intramural athletics program in that no scholarships are offered for participation.

College choice – A set of processes that prospective college students use to make decisions about enrolling in a college or university (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982)

College readiness – An academic measure used by the American College Testing Program. The benchmark predicts whether or not a student will score at least a B or higher in 1<sup>st</sup>-year college courses of English composition, college algebra, biology, and a social science course (ACT, 2009).

Institution choice set – The set of internal or external characteristics of a college or university that attracts students to enroll (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) – The governing body for Division I, II, and III colleges and university athletic programs. The association establishes rules and governs regulations for colleges and universities for all sports programs.

National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) – A conglomerate of community colleges who offer athletic programs that are governed by this agency for fair play and competition (commonly referred to as “juco”), with the exception of California community colleges

Revenue generating sports – Intercollegiate athletic programs whose revenue exceeds 3 million dollars per season; primarily Division I and II football and basketball programs

Socioeconomic status – An economic classification determined by the U.S. Census Bureau that stratifies earnings and potential for a group of people

Student athlete – A student who has the dual responsibility of studying and participating in competitive sports at a college or university

Virginia Community College System (VCCS) – A comprehensive education system founded in 1966 to provide education opportunities to expand the knowledge and skill set of Virginia’s workforce. The system adopted an “open door” policy so that community members could (a) enroll in vocational education or college level courses leading to an associate’s degree or (b) transfer to a 4-year college or university (VCCS, n.d.)

### **Overview of Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I provides a rationale for the study by discussing the topic, context, and background. The chapter addresses the research problem statement, introduces the research questions, explains the significance of the study, identifies the assumptions of the study, lists the limitations, and addresses the definition of key terms.

Chapter II provides a theoretical foundation for the study by reviewing college choice theories. A review of the literature examined Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-stage model of college choice and how students employ the college decision-making process. Freeman’s (2005) African American model of college choice provided a framework and then narrowed the factors applicable for African American male student athletes. The review of the literature encompassed the historical overview of African

American people in education, African American student athletes, and the role of the community college and club sports.

Chapter III summarizes the qualitative methodology used to answer the research questions. The chapter presents information about the research design, theoretical framework of the study, research questions, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection techniques, data preparation and handling, data analysis procedures, data presentation methods, and human subjects review.

Chapter IV summarizes the results from the face-to-face interviews by providing a rich description of the responses of the participants to the interview questions. The responses were coded according to the emergent themes: (a) value of experience, (b) escape, (c) a caring and academic-focused coach, (d) support network, including self, (e) discounted hoop dreams, (f) He got game? (g) second chance, and (h) stepping stone. The themes were synthesized to develop a broad overview of the experiences of African American male club basketball players to answer the main research question and the three subquestions.

Chapter V includes discussion of the results of the study. The results help create a profile of African American club basketball players in the community college and create a new model of college choice for this population. Additionally, this chapter provides tools for use by practitioners in the community college setting to create access, sustain retention, and help transfer African American club basketball players.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

If one is athletically gifted, young, and has developed a decent work ethic, deciding to look past the opportunities that may be possible in sport may be an incredibly big mistake. Or is it? (Smith, 2006)

Aspiring to attend college and the actual decision to go are phenomena that affect most students (Astin, 1993; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1997). Every student approaches the college choice decision-making process differently, with a certain set of internal and external criteria that will ultimately affect where he or she will attend. Freeman (2005) noted that African American students approach the college choice decision-making process from a cultural lens that is predicated by immediate family as well as their high school curriculum. She asserted that although African American students aspire to attend college at percentages equal to White students, there is a disconnect between African American students' aspirations and their actual enrollment in any higher education institution (Freeman, 2005). Therefore, it is important to understand the cultural nuances that predicate college enrollment for African American students, especially African American males, as males respond to different social cues and are given distinct cultural cues regarding higher education as compared to females. Hossler and Stage (1987) reported that, overall, women think about attending college more than males do. Freeman's research focused specifically on African American males and females and concluded that between the groups, females received more encouragement due to their race and gender. African American males, however, are encouraged to attend college when they are athletically inclined. As Freeman's interviewees stated, "Black males have to get in college through athletics, and females, they have to work their way up" (2005, p. 38). So, as African American males determine



whether or not to attend college, what is the perceived relationship between sports and admissions? More importantly, how much value do African American males place on sports as an avenue to enter higher education?

There have been several studies that delved into the college choice process for African American students, but the majority of these studies focused on the college choice process for high school students interested in attending 4-year colleges and universities (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Lee, 2008; Olsen, 2007; Pate, 2009; Rooney, 2008; Thallemer, 1998;). The literature was well-established regarding the college choice process for African American student athletes in 4-year colleges and universities (Abdur-Rahman, 1993; Bartee, 2008; Croft, 2008; Loudermilk, 1983; Smith, 2006; Teeples, 2005) and student athletes in 2-year colleges and universities (Berson, 1996; Nanney, 2008; Sawyer, 1993).

African American athletes in both 4- and 2-year colleges must meet similar criteria for selection, especially when considering participation in intercollegiate athletics. Few studies, however, have chronicled the college choice process for African American students who enroll in the community college (Barnes-Teamer, 2003; Cyprian-Deandrews, 2004; Lasker, 1994; Olsen, 2007; Wysong, 1990). Although a plethora of studies have explored the college choice decision-making process for African American male athletes in higher education, studies on African American male athletes who enroll in the community college are quite limited (Gayden, 2005; Harrison, 1999; Hatcher, 2004; Kornspan, 1997; Lee, 2008; Riley, 2007; Witherspoon, 2005). Specifically, studies about African American male athletes who participate in club basketball have not been conducted. With the existing models of college choice (Freeman, 2005; Hossler &

Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Chapman, 1981; Jackson, 1982), this qualitative study contributes to the knowledge base and research about the college choice decision-making process for African American male club basketball players in the community college through a descriptive explanation of their experiences.

The purpose of the study was to examine and to understand the factors that influence college choice and the decision-making process for African American male club basketball participants who enroll in the community college. To understand their experiences, it was important to identify the major characteristics of African Americans in higher education and club sports in the community college. Chapter II provides an overview of the theory of college choice and related models and outlines common factors or influences that contribute to the decision-making process for students. The dominant theory discussed is Freeman's (2005) college choice model for African American students. The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice is referenced to determine if the population studied had the same experiences as the initial researched population when making decisions. Specifically the study determined how the college choice decision-making process affects final college choice selection for African American club basketball players in the community college.

## **Background**

College choice is a critical phenomenon to examine in higher education because the process involves identifying internal factors and matching them with institutional choice sets. The education attainment of African Americans is a critical topic to study in higher education, including examining access to higher education in segregated systems, access to predominantly White institutions, and access to historically African American

colleges and universities. It is important to understand the challenges that African American people historically faced in gaining entry to higher education because many of these barriers continue to exist and prevent enrollment in many types of higher education institutions.

**From slavery to schools.** Several authors chronicled the nuances of “African American education” specifically justifying the need for African Americans to receive an education and determining the best places for them to be educated. Both Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Dubois provided a philosophy of education for African American people, reflecting a dichotomous perspective on higher education for African Americans. Washington disagreed with the militant behaviors of African American people and was therefore criticized for tacitly accepting the tenets of slavery. Nevertheless, Washington was also instrumental in developing schools that promoted the education of African Americans in technical fields. He viewed education as providing a tool for individuals to better their everyday lives rather than education’s being a social empowerment tool.

In contrast, W. E. B. Dubois, the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard University, supported the elevation of African American people through education comparable to that of Whites. He believed that a well-educated “talented tenth” could organize and articulate the social and economic needs of the race. The dichotomy between these two prominent African American leaders’ views of education caused a rift within the African American community regarding the purpose and need for the advancement of education.

Moreover, the foundation of education for African American people was deeply rooted in the church during and after slavery. The first school in South Carolina was established in 1826 through the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church for free African American children and adult slaves. The school was closed within 8 years as the state legislature prohibited free African American citizens from keeping any school or other place of instruction open for the purpose of teaching any slave or free person of color to read or write (Tillman, 2009). This barrier to education was widespread as many states scurrilously banned African Americans from the pursuit of education.

In the ensuing years, additional federal legislation and state initiatives diluted the education bans, allowing African Americans to be educated in some states under various circumstances. Exclusive African American schools were developed and funded by the church to ensure that the community received educational resources in a “separate but equal” ideology. The first college opened exclusively for African American students was Wilberforce University; the college hired African American teachers and administrators to provide educational access to the community. The States of Pennsylvania and Ohio as well as the border states, “the states of old Confederacy,” including Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, supported the education of free African American citizens (Betsey, 2008).

**Civil Rights Era.** Only 60 to 70 years later after slavery ended did African Americans begin to gain access and admission to more colleges and universities. In the penultimate decision on African American access to education, the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954* overturned legislation that supported education of African American youth in segregated schools at the K-12 level. Later, the Civil Rights

Act of 1964 required colleges and universities to increase African American enrollments or risk losing federal funding, thereby allowing more African American students to enroll in various higher education institutions across the nation (Weinberg, 1991).

With the development of these major civil right achievements promoting access to higher education, several studies have since focused on the higher education achievement gap for African American students. The research has indicated that African American students are less likely to enroll in postsecondary schools than White students and, if enrolled, to obtain a degree. Additionally, African American students have more challenges that affect access to higher education than their White peers, including lower socioeconomic status and less rigorous precollegiate academic preparation (Garibaldi, 1991; Stiff-Williams, 2007; Wilson, 1998).

When the African American high school student begins to engage in the college choice process, financial aid is the most dominant determinant of where the student will attend (Kuykendall, 2008; Levine & Nidiffer, 1973; Maxey et al., 1995; St. John et al., 2005). Family influences, academic preparation, SAT scores, and geographic locations are other important decision-making factors for African Americans to consider (Alexander, Bozick, & Entwisle, 2008; Kuykendall, 2008; Lasker, 1994; McDonough et al., 1997; Pascarella et al., 2004).

A study conducted by the American College Testing organization (ACT, 2009) showed that many African American students do not take the college entrance exam until their senior year, thereby delaying their ability to identify and rectify their academic deficiencies before college enrollment. African American students generally begin the college choice process much later in their high school academic career than other

students. Most of the literature on African Americans shows that this group may engage in the college choice decision-making process differently than other students (Burlison, Hallett, & Park, 2008; McDonough, 1997; McDonough et al., 1997; “Vital Signs,” 2006). Therefore, this study adds to the existing literature on the relevance of understanding the factors that influence African American males to enroll in higher education, specifically at 2-year colleges.

The education attainment of African American males has been documented in various studies, but their achievement is disproportionate compared to African American females. African American males are the least represented in higher education and degree attainment according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010). According to that report, there were 17.3 million students enrolled in higher education in 2009: 7.387 million males and 9.885 million females (NCES, 2010). White students constituted the largest percentage of the undergraduate student population, representing 66.1%; African American students represented 12.5%, Hispanic students 10.5 %, Asian students 6.4%, and American Indian students 1.0 % (NCES, 2010). Yet, African American males represented 37% of the total number of African American students in higher education, compared to 63% females; they earned 11% of all associate’s degrees, 9% of all bachelor’s degrees, 8% of master’s degrees, 5% of doctoral degrees, and 11% of all professional degrees (NCES, 2010). The data indicated that African American males represented a very low percentage for degree attainment among all student populations, although the report revealed that the majority of African American males obtained associate’s degrees at a higher rate compared to all other degree options (NCES, 2010). Currently, community college is the most attainable higher education option for

African American males. If access into higher education for African American males can be gained through athletics, it is important to explore the educational aspirations of African American male athletes in the community college.

**Leveling the playing field.** For African American male athletes, the road to participation in college sports has been quite difficult. During slavery, African American people organized sports programs as a form of recreation. As most of the United States was segregated until the 1960s, African American athletes competed on teams only in certain regions and for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). When African American athletes were given the opportunity to compete with all-White teams, it caused significant racial tension particularly when the all-African American team was victorious. Nevertheless, many White coaches realized the immeasurable talents possessed by African American athletes and sought ways to entice them to White-only schools (Edwards, 1973; George, 1999; Wiggington, 2006). In many instances, the only African Americans on campus were athletes. Athletic competition between colleges, the coaches, and revenue-generating programs have propelled intercollegiate athletics into an economic commodity.

Historically, there has been controversy over the role of African American males in sports. Edwards (1973) wrote that some African American athletes were being exploited by the American higher education system for their athletic talents and were leaving college empty-handed, with neither a degree nor a professional contract. Some African American males viewed sports participation as the only escape from an economically oppressive society (Edwards, 1973, 1983). Edwards contended that some African American males were pushed into sports by their parents as a viable avenue for

social and economic mobility. Education became the means to an end—a lucrative sports career (Edwards, 2000; Figler & Figler, 1984; Harrison, 1999; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). African American athletes are primed to compete for athletic scholarships in hopes of enhancing the revenue-generating potential for college sports programs. During the pursuit of athletic championships, the African American athlete lacks the required stamina to endure the academic rigors of college (Edwards, 1982). The end result is that some athletes leave college without a professional sports contract and without a degree.

Wiggington (2006) chronicled the plight of African American athletes from slavery to the post civil rights era. Initially, White America viewed Blacks as less than equal, and physical ability in sports was no different. Except for a few physically dominating athletes emerging in a variety of sports, African American athletes still dealt with the psychological barriers that prevented acceptance. Grass roots social change organizations that developed during the civil rights movement helped African American athletes utilize sports as a platform to address racial inequalities. More African American males were selected for jobs as coaches or administrators. In 1966, Bill Russell became the first African American male coach of a professional basketball team. Soon thereafter, other African American males began to secure positions that had been reserved for Whites. The emergence of African Americans in sports did not occur overnight; although the histories of a few star athletes of this era have been chronicled, many never had the opportunity to showcase their talents in mainstream culture.

Sailes (1998) documented the commercialization of sports and how African American athletes have contributed to its popularity. Sports heroes have emerged as a result of the building of large stadiums, media coverage, all-star games, nationally



recognized championships in all sports, and the revenues generated from global marketing and advertisement (Sailes, 1998). Sailes noted that American sports were segregated from African American people until Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball in 1947. Since then, African American athletes have become an integral part of sports and society, dominating the field in football, basketball, and baseball in both collegiate and professional teams.

In their pursuit of a glorious athletic career, some African American athletes must contend with marginal academic preparation for college, limited resources due to lower socioeconomic status, low self-concept, and the negative stereotypes perpetuated by other students and faculty members (Sailes, 1998). Yet the over exposure of society to the media and sports icons entices aspiring athletes of all races, despite the odds, to strive for the status, wealth, fame, and endorsements attached to a professional sports career.

George (1999) researched and traced the history of basketball beginning with James Naismith, who introduced the game of basketball to YMCA participants in 1892. Its popularity propelled colleges to quickly adopt the game; the first intercollegiate game was between Yale and Pennsylvania State University in 1897. The first African American players appeared at White universities after the early 1900s, but these players were unique in that they came from the antislavery North and had attained both freedom and economic stability. The first known African American basketball player, Samuel Ranson, played at The University of Wisconsin from 1904-1908. Paul Robeson was the most popular African American basketball player at Rutgers University from 1915-1919; he lettered in 15 varsity sports (George, 1999). To combat legal segregation, Edwin Henderson organized the first African American high school athletic association in

Washington, DC in 1905 to help aspiring African American athletes develop their talents and gain entry to higher education (George, 1999).

After several decades of combating legal segregation in schools, Blacks developed their own leagues and filtered their star athletes through the African American colleges. In 1950, Earl Lloyd, Chuck Cooper, and Sweetwater Clifton were the first African American males drafted into the National Basketball Association (NBA) (George, 1999). After African American basketball associations and colleges started producing star athletes for the NBA, coaches at White schools began to take notice of the athletic ability of the African American athletes. Soon thereafter, more African American players were invited to play for segregated schools for the sole purpose of winning a championship (George, 1999). This scenario was masked as a win-win situation, but the White schools were interested only in the African American students' athletic ability and placed very little emphasis on educational attainment.

The overall emergence of African Americans in professional sports elicited pride within the culture, elevated their status within their communities, and facilitated access to social, economic, and political arenas they were previously denied. Previous studies confirmed that young African American boys are attracted to sports because they can escape a life of poverty and live a lavish lifestyle, all with minimal academic qualifications (Edwards, 1975; Sailes, 1992; Wiggington, 2006). Despite the bleak odds, wherein only 3 high school basketball players in 10,000 make it to the NBA (NCAA, n.d.), high school student athletes still place a greater emphasis on athletic prowess over academic excellence. Many African American males still aspire to become professional athletes at any cost (Hinkle, 1994; Ryan et al., 2007; Sowa & Gressard, 1983;).

**Community college and sports.** Community colleges serve a diverse population of students. Although the community college was founded in the early 1900s to provide equal access to postsecondary education for the “community,” the core mission was access and transfer (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Lombardi & Cohen, 1992). The geographic locations of many community colleges help facilitate education throughout the region for people who may not have the opportunity to attend a higher education institution away from home (Barnes-Teamer, 2002; Cyprian-Andrews, 2004; Mbadugha, 2000). The rapid growth in enrollment in community colleges can be attributed to the open-enrollment policy that removes traditional barriers to education at 4-year colleges and universities, such as standardized test scores, high school curricula, cost of attendance, and geographic location (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Intercollegiate sports in community colleges are governed by two major agencies, the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC) and the national Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Both organizations enforce academic standards, rules, and regulations among competitive sports programs. The organization and sustainability of college athletics cost money and present a financial burden for non-revenue-generating sports programs. Nevertheless, the ability to participate in extracurricular activities is a benefit of college participation. With recent changes in NCAA eligibility rules, community college may be the only available point of entry into higher education for academically unprepared athletes (Horton, 2009; NCAA, n.d.). As a result, careful examination of the athlete’s academic background and aspirations to transfer must be considered to ensure a seamless transition to a 4-year college or university.

A recent study examined the impact of athletics in community college. The data showed that intercollegiate athletics was a very popular activity in the community college, more so with male students, who made up 63% of athletic participants (Bush, Castaneda, Hardy, & Katsinas, 2009). More than one million students were enrolled in urban community colleges; it was shown that athletics are an important factor in attracting male students. Male students accounted for 6% of all first-time students when athletics became more visible in urban, suburban, and rural community colleges (Bush et al., 2009). Another study summarized the mission of the community college as supporting open access and “enhancing individual academic and athletic skills, building social and human capital through sports participation, and developing personal discipline through academic study and athletic participation” (Horton, 2009). This study incorporated qualitative interviews that revealed that many students were eligible to attend a 4-year institution after high school but attended a community college for the following reasons: “to stay at home, less expensive tuition, lack of confidence academically to excel at a larger college, and the opportunity to play [sports]” (Horton, 2009, p. 21).

### **African American Male Student athletes**

The worst victim is the African American athlete, and society’s promise that sport will lift African American youth from poverty to riches and fame is a cruel illusion. Yet parents, coaches, and administrators buy into the media package and encourage the illusion; African American athletes themselves sacrifice educational opportunities to the glittering dream of the sporting arena. (Lapchick, 1989, p. 20)

African American male student athletes constitute a widely researched population in higher education. Most of the literature has focused on academic preparation (Adler & Adler, 1985; Berry & Asamen, 1989; Boswell, 2005; Cogan & Petrie, 1996), access to

higher education (Adler & Adler, 1985; Braddock & Hua, 2006; Wilkins, 2005), the influence of participation (Kiger & Lorentzen, 1988; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Melendez, 2006; Pietryk, 2008), exploitation of African American athletes (Edwards, 1973; Farrell, 1990; George, 1999; ; Smith, 2006; Wiggington, 2006), poor graduation rates (Ferrell, 1986; Hatcher, 2004; Lederman, 1992; Smith, 2006) , career self-efficacy (Akiyu, 2005; Kornspan, 1997; Wilkins, 2005; Witherspoon, 2005), and career indecision (Edwards, 1984; Kornspan, 1997; Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997).

Consequently, for African American male athletes the college choice process is quite different from African Americans who are nonathletes. Student athletes consider the coach, athletic facilities, and the opportunity to play as the factors determining college choice, especially for Division I and Division II colleges and universities (Bartee, 2008; Letawsky et al., 2003; Loudermilk, 1983; Ryan et al., 2007).

The literature on African American athletes in the community college highlights transfer rules and requirements (Harper, 2009; Harvey, 2009; Moore, not in ref 2006; Sawyer, 1993; Storch & Ohlson, 2009), academic preparation (Barlow, 2004; Bush & Bush, 2005; Mora, 1997), and sports participation (Bush, Castañeda, Hardy & Katsinas, 2009; Harrison, 1999; Kornspan, 1997; Riley, 2007). Research on the factors that influence African American male athletes to select a community college for enrollment was limited and did not equally reflect the decision to enroll in all levels of higher education. Thus the current research study is significant because the results add to the literature base on college choice and African American male athletes in the community college.

The literature was limited on the college decision-making process for African American males who participated in club sports in the community college. It was important to explore the factors that influence enrollment for this group of students in 2-year colleges. First, it was important to examine in detail the literature on college choice.

### **College Choice**

The cliché about basketball offering “a ticket out of the ghetto”—through college choice scholarships and professional contracts—traps boys into framing their lives around the sport while abandoning studies that would actually prepare them for reachable careers. (Barlow, 2004, p. 64)

To gain a better understanding of the factors that influence the college choice decision-making process for African American males to attend a community college, it was necessary to examine college choice theory. College choice has been described as a developmental process that begins in elementary school and is guided by the academic program of interest. Cost, social climate, parents, counselors, teachers, friends, socioeconomic status (SES), aptitude levels, educational aspiration, and high school performance have been cited as critical factors for students during the college choice decision-making process (Johnson, Stewart, & Eberly, 1991; McDonough, 1997). First, the relevance of college choice models is discussed. Second, Jackson’s (1982) college choice model and Freeman’s (2005) model of college choice for African American students (2005) are examined, with greater emphasis on the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college student choice.

In *What Matters in College*, Astin (1993) identified three major issues for prospective college students. The first issue is whether or not to attend college, the second issue is where to go to college, and the third issue is how to go to college. Astin contended that college has a major positive impact on one’s life, but the aforementioned

listed issues determine whether or not a student chooses to seek that positive impact. For example, whether or not to go to college is greatly influenced by perceived academic and financial ability to attend college. The second issue of where to attend college is influenced by the student's preference for the type of institution to attend: "large or small, public or private, religious or non-secular, and two-year versus four year" (Astin, 1993, p. ?). About the third issue, how to go to college, Astin stated that it is "poorly understood by counselors and parents [and] involves issues such as the need to finance a college education, where to live while in college, what to study in college, what academic schedule to select full or part time and which extracurricular activities to pursue" (p. ?).

Astin's (1993) work set the tone for further inquiry on the road that an individual must travel to make a final college choice decision. The four major theories examined for college choice were Jackson's (1982), Chapman's (1984), Freeman's (2005), and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) models of college choice that represent a sequential progression to the decision.



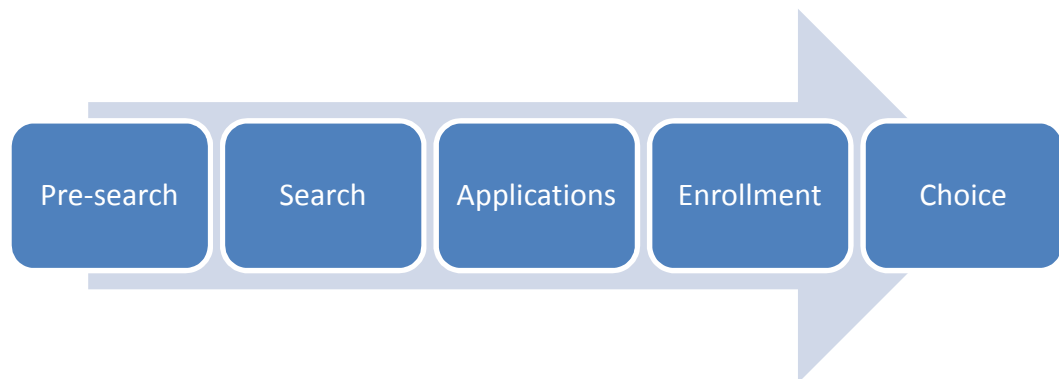
*Figure 4.* The Jackson model.

In Jackson's (1982) model (Figure 4), the three stages are preference, exclusion, and evaluation. Jackson emphasized classifications of factors that highlight the relationship among the factors that influence choice. Preference is the first stage in the

model and focuses on the sociological processes of college choice whereas the latter stages emphasize the economic processes of college choice. In Jackson's model, academic achievement in high school is the strongest determining factor on a student's aspirations to attend college. In addition, socioeconomic status, peer influences, parental education, and high school curriculum are external social factors that influence choice during the preference stage.

In the second stage, exclusion, students begin to synthesize information received from colleges to better assess fit based on their academic ability, cost, and location of college. Economic theory is utilized in the process of elimination to remove certain types of colleges and universities from the student's interest list.

The last stage in the Jackson model is evaluation. When the list is synthesized from a large list to a smaller list based on the factors listed above, the student begins to evaluate the characteristics of the final choice set institutions.

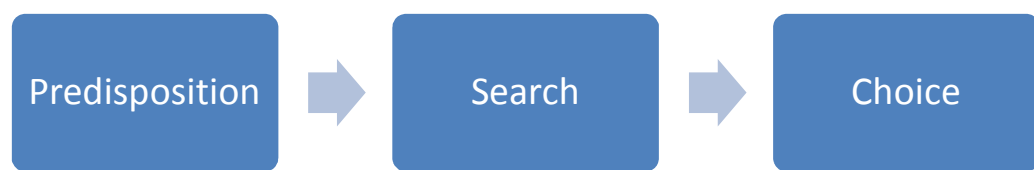


*Figure 5.* The Chapman model.

Chapman (1984) developed a five-stage college choice model (Figure 5). The stages include (a) presearch, (b) search, (c) applications, (d) choice, and (e) enrollment. In this model, external influences are the most dominant factors affecting college choice.



Chapman (1981) specified that college choice is influenced by a set of student characteristics with external influences. The student characteristics are socioeconomic status, level of educational aspiration, and academic performance. External factors have been identified as significant others (parents, friends, high school counselors), fixed college characteristics (cost, location, programs), and college marketing efforts (campus visit, admissions, recruiting, and publications).



*Figure 6.* The Hossler and Gallagher model.

The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice (Figure 6) has been used frequently by researchers to assess student characteristics and college choice (Anzai, 2008; Coneal, 2002; Lee, 2008; Olsen, 2007; Pitre, 2002; Smith-Vosper, 1997). These studies used the Hossler and Gallagher college choice model to understand the influences of the college choice decision-making process on diverse student populations.

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model is relevant for students in postsecondary education. The three stages are predisposition, search, and choice. Hossler et al. (1989) described the three phases thusly: predisposition is the formation of educational aspirations; search is the acquisition and examination of information about colleges to identify a limited set of institutions to apply; and choice is the evaluation of alternatives to make a final college selection for matriculation.

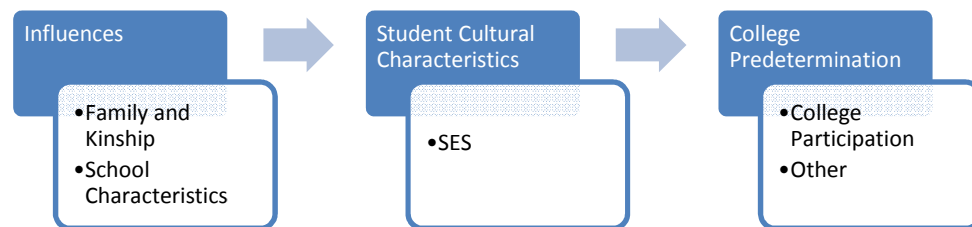
The first phase, predisposition, typically occurs in the elementary school and represents the earliest indication of the student's feelings about whether or not he or she wants to attend college. The key characteristics that influence this stage are socioeconomic status, academic ability, parental influence, and peer influence. Parents are the dominant influence in promoting educational aspirations for students at this stage (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Most students make the decision whether or not to attend college by the ninth grade (Hossler et al., 1989).

When the student has determined that he or she will indeed attend college, the next phase is identified as search. The search phase and application stage typically occur in the junior year of high school, culminating in the application process at the beginning of a student's senior year. The tangible activities associated with this stage include the following: student consults source, source provides new school suggestion, source provides information on new school, student evaluates source's information, student adds or drops school, student adds search factor(s), student evaluate schools according to refined search criteria, and, finally, student applies to school(s). Parents still play a critical role in helping the student narrow college options based on the financial costs of school(s), weighed against parents' income, college savings, and students' scholarship opportunities (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Hossler et al., 1991). Institutional characteristics that typically influence selection involve financial aid, fields of study, academic reputation, location, social atmosphere, faculty teaching reputation, academic standards, and careers to which college might lead. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) determined that during this stage institutions play a pivotal role in highlighting the characteristics that are most important in helping the student determine a "choice set." The choice set is the list

of institutions to which the student is likely to be admitted, based on academic achievement and college entrance examination scores, and which meet the student's criteria, including factors such as geographic location, cost of attendance, and major.

The third phase is labeled as choice. This phase showcases a clearer distinction of the institutional characteristics that are most important to the student in finalizing a choice. During this phase, the student identifies colleges to which to submit an application for admission and ultimately decides which of the accepting schools to attend.

The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model identifies numerous factors that influence the college choice decision-making process for students, including socioeconomic status, family influences, earning potential, and race. Other research has highlighted the importance of additional factors in the college choice process.



*Figure 7.* The Freeman model.

Freeman (2005) expanded the work of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model of college choice (Figure 7) to determine if African American students followed the same stages with similar influential factors. Freeman studied African American students' college choice process but only focused on the predisposition stage, including the role that the family, church, and college aspirations play in decision making.

Freeman contended that the church was a major catalyst in creating funding for the

establishment of schools so that African American children could be educated during slavery and segregation.

Further examination of the family and individual influences by Freeman (2005) revealed that several other factors were critical to examine such as economic influence, internal influences, external influences, high school curriculum, and potential perceived barriers to higher education. Freeman identified internal influences as family, extended family, the church, the community, automatic expectations of family to attend college, influence to go beyond the family economic level, self-motivation, and avoidance of “what I don’t want to be” (p. 15). The external influences were identified as the economy, geographic location, high school counselor or teacher recommendations, quality of high school attended, and high school academic curriculum (p. 41). One limitation of Freeman’s work is that it focused only on the predisposition stage of college choice. The factors should be examined to determine their reliability for the choice stage.

### **African Americans and College Choice**

When the African American high school student begins to engage in the college choice process, several factors influence or deter enrollment. Freeman (2005) suggested that family influences should be expanded to include both immediate family and close relatives. For White students, the literature shows that if either parent attended college, this fact has the greatest influence on the child’s attending college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Levine & Nidiffer, 1973; McDonough, 1997; St. John et al., 2005). For African Americans with low educational attainment levels and low socioeconomic status, the parental influence results from the child’s strong desire to escape a life of poverty rather than the parent’s having personal experience from attending college (Freeman, 2005).

Also, financial aid is often the most significant determining factor of where the student will attend (Hearn, 1984; Kuykendall, 2008; Levine & Nidiffer, 1973; Maxey et al., 1995; St. John et al., 2005). Family influences, academic preparation, SAT scores, and geographic locations are other important decision-making factors for African Americans to consider (Alexander et al., 2008); Kuykendall, 2008; Lasker, 1994; McDonough et al., 1997; Olsen, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004). The decision regarding which college to choose for academics and sports will continue to present a challenge for the student athlete when examining all of the factors that promote and prevent access to higher education.

Freeman (2005) expanded Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model of college choice to determine if African Americans followed the same stages with similar influential factors. Freeman studied African American students' college choice process but focused only on the predisposition stage, including the role that the family, church, and college aspirations play in decision making. Freeman contended that the church was a major catalyst in creating funding for the establishment of schools so that African American children could be educated during slavery and segregation.

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economy, geographic location, high school counselor or teacher recommendations, quality of high school attended, and high school academic curriculum (p. 41). One limitation of Freeman's work is that it focused only on the predisposition stage of college choice. The factors should be examined to determine their reliability for the choice.

#### Influences on College Choice

The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model identified numerous factors that influence the college choice decision-making process for students; some of those factors are synonymous with socioeconomic status or race. Other research has highlighted the importance of additional factors in the college choice process. The factors described in this section are family, socioeconomic status, coach recommendations, athletic reputation, and career aspirations, all of which are critical in understanding the decision-making process for student athletes.

An important study by McDonough et al. (1997) focused on the college choice patterns of African American students, particularly those who opt to attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In 1992, there were over 1.4 million African American students enrolled in higher education, and African American males represented only 39% of that figure. The purpose of this study was to determine what factors affect the college choice decision-making processes of African American students and whether or not African Americans use the same process when deciding to attend a HBCU as they use for a predominantly White college. Historically, college access has portrayed a "natural fit between talent and ability," but that concept is not true for students of color (McDonough et al., 1997, p. 12). Instead, the greatest barriers to college access include academic preparation in high school and the cost of higher education.

The study by McDonough et al. (1997) examined 220,557 first-time, full-time freshmen from 427 U.S. colleges and universities. The survey contained questions regarding the student's background, demographics, experiences in high school, reasons for going to college, reasons for choosing the particular institution, expectations about college, self-concept, degree aspirations, and career aspirations. African American students accounted for 147,420 of surveyed participants and of those participants, 49,842 attended HBCUs. The results showed that the majority of African American students in college were women and that African American students had difficulty being accepted to their first-choice institutions, submitted applications to several colleges, and chose colleges based on academic reputation and financial aid offers. Also the study pointed out that many students were from families with annual incomes below \$20,000; had lower high school GPAs and SAT verbal scores; and selected their respective colleges based on the social reputation of the school, lack of college options (not being admitted anywhere else), and familial influence. Academic reputation and financial aid offers were the most important factors for African American students in selecting a college. The study showed that 70% of all freshmen were admitted to their first-choice college compared to 59% of African American students. Most importantly, more than 60 % of all African American and HBCU students "consider[ed] themselves above average in intellectual and social self confidence" (p. 19).

The aforementioned study indicated that African American students at HBCUs attend those schools because of geographic proximity, student's religion, the school's social reputation, and desire of relatives. In contrast, African American students at predominantly White institutions attend because they are recruited by an athletic

department, they wish to live near home, and they value the college's academic reputation. Financial aid awards are also an important decision-making factor for African American students.

Other studies complemented the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice for African American students.

**Family.** Several research studies documented the influences of parents on the development of a student's interest to attend college. They provided evidence that students rely on an educated parent's perception of college and thus have more options when selecting a college (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Additionally, the same authors contended that students rely on the advice of supervisors and employers if their parents did not attend college. A study by Bouse and Hossler (1991) determined that parental encouragement was ranked the most importance influence for college attendance of African American males.

Examination of parental influences indicated that educated parents, particularly educated fathers, influenced higher education participation. Socioeconomic levels and student academic ability also were determining predictors of choosing to attend college. Specifically, African Americans were influenced by economic expectations particularly the expectation of jobs commensurate with their level of education after higher education.

African American students often strive to go beyond the family's level of education. In such cases, the family influences that persuade participation result from negative motivation and the student's realization of what he or she does not want to become. Sometimes college attendance is not ingrained in African American children,



but overall this group is greatly influenced by their mothers, extended families, and job market expectations fueled by self-imposed pressures to achieve for the family.

**Socioeconomic status.** St John et al. (2005) documented that African American students rely heavily on financial aid offers and competitive tuition costs as an important factor in selecting a college, because they have “greater financial need and can only afford to attend less expensive colleges” (p. 556).

McDonough (1991) postulated that even with the intent to go to college, social class affects the high school student’s perception of college. Her research examined information obtained from the late 1980s and early 1990s about college choice. It showed that White middle- and upper-class students apply to many colleges and can spend nearly \$1,000 in application costs alone. Students with the ability to pay for multiple admissions applications make choices regarding the types of institution to which they will apply that are different from the choices made by their peers of lower socioeconomic status. African American students, women, and others from low SES backgrounds are more likely to attend lower selectivity institutions regardless of academic achievement, ability, or aspirations due to the lack of financial resources to enroll and to afford tuition at their first-choice colleges (McDonough, 1991; Styles-Hughes, 1987).

**Financing college.** In addition to the desire to attend college and the presence of family support, students must be financially able to afford college. St John (2002) disclosed that the greatest barrier for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds is the ability to pay for 4 to 5 years of college. Financial aid was established to help students defray the costs of higher education, but the student still has to weigh the cost of

tuition, type of institution, and family contribution when making a final selection (Paulsen & St. John, 1997; St. John, 1990).

### **Influences for Student athletes**

With all the challenges faced by the general student population as well as African American students, specifically, when engaging in the college choice process, there are many factors that may contribute to the college choice decision for African American athletes. Freeman (2005) proposed that when African American males seek enrollment in college, they select athletic programs where they are eligible for a scholarship, as the option of attending college otherwise may be financially unfeasible. Other than the possibility of receiving an athletic scholarship, what other factors contribute to the student athlete's selection of a college?

Gabert, Hale, and Montalvo (1999) researched the differences in college choice factors among freshman student athletes. The study involved 246 first-time freshman student athletes from NCAA Divisions I and II and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) member schools. The participants included 177 males, of whom 88 were nonscholarship students from five universities in the mid-south (none were HBCUs). Participants were given a student athlete college choice profile scale to measure differences on college choice factors. The study showed that the head coach and academic support services were important for Division I respondents and location was most important for Division II respondents. When comparing the responses from men and women, the first and third most important variables for college choice were the head coach and the opportunity to play immediately. Only two of the five top variables were related to athletic participation. The 71 non-White respondents stated that the head

coach, degree, chance to play, academic support, and athletic tradition were important to their decision in ranked order. The nonscholarship athletes indicated that the location of school, degree programs, local community, chance to play, and family members were important.

This study was critical in explaining differences that student athletes faced based upon gender and ethnicity and how those factors contributed to their college selection. The next section focuses specifically on how African American male athletes engage in the college choice process.

### **College Choice and African American Male Athletes**

College sports have developed into a multibillion dollar industry. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the top governing agency for collegiate athletics. In the early 1900s, football's rough play, resulting in numerous injuries and deaths, prompted many institutions to discontinue the sport. Other schools urged that football be reformed or abolished from intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA was spawned from a meeting with athletic directors to establish rules for safe play that would be adopted among all member colleges. In 1905, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was founded by 62 members; the association was later renamed the NCAA. The first championship game, for track and field, was held in 1921.

In 1973, membership was divided into three legislative and competitive divisions: I, II, and III. Five years later, Division I members voted to create subdivisions I-A and I-AA (subsequently renamed the Football Bowl Subdivision and the Football Championship Subdivision) in football. The NCAA began administering women's athletics programs in 1980 when Divisions II and III established 10 championships

expanding the women's championships program. Membership in each division is described in detail in the following section (NCAA, n.d.).

Division I member institutions must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women), with two team sports for each gender. Each playing season (fall, winter, spring) must be represented by each gender as well. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria. For sports other than football and basketball, Division I schools must play 100% of the minimum number of contests against Division I opponents; anything over the minimum number of games must be 50% Division I. Division I schools must meet minimum financial aid awards for their athletics program, and there are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a Division I school cannot exceed.

“Revenue-generating sports” are programs labeled by the NCAA as colleges and university sports programs that generate at least 3 million dollars annually in revenue from ticket sales, conference participation, and championship games (NCAA, n.d.). Higher education institutions rely on revenue-generating sports because the sports influence campus identity, people enjoy the competitive nature of conference rivalries, and sports bring the prospective students, current students, and alumni together to foster a sense of community rooted in a common shared interested of customs and traditions (Toma, 1998). More specifically, football and basketball programs bring school name recognition spectators, entice television networks, and attract hundreds of national and local journalists to cover the games on local and cable news channels (Edwards, 1973; Figler & Figler, 1984; Rhoden, 2006;). So, it is equally important to examine and learn about the college choice decision-making process of African American male athletes who

do not participate in revenue-generating sports programs to understand the factors that influence enrollment in a community college.

The college choice decision-making process involves specific factors for student athletes such as the reputation of the college, the reputation of the athletic program, the location of the college, and potential exposure through the media to professional teams (Croft, 2008; Edwards, 2000; Kraft, 1996; Ryan et al., 2007). The desire to participate in club sports and enroll at a community college is not a logical progression for someone who self-identifies as a “student athlete,” as community colleges offer few of the aforementioned incentives. This study provides additional insight on how student athletes decide to enroll in a community college that is not a member of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). The NJCAA is the governing body for community college sports that promotes conference competition and a structured transfer program to 4-year colleges and universities for athletics. Based on the club sports model in community colleges, this study helps identify factors that influence enrollment for African American males to participate in a club sports basketball program.

### **Influences for African American Athletes**

Several factors have been identified that influence the college choice decision-making process of African American students. Specifically, examination of the choice phase of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model indicated that African American students’ choice factors and processes are somewhat different from those of White students.

It was noted in the literature that, in general, African American students are less likely than White students to attend college (McDonough, 1991; McDonough et al.,

1997; St. John, 2007). African American students focus more on the costs of attendance, social background of college peers, and the availability of financial aid than their White peers (Lewis & Morrison, not in ref 1975; Litten, 1982). College aspirations of African American students relate more to academic achievement in school, the influence of significant others (parents, teachers, and friends), and their self-esteem (Freeman, 1999; Freeman, 2005; Murrell, not in ref 2009; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Although the level of college aspirations of African American prospective college students equaled those of White students and other students, achievement and significant others' encouragement were more important for educational aspirations than was self-esteem. So, African American are more persistent with the college choice decision-making process when they feel academically prepared and they have the support of significant others.

In addition to the factors that influence college choice for the general student population, student athletes weigh additional institutional characteristics before making a final selection. The additional factors for student athletes to be reviewed are family, coach's recommendations, athletic reputation, the ability to play, and socioeconomic status.

The three stages of the college choice decision-making process for African American athletes are greatly influenced by athletic ability, academic preparation, and oftentimes scholarship awards. By virtue of self-identifying as an athlete, the student athlete has a predisposition to attend college based on his or her desire to play professional sports. The search process consists of recommendations from the high school coaches, interest from college recruiters, campus visits, and the athletic reputation (Gabert, et al., 1999; Kraft, 1996; Ryan et al., 2007). The final selection process entails

determining which of the colleges to which the athlete is admitted offers the best athletic scholarship and opportunity to play. Overall, the four general factors related to college choice for student athletes includes factors that are internal to the institution (academic reputation, prestige); factors that are external to the institution (location and proximity to student's home); human influences (relatives, friends, and counselors); and individual factors (personal and socioeconomic status).

**Athletic reputation.** Student athletes select a college to attend based on factors such as recommendations from the high school coach, relationship with college coach, the opportunity to play collegiate sports, athletic facilities, and the possibility of being a contributing member of a championship team (Gabert et al., 1999; Kraft, 1996; Ryan et al., 2007;).

Braddock and Hua (2006) conducted research on college destination of African American high school seniors. Although they utilized data from NCES that included information for 14,000 students, their study focused on only 468 African American high school seniors who had enrolled in a 4-year college by 1990. The college choice inventory was used to determine the importance of 18 separate factors on the student's college choice, including the reputation of the school's athletic programs. One of every three college-bound African American high school seniors, over half of whom were male, considered a strong athletic reputation to be at least somewhat important (26.4%) or very important (31.3%) in the choice of college (Braddock & Hua, 2006). African American male high school seniors were roughly 22 times more likely than African American females to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college. Additionally, seniors from high-SES families were more than eight times as likely as

African American seniors from low-SES backgrounds to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college. African American seniors who ultimately participated in intercollegiate varsity sports programs were significantly more likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college compared to those who did not participate. African American college student athletes were more than 15 times as likely as nonathletes to attach greater importance to a college's athletic reputation.

Teeples (2005) also examined college choice decision of student athletes. The researcher surveyed 408 student athletic participants who competed in 16 different sports at the University of Tennessee: baseball, men's and women's basketball, football, men's and women's softball, women's golf, men's and women's track and field (indoor and outdoor), men's and women's swimming and diving, men's and women's tennis, women's volleyball, and women's rowing. The athletes were categorized by gender, race, socioeconomic status, scholarship level, and sport played for data analysis. The study involved interviews of 234 male participants and 174 female participants; 156 were on full athletic scholarships, 147 on partial scholarships, and 105 were nonscholarship recipients. Of the participants, 46 stated that at least one parent had a high school or less education, 82 stated that only one parent had college experience, and 280 stated that both parents had college experience. Of the participants, 275 were Caucasian and 133 were non-Caucasian. The 27-item questionnaire was used to measure reported differences in the criteria for choosing to attend the University of Tennessee. The results revealed that the opportunity to win championships was the major reason for choosing the University of Tennessee. Other significant factors were the school's athletic conference reputation, the athletic facilities, the school's sports programs reputation, and the camaraderie with



other players. The lowest ranked factors were the high school coach's recommendation, college guides and publications, peer recommendations, school alumni, and recommendations of their high school guidance counselor.

Both studies (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Teeple, 2005) were consistent with other studies in that African American seniors, like others, considered a wide range of issues in their decision-making process. College athletics was not at the top of the list, but it did matter to a significant number of African Americans. Students with high SAT scores gave little consideration to the athletic reputation. African American males and varsity athletes were found to give stronger consideration to college athletic reputation than females or nonathletes.

Research has indicated that a student athlete's selection of a college based on the athletic reputation is different across the NCAA divisions. The common factors influencing college choice for Division I and II athletes were high school coach's recommendation, quality of competition, tuition costs, life after sports, and social class perspectives (Bartee, 2008; Croft, 2008; Letawsky et al. 2003; Loudermilk, 1983; Ryan et al., 2007; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Teeple, 2005). For Division III athletes the most important college choice factors were athletic program, opportunity to make the team, and financial aid (Faulkner, 2005; Finey, 2005; Snow, 2006).

**Coach's recommendation.** Croft (2008) studied the factors that influenced the college selection choice basketball players in the Big Twelve Conference. The goals of the study were to develop a profile of male basketball players, identify factors influencing their school choice, and identify the individuals who influenced school choice. The results indicated that more than 50% of male basketball student athletes in the conference

were African American, the majority of whom were sophomores and juniors. The significant factors revealed about college choice for student athletes in rank order are the following: student athlete relationship with head coach, opportunity to play in the NCAA tournament, reputation of the head coach, opportunity to play in the Big Twelve Conference, head coach's style of play, and student athlete's relationship with the assistant coaches.

In addition, Croft's (1998) study showed that mothers and fathers were the most influential factors in the student athlete's college choice decision making. Most importantly, the head coach was indicated as influencing school choice by two thirds of the student athletes at five of nine participating institutions. Other factors that influenced prospective student athletes were the basketball arena, the athletic facilities, receiving telephone calls from the head coach, and visits from the head coach at their school or home.

**Career aspirations.** Witherspoon (2005) explored the impact of environmental influences on the career choices of African American males. The focus of the study was to understand the impact of environmental influences (parents or guardians, school counselors, school administrators) on the career choices of African American males, specifically those who aspired to become professional athletes. Results from the qualitative interviews and focus groups revealed that African American males' career choices are impacted by introduction and exposures to career experiences by environmental influences and role models. These experiences help participants formulate their career choices as they are exposed to and participate in their communities. African American males' career choice is influenced by their current practice and performance;

their career self-efficacy is impacted by compliments and encouragement from other role models.

Two major factors outlined in the general college choice literature—family and socioeconomic status—have not been researched thoroughly for student athletes. As Freeman (2005) noted, when African American males engage in the college choice process, it is primarily through sports. In addition, socioeconomic status represents a barrier to access even as higher education provides an opportunity to enhance one's socioeconomic status. African American families see education as an option for the current generation to escape the economic and financial woes of the past. Freeman (2005) stated that college attendance was influenced by three factors: (a) an automatic expectation from the family (even if the parents had not attended college, (b) influences beyond the family level (desire for a better lifestyle), and (c) self-motivation and avoidance (refusal to be like everyone else in the family).

Gabert et al. (1999) explored the differences in college choice factors among freshman student athletes. The study examined 246 first-time freshman athletes from Division I and II and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) programs in the mid-south. A 30-item Student Athlete College Choice Profile Scale was used to measure reported differences on college choice factors for 177 male student athletes. This scale was modeled after Hamrick and Hossler's (1996) model of college choice to be more applicable to student athletes. The scale results indicated that academic support was most important to Division I student athletes; location of the school was most important for Division II student athletes, and the head coach was the most influential factor in selecting the college for NAIA students. So, the responses of the various

student athletes in the divisions were consistent with previous studies of the decision-making process for athletes.

Additionally, the descriptive statistics reported in the study by Gabert et al. (1999) revealed that for all three groups the college head coach, location of school, and opportunity to play were the three top factors for selection. The top factor for males was the location of the school; for revenue and nonrevenue sports, the top factor was the head coach; for non-White students the top factor was the head coach; and for nonscholarship students, the location of the school was the top factor for selection.

African American seniors who participated in intercollegiate varsity sports programs were significantly more likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college compared to those who did not participate. African American college student athletes were more than 15 times as likely as nonathletes to attach greater importance to a college's athletic reputation. The findings from the study by Gabert et al. (1999) were consistent with other studies that found that African American seniors, like others, consider a wide range of issues in their decision-making process. College athletics is not at the top of the list but it does matter to a significant number of African Americans. Students with high SAT scores give little consideration to the athletic reputation. African American males and varsity athletes were found to give stronger consideration to college athletic reputation than were females or nonathletes.

### **The Community College**

“For minorities, the community college or what alternative? For most students in two year institutions the choice is not between the community college and a senior

institution, it is between the community college and nothing” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 58).

The purpose of the community college centered on the education of teachers in the 1920s and then transformed to provide job training for the unemployed during the 1950s. The vocational training system helped economic development by educating, training, and hiring laborers within communities. Now, the community college is seen as a vehicle of access for anyone pursuing higher education, a means to gain temporary knowledge, or a way to gain job-training skills to support workforce development from 2014 and beyond (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], n.d.). The AACC notes that community colleges “have been inclusive institutions that welcome all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience” (AACC, n.d.).

The community college was founded on the principle of “open door” practice: providing access to education especially to students who might be disenfranchised from higher education. The community college provides a diverse offering of educational opportunities for students, including remedial courses, courses to grant a technical degree for employment, courses to facilitate transfer to a 4-year institution, community education, and learning for general purposes (Pierce, 2007). Other attractive features of the community college include the ability for students to receive an education at a low tuition rate, distance learning, the ability to register on a part-time basis, academics that can accommodate low-ability students, a variety in course offerings, and a nonselective admissions criteria (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges provide a broad range of educational opportunities for groups of people with diverse higher educational needs.

Despite the open-access initiative, the plethora of vocational opportunities, inexpensive tuition rates, and geographic availability, African American students' higher education attainment at the community college is still lower than their White counterparts who graduate at a rate of 54.1 % (U.S. Census, 2000). In 2007, the community college enrolled more than 38% of students in higher education, and minority students represented 46% of that total enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). With the increasing emergence of competitive athletic programs, the community college may experience a surge in enrollments by African American males who aspire to transfer to a NCAA 4-year college or university for sports or enter into the NBA.

### **Sports in the Community College**

At the time of this study, there are 1,694 community colleges nationwide and, of that number, 550 are members of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). The NJCAA is the governing body for junior college member schools; it provides an atmosphere that fosters “intersectional and national” athletic competition. Approximately 50 national championship games are supported for both men's and women's sports, including as nine football bowl games. The states that do not hold memberships with the NCJAA are California, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia , and West Virginia. In 1929, California was the first state to establish an independent athletic association called the California Community College Athletic Association (CCCAA) to support 25,000 men and women student athletes in the state governed by the Community College League of California (CCCAAA, n.d.). The Northwest Athletic association of Community Colleges (NWAACC), established in 1946, is the governing agency for 35 community colleges in the states of Oregon and

Washington (NWAACC, n.d.). The aforementioned athletic associations provide a guide or barometer on the types and locations of educational institutions for prospective college student athletes.

The factors that prospective college students use to research, apply, and matriculate into a college are multifaceted. Students must make a choice based on institution type, institution size, and academic reputation when engaging in the college-choice process. Student athletes investigate the same factors; however, other factors are more important to their selection of a college at which they can play sports.

As previously noted, organized and intramural sports have been an integral part of the higher education experience for students. There is limited research on sports in the community college, especially research comparing NJCAA athletic programs to extracurricular programs or intramural programs (Loutsch, 2007; Nesbitt, 1993; Peterman & Matz, 2000). Sports represent a growing phenomenon in the community college. With the new rules and regulations from the National Basketball Association (NBA), put in effect in 2009, all players seeking to be drafted by the NBA must complete at least one year of college (“Eligibility for the NBA Draft,” n.d.). This ruling has quelled the number of high schools that have prepared star athletes to enter the NBA draft after graduation. In addition, the NCAA has barred players from attending a prep school for a 5<sup>th</sup> year to increase their grade point average, commencing with the graduating class of 2008 (NCAA, n.d.). Next, the ruling will force revenue-generating 4-year colleges and universities to either admit more underprepared NBA hopefuls for a temporary position on a collegiate team. Alternatively, the ruling will force more community colleges to strengthen or develop athletic programs that allow star athletes to complete one year of

college without changing the personnel dynamics annually for intercollegiate teams to be eligible for the NBA draft.

This ruling from the NBA will change the enrollments of African American athletes in the community college. During the 1980s and 1990s, community colleges were the perfect resource to boost academic eligibility of struggling athletes, but now more athletes are being funneled through prep schools rather than community colleges (Bradley, 2007). Consequently, more academically unprepared athletes will pursue education in the community college to transfer to one of the 550 member colleges of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), as the gateway to NCAA sports participation or the NBA draft.

With the influx of potential underprepared students on campus, the community college will need to streamline resources to ensure the academic and athletic success of the African American male athletes who choose to enroll.

Studies on African American athletes in the community college have addressed issues for the group such as access to higher education (Beckles, 2008; Harrison, 1999; Wilkins, 2005) and career maturity (Kornspan, 1997; Witherspoon, 2005). Although the research was limited, three studies were examined with different perspectives on the role of sports in the community college.

Berson (1996) examined student perceptions of the intercollegiate athletic programs in a community college. Cocurricular experiences are critical to examining the effectiveness of student development functions. Study interviews revealed the following themes: high level of commitment and enthusiasm for their sport, their teammates, and the athletic programs. Current players attributed their continuation in college to their



membership on the team and named factors such as full-time attendance requirements as being partly responsible for their persistence. The overall results indicated that no overriding factor influenced academic success of the student athletes, yet they confirmed the retention literature stating that the stronger the relationship between the student and the institution, the greater the likelihood of course completion.

Kornspan (1997) examined the relationship of demographic and psychological variables to career maturity of junior college student athletes. Career maturity is a concept that compares the career expectations of a student with his or her academic or physical ability to achieve that career. For studies involving athletes, the term refers to an athlete's having a high expectation of becoming a professional sports player but not possessing the academic or physical skills for that type of career. The study compared the demographic (general, age, race, year in school) and psychological variables (athletic identity, career self-efficacy, and career development locus of control) and their relationship to career maturity. The study's 259 participants included 178 males, 145 freshmen, 114 sophomores, and 74 African Americans. The surveys consisted of scales for career maturity, athletic identity measurement, career decision self-efficacy, and career development locus of control. The results indicated that demographic and psychological variables accounted for a significant amount of the variance in predicting career maturity of junior college athletes.

Nanney (2008) investigated the perceptions of athletic participation. The comparative case study examined the reasons that one North Carolina Community College supported athletic teams whereas a comparable college did not offer sports. Interviews were conducted with administrators and student government associations at

each institution: Rockingham Community College (with athletics) and Cleveland Community College (no athletics). The results showed that athletics had impacted enrollment, as more athletes enrolled at the school with sports programs. Recruitment was not affected, and publicity had the least impact. At Cleveland Community College (CCC), publicity was considered an area that would have the most impact if sports were offered, with an accompanying need for fundraising. At Rockingham Community College (RCC), fundraising and funding of sports constituted a major component in budgeting for athletics. Additional questions were asked about the lack of sports at CCC; answers included the following: the college preferred to focus on academics, workforce training, increased classroom space. At RCC, athletics were implemented to provide a well-rounded collegiate environment for all students and an opportunity for athletes to continue their athletic participation and education.

The examined studies provided a scant overview of the role of the community college and sports. Offering athletic programs in nonrevenue-generating programs is a costly student activity for nonmember NJCAA colleges, but community colleges should prepare for the influx of students who seek enrollment for sports advancement.

**Club sports.** Club sports and recreational sports began in the early 1900s with the mission to provide a physical recreational outlet for students. Early club sports programs included rowing, baseball, football, and track and field. The first intramural competition took place at Princeton University in 1857. The first intramural athletic departments were founded in 1913 at the University of Michigan and Ohio State as a result of students' interest in athletics but not necessarily in joining an intercollegiate team (Hyatt, 1977). Common definitions used today reference intramural sports as

competitive sport programming for students (excluding varsity athletes), which includes expansive traditional and nontraditional competitive sports activities. Also, club sports refer to nonvarsity level competitors who still compete against teams from other campuses.

Hyatt (1977) specifically reviewed the organization of intramural sports. Club sports surfaced in high schools, community colleges, and colleges to provide recreational or competitive activities for students. Club sports include students who participate in sports on a voluntary basis. In addition, the participation and activity may be “temporary in nature, self perpetuating, and a part of a formal, ongoing campus organization” (p. 205). The number of club sports may vary depending on the interest of the participants.

Spechalkse (1975) explained the origins of club sports. Historians viewed club sports as a “group of people gathered to engage in competitive physical activity” (p. 2). Participation in club sports is high in demand because it elicits voluntary participation from the students, faculty, and staff as both participants and spectators.

Lewis, Jones, Lamke, and Dunn (1998) examined recreation on college campuses. Recreational sports are offered in all types of college settings. Recreational departments sprouted in the late 1800s and early 1900s because many students would not nor could not participate in intercollegiate athletics. The first program was founded in 1904 at Cornell University (Lewis et al., 1998, p. 74). The catalyst for the program was to provide physical exercise that was fun and exciting for students but did not involve competition. Most importantly, intramural athletic became popular because the varsity athletic program could support only a few elite athletes, thereby excluding many students who loved sports from participating.

The literature on African American male club basketball players has been quite limited. The lens that has been used in most studies on club sports has involved the impact of involvement in extracurricular activities as it relates to student development (Loutsch, 2007; Naples, not in ref 1987; Nesbitt, 1993). More studies focused on involvement in 4-year colleges and universities (Handel, 1993; Melendez, 2006; Pietryk, 2008). The studies indicated that club sports members scored higher than nonparticipants for extracurricular involvement. When interviewed, the club sports participants reported that travel with the club, exercise and fitness, and competitions were more important than scholarships or professional competition.

Usera (1989) studied high school juniors' and seniors' interests in academic, technical, and extracurricular college programs. The study used data from the National Longitudinal Study of the high school class of 1972 (NCES, 1972). Sample participants responded about their varsity athletic status in college; participants included students enrolled in sports-related courses, likely varsity athletes, physical education school teachers, intramural athletes, and nonathletes. The study concluded that African American football and basketball players had the lowest percentage of participation in intramural sports. The author contended that low-SES African American high school students who are active in sports are naturally more likely to participate in intercollegiate athletes because scholarships can be earned for exceptional physical ability. Further, high-SES students are least likely to participate in football and basketball. High-SES students participate in leisure sports of the middle class such as tennis, skiing, and golf. This study extracted data from the high school class of 1972; it did not involve

community colleges. Using more recent data might draw out different responses based on the changing role of intramural sports in colleges.

Jackovic (1999) compared student development outcomes among male revenue athletes, nonrevenue athletes, and club sports athletes. The researcher investigated nine outcomes associated with the overall college experience for male athletes at a NCAA Division I university: overall college satisfaction, overall college success, and Chickering's (as cited in Jackovic, 1999) seven student development outcomes. Also studied were the impact of participating in college athletics on student development, college success, and college satisfaction. The mixed-methods study involved a survey and focus group with the male revenue, nonrevenue, club sport athletes, and nonathletes. There were significant differences between the four groups studied; nonathletes scored lower overall for six of the nine outcomes measured.

### **Summary**

College-bound students participate in a process to identify, select, and enroll in a particular institution, identified as the college choice process. Within each step there are two to three substeps to use as a guide before moving on to the next step. Several factors within each step and substep help influence the decision.

For many students, where they go to college matters; colleges use various recruitment methods to highlight the institutions' achievements in hopes of attracting as many students as possible. Although this is true for all students, student athletes select a college of attendance based on different factors, such as high school coach recommendations, relationship with college coach, the opportunity to play collegiate sports, athletic facilities, and the hope to be a contributing member of a championship

team (Gabert et al., 1999; Kraft, 1996; Ryan et al., 2007). Specific studies exploring the college choice decision-making process for African American athletes concluded that athletic reputation was very important for males (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Croft, 2008; Gabert et al., 1999). Every person has his or her own perspective about labeling the “best” college, major, or athletic program. *U.S. News and World Report* publishes a study every 2 years that rates higher education institutions by comparing academics, cost of attendance, college size, and specialty majors by geographic locations (Croft, 2008). Many prospective undergraduate and graduate students, as well as colleges, use this as a tool to influence their decisions about college choice. African American and other first-generation college students progress through the same college choice continuum but with the addition of the following factors to influence their decision-making process: decision to attend a HBCU or a PWI, how to pay for college, academic preparation, and leaving family and support network (Burlison et al., 2008; McDonough, 1991; McDonough et al., 1997; “Vital Signs,” 2006).

For African American male athletes who aspire to play professional basketball, the ideal education path would include applying and being admitted to a top-ranked college sports program that offers an athletic scholarship. It is assumed that a well-recognized athletic program is more attractive to a prospective professional athlete based on the reputation of the college, reputation of the athletic program, location of college, and potential exposure from the media and by professional teams (Croft, 2008; Edwards, 2007; Kraft, 1996; Ryan et al., 2007). The academic rigor of college and the physical skills required for mastery in sport have an adverse effect on most revenue-generating sports athletes, particularly African American males. These student athletes tend to have

developed unrealistic career goals of becoming professional athlete at an early age (Hinkle, 1994; Purdy, not in ref 1983; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Historically, academics have been considered a vehicle for entry into collegiate sports, and sports participation has become the vehicle for social identity and cultural recognition.

Because African American males are the least represented of all student populations in higher education, it is important to understand the process by which they decide to enroll in college. Due to the lack of literature on African American male club sports participants, this study contributes to the research base on college choice and participation in nonrevenue-generating sports programs. Both areas are highly researched topics in higher education, and this study adds another layer of insight into understanding the college choice decisions of African American male athletes in the community college.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of the study was to understand the college choice decision-making process for African American male student athletes in a community college by using Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model and analyzing it through Freeman's (2005) college choice model for African American students.

Chapters I and II identified the challenges faced by African American males: academic preparation, college access, and sports participation. Although some athletes in Division I, II, or III institutions are not academically prepared, their potential exposure through team association may increase the probability of achieving their academic and career goals. College choice for aspiring professional athletes involves focusing on specific factors when selecting a college such as the coaching staff, athletic reputation, opportunity to play, and the potential exposure to professional scouts. Consequently, American male athletes in club sports at the community college who are interested in playing in the NBA have few opportunities to compete at a national level because basketball is not a recognized revenue-generating program at this level. Yet, it is important to understand the decision-making process used by African American male students to enroll in college and participate in club sports.

A qualitative research approach was utilized to construct the meaning of the college choice decision-making process for African American club basketball players in the community college.

This chapter describes the methodology for the proposal. The items discussed in the proposal include the theoretical construct, the research design, the research question,



the interview protocol and guide, the site and population, the instrumentation, and the proposed data collection, handling, and analysis methods.

### **Paradigm of Inquiry**

The most appropriate paradigm of inquiry for the purpose of this study is constructivism. Although there are several known epistemological perspectives that complement quantitative and qualitative studies, objectivism contends that meaningful reality exists without any consciousness. Truth in objects exists regardless of whether or not anyone is aware of its existence. In contrast, a constructivist perspective indicates that truth must be discovered through interaction with the realities of the world (Crotty, 1998). Crotty explained, “

Constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

The most important tenet of constructivism is that “meaning is not discovered, but constructed and people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Moreover, a constructivist believes that because the human world is different from the physical world it must be studied differently and that constructivism is the most appropriate epistemology for qualitative researchers (Patton, 2002). Patton asserted that humans must be studied differently as their multiple realities are constructed by people, without absolute interpretation; perception is shaped by culture and linguistic patterns. Consequently, meanings are constructed by human beings as they actively engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). Merriam (2009) wrote that constructivism is commonly interchangeable with interpretive research: “Interpretive research assumes that reality is socially

constructed and there is no single observable reality” (p. 8). Knowledge is constructed in a social context through which individuals make meaning of their own experiences.

Crotty contended that because of the relationship of the human experience with other objects, no object can be described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it nor can any experience be described in isolation from the object. The multiple realities constructed by people are considered their reality. When compared to the positivism approach used in quantitative research, constructivism aims to achieve and interpret information to a degree of certainty rather than measure each individual experience separately (Merriam, 2009).

Through semistructured interviews, each student athlete’s perspective was documented to understand, create, and interpret multiple realities for the participants. The qualitative approach intentionally enhances the interaction between the subject and the object. In this paradigm, as Bentz and Shapiro (1998) stated, “the researcher is the self-observer or participant-observer, gains knowledge of the feelings and images of the researcher participant or subject so that the first conceptualization is as close to the experience as technically possible” (p. 96). Moreover, the constructivism perspective contends that (a) truth is a matter of consensus among informed constructors, (b) facts have no meaning except within a value framework, and (c) data derived represent another account used to construct reality (Patton, 2002).

Specifically, this study expands the knowledge about the reality of African American male club basketball participants and constructs reality from their own individual experiences. Because it is important to understand what people experience and how they interpret the world, these shared experiences generate a collective

description of those experiences (Patton, 2002). Through the use of semistructured interviews, the researcher constructed the reality of African American male club basketball players' experiences of college choice, as the researcher was the instrument and the vessel of the narrative presenting the common or different themes shared by the participants (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). By documenting the participants' responses to the prescribed research questions, the researcher was able to chronicle the actual experiences without making assumptions. The results of the study create a profile of African American male club basketball players through their documented similar experiences at the two colleges selected for the study.

### **Research Design**

This study explored the experiences of African American male community college students who participated in club basketball by utilizing a qualitative approach guided by one main research question: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process? The three research subquestions were the following:

1. How does athletic identity influence college choice?
2. What role do support networks take in the selection of a college for African American male club basketball players?
3. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice of African American male club basketball players?

The interview approach was chosen for this study because it allowed the researcher to extract participants' experiences in context as well as in a comprehensive manner.

According to Patton (2002), qualitative interviewing ensures that the perspective of

others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and able to be made explicit. Moreover, the information obtained during the interview is heavily dependent on the interviewer and the relationship that can be established during the interview.

Patton (2002) also identified three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through interviews: informal conversational interview, general interview guide approach, and standard open-ended interview. A qualitative approach assisted the researcher in understanding personal information about African American male experiences and knowledge, including opinions, beliefs, feelings, and demographic data (Best & Kahn, 1998), to provide a descriptive picture of how they make meaning of their college choice decision. The study incorporated semistructured, open-ended, face-to-face interviews to document the personal perspectives and experiences of the participants (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The research questions were carefully worded to elicit honest and open responses. The questions were asked of each participant in the same order.

A qualitative design was used for this study because it enabled the researcher to gather relevant information from a smaller sample size. Purposefully selecting the interviewees based on specific criteria was useful in generalizing some portion of the population (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). The interviewees could confidently answer the questions regarding their college choice experiences through descriptive and explanatory interviews. One overarching research question guided the study with four general subquestions that addressed the choice stage of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and determined relevance with Freeman's (2005) model of college choice for African American students. The questions designed for the study elicited true and honest responses about the experiences that cannot be generalized across

all populations. Yet the descriptive patterns of experiences can be explained for a small group of participants who meet the same criteria. The criteria for participation in the study were (a) African American male student, (b) enrolled in a community college, (c) registered for at least six credits, and (d) a member of the club basketball team for the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year.

Utilizing a qualitative design ensured that the respondents would answer the same questions in the same sequence to minimize variation and reduce bias that might come from asking different people different questions. The data on the topic were descriptive and complete for each person and were addressed in the interview, drawing on the literature about college choice. The overall results of the study have created a rich and descriptive profile of African American male club basketball players in the community college from their own experiences, which could not have been achieved using a quantitative approach.

### **Population and Sample**

The study adds to the literature on college choice for community college students. First, there was little research on African American males who enrolled in the community college for sports. Second, college basketball was generally associated with revenue-generating programs in Division I or II colleges or intercollegiate athletics in Division III sports programs versus intramural athletic programs. At the community college level, basketball programs are recognized through the NJCAA, and little research has explored African American male athletes who participate in club basketball programs at nonmember institutions.

The findings of this study contribute to the overall picture of why African American males choose to enroll in a community college and what factors contribute to that decision. The criteria for inclusion in the study were identified; the participant had to be (a) self-identified as an African American, (b) male, (c) enrolled in one of the study community colleges, (d) enrolled in at least six credits, and (e) a participant in club basketball for the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year. To understand their individual experiences, 21 African American male student athletes who participated in club sports in a community college were purposefully selected based on the research criteria. The reason for purposefully sampling individuals for the study was to elicit needed information from participants to assist the researcher in understanding the problem being investigated (Creswell, 2003). The specific students chosen for the study were not expected to represent the entire population of African American male club basketball players, but they were able to provide insight about their experiences as a special population. To obtain a detailed and descriptive account of their experiences, 14 participants were interviewed from Northern Virginia Community College as well as 7 participants from Germanna Community College.

### **Site Information**

The sites selected for the study were Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and Germanna Community College (GCC), both located in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Both community colleges were members of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), which was established in 1966 and was composed of 23 community colleges located within the state. All 23 community colleges offered programs for students to earn associate's degrees or transfer to 4-year colleges and

universities, as well as other developmental, remedial, and personal interest courses. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV, n.d.) reported that in 2009 50% of students attending community college were under the age of 24, 45% were over the age of 25, two thirds attended part time, 30% were from a minority group, and more than 59% were female. The VCCS endorsed athletic-sports consortia of club teams in women's and men's sports. The VCCS defined club sports as

Sports designed to provide opportunities for students to participate in a variety of sports and recreational activities. Each club is considered an organized club with an affiliation as a registered student organization on campus and a club sport. Club sports are conducted under the direction of an assigned staff member of each college. Club sports may be instructional, recreational, competitive or some combination thereof. (VCCS, n.d.)

Virginia is one of a few states that offer club sports at the community college level. Both study sites were geographically convenient for the researcher's access. Club sports involve a consortium of colleges and teams across the state governed by the state educational accrediting board. Each club sports participant must be enrolled in at least six credit hours each semester and must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 1.75 for the first semester and a 2.0 GPA during subsequent semesters. A student can participate as a member of a club sports team for a maximum of 3 years in any sport at any postsecondary school.

The two sites in the east coast community college system were purposefully selected based on specific criteria. The selected criteria applicable to the study included the number of African American club basketball participants, reputable club basketball programs, and the proximity of the colleges within the state. All students at each site who met the study criteria were contacted for participation.

Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) comprised six campuses offering various degrees and certificates that included 77 2-year degree programs, 22 certificate programs, and 64 career studies certificate programs. For the 2008-2009 academic year, more than 67,000 unique students were enrolled in courses. More than 46% of the student population were males; the greatest age range was 22-24 at 40%; and 15.9% reported their ethnicity as Black, which represented the third largest ethnicity on campus. The majority (65%) of students were enrolled on a part-time status (more than 6 credits but fewer than 12 credits). The graduation statistics revealed that NOVA graduated more than 3,000 students in the 2007-2008 academic year, with more than 40% being males. The average age range of graduates was 22-24 (29%), and African American students represented the third lowest group to graduate with a graduation rate of just over 11%. Although club basketball was offered only at the Annandale Campus, college statistics on admissions and graduation were important to review.

Germanna Community College (GCC) was a comprehensive three-campus community college established in 1970, which provided high-quality, accessible, and affordable educational opportunities for the residents of the counties of Culpeper, Orange, Madison, Caroline, King George, Stafford, and Spotsylvania as well as the City of Fredericksburg. GCC offered 10 degree programs for transfer as well as career and technical education at all three campuses. GCC was located approximately 60 miles from NOVA, south of Washington, DC. The GCC full-time headcount was almost 3,500 students in fall 2008; more than 922 of those were African American students. The average age range for the fall 2008 entering study body was 18-24, 70% of the students were enrolled part-time, and 37% of the campus population were male students (SCHEV,



n.d.). In 2007, GCC graduated 19.8% of the students who had entered in 2004; 13% transferred to 4-year colleges and universities. African American students represented the second largest ethnic group on campus compared to White students. Campus statistics for both colleges are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Campus Statistics for Northern Virginia Community College and Germanna Community College*

	Northern Virginia Community College	Germanna Community College
Number of students enrolled (full-time)	24,710	3494
Number of African American students enrolled	6765	922
Age range of enrolled students (18-24)	7223	2934
Male students on campus	19,762 (46%)	2447 (37%)
Graduation rate	13.3	19.8
Transfer rate (all students)	14	13

Source: Virginia Community College System ([www.vccs.edu](http://www.vccs.edu))

## Participants

The study participants were African American males; 21 African American males who were enrolled at NOVA or GCC were purposefully selected for the study. They were members of the club basketball team during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year and were each enrolled for at least six credits. Access to the population was requested at the community colleges through the vice presidents of institutional research and the basketball coaches. The coaches informed the club basketball players of the research study, distributed the informed consent forms, and encouraged the club basketball players to contact the researcher for an interview.

The coaching staff, faculty advisors, and student athletes were able to provide additional names of club basketball players to be interviewed to ensure that the targeted number of students to interview was achieved.

### **Method of Obtaining Data**

The researcher initially requested access to the African American male club basketball participants at two community colleges through the vice presidents of institutional research. Maxwell (2005) described negotiating the research relationship: “Total access can be necessary for successful study but developing relationships that allow the researcher to ethically gain the information that can answer the research questions [is important]” (p. 83). The researcher understood that access to the population might involve approval from the state system office, faculty advisor for club sports, or the director of student activities depending on the organizational structure for the campus. Moreover, the relationship developed with the gatekeepers and the participants could enhance or hinder the components of the research study. Gatekeepers in the context of this study referred to the senior administration in charge of research for the college, the basketball coaches, and possibly the faculty advisor for club sports. Maxwell noted that the researcher is the instrument for data collection, which in turn affects the philosophical, ethical, and political issues with the participants. Therefore it is of utmost important to “follow the rules for considerate interaction with others, especially if the rules and the participants are different from what you are used to” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 85).

The researcher initially scheduled two consecutive days on campus to conduct interviews. The researcher e-mailed each student within 48 hours to confirm the

interview time. Many participants missed the interview appointments; therefore, alternate days and times had to be rescheduled based on the participants' school and practice schedules. The interviews extended for more than 4 days at both community colleges. At GCC the interviews took place over a 3-week period as the researcher had to travel to the college on weekends before and after practices or games.

### **Interview Protocol and Guide**

The interview protocol and guide were established to ensure that the researcher followed the appropriate steps in the same manner for each interview. This section lists the three major parts of the protocol and guide.

**Part A.** To ensure that standardized information was provided to and received from the respondents an interview protocol was used for the study. The interview protocol (a) identified the purpose of the study and the intentions of the researcher; (b) discussed the method of collecting information, including taking notes and the use of audio equipment; (c) discussed the method of recording the interview; (d) identified how the interview content would be maintained; (e) discussed the protection of respondents through the use of pseudonyms; (f) identified incentives for participation; and (g) provided information on the duration of the interview.

Standardizing the interview removed potential bias and ensured that every respondent had the opportunity to respond to the same questions. Patton (1990) contended that this systematic approach provides a framework within which the researcher can “develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth” (p. 201). The research proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher's institution and to

the community colleges where the study would be conducted to gain permission to survey the population.

Respondent data were coded according to pseudonyms based on a combination of numbers, first names, and colleges. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the anonymity of the participants. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes per participant at NOVA and GCC.

At the conclusion of each interview, the audio-taped session was transcribed and stored. The researcher took notes during the interview, which were transcribed and filed with the audiotape. The notes were based on observations of nonverbal communication during the interview and were analyzed with the verbal responses. The data collected via audio tapes and field notes was to be retained for at least one year after the study and then destroyed after final edits for the project were completed.

**Part B.** An additional step of the interview protocol was to obtain specific information on the participants in the study. The specific criteria used for this study identified African American males who were enrolled at least part time in a community college and who participated in club basketball during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year. A demographic survey was given to each participant before the tape-recorded session of the interview (Appendix I). The demographic survey ascertained pertinent information including year in school, grade point average, and parental information. The descriptive information helped the researcher synthesize responses and make inferences about the participant responses.

**Part C.** Conducting semistructured interviews allowed the researcher to use the prescribed questions and leave room to probe the participant in search of deeper answers

to the questions. This method was selected because the researcher wanted to gather specific information from the subjects to look for patterns or use a combination of previous knowledge, intuition, and creativity to find patterns (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Understanding the demographic information of the population studied was useful in analyzing their college choice decision-making process and making comparisons to the general population of African American male athletes.

The open-ended interview questions used for the study were generated from the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice decision-making model. Freeman's (2005) African American model of college choice was utilized to determine if the responses for African American male club basketball players reported similar factors when making college choice decisions. The interview questions were designed to complement the choice phase. The primary research question was worded as follows: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process? The three research subquestions were the following:

1. How does athletic identity influence college choice?
2. What role do support networks take in the selection of a college for African American male club basketball players?
3. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice of African American male club basketball players?

The interview questions were field tested in a pilot study prior to IRB approval to ensure that the questions made sense to the population being studied. Results of the pilot test were transcribed, coded, and analyzed so that changes could be implemented before the formal study. No additional corrections were made to the interview questions.

The researcher implemented specific steps to follow the interview protocol and guide. The goal of the study was to ascertain the factors that influence enrollment in a community college for African American male club basketball players. A qualitative approach was utilized to gain rich and detailed experiences from the participants. To obtain access to the students at NOVA and GCC, the researcher gained approval to study the site through the vice president of institutional research at each college (Appendix E). When written approval was received (Appendices B and C), the researcher contacted the coaches via e-mail for access to the club basketball participants. When the student agreed to participate in the study, he was given a choice of two interview dates and times for the face-to-face, tape-recorded interview (Appendix D). The participants were offered a \$10 gift card for their participation. The researcher scheduled rooms in the library, at the gym, and in quiet offices to conduct the interviews. Each participant was contacted 48 hours prior to the interview to confirm participation and then again one day prior to discuss the date, time, and location on campus.

During the interview, tape-recorded sessions enhanced the data collection as the responses were transcribed verbatim. The researcher wrote notes or used open coding to document nonverbal cues, grouped emerging themes, and made notes to follow up on specific questions to make sense of the information provided by the participants. The tapes, notes, and transcripts associated with each interviewee were used as the primary data source for the study.

At the conclusion of each interview, the audio-taped session was transcribed and saved in a database. During the interview, the researcher took notes that were transcribed and filed with the audiotape. The notes were based on observations of nonverbal

communication during the interview and were analyzed with the verbal responses. The data collected via audio tapes and field notes was to be retained for at least one year after the last interview was completed and then destroyed after final edits for the project were completed.

### **Design and Procedure**

The interview protocol and guide were followed during this process. The use of a semistructured interview format ensured that each participant was asked the same question in the same order as other participants. Using the information from the literature review, 30 open-ended research questions were designed to complement Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) choice stage. Every question was designed to elicit perceptions of the importance of the factors influencing the African American male student athlete's final college choice in the decision-making process.

### **Research Question**

The study was based upon the following guiding research question: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process?

The three-stage college choice model by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) was used as a guide to develop the pertinent interview questions to answer the main research question about how the African American club basketball player selects and enrolls in a college. Freeman's (2005) model of college choice was used to determine relevant factors for African American students. Both models were used to determine the relativity of factors for African American male club basketball players enrolled in the community college. This research focused on the factors that influenced the last phase, choice. The

four important factors extracted from Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and from studies on student athletes and college choice were as follows: (a) athletic personnel and facilities; (b) athletic tradition and identity; (c) expectations from support network; and (d) access to higher education (affordable, close to home, social climate). Each factor assisted the researcher in determining the most salient factors that influenced the club basketball participant to select the community college for enrollment. Additional subquestions were determined after an exhaustive literature review to find the key factors that play an important role in the college choice decision-making process for African American male athletes.

The research questions outlined for the purpose of this study were identified through the literature examined in Chapter II regarding the factors influencing the college choice decision-making process for African American male club basketball players.

Patton (2002) discussed the strength of using standardized predetermined questions: The respondents answer the same questions, thereby increasing the comparability of responses, reducing interviewer biases, and facilitating organization and analysis of the data. Conversely, the weakness of open-ended standardized questions is that there is little flexibility in relating the interview to particular individuals and circumstances (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Prescribed questions may limit the natural responses of the questions and answers (Patton, 2002). It is important to ask clear questions in language that the respondents can identify with, using specific terminology and activities that are familiar (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).



The researcher interjected probes as necessary during the interviews. Both clarifying and contrasting probes were used during the interview to help the researcher maintain control of the interview and hone in on nonverbal cues from the respondent.

The identified research question and subquestions provided detailed descriptions of the factors that influenced African American male club basketball players to enroll in a community college. Each question addressed related factors identified in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice to determine the factors that influenced the final college choice selection; responses were further synthesized with Freeman's (2005) model of college choice for African American students.

### **Data Analysis Method**

This qualitative study incorporated interviews to understand the real experiences of African American club basketball participants. Data analysis occurred throughout the interview process during the research. Patton (1990) asserted that data collection and analysis must be a simultaneous process in qualitative research.

Creswell (2003) listed six major steps important for data analysis. The first involves organizing and preparing verbatim the interview transcripts for analysis. The next step involves reading the transcripts to become familiar with the responses of the participants. During this step, it is critical to read and reread the transcripts for clarity. Then, the researcher should jot notes in the margins of the interview transcripts to highlight special anecdotes from each transcript. An open-coding method to document themes assists with further analysis. This step helps to create a master list of themes that can be grouped and clustered into subthemes; additional themes may be introduced. The master list of themes is used to create a coherent table of themes, identifying similarities,

differences, and the frequency of common responses to the interview questions. Finally, the data are prioritized to construct a specific table of themes.

### **Data Coding**

The interview transcripts were coded using the categories related to three phases of college choice—predisposition, search, and choice—based on the data provided by respondents. Also, the factors that contribute to the overall decision-making process for athletes as discussed in Chapter II were considered: (a) coach, (b) athletic tradition or identity, (c) support network, (d) opportunity to play, and (e) geographic location.

Each audio-taped interview was transcribed and analyzed using a thematic approach. Patton (2002) stated that developing a manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis. This analysis is helpful in determining what content from the interviews is significant.

The first step of coding was reading the field notes and listening to the audio tapes (Maxwell, 2005). The first cycle of coding involved transcribing the data collected in the interviews: open coding. This process involved making the data manageable, hearing the stories of the participants, and documenting patterns. Also, during this first cycle, the field notes were transcribed and analyzed. The codes were analyzed to construct another analysis of interpretation based on the literature and the findings (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The second cycle of coding involved organizing the filtered interview data into relevant texts and repeating ideas. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) indicated that during this cycle the data should be grouped together by related texts and by repeating ideas. In addition, grouping the repeated ideas helps to organize themes into sensible categories.

Merriman (2009) described this process as “looking for concepts and themes ranging from using common sense to more complicated approaches” (p. 210). She further described the process as reviewing the questions asked, noting the concepts and frequently mentioned themes, highlighting concepts revealed indirectly, comparing themes and responses among participants, and then recommending new concepts and themes. The transcribed interviews were filtered to determine which responses to include in the data analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The coding process was a detailed level of analysis that involved organization and reorganization of the descriptive data based on categories and concepts.

**Codebook.** The researcher developed a codebook (Appendix J) to organize and classify the data collected during the interviews (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The codebook included the major factors outlined in Freeman’s (2005) African American college choice model and Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model of college choice in addition to factors researched for student athletes and college choice. The codebook is included in Appendix J.

**Analysis software.** Atlas ti was used for data management: storing, coding, comparing, retrieving, and linking data (Merriam, 2005; Patton, 2002). Atlas ti not only automates data for creative retrieval but the program also “supports the construction of complex networks and structures in the developing category scheme” (Merriman, 2005, p. 195). The parameters were established in the database program to ensure that the data were maintained properly for easier management of the transcribed interviews.

## **Data Presentation**

The data extracted from the interviews were presented by using both rich descriptions and thematic coding analysis. Qualitative research, by nature, is descriptive because it explores and explains the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriman, 2005; Patton, 2002). The researcher aimed to build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that were rooted in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model of college choice while examining the responses through Freeman's (2005) lens for African American male club basketball players in the community college. The quotations and stories from the African American male club basketball players were combined to make sense of their experiences and were grouped to show a relationship between the participants. The goal of rich descriptions enables the researcher to determine whether the findings are transferrable to other subjects who meet the same criteria.

One challenge of qualitative analysis is making sense of large amounts of data (Patton, 2002). The individual responses were analyzed and coded for themes. The interviews were reviewed after transcription for similarities and differences among the respondents and between the sites studied (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Nontraditional concepts were noted and grouped according to the appropriate themes in the codebook, or new themes were introduced.

Next, a thematic analysis creatively presented the information that emerged from the data. This analysis method allowed the researcher to uncover patterns, themes, and categories that reflected meaning of the respondent's world (Patton, 2002). These two approaches to understanding the data allowed the researcher to provide a detailed account

of each interview, synthesize the responses to group into codes, and create a picture of the experiences of the African American male club basketball players.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

One noted design issue in qualitative research is the role of the researcher. The nature of qualitative research involves the researcher's acting as the instrument to ask, receive, and interpret data from the participants. Maxwell (2005) stated, "While interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's perspective, observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data" (p. 84). Consequently, the interview questions needed to be direct about specific events and actions rather than ones that elicited generalizations or abstract options (Maxwell, 2005).

The qualitative process forces respondents to be honest about their experiences and the questions being asked. Patton (2002) described interviews as "becoming confessions, under the promise of confidentiality" (p. 407). Consequently, the process of conducting interviews is very personal and in turn may be intrusive to the participants (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The researcher is an African American female passionate about sports and student athletes. It was her hope that the African American male athletes being studied would feel comfortable sharing as much information as possible about their college choice experiences.

As a result, the researcher ensured that the research setting elicited an environment in which the athlete felt comfortable about sharing his experiences about the college choice decision-making process regardless of the researcher's role as a campus administrator in the community college. In doing such, the researcher ensured that (a)

good questions were asked, (b) good listening skills were utilized, (c) the issues being studied were clear, (d) unbiased options did not surface, and (e) the research environment allowed for flexibility and adaptability by the researcher (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 1994). Merriman (2009) stated, “An interviewer should assume neutrality with regard to the respondent’s knowledge, regardless of how antithetical to the interviewer’s beliefs or values the respondent’s position might be” (p. 106). The researcher’s passion for researching this population and her personal biases needed to be removed to ensure that the experiences of the participants were accurately captured and that her personal views remained absent (Merriam, 2009).

The validity and reliability of qualitative data are greatly dependent upon the sensitivity, interviewing skills, and integrity of the researcher (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Van Maanen, 1983). Reliability of the research refers to the degree to which the study can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2003). To validate the research, the use of semistructured interviews provided a detailed account of the respondents’ college choice decision-making process from each individual perspective.

First, the researcher conducted pilot interviews with two participants who met the criterion for the study (an African American male who was a member of the club basketball team during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year). Pilot testing of the questions allowed the researcher to test the ideas and theories of the research on the sample population. Maxwell (2005) explained, “One important use of pilot studies is to develop an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the people you are studying, what is called interpretation” (p. 58). Moreover, the implementation of pilot testing ensured that the researcher understood the meaning of people’s ideas, behavior,

and language as related to their culture. Due to the nature of qualitative research, that it is interpretative, an exploratory pilot study helped the researcher retool or rethink the questions or approach before the actual study (Yin, 2003). The researcher audio recorded the interviews and elicited feedback from the participants regarding the clarity of the questions. The feedback from the participants indicated that the questions were clear; therefore, the researcher utilized the interview protocol as piloted.

Second, a peer reviewer reviewed the codebook, codes, and interview transcripts after the first cycle of coding. The peer reviewer provided an external check to this qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009) and found that the codes were well aligned with the participant quotes and that the coding was conducted consistently. Based on the evaluation of all of the coding categories, the reviewer suggested that three coding categories be merged.

Third, member checks (Merriam, 2009) were conducted. The interview participants reviewed their individual transcripts. Half of the interviewees chose to add more comments to further elucidate their responses to specific interview questions. The researcher included these additional comments as part of their interview transcripts.

Through these validity and trustworthiness techniques, the researcher addressed potential personal and professional biases by including others in the confirmation and verification of the behaviors, actions, and feelings captured during the study.

### **Consideration of Human Subjects**

The George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the dissertation proposal prior to data collection to ensure that subjects were not placed at undue risk and that their informed consent for participation was received. The questions

designed for this research did not pose any potential risks or harm to the participants in this research.

Each participant received an informed consent form prior to the scheduled interview, thereby ensuring that each participant was knowledgeable about the purpose and nature of the research project and how the data would be used. In addition, each participant was informed of the mechanisms the researcher would use to protect their privacy and the confidentiality of their responses during the interview and transcription phases. The participant was given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview to ensure that his personal experiences had been accurately captured and noted. Additionally, the participants were informed of the coding design to ensure the anonymity of the responses so that only the researcher would be able to identify the participant. All notes pertaining to the interviews as well as the transcription tapes were to be destroyed upon approval of the dissertation.



## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to tell the stories of the college choice experiences of 21 African American male club basketball players enrolled in the community college. The primary research question guiding this study was the following: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process? In addition, there were three subquestions:

1. How does athletic identity influence college choice?
2. What role do support networks take in the selection of a college for African American male club basketball players?
3. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice of African American male club basketball players?

Each narrative provides an in-depth description of the participant's college choice experiences, as well as the barriers he faced and his satisfaction level with the decision-making process, specifically within the choice stage. The theoretical frameworks guiding this study were the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice and the Freeman (2005) African American model of college choice. Although Hossler and Gallagher's model of college choice was used as a framework, the original model is not applicable to diverse student populations. Freeman's (2005) model of college choice is directly related to this population but examines factors in the predisposition stage only. This study was designed to determine which factors influence the final stage, choice, for African American club basketball players.

In summary, analysis of the data indicated that the majority of the African American male participants believed their athletic ability would allow them to participate

in Division I or II basketball programs. Several participants had previous college experiences but were forced to drop out due to their poor academic performance. For all of those participants, the community college was the only option available for higher education enrollment. Some participants with marginal athletic exposure in high school considered participation in club sports as a stepping stone to a 4-year college athletic program. Parents and significant others who had participated in college influenced the male participants to enroll and persist in higher education. For the participants whose parent(s) had not attended college, self-motivation was the most dominant impetus for enrolling and persisting in college. The open-door admission policy was viewed as a positive option because it allowed these students to gain access to higher education, continue their higher education career, or determine if higher education was right for them. The participants, despite their discontent with the negative stigma of being a club basketball player, viewed the choice of enrolling in the community college as a positive experience.

Data analysis identified common themes that emerged from the interview narratives. Subsequently, this chapter highlights descriptive information obtained from the interview transcripts to answer each of the research questions. Interview sites, participant demographic information, and detailed analysis of the research questions including related themes are discussed in this chapter.

### **Interview Sites**

The researcher had access to students at NOVA; GCC was the closest neighboring college in the VCCS system that had African American males on a club basketball team.

Germanna Community College (GCC) was established in 1970 to serve the residents of Caroline, Culpeper, King George, Madison, Orange, Spotsylvania and Stafford counties and the City of Fredericksburg. GCC, approximately 45 miles from Washington, DC, enrolled more than 7,500 students annually across the three campuses. GCC had experienced a steady increase in the number of African American students enrolled, from 573 in 2003 to 1,068 in 2010 (SCHEV, n.d.). Germanna awarded 17 degrees to African American males during the 2009-2010 academic year, representing 8% of the total associate degrees awarded. Interviews were conducted with six participants from GCC in the spring semester of 2011 during club basketball season.

Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), the second largest community college in the nation, was established in 1964. NOVA had six campuses that served students in the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William, in addition to the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park. NOVA enrolled more than 70,000 students annually across the six campuses. NOVA had experienced growth in the number of African American students enrolled, from 5,806 in 2003 to approximately 7,759 in 2010 (SCHEV, n.d.). For the 2009-2010 academic year, 173 associate's degrees were awarded to African American males, representing 10% of all associate's degrees awarded. Interviews were conducted with 15 participants from NOVA in the spring semester of 2011 during club basketball season.

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were African American males who were (a) enrolled in a community college in Virginia, (b) registered for at least six credits, and (c) members of the club basketball team at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) or

Germanna Community College (GCC) for the 2009-2010 or the 2010-2011 academic year. The participants were considered nontraditional students because more than half of them worked at least 20 hours a week to support themselves financially. Their ages ranged from 19 to 27, and 13 had prior experience at 2-year junior colleges (juco) or at Division I or II 4-year colleges or universities (see Table 2).

To provide anonymity, pseudonyms were used for all participants in this study. The players were identifiable because of the small team size, and they were highly visible individuals on campus. It is therefore appropriate to introduce each participant through an annotated narrative.

**Deandre** was a shy but vocal former player. He was enrolled at the community college for 3 years. During his entire academic career in the community college, he considered himself more a student than an athlete. Basketball was a hobby, but his main concern was academics with plans to transfer to a 4-year college.

**Mike** was a confident 2<sup>nd</sup>-year community college student who participated in club basketball his 1<sup>st</sup> year. His decision to stop playing was fueled by his desire to focus on his academics to help him transfer to a Division I or II basketball program.

**Jim** was a humble former club basketball player, who was still enrolled in the community college. He had high aspirations of leading the team to a victorious season and transferring to a Division I school or playing overseas, but midseason he decided to focus on academics to pursue a career in dentistry.

**Vick** was a focused 1<sup>st</sup>-year college student and club basketball player. He joined the team because he loved basketball and he wanted to stay in shape. He worked full

time and was enrolled in 12 credits. His goal was to finish his degree as quickly as possible and transfer to a 4-year school.

**Martin** was a likable 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player who had been enrolled at the community college for a full academic year before joining the club basketball team the previous season. He had been able to watch the team grow and was hoping that his participation would help him transfer to a 4-year college.

**Jimmy** was a talkative and outgoing 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had attended other community colleges on a basketball scholarship. He loved playing basketball and hoped that this club basketball experience would help him transition to a Division I or II school for a basketball scholarship.

**Charles** was an experienced 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had been playing basketball from a young age. He was recruited by Division I schools in high school but declined attending due to personal reasons. He was hopeful that this second community college experience would help him transition to another recognized basketball program.

**John** was a quiet 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had been playing basketball all his life. This was his first experience in college; he thought that if he did well academically he would have a good chance to play Division I or II basketball.

**Kevin** was a friendly 2<sup>nd</sup>-year basketball player. He was heavily recruited to play sports in college even though he never played in a high school game. He worked while attending school and needed financial aid to persist. His love for the game of basketball kept him hopeful of finishing his college career at a Division I school.

**Dwayne** was a confident 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. Both of his parents graduated from college, and he had the expectation of doing the same. He considered himself

naturally smart, but he relied on his parents and extended family to keep him motivated to stay in college, even if it was to prove a point to them that he was in total control.

**Greg** was a cautious former player. He had previous college experiences and had enrolled at the community college to bring his grades up to transfer back to a 4-year college for basketball. He enjoyed club basketball but more important to him was the opportunity to play Division II basketball again.

**Anthony** was a reserved 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had had other 4-year college experiences but enrolled in the community college due to financial issues; he was desperate to finish his basketball career at a Division I college program.

**Nick** was a reserved 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had had other 4-year college experiences but due to unforeseen circumstances had to enroll in the community college. He believed that his basketball talents coupled with good grades would help him transfer to a 4-year college on a basketball scholarship.

**Matt** was a talkative 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had had other college experiences but had to return home after his 1<sup>st</sup> year. He was hoping this experience would help him transition to a Division I or II school to finish his basketball career.

**Ray** was a calm 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. This was his first college experience and he was hoping that participating in club basketball and getting good grades would help him transfer to a 4-year college or university. He worked a full-time job while going to school.

**Clyde** was a 1<sup>st</sup>-year college student and basketball player. He had no formal basketball experience in high school, but his love for the sport convinced him to try out

for club basketball. He was hoping this experience would help him build the skills necessary to compete at a 4-year college.

**Grant** was a pleasant 1<sup>st</sup>-year college student and basketball player. He had played high school sports and was currently enrolled in the community college to bring up his grades. He did not do well academically at his previous 4-year college but was quite anxious to transfer and continue his collegiate athletic career.

**Juan** was a timid and quiet 1<sup>st</sup>-year student and club basketball player. He admitted to having a rough childhood, but his interest in sports was fueled by his desire to be more vocal and talkative. He hoped this experience would help him become more of a “people person.” His professional aspirations included being in the legal profession, so he needed to stay motivated in school to stay on task.

**Scott** was a calm second-season basketball player. His entire family had played sports in high school. He had always had visions of playing basketball and had been involved in sports since he was 4 years old. He worked about 40 hours a week but still made time for basketball in hopes that he could transfer to a 4-year college and play sports while earning a bachelor’s degree.

**Chris** was an energetic and talkative player. He had been enrolled in the college since 2006 and juggled school with his full-time job in a professional career. He considered himself a star high school athlete who focused on sports and not academics. Now that he had held professional jobs, he was focused on academics to help propel him to a 4-year college and his ultimate career goals.

**Allen** was a verbal 1<sup>st</sup>-year basketball player. He had had previous college experience as well as experience playing collegiate basketball. He was enrolled in the

community college to bring his grades up and transfer back to a 4-year college for basketball.

Table 2. *Introduction of Participants by Family Background, Siblings, Year on Team, Cumulative GPA, and Prior College Experience*

	Family background	Siblings	Year on team	Cumulative GPA	Prior college experience
Deandre	Parents Married	2	Former Player	2.67	Yes
Mike	Single Mom	3	Former Player	2.91	No
Jimmy	Parents Separated	1	Former Player	3.29	Yes
Vic	Foster Child	17	First Year	0*	No
Martin	Single Mom	1	First Year	2.25	Yes
Charles	Single Mom	1	First Year	2.04	Yes
James	Parents Divorced	8	First Year	2.00	Yes
John	Single Mom	1	First Year	2.2	No
Kevin	Single Mom	2	Second Year	2.21	Yes
Dwayne	Recently Divorced	None	First Year	2.20	No
Greg	Single Mom	4	Former Player	0*	Yes
Anthony	Single Mom	2	First Year	1.80	Yes
Nick	Single Mom	1	First Year	3.33	Yes
Matt	Single Mom	2	First Year	0*	Yes
Ray	Single Mom	2	First Year	2.5	No
Clyde	Parents Married	None	First Year	2.25	No
Grant	Parents Married	1	First Year	2.66	Yes
Juan	Foster Child	1	First Year	0*	No
Scott	Parents Married	1	First Year	2.33	No
Chris	Parents Married	None	First Year	1.35	Yes
Allen	Parents Married	1	First Year	0*	Yes

\* The student had no cumulative GPA; the participant either was enrolled in only developmental math or English courses or it was his first semester of enrollment at the time the interview was conducted.



Table 2 presents the household information, year on basketball team, cumulative GPA, and prior college experiences of the participants. The data include important information that is critical to understanding the college choice decision-making process of this population. Three themes emerged from the demographic information provided by the participants: single parent, prior college experience, and low GPA. The next sections examine the themes and how they related to the decision-making process for African American male club basketball players in this study.

First to be discussed is the single-parent theme. Family background is an important determinant of college aspirations and attendance. The literature discussed in previous chapters indicated that children are more likely to attend college if their parents are educated. All of the participants reported, in the demographic questionnaire, that their parents had earned high-school diplomas. Only a few reported that their parents completed bachelor's degrees or higher. In addition to educational attainment of the parents, it is important to note how many African American males are being raised by single mothers. This phenomenon is common in the African American community and cited in national education studies indicating that the role of both parents in the household is to influence education attainment. Moreover, the literature on African American students has asserted that the father plays the strongest role in encouraging college participation for males. Several of the participants revealed that their fathers were not involved in their childhood, which contributed to a negative impact on their academic progression. In comparison, the students in two-parent households expressed how influential their fathers were in helping them make life decisions. Table 2 depicts a family background experience that is common among African Americans, overall. It

indicates why extended support networks are needed to help influence and encourage college enrollment for African American males.

The next theme to be examined is prior college attendance. More than half of the participants in this study had prior college experience in either a junior college or a 4-year college. Moreover, 8 of the 13 participants who had prior college experiences were raised and encouraged by single mothers to attend college. The encouragement to attend college appeared to be manifested more as a recommendation because the participants were unaware of the high school academic preparation required to be admitted to certain colleges and universities. All of the participants with prior college experiences, whether raised in single-parent or two-parent homes, had been academically suspended from their previous institutions. Although they expressed excitement in being able to get away and impress their parents, they were not mentally prepared for the academic adjustment to college. A few participants were removed from the college for disciplinary reasons. In summary, the majority of the participants in this study were able to transition from high school into junior colleges or 4-year colleges and universities for sports. The experience helped them to learn about collegiate sports in addition to understanding the academic rigors required in college to maintain eligibility. Financial, disciplinary, and adjustment issues forced the participants to rethink their higher education options, and the community college's open-door admission practice helped them start over.

The third theme to address is low GPA. The demographic questionnaire and specific interview questions addressed the participant's GPA. The majority of participants reported a very low GPA in high school. They admitted to performing poorly in courses, and they had thought that playing basketball would be their saving

grace. Table 4 reports the participants' current academic performance for the spring 2011 semester. It is important to note that the eligibility guidelines for participating in club basketball in the VCCS require a 2.0 GPA in at least 6 credits. The cumulative GPA of several players was much lower than the requirement for club basketball participation and transfer. Only two participants with previous college experience demonstrated academic success with cumulative GPAs greater than 3.0. Additionally, some of the 1<sup>st</sup>-year students were enrolled in developmental English or math courses, which do not generate a GPA or transfer as credits to 4-year colleges. Even though the open-admission practice of the community college had been beneficial for the participants to have a fresh start, their current academic performance did not meet the standards required to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

These themes are critical for understanding the impact of high school academic performance and family background on the college choice decision-making process of African American male club basketball players. Athletic ability helped the participants achieve a portion of their dreams by being recruited into a Division I or II college, but academic performance forced them to rethink the dream and map out a new plan.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question guided this study: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice experience? In addition, the following subquestions were explored:

1. How does athletic identity influence college choice?
2. What role do support networks take in the selection of a college for African American male club basketball players?

3. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice of African American male club basketball players?

Thirty interview questions were developed based on factors in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and Freeman's (1995) African American model of college choice to answer the primary and subquestions. The interview transcripts were coded using the categories related to the final phase, choice, based on the data provided by respondents and the factors that contributed to the overall decision-making process for athletes, as discussed in the literature on college choice: (a) coach, (b) athletic tradition or identity, (c) support network, (d) opportunity to play, and (e) geographic location

The first step of coding involved reading the field notes and listening to the audio tapes (Maxwell, 2005). The first cycle of open coding involved transcribing the data collected in the interviews. This process made the data cohesive for hearing the stories of the participants and documenting patterns. Also, during this first cycle, the field notes were transcribed and analyzed. The codes were analyzed to construct further interpretation based on the literature and the findings (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The second cycle of coding involved organizing the filtered interview data into relevant texts and repeated ideas. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) indicated that during this cycle the data should be grouped together by related texts and repetitive ideas. In addition, grouping the repeated ideas helped to organize themes into sensible categories.

The transcripts were reviewed a third time to extract any common ideas expressed by the participants that were not represented in the original or secondary codebook.

Finally, the codes were reviewed and mapped together to create themes. The significant themes that emerged from the interview process were the following: (a) value of experience, (b) escape, (c) He got game? (d) discounted hoop dreams, (e) a caring and academic-focused coach, (f) expanded support network, including self, (g) second chance, and (h) stepping stone. The next sections provide a rich description of the participants' answers to the interview questions, illustrating their experiences as African American male club basketball players in the community college.

Research Question: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process?

One main research question guided this study: How do African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process? During the course of the interviews, the participants reported varied levels of experience in higher education, in sports, and in life in general. Although they shared a common bond in their passion for sports, specifically basketball, their life paths had taken different twists and turns. The majority of the participants were reluctant to describe their mishaps, faults, and blunders in higher education with respect to their decisions and choices. Ray simply stated, "Try it out at least. Do not just say no [to college], try it out, see how you like it, stay motivated and do not give up." Additionally, Grant's advice was "work hard and anyone can achieve their goals." The two themes developed from this overarching research question were (a) value of experience and (b) escape.

**Value of experience.** The first theme related to answering the main research question is value of experience. Value of experience was intended to represent the participant's personal views about his past and current educational journey. Each participant expressed different beliefs about higher education and the paths that led them

to enroll in college. Their collective experiences helped address how they made meaning of the college choice decision-making process.

Michael was the most disappointed in his basketball participation in the community college and decided to play only one year. He regretted not planning appropriately in high school for collegiate sports and thinking that his basketball “game” would put him at certain Division I schools, not Division II schools where he was actively recruited. Michael stated, “Honestly I think, if I was to start last year over, I wouldn’t play basketball, I would work out, stay in good shape, make the best of my grades, contact schools—something I did not do in high school—but call them and try to get in.”

For two players, Jimmy and Vick, basketball at any level was viewed as a grounding force and a deterrent from violence and drugs. Jimmy stated,

I would say overall, college basketball at any form is a deterrent from violence and just getting into trouble. When I, in fact, got into several situations in my life, the only thing I could turn to was basketball, whether or not I could get the outcome that I wanted. I still think I’m in a better place than a couple of years ago. It is something positive and something to occupy your time positively.

Vick said,

It is tough but it keeps me grounded. Even here I would say I love basketball; I wouldn’t say I love the institution but it keeps me grounded. I have said many times that I wouldn’t go back but I find myself in the gym. It is like no matter how bad things get, it is still basketball. I wouldn’t say that I do not like the coach or anything like that or I like being in the gym, sweating and having a purpose; it feels good.

Ronald discussed in detail the choices that he made in high school and how they affected his being recruited for collegiate basketball. He found himself in trouble on many occasions by hanging around the wrong crowd in high school. He revealed that he used to complain about the things that he did not have growing up and how he felt

“disadvantaged” compared to his high school classmates. As a result, he started to hang around with the wrong crowds and realized that trying to impress them hurt his chances of playing collegiate basketball. Ronald stated,

I would pick the right friends to hang around with or stick to myself. At school, I saw kids with things that I did not have. I would come home and tell my mom, “You have me riding around in this raggedy minivan and there are kids riding in Jettas and Mitsubishi and I do not have a car.” I kept complaining about where I was and really it doesn’t matter about that and they are going to forget about you. That is another thing.

Another participant, Kevin, sadly discussed how his college experiences had made him a better person. He mentioned that in his family, college attendance was neither mandatory nor encouraged. His brothers had not graduated from high school nor attended any college. He knew that his mother would not push him to attend college or provide him with the necessary resources for success as she was incapable of doing such. He mentioned that the only support he received was from people in his neighborhood. They were encouraging him to “get out” and do better for himself. As a result, his experiences were more meaningful at each level of higher education participation because he had a lot to prove to his family and community. In light of the lack of support or role models in his family, Kevin relied on the guidance of his personal mentor and a college administrator regarding his college persistence decisions. Kevin said,

Well, at the community college, even though it’s open door, I think it is still good to have support because I did not have too many people supporting, encouraging, pushing me to go to college, even if you wanted to go to school. It is helpful to have some people telling you good things, without that it is kind of nonmotivation. With me, my mom could care less if I went to school. When I said I was going, she was happy but if I did not go, it did not matter. If you do not have anyone pushing you for life or school, period, you won’t do well. People like you are a big help because most people do not go out of their way to help you when you need it.

For another participant, Matt, college attendance was viewed as a badge of honor. Both of his brothers were attending college and he looked to them for support and guidance on college decisions. Although he was attending college, he admitted to being naïve about the social nuances of being a college student. A major factor for the majority of the participants was responding to cultural influence whether positive or negative. Even with support, success in college is not guaranteed especially if you do not have family, peers, or close friends who have obtained bachelor's degrees. The absence of African American role models in the community was an issue for Matt. He was upset that his best friend had an opportunity to play collegiate basketball but returned home to be with his girlfriend. He and his two other best friends had to return home because of academic and disciplinary issues while away at college. Matt said,

I would say some people do not have the good grades and they could go to college because they are talented athletically. I would say for some Black males, well a lot in my area, they are very talented and never went to college, or never had the opportunity. On the other hand, of people that did go, they had to come back, like me. One of my friends, he came back the first day because of his girlfriend. Because he was so in love and pressed over her. He was my best friend and we all went away to college, and we all ended up coming back. Sadly, they are still together. They come back because most Black people, we watch videos and listen to rap music—you know what I'm saying—stuff that is not really positive all the time. It is some bad influences, I know that. Like Black people have the worst influences than any other races. White people see all rich people growing up; Spanish people see their people working hard. Black people see rappers, gang bangers and drug dealers, stuff like that.

Two participants, Chris and Greg, commented that community college was the best choice after high school. Both had previous 4-year college experiences but regretted not attending community college first while they “decided” on their next moves. They boasted that the community college was diverse and that enrolling could help you narrow your focus so that you would be better prepared for the rigors of 4-year colleges. The



value of their experiences was in the realization that they jumped into attending a 4-year college because it was the “cultural” thing to do. In reality, the community college would have been a much better first choice option because the participants would have had an opportunity to explore majors, enroll at a lower cost, and focus academically. Chris noted,

If anyone has any questions about going to a community college, just see if it is going to be a fit. I do not see anyone that could not fit in the community college. There is so much diversity. I’ve seen pregnant people at school, people’s kids; the population is so diverse. Besides everything on the school end, basketball will reinforce why you are going to school. I can tell you everyone who is out there playing basketball wants to make a better education and want to get better jobs and want to make more when you get out of college. So make the ground rules for your family when you get out of college.

Greg agreed:

Anybody, any kids that are coming out of high school should consider going to NOVA because they give you a good opportunity to pursue whatever you want to pursue. I know most people want to go to a big school, but the 2 years can really change your life.

With the understanding that all of the participants were from various backgrounds, had different orientations to life, and had experienced the complexities of navigating higher education, the significant factor that resounded in their interviews was how their experience at the community college had played such an important role in helping to shape their lives, their goals, and motivation to continue to strive for an opportunity to attend a 4-year college or university and play collegiate basketball. The values and experiences that each interviewee expressed speak for so many other African American males for whom athleticism plays a major part, along with parental and community influence, in the selection of their institutions. Scholarship funding and the ability to minimally or fully participate on the court as meaningful contributors to their

teams were other factors to consider. As participants in this research, the students emphasized that diverse experiences in the community college were prominent. The experiences with other cultures, races, and denominations assisted in shaping their personalities and provided experiences they had not received in the communities from which they came. They deemed the community college experience to be valuable in introducing African American males with the ability to participate in club sports to higher education.

**Escape.** The second theme related to the main research question is escape. The escape theme emerged from the data coded as chance to escape, childhood, future plans, and incentives. Escape in the context of this study means how the participant viewed his childhood and the absence of many options or role models to guide him in successful educational and professional paths. This theme helped answer the research question by highlighting what the participant valued in life and how that transferred to higher education. Several participants indicated that many of their neighborhood friends went to jail, and they feared that would be next for them if they did not go to college. Others thought that playing sports was an automatic ticket to escape a poor living environment. Many of the participants reinforced the sentiment that basketball had provided a “get out of the ghetto for free” card. But, oftentimes, that card came with a hefty price that the participants were unable to afford. The participants who wanted to “escape” were very hesitant and reserved when asked about their childhood. The common adjectives used to describe the participants’ childhoods were rough, hard, bad, and poor; their facial expressions matched their descriptors. Their high school academic performance was not stellar, and, as a result, they chose the first school that accepted them and offered them a

partial scholarship. In retrospect, that choice was not necessarily the most suitable choice for academic, personal, and social reasons, but they used that higher education opportunity as a vehicle to “move away” from an environment that was not suitable for their success. One participant bluntly revealed that his dilemma was to sell drugs or play basketball; he chose the latter: “I went to live with my older brother and he taught me how to sell drugs at an early age. So, either you play sports to stay out of jail....” It is not a secret that many of the participants used basketball or sports as an avenue for college.

Jimmy commented that his childhood was not great; he believed the absence of his father in the household psychologically impacted how far he could go in sports. He stated,

I had a passion for sports, and my dad separated from us and we had some trouble, which is why I did not go as far as I could in sports—because my grades weren’t all that great in school. I would say, overall, college basketball at any form is a deterrent from violence and just getting into trouble. When I, in fact, got into several situations in my life, the only thing I could turn to was basketball, whether or not I could get the outcome that I wanted. I still think I’m in a better place than a couple of years ago. It is something positive and something to occupy your time positively.

Anthony expressed a similar sentiment: “My childhood was pretty rough, and I was raised by a single parent. My dad was not around. My mom did most of the things for me. College is good for anyone; if there is nothing else for them to do but be on the streets, they should come get their education.”

Vick chimed in about his childhood experiences and how college was his only option, saying that it really did not matter where:

I do not know really too much about my family. I was a foster child and, I got, I got emancipated when like 16. I went to live with my brother. So, either you play sports to stay out of jail, so I kept going with that. I had to do what I had to

do. If you have 17 brothers and sisters and out of all of them, that you know, none of them went to school, and none of them graduated from high school. Look at your mom; you are here for a reason. You can be like your brothers and be in prison; you can be like your cousins and be dead. I'm going to take the second one; it is an easy answer. I do not want to go to prison. I love being able to breathe fresh air. I hate rain, I hate snow, but I'd rather see it outside than to see it locked up.

Ronald and Juan indicated that they had lost several important people in their family; that greatly affected how they perceived life and more importantly higher education. Juan stated,

But growing up, but like, it was hard growing up because the one that took care of me passed away so I stop really playing basketball for a little while trying to get my mom get through it. Then stuff got crazy and I ended up going to a foster home.

Besides the need to escape unhealthy living situations, the participants desired the help of someone to facilitate their escape, which might have been the reason many relied on themselves for support and motivation. Ron disclosed, "I do not just want to sit around the house and be a 'nobody.' So I had a few months to get myself together before school." Ray also noted that he was "just trying to go somewhere with my life; go to school and not just be out there. I want to do something with my life, not knowing what I want to do but at least I could start somewhere."

Kevin noted how important a support network was in helping one make important life decisions: "If you do not have anyone pushing you for life or school, period, you won't do to well. To see people in my neighborhood doing nothing, that motivates me to do better."

Moreover, Matt stated that young Black males were in living environments void of positive role models or people to encourage them to go to college. He alluded to the

fact that people in his neighborhood were talented athletically but lacked the support to make sure their grades were good in high school. Matt said,

I would say, like, some people do not have the good grades so they could go to college but they have the athletic part of it down. I would say for some Black males, well a lot in my area, they, like, are very talented and never went to college. On the other hand, people that did go, they had to come back, like me. It is some bad influences, I know that, like Black people have the worst influences than any other races.

Overall, these collective stories by many confirmed that attending college and playing basketball was viewed as an opportunity to escape a “bad” childhood. For some, the negative childhood experiences were the direct result of the father’s being absent from the household. The participant viewed the “neighborhood” as an entity that supported negative behavior; playing and excelling in sports was the only way to escape. College for these participants and playing basketball represented the first opportunity to do “something better” other than just sit at home. Oftentimes, the participants were not academically or socially prepared for the adjustment to a 2- or 4-year college but were able to successfully enroll in the community college and continue their higher education experience.

The study captured the college decision-making process for the participants differently, based on their family background, academic background, and future plans. For some participants, college attendance was mandatory because everyone in their family had bachelor’s degrees. Their nonattendance at a 4-year college was frowned upon by family members, and the participants strived to work hard to transfer. For other participants, college attendance was viewed as an escape from their neighborhoods. Those participants felt more pressure just to “do something” other than just sit around every day, hanging around with the people in their neighborhoods. They believed that

attending college would help them break away from the cycle of violence that plagues most inner-city neighborhoods.

In summary, student interviews provided rich data to give meaning to the college choice decision-making process of African American male club basketball players. The underrated aspects of the community college were the most promising factors that influenced enrollment of the participants and promoted persistence and retention: low tuition, geographic locations, open enrollment, and transfer options. The two themes, value of experience and escape, helped answer the main research question by explaining the factors that encouraged the study participants to enroll and persist in higher education. To further understand the experiences of African American male club basketball players in the community college, three additional subquestions are addressed and answered in the next sections.

Subquestion 1: In what ways does athletic identity influence college choice?

To answer this research subquestion, two themes emerged: (a) He got game? and (b) discounted hoop dreams. The theme, He got game?, refers to how the participants viewed themselves as athletes in both on- and off-campus settings. All of the participants described remembering and enjoying playing sports since they were young. Many mentioned that they would not know what to do on a personal level if they could not play basketball. They identified with the sport and all of the perceived incentives that participation might bring. Even though they were club basketball players, the participants felt uneasy mentioning a losing season or poor individual performance on the court. None of them showed disappointment regarding their current academic GPAs but talked extensively about winning and losing basketball games. One participant stated, “I

do not like to lose.” A few mentioned that their decision to play club basketball was “the worst decision I made” because “it means nothing, we are not recognized.” Other participants were elated to simply be part of a team and viewed it as an incentive to persist in higher education.

Additionally, discounted dreams referred to the collective feeling that the community college and club basketball participation was a “step down” from where the participant thought he should have been. Almost all of the participants had been involved in organized sports as young children and almost expected a collegiate or professional career in sports based on their personal perceptions of ability. After being in competitive collegiate programs outside Athletic Amateur Union (AAU), the participants realized that being a student athlete was not “as easy as it looks” on television. A successful high school athletic career was not an automatic guaranteed admission to a nationally ranked collegiate program. Instead, high school grades and meeting NCAA eligibility rules in college were the true determinants for academic and athletic success.

**He got game?** The literature suggested that athletic identity affects college choice, career development, and retention in college because the stronger the identity the athlete possesses, the higher he will aspire in terms of college selection and ultimately a professional career (Blum, 2003; Figler & Figler, 1984; Rhoden, 2006). “He got game” is common terminology among athletes; the phrase refers to their skill level on the court. Therefore, it is an appropriate phrase to represent this theme of the perceived athletic skill and ability that each participant inherently possesses. All of the participants commented on spending countless numbers of hours learning how to play or practicing basketball. Many beamed when discussing how many points they scored, how many rebounds they

made, or how they traveled with the AAU team. Athletic identity and ability play an important role in shaping the college choice decision of the student athlete. As a result, athletic identity is a major theme that comprised the following codes: athletic statistics, future plans, and incentives. For the purpose of this study, it was critical to understand how the student perceived himself in the higher education process, specifically as a student or as an athlete. Table 3 includes information about where the participants hoped to attend college and play basketball. The colleges listed have strict admissions requirements and nationally ranked basketball programs. Table 3 depicts the participant's high school academic background and the reality of their attending had their admission been based solely on athletic ability, not academic merit.

Table 3. *Student Rationale for Ideal College Choice*

	Years of high school basketball	Ideal 4-year college	Rationale
Allen	4	UNC Chapel Hill	Favorite basketball school
Anthony	4	Tennessee	Loved the school since I was young
Clyde	4	Virginia Tech	Always loved the school
Grant	3	Duke	Favorite school
Jimmy	4	Maryland	Great basketball program
Kevin	0	Georgetown	The best basketball program
Matthew	4	Georgetown	Always loved that school
Michael	4	Georgetown	They have always had a good basketball program
Ray	3	Florida	I would love to be in Miami where it is nice weather
Martin	2	Virginia Commonwealth	Home town school
Vick	3	UCLA	Stay close to home



The responses regarding whether or not the participant considered himself a student or an athlete varied by age and prior college experience. The participants who had previous high level basketball experience responded that they were athletes whereas the students who had a marginal high school or no athletic career identified themselves as students. For these self-identified students, participating in club basketball was an opportunity to stay in shape as well as an opportunity to learn something new and be a part of a team while attending the community college. Deandre said, "I considered myself a student first, an athlete second, because you always have to have a plan B." Vick agreed: "I answered that way because where I'm from you can be an athlete all you want to and not? be anything; but when you are a student there is a future behind you." Dwayne said, "I consider myself a student because I'm not good enough in sports where I don't need to worry about going to school or going to the NBA; there's life after basketball." The former student athletes, on the other hand, desired to be considered again by a 4-year school.

Deandre, Jimmy, Charles, Greg, Clyde, and Scott recalled playing sports before turning 6 years old. Sharing their experiences and childhood stories made them smile, and they showed a genuine passion for sports. The researcher noted their physical reaction to talking about sports as positive and excited. Other participants specifically noted, when referring to their identity in college, that they viewed themselves as athletes. The participants with previous collegiate athletic experience agreed that their focus had been more on sports and not on academics. Nick stated, "I had to go to class to play. So, I kept my 2.0 GPA to be able to play." Jimmy added, "I considered myself an athlete. I

only took classes so I could play basketball. It's already bad enough to be a student so I wanted to separate myself from that too."

Kevin mentioned that at his other school, "all they cared about is sports; grades really did not matter." Anthony enrolled at the community college only because he thought it was juco; he stated, "It's not been up to par or playing how I usually do. I'm just playing down, not playing to my full potential. It's just club; it's not a real team." Allen confessed that he enrolled in college only to gain exposure to collegiate teams; grades were secondary. Allen stated, "I was an athlete, because I was not going to that school to get my grades straight. I was going to get exposure as a basketball player. I was doing the class work and everything, but basketball came first." During the higher education process, Chris actively applied to more colleges than any other participant. He was hopeful that his basketball talents would overshadow his high school academic performance. At the end of his senior year, he accepted an admission offer at the school that would accept his GPA. Chris stated, "I mean, I really I didn't have a strong academic background, but my focus was towards playing sports no matter which type of sport. I was always well rounded as far as sports." Clyde focused all of his energies on perfecting his basketball skills. He was very active in AAU and expected to enroll in a Division I school because he thought he was that good at playing basketball. Clyde asserted, "I played basketball nonstop every day. I never stop playing about until 11 o'clock at night. I just never really stop playing. I just keep playing and I never wanted to put the ball down."

Two participants specifically mentioned playing sports as giving them some sort of status. Martin said, "I love winning and I hate losing. What sports gives me is that

I'm tall, Black, and people look at 'he has money or played sports professionally,' but that's the vibe I get from other people and they don't even know me." Juan also commented, "I wanted to play basketball because I want people to remember me. I want to be at the top, so somebody can remember me."

Overall, the participants in this study expressed some degree of athletic identity. Each participant displayed various layers in how they perceived themselves based on their recounting of sports in their childhood. The majority of the participants had been playing recreational sports since a young age and expressed a strong desire to play collegiate and professional basketball. This goal dominated their view of life and their role in college. Playing basketball was extremely important to their experience and their identity.

**Discounted hoop dreams.** The discounted hoop dreams theme emerged from the interviews with the participants. Those who considered themselves athletes felt discontent with participating in club basketball and expressed dissatisfaction with the club basketball program. Based upon the types of colleges and basketball programs that some of the participants planned on attending, participating in club basketball at a community college was perceived to be a humbling experience. Table 3 highlights the caliber of schools that the participants aspired to attend. Several beamed when they spoke of the countless hours they had spent learning the game of basketball, staying in shape, participating in the AAU teams, and even being recruited to play college basketball. The stigma of having to return home after an unsuccessful collegiate basketball career or never "making it" to college was hurtful for 18 of the 21 players. They felt that they let down their family, their neighborhood, and themselves. The theme

of discounted dreams was derived from the codes for disappointment and being misled because their high hopes had been diminished and redirected in another direction.

Mike, Kevin, Chris, and Anthony believed they had been misled about the type of basketball program at the community college. They indicated that when they were recruited by the coaches, the team was presented as a juco team. Kevin, Chris, and Anthony were heavily recruited to play club basketball but were experienced playing basketball at higher levels. They assumed that when the coaches approached them about playing, the basketball program would be equivalent to a juco program. Mike had no prior college experience, but he assumed that the club basketball program was regionally ranked and would help him get more exposure. He passed up an opportunity to play at a Division II school to end up having no other option than to play club basketball in the community college. Mike stated,

I could see better than a community college and being...though I can play ball very well, I know I can play on a collegiate level, not D I but NAIA, or High D II. I'm not too satisfied but life goes on. I did not know it was a club sport until the end of 1<sup>st</sup> year playing. I was told by coach that it was a real program, a real collegiate program, and at the end of the year it was not all it was said to be.

Jimmy indicated that what attracted him to play club basketball was that the coaches made promises of his receiving a scholarship and being able to transfer to certain Division I colleges. He lamented,

They promised that I would have several Division I scholarships with my skill level, and I do not really think they had the contacts that they had. But, the promises that were made, I soon saw that they could not give what they promised. Initially, I thought it was a waste of time, but I had to complete certain number of credits to play, so at least I got 25% of my courses done.

Vick and Anthony considered their academic situations and quickly adopted a positive attitude. Both noted that the club basketball program was not a “real junior

college” program but realized they had no other options in the area. Vick stated, “I will say I was not necessarily satisfied but I was complacent out here because there is nothing else out here.”

The themes of He got game? and discounted hoop dreams depicted the feelings and attitudes of the participants regarding how athletic identity influenced college choice. The participants’ first choice schools were nationally ranked academic and basketball programs, and the participants viewed themselves as being at least contenders as athletes (see Table 3). The participants were not shy in discussing how their academic performance in high school and in other colleges affected their choices and options to meet NCAA requirements for collegiate basketball. Despite their poor high school or previous college experiences, as well as their negative opinions of the club basketball program, the participants believed that positive incentives would result from their experience. The two themes help answer the question as athletic identity plays an important role in developing college aspirations and, more importantly, determining where to attend.

Subquestion 2: What role do support networks take in the decision-making process for African American male club basketball players?

To answer this research subquestion, two major themes emerged: (a) a caring and academic-focused coach and (b) family matters. Parents and significant others play an important role in introducing, explaining, and providing financial resources or options to students regarding higher education. For student athletes applying to Division I and II colleges and universities, the coach plays an important role in the selection of a college. When recruited by colleges, the participants in this study had a sense of pride and accomplishment as they were being wooed. In Division I and II college sports, the coach

is viewed as the most important factor for college selection. The coaches are known to visit homes, speak with parents, and explain the collegiate athletic process. Because the basketball programs at both community colleges were not nationally recognized or ranked, it was important to understand the premise of “recruiting” and the role of the coach in the community college. This theme helps determine if that factor exists for club basketball participants. Although most of the study participants had a short-lived athletic career marred by no playing time or academic ineligibility, their perceptions and relationships with the coaches were instrumental in their desire to register and play club basketball in the community college.

The role of family and support networks is important in the college choice process. Parents introduce college to students by providing insight on the “best” colleges based on their personal experience and exposure. For some students, in general, parental encouragement and support are nonexistent. Specifically, two participants in this study reported that their mothers had not attended college and never discussed it as an option with them. They felt that the college decision-making process was undertaken as a trial-and-error process. One of the same participants mentioned that his mother did not encourage him to go to college: “But if I did attend, then that was fine. If I did not enroll, then that was fine as well.” The role of a “support network” assumed a different meaning for the African American students in the study; girlfriends, grandparents, uncles, siblings, personal mentors, AAU coaches, college counselors, and college administrators were named as most influential in shaping the participants’ college choice process. For the 14 participants who were raised in single-parent homes, the extended family played a critical role in shaping their decisions to attend college.

**A caring and academic-focused coach.** Players reported that the basketball coach was an outstanding mentor and role model and served as a support network person. The overall sentiment from the players was that they felt appreciated and that the coaches had their best interest at heart. It is important to note that at one community college, the coach was an administrator at the college. He was able to recruit players for the team as they came to campus for advisement. All of the participants at that community college indicated they learned of the club basketball team from a flyer or visiting the counselor for advisement and class selection. At the other community college, eight players mentioned the coach's actively recruiting them for the team after seeing them play at a park, AAU tournament, or in high school. The actively recruited players felt a sense of pride because they were recruited but soon realized that the club basketball system was quite different from a juco or ranked division university.

Despite the disappointment that loomed over a losing season, broken promises, fewer transfer options, limited playing time, athletic ineligibility, and an inconsistency of team members by semester, the participants respected their coaches for being concerned about their academics. Two participants specifically stated that their former juco and Division II school were concerned only about their athletic ability and discouraged them from focusing on academics. The coaches were supporting academic stability to help the players transfer to another college or university.

Other descriptors that related to the role of the coach included good coach, caring coach, and a mentor. Deandre, Charles, John, James, Matt, Nick, Juan, Scott, and Allen each described the coach as "a good coach." Many appreciated learning basketball

fundamentals but good coaching was always linked to the statement “and they care about you.” Deandre commented,

Coach, they are good coaches, they take the best interest of their players. They are good coaches; they help you out a lot whether it is trying to find you a school to go to or even just putting your name out there. They helped out a lot and they were more focused on our grades.

Charles agreed:

They are doing a good job at this level. At this level it may be a hobby or something to do. Both are trying to boost this program and get more students into 4-year schools. But that is part of the reason we have community college basketball to get kids into 4-year schools.

In addition, a few players spoke highly of the coach as being an excellent mentor.

The consensus among the players suggested that they valued his role as a mentor, which strengthened their coach-player relationship. Those six participants really focused on how much the coach cared about them as people and was available for them anytime.

They viewed him as a person that could fix any problem that might arise. Clyde stated,

I would have to say that [he’s] a very good mentor. You know, coach is such a great guy. He is willing to give people chances. It is really hard to describe because he is such a great guy. I remember failing a test, and he pulled some strings to help me take the test again, and I ended up passing the course. If it was not for him, I probably would not be here right now.

Many players commented on how the coach was available to answer any questions about life and school. They valued his opinions and appreciated how much his care was displayed on the court as well. Scott chimed in to say, “I’d say he’s a great coach; he’s more of motivation type coach, and he will try to motivate you to do better and such.” Chris commented,

He is probably the number one person who is right there to push me. Every time I feel like I have failed or I’m down or I have failed a class, he is always there to show me there is another way, and always the way is right back to the classroom.



Coach is... I wouldn't even call him coach, because he has been more like a father, a big brother, especially to me personally because I know for a fact that if I ever get into a bind, I know I can pick up the phone, call him. As far as him being a mentor, I mean he's probably one of the best that I ever had, somebody that actually wanted me to succeed off the basketball court, not only basketball court.

Even players with previous college experience appreciated how the coach taught the game of basketball to the players. Allen commented that in other basketball systems, the coach expects you to know all of the plays and is reluctant to explain the fundamental of basketball. He stated,

I would say he is a good coach. He listens before he tells you what to do. Some of the coaches that I have played for at different levels, and at specific camps, will tell you that you need to do this. They do not care if you can't, just do it. He will tell you to do your best.

Overall, the players did not elect to enroll or play club basketball because of the coach. Although some were actively recruited, they were already enrolled in the community college. Few participants honestly discussed their coaches' coaching ability as less than par. Kevin said they were "good people but their coaching [was] not good." Jimmy agreed that the coaches are nice people but said that the "relationship with the players appears like a friend to friend rather than a coach to a student." Charles noted they are doing a good job at "this level" because "it may be a hobby." Grant described the coach as a good person but stated that he "still needs to learn about coaching."

The caring nature of the coaches helped the participants feel more comfortable about their college choice for basketball. The participants perceived that the coach was willing to teach them aspects of the game and displayed patience as they learned. Despite a few players' opinions of their lack of coaching skills, the general sentiment was that the coaches really tried to help the players off the court with academics and transfer.

Overall, the coach was viewed as a positive influence for the African American students.

The coaches' positive influence in the players' everyday lives helped them develop a bond that contributed to their academic and athletic success in the community college.

**Expanded support network, including self.** The theme of expanded support network, including self, helps answer the research question regarding the role of support networks in the college decision-making process. It is important to note that 11 of the 21 participants were raised in single-family homes headed by a mom. Of the 21 participants, 2 lived in nontraditional households and were raised by foster parents; 6 participants still resided in two-parent households. The participants in single-mom households stated that their mom encouraged them to go to college. Respective of this culture, many students responded "myself" when asked about their support system. Culturally, African American males are socialized not to depend on anyone for advice or success. As discussed later in an interview question that asked about who kept them motivated, the common response from the participant was "myself."

Because he was financially responsible for his educational progress, Vick felt personally vested. He stated, "I don't really talk to anybody. I sit, write everything down, and evaluate it myself. I have my brothers and sisters, but I feel like they have problems of their own and I don't want to bother them." Charles relied on friends for advice about small things, but he said, "The most motivation comes from me." Kevin quickly stated, "I motivate myself, the fact that I don't want to wake up doing nothing. To see people in my neighborhood doing nothing, that motivates me." Nick quietly said, "No one, I keep to myself." Matt confidently disclosed, "I depend on myself because people are having tough times getting a job without a college degree; well, not really, but

if you want to make some good money you need a college degree. That's how I was raised; that is what I was told."

It is important to note that the majority of the participants trusted their mothers' opinions and judgment to a certain degree. They indicated that their moms were the persons who encouraged them to go to college or provided constant support throughout the college decision-making process or for life decisions. Deandre said, "Really, I talk to my mom about more stuff than my dad; my mom, she's my best friend. I can always count on her for anything. Ronald admitted his hesitancy in telling his mom his problems; he said, "She will want to talk to me but I do not like telling her everything. But, now I am more open and I listen to her." John became emotional and stated, "I will do anything for her. She is my heart and supports me with most of my decisions to the fullest."

Besides the large number of African American male club basketball players who attributed their college decision-making process to their mothers, several of the participants either were raised in two-parent households or their fathers were very influential parents despite being outside the home. A few students indicated how their parents influenced and encouraged them to go to college. Deandre said, "I must say, my parents, seeing them tell me that they went and they are successful and have master's, and I was just like, I can do that." Grant and Clyde attributed their academic goals to their parents as well. Clyde responded,

My mother or my father. My father because he tells me about previous experiences in his life with other people when they did not finish their college degree, and life has been hard for them, and he doesn't want me to go through that. So he wants me to get good grades and finish school.

Other support networks noted by a few of the participants included grandparents, people from the neighborhood, best friends, brothers, sisters, mentors, or significant others. Although most of the participants credited their mothers or both of their parents as the persons who encouraged their enrollment in higher education, they did not necessarily seek them out for advice when in trouble. But, when asked how important college was to their families, the list of support networks extended as they each paused and took a minute to think about each person in high school or during college who helped them make the important decisions regarding their education. The two themes helped answer the research question by addressing how the participants relied on their support networks, extended networks, or selves for motivation to enroll, attend, and persist in higher education. The study participants valued the input of various people who had impacted their lives, and they strived to be academically and professionally successful to make them proud.

Subquestion 3: In what ways do institutional factors contribute to the college choice decision-making process?

Several institutional factors play an important role in the college choice decision-making process. Students begin to look at institutions and factors they believe will give them the best academic experience. Those factors are listed and ranked according to the best institutional fit for the students. With regard to Subquestion 3, two major themes emerged: (a) second chance and (b) stepping stone. The community college was viewed as a welcoming higher education institution that accepted students regardless of the previous academic history because it provided the athlete with a second-chance opportunity at higher education and sports. The stepping-stone theme was equally as important because the participants realized that the community college programs and

articulation agreements helped transition them into a 4-year college if they graduated with the required GPA. The participants were able to apply and enroll with ease based on their future plans of transferring to 4-year colleges or universities. Both themes represent institutional factors influential in the decision to enroll in the community college.

**Second chance.** Although the community college has always been a viable option for students to enter higher education, it is rarely viewed as the number-one choice; this was true for the participants in this study. The second-chance theme was derived from the following codes: (a) chance to escape, (b) factor for choice, (c) institutional factors, (d) multiple college experiences, and (e) second chance. As noted in the interview discussion with the participants in this study, enrollment in community college was viewed as an opportunity to start over after a poor academic performance in another 2- or 4-year college or university or as an option for aspiring college students who had no other choice. The participants explained that the community college was the only option available for them to continue their education because of poor high school academic performance, no college planning, or poor academic performance while attending another college. Only 1 of the 21 participants knew what the term open enrollment meant. It was explained as meaning open access, reduced tuition at in-state rates, diverse course offerings, flexible study plans that included evening and weekend programs, and no admissions requirements.

Several of the participants commented positively about the open admission practice at the community college because it allowed them to apply and enroll without specific requirements. Only a few participants remembered their high school? and scoring low on the SAT or ACT exams. James said, “It gives you a chance where if you

mess up in high school you get a second chance, and that's what most people do not understand. Like, this is your last chance; after college there's nothing else." John said,

I think it is great, especially for kids that did not get up to their potential in high school but know they can do better in school. And they have an opportunity to get better and go on to a better school after 2 years and graduating from a [community college].

Greg was also positive about having high school GPAs and test scores waived:

A lot of people are not good at taking tests, and I feel like you should not be denied the opportunity to go to college because you do not have a great SAT or ACT score. Because you still can't be a good student, you just might not do good on tests.

Juan said, "You have to take the SATs and have to have a certain score to go to certain colleges, so I would have to say very high [ranking for the community college's open door admission policy]." Ray had been unsure of what he wanted to do; he stated, "The campus is not too far from home, and, and I really didn't know what I wanted to do. It was a start and something that would help me get started on my next life."

Matt noted that students can apply to a community college when they have graduated from high school or have reached the age of 18. One does not need a high school diploma or GED to enroll. He said, "I think it is nice because people could get a chance go to school who may not have the GPA or they may not have finished high school and got a GED or something."

Anthony thought all colleges and universities should have open admissions because the high school GPA and SAT requirements for most colleges were not being met, especially by this population. He stated, "I like that better [referring to open admissions], and if that was the situation with all schools, I could have gone to a better school than where I was at. My SAT scores were not that good." Many of the

participants discussed their ideal colleges for sports but noted that the admissions requirements were very high; therefore, their “choice” for colleges was limited based on their high school GPAs and test scores (Table 2). Table 2 depicts the participants’ reported high school GPAs and their academic progression in the community college. It is important to note the similarities and differences between the high school and first-semester community college GPAs. For the participants who could recall their GPAs at their previous college, they reported none as they did not complete any classes (meaning of this sentence unclear). They had to enroll at the schools that accepted them. For Kevin, the options were slim: “I wanted to go to school anywhere.”

Table 4. *Academics – High School GPA, College Major, First-Semester GPA, Cumulative GPA, Number of Community College Credits Completed*

	High school GPA	College major	First semester GPA	Cumulative GPA*	Number of credits completed
Deandre	2.75	General Studies	2.0	2.675	40
Anthony	2.2	Business Administration	1.8	2.0	8
Charles	DNK	Social Science/Education	1.667	2.036	21
Chris	2.3	General Studies	3.0	1.35	33
Clyde	DNK	Graphic Communications	2.25	2.25	4
Dwayne	2.7	Computer Science	2.0	2.2	4
Grant	2.9	Business Administration	0	0	0
Greg	DNK	Business Management	0	.75	6
James	1.7	Business Management	2.0	2.0	3
Jimmy	1.8	General Studies	2.0	3.294	68
John	2.0	General Studies	2.25	2.0	12
Juan	2.6	Police Science	0	0	0
Kevin	1.8	General Studies	1.667	2.12	18
Matt	2.3	General Studies	0	0	0
Michael	3.0	General Studies	3.0	2.909	19
Nick	2.0	Business Administration	3.33	2.5	13
Ray	2.3	Liberal Arts– Psychology	2.5	2.5	21
Martin	2.6	Social Science– Teacher Education	0	2.25	12
Scott	2.7	General Education	2.8	2.33	21
Vick	2.3	Social Science– Teacher Education	0	0	0

\* Grade point average for transferable credits (not developmental courses)  
 No GPA = student enrolled in developmental courses only



Overall, the open-admission practice of the community college was helpful to the participants who did not excel in high school or in their first experiences as college students. The opportunity to enroll in the community college without specific admission requirements allowed the participants a second chance at higher education and sports. Open enrollment influenced the college choice of the participants because they could complete the application quickly, apply for financial aid, and register for classes, all in the same day. The participants had utilized this academic experience in the community college to explore majors and career options they would not have previously considered because their main focus had always been playing basketball rather than excelling academically.

**Stepping stone.** The stepping-stone theme emerged from the data because attending community college was viewed as a stepping stone toward transferring to a 4-year college or university for academics and sports. The theme was derived from the following codes: (a) future plans, (b) institutional factors, and (c) stepping stone. All three codes represented the participant's desire to attend college as an avenue for professional sports; participation in club basketball also could help facilitate initial or reverse transfer to a 4-year college. Throughout the interviews, students new to higher education thought enrolling at the community college would help them transfer to a 4-year college or university. Jimmy asserted that attending the community college was a great way to transfer to a well-known 4-year college in the area. When asked if he would refer a friend to this college, Jimmy responded, "If for academics, yes. I feel that it is a good stepping stone to get into George Mason University. If someone is serious about going to that school, I would recommend that they start here."

Within the stepping-stone theme, two distinct concepts were noted: academic rebounding and “more bang for my buck.” Academic rebounding referred to the idea that the participants could enroll in the community college and start fresh academically. The community college was viewed as a place to establish or improve a cumulative GPA for the purpose of transferring to a 4-year college or university. After failing out of a previous college, enrolling in the community college allowed the participants to rebound academically. “More bang for my buck” referred to the participants’ having lower tuition and out-of-pocket expenses as they perused options in higher education. Of the 21 participants, 11 had prior college experiences in 2- or 4-year colleges or universities and had withdrawn for various, often financial, reasons. Many could not return to their previous colleges due to academic, financial, or disciplinary reasons. Because more than half desired to continue their athletic careers despite doing poorly in college, enrolling in the community college was a stepping stone. The most important reason was to improve their academic performance and, potentially, transfer to another 4-year college.

*Academic rebounding.* The concept of academic rebounding supported the participant’s enrollment at the community college. The community college was an ideal place for improving their grades to be able to initially enroll or transfer back to a Division I or II college for academics, sports, or both. Deandre wished he could have attended the community college immediately after high school, but he had been excited about being accepted to a 4-year college. Jimmy and Greg had been excited about playing Division II basketball immediately after high school but believed their basketball “game” was too advanced for that division. The participants who had previous 2- or 4-year college experiences utilized the community college’s various guaranteed admission articulation

agreements to transition to a state 4-year college. Deandre and Greg had enrolled in the appropriate classes and prepared themselves to transfer to another state Division II school. Other participants, Anthony, Kevin, Chris, Nick, and James, enrolled at the community college to live at home while bringing up their GPAs to transfer to the “best school for sports around the country”; they had no desire to stay in the area. Both Deandre and Greg had previous college experiences in which they had difficulty adjusting to the academic rigors of a 4-year college. Now that they were academically prepared to transfer back to a 4-year college, they commented on their regret at not starting at the community college. Both considered the community college the best place to start or resume their education because there were so many more options available.

Deandre stated, “[The community college] is a good place to start off. It is that once you finish in 2 years you get automatically accepted in any school in Virginia if you meet the requirement.” Greg mentioned that in high school the guidance counselors had recommended the community college for enrollment, but he had been more interested in attending a “real” college. About his 4-year college experience, he said,

Well, coming out of high school, the guidance counselor was saying that [the community college] is a great start to get you prepared for the big colleges. But, I wanted to get away. But coming back to [this community college] I realize I should have come straight out of high school because the classes are just like at the big universities. A lot of schools recommend transferring now and see it as a good thing for students to transfer. And coming out of high school I would not be able to get in this school that I am at now, but I guess coming from the community college it looked better. My current college, they saw that I had good grades and accepted me.

The participants were confident that their community college education would help them get an associate’s degree and transfer to a 4-year school. Ronald commented, “I’m glad to get that piece of paper [degree] to go to another school; knowing that is my

ticket to another school.” Kevin agreed, “It is a good college, if you cannot get into a 4-year school, to get you off the ground, a good stepping stone.” Juan said, “[Start] at the community college; then finish up at a big school.” The ease of completing the application was appealing to Grant, who stated, “I completed the application in 10 minutes. I believe a community college is a stepping stone to go to a better place. You can try it out and if you do not like it, then college may not be for you.”

*More bang for my buck.* After poor academic performance in high school or in a previous college, the participants found enrolling in the community college to be attractive for several reasons, especially the low cost to attend. Virginia residents are entitled to in-state tuition benefits, which are substantially lower than the cost to attend out-of-state or private 2- or 4-year colleges. Typically, the cost of attendance is a major factor in the decision-making process, but many of the study participants had not considered cost, financial aid awards, or time to complete a degree at their prior colleges. Ironically, most had pending financial aid obligations at their previous colleges that had prevented the transfer of course credits. A few had opted simply to start all over, and some had taken the same courses at two different institutions.

Although Jimmy had prior college experiences, he revealed,

The community college has been the best choice for me after I matured. I would have transferred out more recently than I have because the cost of college is so influential in me staying here to finish my 2-year degree.

Ronald’s previous college mishaps reconfirmed his need to secure financial aid; he explained his situation:

I was at a community college in another state my first year out of high school. I really did not like it, and I got into a lot of trouble. I was wasting my mom’s money. I had to move back home, and I heard NOVA had a basketball team. I knew that I could get in-state tuition and go for free and not have her pay.

Clyde, like Jimmy, wanted to enroll in the community college to see if it was a good fit and to save money. He said, “Four-year colleges are very expensive, but I saw this as an opportunity for me to get some experience in the college life.” Chris, too, had previous college experience; he was trying to balance work, school, and keeping up with his bills. He said,

I’m able to do everything at my own pace, to balance time with work and having a career, being able to at least have a social life as well. Probably I made it [going to a community college] a better decision than going to a 4-year university.

Jimmy, Greg, and Chris spoke in detail about the cost of attending college. They all had experiences at other 4-year colleges; the cost of tuition, absent an athletic scholarship, became the most important factor. Ronald expressed the sentiments of other participants; he said that he “did not want to waste his mother’s money and needed to focus.” Jimmy stated,

I think it is fair, knowing the expenses of a larger college, gives people from all demographics the opportunity to go to college and see if it is for them. Instead of spending \$20,000 for something that is not for you, you can pay a low cost and then shop around for the best college.

Chris commented,

I always wanted to go to another 4-year school. I mean, just, bills are going up, cost of living is higher up here, as well as being in Florida and North Carolina. It has probably been easier to go to [this community college] because of the cost, the classes, the flexible payment plans.

The in-state tuition rate allowed the students to get more “bang for their buck.”

The cost of tuition at the community college is substantially lower than tuition, room, and board at 4-year colleges in Virginia. The only qualification for the in-state tuition rate is to be a resident of Virginia. Students are able to apply for admission and take placement exams for free. Most, if not all, of the study participants were qualified for federal tuition

assistance, which included grants and loans that helped to minimize the out-of-pocket costs for their families. The cost factor to attend the community college proved to be a strong institutional factor that influenced enrollment for the participants.

In summary, the stepping-stone theme emerged from the participants' responses regarding the role of the community college in their higher education journey. All of the participants had the desire to attend college, but they were well aware that their academic performance in high school prohibited them from attending their top choice, or sometimes second or third choice for higher education. Actually, they were limited to attending the college that accepted them for academics and sports. Specifically, two participants indicated that they were "athletically better" than their previous schools, which affected their level of academic integration and athletic acculturation. As a result, they left those academic institutions and were utilizing the institutional factors of the community college to help them transition to a 4-year college or university. Based upon the interviews, the institutional factors that had benefited the participants were open admission, low cost, flexible class schedules, location (many campuses close to home), and the availability of financial aid. Overall, club basketball was not an institutional factor that influenced enrollment of the study participants, with the exception of three participants, who indicated they would not have enrolled if there had been no basketball team. Of those three, one had abandoned the idea of playing Division I college basketball. Of the 21 study participants, 19 hoped to use club basketball participation to transfer to a Division I or II basketball program.

One of the most important institutional factors for enrolling at the community college was the open-admission policy. Even though only one participant actually knew

what the term meant, when the term was explained they all had positive things to say about it. The overall sentiment was that the ability to enroll despite poor high school academic and standardized test performance was both surprising and well received. They perceived that poor high school academic performance had prohibited them from attending their first, second, and third choice schools. As a result, enrolling in the community college was viewed as a second chance at higher education; they could enroll for courses with reduced cost and increase their GPAs to transfer to 4-year colleges or universities.

### **Summary of Results**

In summary, conducting face-to-face interviews was the most appropriate method to learn about the experiences of this population. To hear the actual stories and processes by which these African American male club basketball players engaged in the college choice decision process was enlightening. The literature suggested that students engage in the college choice decision-making process in three distinct stages: predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Associated with each phase are certain influences and factors that help the student progress through the stages and finalize the choice. Freeman (2005) asserted that African American students are influenced by student and cultural characteristics that are more influential in the predisposition stage, such as family and external influences.

Selecting a college for enrollment is based on several factors including location, major preference, cost, and whether or not enrollment is feasible. There is a weeding-out process that traditional students undergo to determine the best fit. For African American students, certain factors take precedence in the decision-making process, such as financial

aid and admissibility. For African American athletes, the coach, the opportunity to play, and scholarship availability are critical factors that influence enrollment.

For this study it was important to learn how African American male club basketball players selected the community college for enrollment as well as what influences aided in their decision making. Only one participant in the study indicated that his high school GPA exceeded a 3.5; he selected a community college as his first choice because he thought he was not ready to go to a 4-year school immediately. All of the other participants stated that their high school GPAs and SAT scores were very low and that they almost did not graduate on time. Many players commented that they did not know what they wanted to do following high school until after the actual graduation ceremony. All of the participants who had been accepted to 2- and 4-year colleges and universities returned home after one or two semesters of no academic progress. Being at home forced many players to seek other higher education options as they “did not want to sit at home and do nothing.”

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to learn about the college choice experiences of African American male club basketball players in the community college. The face-to-face interviews with 21 participants helped tell their stories and describe their experiences. From the interviews, major themes emerged to answer the main research question and the three subquestions. Although the community college was the first choice for only one participant, it was, ultimately, the best choice for the other participants, based on specific institutional factors that allowed them a second chance at higher education and sports.



Specific institutional factors helped make the community college the best higher education choice for the participants, such as location, cost, and no admission requirements. Support networks—family, extended family, and coaches—were influential in encouraging college participation. The participants relied on advice from various members of their support network about how to navigate the higher education process. The caring coaches and supportive mothers helped the participants engage in the college choice process and persist academically through higher education. The participants in this study displayed a strong connection to sports and aspired to play collegiate basketball. For many, playing sports appeared to be the only way to escape their neighborhoods. They soon realized that sports helped them get out but poor academic performance in their previous college forced them back. Their collective experiences had helped each of them become better prepared for life's challenges and their next moves.

The subsequent chapter, Chapter V, utilizes these themes to respond to the primary research question, build a profile of African American club basketball players, and discuss the college choice process among these students.

## **Chapter V: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male club basketball players made meaning of their college choice decisions. In-depth semistructured interviews with 21 participants were conducted during the spring 2011 basketball season. Previous chapters have included discussion of the problems of practice and research addressed in this study, the literature related to the topic, the methodologies used, and the data collected. This chapter presents the study results, including conclusions and recommendations. In addition, this chapter includes responses to the research questions based on the literature and the findings, provides a critique of the study, presents implications for research, provides a profile of African American male club basketball players in the community college, adapts the college choice model for this subpopulation, and provides recommendations for practitioners.

### **Overview of the Study**

Historically, there has been controversy over the role of African American males in collegiate sports. Some researchers believe that athletes are primed to compete for college athletic scholarships in hopes of increasing the revenue for the college's sports programs and schools at large (Edwards, 1973; Parmer, 1994; Sailes, 1992; Wiggington, 2006; Wiggins, 1986). Because they are recruited for their athletic, not academic, prowess, African American student athletes often lack the required skills to endure the academic rigors of college. The reality is that very few college athletes benefit financially from sports participation, as very few are drafted to professional sports teams with lucrative contracts. As a result, numerous aspiring professional athletes leave

college each year both unsigned and without a college degree (Ferrel, 1986; George, 1999; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Lederman, 1992).

African American males are the least represented population in higher education and in degree attainment according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010). There are 17.3 million students enrolled in higher education: 7.4 million males and 9.9 million females. White students represent the largest percentage of the undergraduate population totaling 66.1%; African American students represent 12.5%, Hispanic students 10.5%, Asian 6.4%, and American Indian 1.0%. Of African American students enrolled in higher education, males represent 37% compared to 63% females. Community college plays a unique role in higher education. Two-year colleges provide a low-cost education to a diverse population of students who take courses for enrichment, in preparation for 4-year colleges or universities, or to receive associate's degrees and enter the workforce (Byrd & Williams, 2007; Cohen, 2003; Kissinger & Miller, 2007). Since its inception, the community college has provided educational access to underrepresented and underserved students who have been disenfranchised from other types of higher education institutions. Thus, this study aimed to learn about the college choice decision-making process for African American male club basketball players enrolled in the community college, specifically, by examining how this group makes meaning of their college choice.

### **Overview of Findings**

Interviews with 21 African American male club basketball players in the community college helped provide insight about their college choice decision-making experiences. Overall, the community college created a positive educational experience

for the participants due to institutional factors that influenced choice for the participants, such as open admissions, cost, location, and ability to transfer to a 4-year college. The club basketball players without previous college experience as well as those with college experience hoped their enrollment at the community college would help them rebound academically so that they would be eligible to participate in collegiate sports.

A qualitative method was employed to learn about the experiences of 21 African American club basketball players in two community colleges. Interviews were used to understand the college decision-making process of this student population. Using data from the interviews with 21 African American club basketball players, the researcher was able to answer the primary research question and the three subquestions. The primary research question was the following: How do African American male club basketball players in the community college make meaning of their college choice decision? The three research subquestions were the following:

1. How does athletic identity influence college choice?
2. What role do support networks take in the selection of a college for African American male club basketball players?
3. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice of African American male club basketball players?

From the face-to-face interviews major themes emerged to answer each research question. The themes that emerged from the interviews were (a) value of experience, (b) escape, (c) He got game? (d) discounted hoop dreams, (e) a caring and academic-focused coach, (f) support network, including self, (g) stepping stone, and (h) second chance. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase model of college choice and Freeman's

(2005) African American model of college choice were used to drive this research and determine the relevant factors that influence the final stage, which is choice.

For the majority of participants who had previous college experience, enrollment in the community college was viewed as a second chance at education, life, or sports. The researcher classified veteran players as those who had attended a Division I, II, or III juco or 4-year college for sports. This was the case for 15 of the 21 participants interviewed in this study. Three participants had experienced legal issues that prevented them from reenrolling in their previous college or university; eight had not performed adequately to meet the academic eligibility requirements to continue. Two participants had experienced financial hardships and were therefore unable to remain enrolled and live far away from home. Two participants had been “redshirts” and because of no playing time and other circumstances decided it was better for them to return home.

The themes of value of experience and escape emerged to help answer this research question. When asked about their childhoods, several students indicated that it was rough, partially because they were raised by single mothers. They had started playing sports at an early age to stay out of trouble and had expected that continued participation in sports would keep them out of trouble and help them get into college. Three participants were verbal about having to make the choice between selling drugs and going to college. Their cultural environment was not conducive to higher education, but they continued to aspire to get out of the neighborhood and do better. The participants perceived playing sports as their ticket to a better life for them and their families.

Freeman's (2005) discussion of the predisposition stage for African American students indicated that one main reason for the aspiration of college attendance is the "avoidance of what I don't want to be" (p. 18). The participants in this study felt sad about their friends and family members who were incarcerated; they did not want to follow in the same path. Therefore they used sports as a vehicle to gain access to higher education and a professional sports career. The value of the experience for the participants involved having the opportunity to continue their education beyond high school and utilizing club basketball as a springboard to additional higher education opportunities.

In conclusion, the participants in this study were from diverse backgrounds. Their experiences, although individually different, were very similar as they related to the college choice process. The participants expressed an aspiration to attend college at an early age, but that goal was heavily influenced by the desire to play collegiate basketball. Overall, with limited higher education opportunities, enrolling in the community college for sports was a beneficial and positive experience for the participants even though it was not their first choice.

### **Interpretation of the Data**

The community college has been a viable choice for African American male club basketball players desiring to start or continue their education. Being able to continue to play basketball was a key factor for the participants in this study. Therefore, it is important to address and understand how athletic identity influences college choice.

He got game? and discounted hoop dreams were themes that emerged to answer the research subquestion: How does athletic identity influence college choice? The

participants in this study displayed a high level of athletic identity. All participants had been playing sports, especially basketball, since a young age, and more than 75% desired to play collegiate basketball, professional basketball, or both. The remaining 25% did not believe they were academically talented enough to play at the collegiate level, but club sports provided them the opportunity to explore and further develop their athletic talents. Playing club basketball in the community college became an important contributor to academic persistence for the participants because they aspired to transfer to 4-year colleges.

The literature suggested that students who aspire to participate in collegiate sports undergo the same decision-making process as other students, but additional factors related to athletics play a critical role in helping them narrow the choice (Edwards, 1973; Figler & Figler, 1984; Harrison, 1999). The literature primarily addressed the choice factors for African American athletes in 4-year colleges and universities; little had been documented on the choice factors for 2-year colleges and universities (Freeman, 2005; Gabert et al., 1999; Kraft, 1996). The studies indicated that the coach, scholarship availability, opportunity to play, reputation of the athletic program, and career aspirations are major factors influencing college choice for African American male athletes (Croft, 2008; Ryan et al., 2007; Witherspoon, 2005). Moreover, Freeman (2005) noted that besides the gender differences for college attendance in the African American community, African American males are driven in their choice by the ability to obtain a scholarship. On the other hand, in the community college, scholarships are not available to club basketball participants. The reputations of the community colleges in this study were rooted in academics, not sports. Even though the participants had the opportunity to

be starters on the club basketball team, many of the incentives or perceived perks from playing Division I or II basketball were nonexistent.

Overall, athletic identity was a strong factor that influenced enrollment and persistence in the community college for many of the participants. Although some participants did not know about the team or were disappointed in the club status of the team, they used the experience to help them improve their athletic talents in hopes of transferring to a 4-year college for sports. Subsequently, certain people helped the club basketball players finalize important life decisions. The next section addresses the role of the support network.

African American males are being raised in single-family households led by their mothers. Many of the participants reluctantly discussed their childhoods; a typical comment was “My childhood was rough, I had nothing but basketball.” It was also evident, based upon their college enrollment choices, that being at the community college and playing club basketball were disappointments because so many others expected “more” from them. They were eager to transfer and prove to themselves and those in their neighborhood that they “made it.” The people they were trying to impress by “making it” included their mothers, parents, grandparents, girlfriends, mentors, siblings, and even coaches.

Through the interviews, the role of the coach as part of a support network emerged because he was viewed as “caring” about the participant’s progression on and off the court. All of the participants referred to the coaches as being caring and helpful in assisting them with the resources needed to perfect their basketball skills as well as increase their GPAs for greater academic ability to aid them in transferring.



Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) initial study about college choice process revealed how important parents are in nurturing the college aspirations of their children. Freeman (2005) expanded that theory to include extended family as African American children often are not raised in traditional two-parent households. As a result, African American children receive positive and negative influences for college attendance based on their cultural surroundings. For student athletes, it is well documented that the role of the coach is key for college choice. The coaches actively recruit students and their parents into the higher education system. The student athlete relies on the coach for athletic guidance in hopes of gaining exposure for his talents.

Overall, the role of support networks was another critical factor that supported the college choice decisions of African American male club basketball players. It is important to note that the majority of the participants indicated that they were self-motivated to persist in college but that family members encouraged them to apply and enroll. Mothers and coaches were most influential in encouraging and sustaining motivation for the participants who wanted to go beyond their family level of education and SES; they believed that club basketball participation would help them achieve this goal. In addition to club basketball, other factors contributed to the overall choice of the community college. The next section addresses those institutional factors.

The themes of second chance and stepping stone answered the third subquestion: How do institutional factors affect choice? The participants indicated that although they had aspirations to attend college for sports at an early age, they did not finalize college choice plans until their junior year of high school or later. Several noted that they did not make plans to attend college until after high school graduation, during the summer. Their

initial college choice decisions were based on playing basketball for a junior college or a 4-year college. Poor academic performance prevented all of the participants from attending their respective top choice colleges. They were forced to settle for a lesser ranked college to play sports. After being disappointed with the lack of playing time, financial issues, encountering disciplinary actions, and poor academic performance, the participants were forced to think of other higher education options. The community college was a second chance to “bring their grades up” and a stepping stone to transfer to a 4-year college for academics and sports (Bradley, 2007; Harper, 2009; Horton, 2009).

### **Comparing the Findings to the Literature**

The college choice literature for African American students supports these findings; compared to White students, African American students experience a disconnect between aspirations and actual enrollment (Freeman, 2005), which leads to the community college as a final choice. The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model indicates that, in general, students aspire to attend college as early as the eighth grade and follow through the stages prior to the senior year. Studies by the American College Testing organization confirmed that African American students engage in the college choice decision-making process later in high school and differently from other students (ACT, 1993; Lewis & Morrison, 1975; McDonough, 1991; Park not in ref 2008). Additionally, Freeman concluded that African American male aspirations for college are encouraged when they are athletically inclined. The literature was scant about athletes in 2-year colleges and universities, specifically the process by which the decision to enroll is made.

Neither Hossler and Gallaher (1987) nor Freeman (2005) discussed the critical factors that influence the final stage choice for African American students, but both studies provided a framework upon which to expand. The participants in this study embarked on the higher education experience because they were responding to cultural influences. Athletics has historically been viewed as the gateway to higher education for many African American males (Edwards, 1973; George, 1999; Wiggington, 2006). The African American males in this study possessed marginal high school GPAs and low SAT scores, and they were forced to attend colleges that offered them athletic scholarships. McDonough's (1991) study highlighted the college choice options of African American students and reported that those students are less likely to enroll in their first choice colleges and will select a historically black college or university because of the lower admission standards.

Previous studies showed that African American students engage in the college choice decision-making process differently than other students and that they progress through the stages at a slower pace (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Freeman, 2005; McDonough, 1991). It is important to note that there was limited research on the factors that influence African American male club basketball players to enroll in the community college. Based upon the interview data, the participants engaged in the choice stage fueled by cultural influences and high expectations of playing collegiate basketball.

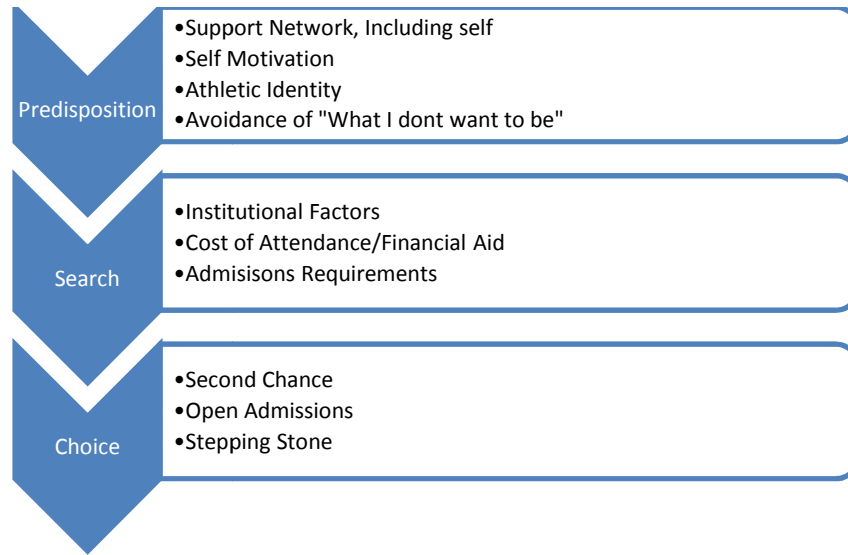
Previous research by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), which documented the college choice decision-making process for students, was quite different for the African American club basketball players. All the respondents indicated that they had a passion for sports but did not research or invest time in college searches until their junior year or

later; this finding supports the previous research on college choice and African American students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough et al., 1997). Of the 21 participants in this study, 19 took a passive role in the search phase. They relied on colleges to contact them via coaches or through literature about admissions, enrollment, and financial aid. The star high school athletes enjoyed the recruiting process and traveling to visit schools, but their hopes and dreams were shattered by their senior year because of academic ineligibility established by the NCAA clearinghouse. Moreover, although the participants were knowledgeable about their high school academic backgrounds, they were still hopeful that athletic ability, rather than grades, would be the overriding factor for admissions. The lack of college preparation, including parental aspirations, saving money for college, and conducting extensive research on colleges, disadvantaged the participants in the study based on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice, especially during the last phase, choice (Figure 8).

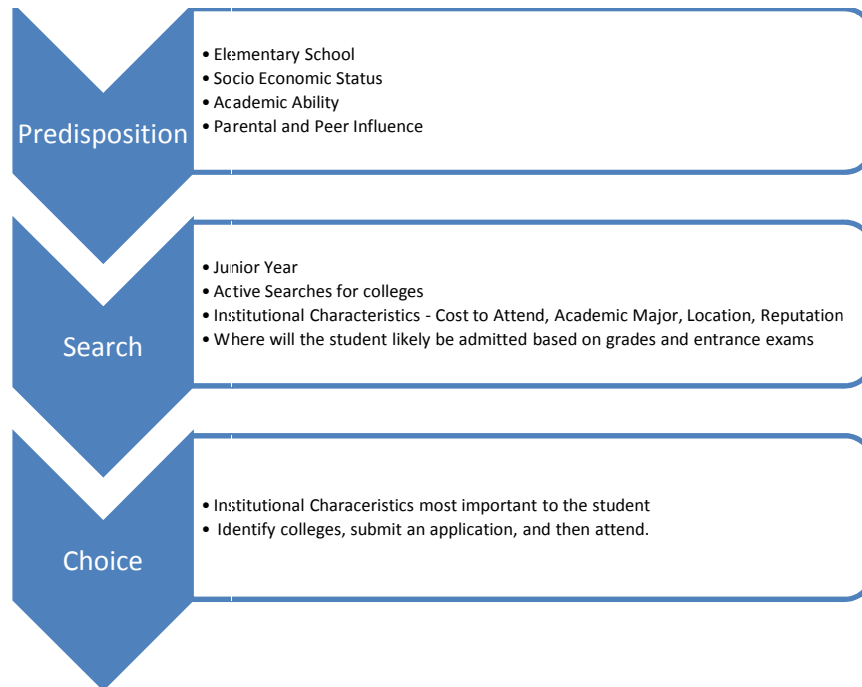
Additionally, Freeman's (2005) African American model of college choice highlighted a similar tendency for this group toward the predisposition, not the choice, stage. All of the participants pursued higher education because "they wanted to do better than others around them"; this finding highlighted the lack of positive role models in African American communities (Freeman, 2005, p. 18). As Freeman had noted, self-motivation as an internal influence for college participation was a common response from these study participants. The data from this study revealed that only one participant reported attending a college preparatory high school, but he was academically ineligible to attend a 4-year college or university. One participant identified the economy as a

specific factor for attending a community college, but that was expressed at the choice stage.

In the context of this study, it is important to identify the internal and external influences that factored into the participants' choosing the community college. The support network influenced these participants from the predisposition stage through the choice stage, even if financial support was unavailable. The participants relied on obtaining an athletic scholarship to college and focused less on meeting the financial aid requirements and deadlines. When full athletic scholarships were not awarded, many of the participants were required to take out loans to cover the cost of their education and oftentimes paid tuition as out-of-state students at either 2- or 4-year colleges. As Freeman (2005) discussed, college attendance was considered a means to escape a life of poverty and was not influenced by parents' education attainment. Only a few participants' parents had attended college and encouraged them to attend, but the others wanted to go to college to have a better life. For this group, the main goal was to attend college somewhere. For the participants with previous college experience, limited research was involved regarding the types of colleges at which they would ultimately enroll in programs of study; adjustment issues, playing status, and cost to attend were not major factors until after their first semester. Figure 8 represents the critical factors that influenced enrollment for the African American male club basketball players in the study.



*Figure 8.* Factors that influence choice for African American male club basketball players



*Figure 9.* Factors related to each of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice phases.

Figure 9 shows in detail the important factors related to each of Hossler and Gallagher's college choice phases and indicates the point at which they should occur in school. It has been documented that this model does not address the experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Freeman, 2005). Freeman's model of college choice expanded the predisposition stage by highlighting factors that influence predetermination. Moreover, during each phase, the African American male club basketball players progressed with different factors and expectations. The next sections compare each of the phases of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice to the findings in this study.

**Predisposition.** In the predisposition phase, the main driving force for college attendance was the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics, not parental influence. Nevertheless, it is important to note the role of mothers in encouraging college attendance for the participants. The participants relied on and expected an athletic scholarship to pay for their education.

**Search.** During the search phase, students in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) study started active searches in the junior year by collecting important information about the colleges. Also, the students began to examine their high school academic performance records and match them with the schools where they would most likely be admitted. Other factors are important such as major preference, location, and reputation of the school. The findings in this study revealed that only a few participants actively conducted college searches. The other participants passively waited for a coach's recommendation or a collegiate recruiting staff member to contact them about enrollment. Also, the participants admitted to performing poorly in high school and on

the SAT exam in both the junior and senior years. The only institutional factor that resonated in this phase for the participants in the study was the ability to be awarded an athletic scholarship and the opportunity to play collegiate basketball. These institutional factors played an important role in the choice phase, which is discussed in the next section.

**Choice.** Hossler and Gallagher (1987) categorized the final stage, choice, as the process of the students' beginning to sort all of the information learned about college in the search phase and narrowing down a choice. Of the participants in this study, only one intended to and actually selected a community college for enrollment based on searching local community colleges. Another participant searched for 4-year colleges to attend, applied, and received several rejection letters. He commented that it was frustrating to hear no from so many schools. The other participants waited for college acceptance letters, which were scant because of NCAA clearinghouse ineligibility. As a result, they were forced to enroll in Division II, III, and junior colleges for sports. The only institutional factor considered for choice was the opportunity to play basketball. But, prior to enrolling in the community college, the participants with prior college experience considered the opportunity to play, proximity to home, low tuition rates, and open enrollment as the factors important in college selection. For the participants without previous college experience, the same factors were considered and influenced their enrollment in the community college.

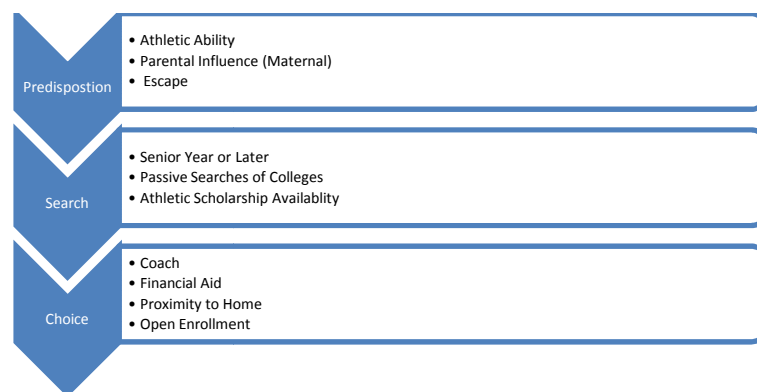
The choice stage factors that influenced African American male club basketball players to attend a community college were escape, academic background, caring coaches, family support, open admissions, and athletic identity. The African American



males in this study expressed an appreciation for the factors that influenced their choice of the community college because they had allowed them to continue their higher education journey while playing club basketball.

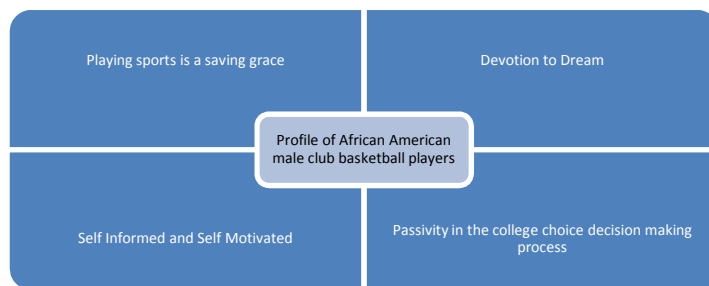
### **Significance of Study**

This study expands the current research on student athletes by introducing the experiences of a population not studied in the original Hossler and Gallagher (1987) study: African American club basketball players. In addition, the results of this study build upon Freeman’s (2005) research by comparing the factors that influence enrollment in a college for African American club basketball players. Moreover, this study enhances the aforementioned research by specifically addressing the factors that contribute to the decision-making process for the final stage, which is choice of a community college. The new Ellis model (Figure 10) highlights the factors that influence African American male club basketball players’ college choice decision-making process during the choice stage.



*Figure 10.* Ellis model of college choice for African American male club basketball players in the community college.

The literature about college choice and student athletes suggested that the majority aspired or wanted to attend a Division I or II college or university because of the coach, athletic program, and the athletic facilities. This study was designed to determine whether the matriculation choices of African American club basketball players mirror that of athletes in revenue-generating sports programs (Figler & Figler, 1984; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). This study is significant because the majority of previous research was focused on the college choice decision-making process for African American student athletes who do attend a Division I or II college or university after graduating from high school; there were fewer studies on the decision-making process for athletes in the community college. The findings of this study help to create a general profile of the characteristics of African American male club basketball players. This work builds upon the three-phase college choice studies by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and the college choice work by Freeman (2005) (see Figure 11).



*Figure 11.* Profile of African American male club basketball players.

Figure 11 depicts the profile for African American male club basketball players in the community college. As discussed in previous sections, the African American males in this study participated in higher education, specifically at the community college level,

for various reasons. The four major concepts to emerge were: (a) sports as a saving grace, (b) passivity in college choice decision process, (c) devotion to dream, and (d) self-informed and self-motivated. The next sections highlight each of the tenets for the profile of African American male club basketball players.

### **Sports as a Saving Grace**

Many of the participants were raised in single-parent homes headed by the mother. In addition, because the participants had experienced bad childhoods, they thought the opportunity to play collegiate athletics would help them escape culturally depressed environments. To escape their negative cultural and environmental influences they poured their hearts and souls into playing basketball. Many commented that when they stepped on the basketball court, all of their problems disappeared. As a result, the participants focused their energy on being the best athletes and not necessarily the best students in high school. They believed that with hard work and great athletic skills, their path to higher education would be clear. The participants enjoyed the recruiting process in high school although none were successful in enrolling in their first choice for college. They were limited in options because they were not able to meet the academic eligibility requirements.

### **Devotion to Dream**

The participants exhibited a real and genuine passion for sports. They were expressive and overjoyed to discuss their high school or college athletic achievements. They boasted, for example, about being the number-one scorer, number-one rebounder, or the captain for the state championship team. Overall, the participants had hoped that their athletic talents would outshine their marginal academic performance so that they

could receive an athletic scholarship. Unfortunately, the participants were so confident of being offered a scholarship to a Division I school, they had no plan B. Without full financial scholarships and good academic progress in other colleges, many African American males in this study had to rethink their higher education options. The next section addresses how the participants progressed through the college choice process.

### **Passivity in College Choice Decision-Making Process**

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) and Freeman's (2005) studies on college choice discussed the internal and external influences that impact college choice. In addition to aspiring to attend college, students must actively engage in the college choice decision-making process by initiating searches. Only two participants in the study mentioned actually conducting college searches online to review admissions requirements. All of the other participants relied on referrals from high school coaches and interest letters from college basketball coaches to engage in the college choice process. Their approach to the college search process was passive. As a result, they were ill informed about all higher education options available. The next section addresses how the African American male club basketball players processed their decisions.

### **Self-Informed and Self-Motivated**

The participants in the study had to rely on the support of their extended families and coaches to introduce and encourage enrollment in higher education. Although they often relied on others for guidance, the African American male club basketball players relied more on themselves for motivation and support. Several participants commented that they preferred to keep to themselves and that they rarely discussed with anyone their problems with school or life. Self-reliance for information had been detrimental to their

academic success in high school and college experiences. The avoidance of seeking advice from their extended support network, high school administrators, and college personnel delayed the participants' college choice decision-making process. As a result, most were forced to decide, after high school graduation and at the end of the summer, to enroll in a college somewhere.

The findings of this study helped to create a profile of African American male club basketball players in the community college. The African American males participating in this study made college choice decisions blindly, based on poor academics, misinformation from support networks, sole self-reliance for important life decisions, and misguided notions that their devotion to sports would save them. The opportunity to play basketball in the community college allowed the participants to repair their past academic mistakes and hope for a second chance at collegiate sports.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

**Practical implications.** There are common factors essential to the college choice decision-making process for all students (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Freeman, 1998; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1991). Separate research studies have been conducted to determine if the same factors apply to all cultural groups. Freeman (2005) developed a college choice model for African American students that focused only on the first stage, predisposition; Freeman concluded that internal and external influences contribute to the student's predisposition to college and that African American students approach the college choice decision-making process differently. In this study, the factors that influenced the final stage of choice for the African American participants were similar to the factors addressed in the predisposition and search stages.

Only one study participant considered attending a community college during the final choice stage. The other participants assumed that it would be a great place to start but had preferred to enroll in a junior college or 4-year college. Their high school GPAs and first-semester college GPAs were marginal compared to those of other prospective college students. Yet, the prospective student athletes were encouraged and recruited to enroll, despite their academic backgrounds. Early intervention programs are needed in high schools to help the prospective collegiate student athlete develop the appropriate academic skills to be successful in college.

Attending multiple colleges for academics and sports, whether junior or 4-year colleges, has long-term implications on the athletic eligibility for the student. The NCAA has strict guidelines and rules that not only apply to academic eligibility but also govern athletic ability. A reverse transfer from a junior college or a 4-year college to the community college may shorten the Division I or II playing time for the student athlete. Specific information and guidelines need to be established to inform the prospective student athlete of the pros and cons of reverse transfer between junior and 4-year college programs and club basketball.

Another implication of the study is that the participants in this study expected to transfer to a Division I or II college or university. The impact of nontransfer after participating in club basketball at the community college is important to consider. Although participating in club basketball had been viewed by the participants as a way to stay in shape, an activity to help them build certain skills, and an avenue for exposure to Division I and II colleges and universities, transfer to another college was not guaranteed. Table 4 revealed that the current academic performance of the participants and their

GPA's were lower than the required admission standards for specific colleges and universities. As a result, club basketball players need to examine their academic performance and seek out colleges that will accept them as transfers and collegiate basketball players. The cycle had repeated as these students all faced this similar dilemma when attempting to transition initially from high school to college.

To assist prospective collegiate athletes, the community college should model advising programs after those established in Division I and II colleges and universities. Student athletes in those institutions have unlimited academic, personal, and financial resources that are tailored to ensure the overall success of the student athletes. In the community college, the club basketball players are often unaware of programs and services that can help them persist academically. As a result, they are enrolling in the wrong classes, not doing well in classes, and ultimately not meeting satisfactory academic progress for financial aid. On many occasions, the club basketball participant was ineligible to play based on poor academics and the inability to pay for classes out of pocket. An athletic-academic advisement liaison will help ensure that the student athlete is meeting club eligibility requirement, progressing through his degree program, and developing a strong academic history to facilitate transfer.

Choice of college is the most important decision that a prospective student athlete can make. The documented factors for student athletes are consistent across Division I and II and junior colleges. The driving factors are the coach and the ability to play. As revealed in this study, the community college was a last resort for several of the participants. The opportunity to continue playing basketball was an added benefit for enrollment, but other institutional factors contributed more heavily to their decision. Low

cost, flexible class schedules, financial aid, location, and open enrollment were noted factors. Open enrollment was the most favorably viewed factor because their academic pasts were forgiven. Knowing that African American males are the most disenfranchised group in higher education as well as the least prepared for college, high schools should develop targeted recruitment programs to introduce the community college as the best higher education opportunity. Presenting the community college's most attractive features to this group in high school not only will produce more applications for admissions and early FAFSA applications but also will increase the awareness of the programs and services offered in the community. As the cost to apply to and attend colleges increases, it is beneficial for a prospective student to know that one can complete a community college application in 10 minutes for free, apply for federal grants for free, take the appropriate placement exams for free, and enroll and pay at the in-state tuition rate. Even though prospective collegiate athletes generally opt for the most well-known school for sports and academics, the completed application for the community college would give them immediate assurance that there are other options, if and when their first choice falls through.

### **Future Research**

The conversations with African American club basketball players regarding their decision making revealed how they were influenced to pursue secondary education and how they made the final choice. Hearing and listening to the participants' stories expanded the researcher's understanding of the college choice process and the many challenges faced by African American males. Moreover, their stories were very similar to those of African American male athletes in general, but their path through higher



education via club sports in the community college provided an additional lens through which to examine this population. African American athletes are a well researched group, but extensive engagement with this population will help generate more valuable studies on sports, access to higher education, and the athletes' personal experiences within the process. The researcher perceives that she only scratched the surface with this group during the interview process.

First, a study should be conducted on the reverse transfer characteristics of the African American club basketball players. Traditionally, students start higher education in the community college and then transfer to a 4-year college or university. A collective study is needed involving African American males who attended a Division I or II college or university immediately after high school but needed to transfer to a community college; the study should examine their personal experiences and expectations of "making it" as well as the psychological barriers of having to return home, regardless of the circumstance. Such a study would help the student build an academic and transfer plan based on his or her academic background and capability.

Second, a comparative study of additional community colleges in the VCCS with predominantly African American club basketball players coached by African American males is critical to understand the similarities and differences of this study's population compared to other urban community colleges. Because many African American males reside in single-parent households, primarily headed by the mother, it is important to determine if the presence of an African American coach as a role model affects their enrollment and persistence in college. According to the findings of this study, the

participants from GCC were more strongly connected with their coach, who was an African American male, than were the participants from NOVA.

African American males continue to be a disenfranchised group in higher education. The data clearly report how they lag in higher education attainment compared to African American females, White students, and students from other races (NCES, 2010). They aspire to attain higher education at an early age, oftentimes heightened by the desire to play sports, but they do not consider the academic requirements for college and sports. As a result, they ultimately make last-minute decisions that will have a lasting impact on their college enrollment and sports participation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The population in this study presented several challenges in attempting to schedule meetings and interviews. First, because the community colleges do not offer residential housing, students are commuters and tend to be on campus only when they have courses. Scheduling challenges occurred as the researcher was unable to schedule interviews on two consecutive days; rather she had to determine what interview would best fit each participant's school and work schedules.

Additionally, this population of students was hesitant to participate in the tape-recorded interviews; thus, they provided brief responses to the initial questions. Follow-up or probing questions were used with each participant to help answer the interview questions. Trust was a barrier between the participants and the researcher. After the interview and during follow-up meetings, the participants began to open up, be more expressive, and add substantial comments to their interview transcripts during the

member-check process. Building rapport and establishing trust with African American males in the study contributed to a successful research project.

## **Conclusion**

With the understanding that the participants were from varied backgrounds and orientations to life, having experienced the complexities of navigating higher education, the important factor that resounded in their interviews was the important role that the community college had played in shaping their lives, their goals, and their motivation to continue to strive for an opportunity to attend a 4-year college or university that might afford them a chance to participate in Division I or II basketball. The values and experiences communicated by each interviewee speak for so many other African American males for whom athleticism plays a major part in the selection of their institution, along with parental and community influence. Scholarship funding and the ability to minimally or fully participate on the court as meaningful contributors to their team are other factors to consider. The participants in this research confirmed the prominence of widely diverse experiences in the community college. The experiences with other cultures, races, and denominations also assisted in shaping these personalities by providing experiences they had not received in their home communities.

Findings from this study revealed that the college choice process for African American male club basketball players to attend a community college was different from the process for students to attend a 4-year institution. Participants were influenced to pursue higher education by parents, extended family, significant others, and coaches. This study expanded the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice by determining the factors influential for African American male club basketball players,

specifically at the choice stage. Although this study provides a glimpse of the predisposition and search stages for the African American male club basketball players, these students did not progress through the phases considered normal for students in general. They relied on input from others and waited for colleges to make the first contact with them. Ultimately, the participants selected the community college for enrollment. The participants moved through the phases just as other students, but the African American students had different experiences in each phase, which influenced their college choice decisions.

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## Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER  
WASHINGTON DC

**Date:** December 27, 2010

**To:** Rick Jakeman, Ed.D.

**From:** The George Washington University Committee on Human Research,  
Institutional Review Board (IRB), FWA00005945

**Re:** Correspondence dated 11/24/2010

**Subject: IRB# 111056 -- *Jumping Through Hoops: The college choice experiences of African American male club basketball players in the community college***

**Sponsor:** None

**Risk Level: Minimal Status: Active Expiration date: December 22, 2011**

This is to certify that the Institutional Review Board has **fully approved** the above-referenced protocol via expedited review procedure under categories # 6 and 7 of 45 CFR 46.110.

The expiration date of this project is **December 22, 2011**. HHS regulations at 45 CFR 46.109(e) require that **continuing review** of research be conducted by the IRB at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk and **not less than once per year**. The regulations make **no provision for any grace period extending the conduct of the research beyond the expiration date of IRB approval. When your protocol expires all research activities must stop**. Please mark your calendar now to insure that the IRB receives a renewal request 30 days before the anniversary date of the project, if this study is expected to extend beyond one year.

This protocol has been approved for a **maximum number of 25 subjects** to be enrolled under the auspices of George Washington University. If you wish to increase enrollment beyond this number, you must submit a modification request to the IRB and obtain approval before exceeding this number.

Please note that the IRB must be notified if the project is altered in any way (change in location, personnel, number of subjects, age of subjects, or any change in research protocol). If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Human Research either by email at [ohrirb@gwumc.edu](mailto:ohrirb@gwumc.edu) or via phone at 202-994-2715.  
SS/meb

Page 1 of 1

## Appendix B: Letter to Prospective Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Kimberly Carlotta Ellis and I am a graduate student at The George Washington University attempting to finish my graduation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. I am contacting you because I am conducting a research study on the factors that influence African American males who play club basketball to attend a community college.

As the project director for this study, I would like to meet with you in person to discuss why you selected to begin your higher education at a community college. I understand that being involved in college athletics can be fun, time consuming, and challenging. Oftentimes, it is very difficult for student to balance the dual role of being a student and an athlete. The interview will last 60-90 minutes with African American male club basketball participants for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years. Your participation in this study will be beneficial to other students, counselors, and administrators regarding the college choice decision-making process of African American males.

I am interested in interviewing students who meet the following criteria: (a) African American male and (b) current or recent member of the community college club sports basketball team.

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached participation form and return to me today. I will be available to answer questions and to collect participation forms at the conclusion of your practice. At the conclusion of the dissertation study, you will receive a \$10 Visa gift card.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time, without threat or consequences. You are also entitled to full, accurate, and honest responses to your questions about any aspect of this study.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail ([pimmyconsultants@yahoo.com](mailto:pimmyconsultants@yahoo.com)) or my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Rick Jakeman, via e-mail ([rjakeman@NOVA.eu](mailto:rjakeman@NOVA.eu)) or telephone (703-726-8254).

Thank you in advance for your participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Carlotta Ellis  
Doctoral Candidate  
The George Washington University  
Enclosures

## **Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Basketball Coach/VP Institutional Research**

Dear Basketball Coach/VP Institutional Research,

Athletics is an integral extracurricular activity for college students that enhances academic, social, and personal development. To learn about how athletics have influenced the college choice decision-making process, I would like to conduct face-to-face interviews with African American male club basketball players in the community college. The data collected will be used to complete my doctoral dissertation at The George Washington University.

The research study involves a 20-item demographic questionnaire that should take about 20 minutes to complete. I realize that a student athlete's time is valuable, so I would like to work with you to accommodate any student athlete outside their athletic commitments. Subject to your approval, I will schedule a 3-day block of time at your college in a convenient and quiet location to record face-to-face interviews.

The enclosed packet of materials includes a letter to the participants and the consent form that explains the scope of the study.

## Appendix D: Consent Form

Title of Research Project:

Jumping Through Hoops: The College Choice Experiences of African American Male Club Basketball Players in the Community College.

Project Contact:

Kimberly Carlotta Ellis, Candidate, Ed.D., Gradation School of Education Development and Human Development at The George Washington University. E-mail: [pimmyconsultants@yahoo.com](mailto:pimmyconsultants@yahoo.com). In partial fulfillment of course requirements under the supervision of Dr. Rick Jakeman, Dissertation Chair and Assistant Professor, Department of Higher Education Administration, The George Washington University, Virginia Campus, Ashburn Virginia 22203. Contact: 703-726-8254 or [rjakeman@gwu.edu](mailto:rjakeman@gwu.edu)

Purpose of Research Study:

The purpose of this study is to understand the college choice decision-making process of African American male club basketball players in the community college.

Procedures for this Research Study:

One 60-90 minute face-to-face interview will be conducted. The interviews will be recorded via audiotapes and hand written notes.

Potential Benefits:

Participants will have the opportunity to openly express and discuss their college choice decision-making process. The discussion will help create a profile for a subpopulation of African American male student athletes in club sports in the community college. It is my desire that the results from this study be of benefit to high school guidance counselors, high school outreach staff, community college administrators, and, most importantly, the student athletes.

Alternative Procedures:

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence. Student athletes who consent to participate will receive a \$10 Visa gift card.

Confidentiality:

To protect your confidentiality, I will ensure that your consent form, audio tapes and transcripts are kept in a locked file cabinet for 6 months after the interview is conducted. Your name will not appear in the interview transcript. The interview transcript will be

reviewed by the researcher and the dissertation chair. A transcriptionist will be hired to confidentially transcribe the audiotapes.

**Signatures and Consent to Participate:**

Federal guidelines and The George Washington University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that we obtain signed consent for the conduct of social research and for participation in research projects which involve human subjects. After the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits have been explained to you, please indicate your consent by reading and signing the statement below.

I have read and been fully informed verbally of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks, and I give my permission for participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Project Director (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Project Director

Please provide your mailing address to ensure prompt delivery of your visa gift card at the conclusion of the interview process:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

City:

\_\_\_\_\_

State:

\_\_\_\_\_

Zip:

\_\_\_\_\_

Email:

\_\_\_\_\_



### **Appendix E: Reminder E-mail**

A few weeks ago you received a request from Kimberly C. Ellis, doctoral candidate at The George Washington University to participate in a dissertation study on African American club basketball players in the community college.

Your 60-90 minute interview has been scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) at \_\_\_\_\_ (location on campus). Should an emergency arise and you are unable to keep this interview time, please contact me immediately so that we can reschedule.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this research. You will receive a \$10 Visa gift card for your honest opinions of your student athlete experience in the community college.

## **Appendix F: Interview Protocol and Guide**

The overarching research goal for the study is to explore how African American male club basketball players make meaning of their college choice decision-making process. The three subquestions that will be investigated are the following:

1. What institutional factors contribute to the college choice decision-making process for African American male club basketball players?
2. In what ways are African American males influenced by athletic identity when choosing a college?
3. What role do support networks take in the college choice decision-making process for African American club basketball players?

The interview protocol to be utilized will follow the attached interview script.

### **Sample Script (R: Researcher; SA: Student Athlete)**

R: Good Morning. I'm Kimberly and I'm working on a research project with George Washington University. I am very interested in learning about your experiences in the community college, specifically the factors that influenced you to attend college.

R: I hope that the results from this research study will help college administrators, coaches, and high school counselors determine best practices for advising student athletes on college choice options, especially when the community college is a viable option.

R: I have been interested in African American males and sports since the 1980s. My cousin was a star athlete at Brigham Young University and was drafted to the NFL and played for the Cincinnati Bengals during the super bowl in 1988. Although he never graduated from BYU, he had a very successful athletic career. I have always insisted that

he finish his degree because, after all, that was the trade off for football. Or was it? I am passionate about education and especially athletes obtaining an education in exchange for sports participation. I truly want you to succeed on and off the court.

R: Just a reminder, this interview will be tape recorded so that I can truly listen to your answers to my research questions and not be inundated with taking notes. I want to be engaged while listening to your stories. I will be jotting down key words and ideas to help begin the data analysis process. I want to be clear that you can be truthful and honest about your experiences at this college, regardless of my position and role on campus.

Tell me a little bit about you. Tell me about your childhood, your family, and about your passion for sports.

Tell me why you chose to enroll in this (NOVA or GCC) college.

Do you feel that you were academically prepared for community college courses?

What kind of courses did you register for your first semester here?

Did you have prior college experience?

From what college?

If not, describe your academic experiences here.

If yes, how would you compare your experience there to this college?

Now that you are enrolled here (insert college name), tell me your satisfaction with your college choice?

Would you refer your friends to the college? Why or why not?

Did you play sports in high school?

Were you recruited in high school by Division I, II, or III schools?

Describe your experiences with the recruiting process.

Did you enroll at any of the colleges that recruited you?

For what sport were you recruited to play?

Let's transition to club basketball.

How did you learn about club sports here (insert college name)?

Describe your athletic career this past season.

If someone asked you about the basketball coach, and his role as a "coach or mentor" what would you say?

When you first enrolled at the community college, did you consider yourself a student or an athlete?

Please tell me more about your response, why did you answer that way?

## Appendix G: Questions for Club Basketball Players

### Demographic Questions

**EMPLID:**

1. Did you attend high school in Virginia?
2. If not, in what state did you graduate from high school?
3. What was your high school GPA?
4. Did you take the SAT or ACT in high school?
5. What did you score on the exam(s)?
6. Is this your first experience as a college student? Yes or No  
If no, what other college(s) did you attend? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Did you receive financial aid for the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year?
8. What was your housing situation for the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 academic year?  
Off campus with a roommate; Off campus with parents; Off campus with significant other, etc.
9. Do you have any children? If yes, how many?
10. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend college?
11. When did you first recall what you wanted to do after high school?
12. What is your educational goal?
13. What types of college information did you collect? How did you receive information?
14. Has anyone in your family attended a community college?
15. Select the highest level of education that each parent has completed (Use DNK for do not know):

	Mother	Father
Did not graduate from high school	_____	_____
Graduated from high school	_____	_____
Received a GED	_____	_____
Attended a community college	_____	_____
Graduated from a community college	_____	_____
Attended a 4-year college	_____	_____
Graduated from a 4-year college	_____	_____
Received advanced degree (master's or doctoral)	_____	_____

16. If someone other than your parents raised you, please state the relationship and select the highest level of education that they have completed:

Did not graduate from high school	_____	_____
Graduated from high school	_____	_____

Received a GED	_____	_____
Attended a community college	_____	_____
Graduated from a community college	_____	_____
Attended a 4-year college	_____	_____
Graduated from a 4-year college	_____	_____
Received advanced degree (master's or doctoral)	_____	_____

16. Did you play sports at your other college? Yes or No

17. What type of sport did you play (division and sport)?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. Did you receive an athletic scholarship? Yes or No Full or Partial

19. Were you recruited to play club basketball by the coach or a teammate?

20. When did you make your decision to attend NOVA or GCC?

21. Did you apply to other colleges?

22. Were you accepted?

23. What were the reasons for nonattendance?

24. Please specify your sport playing status for at the beginning of the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 season:

\_\_\_\_\_ Starter (playing most of the time in almost all games)

\_\_\_\_\_ Active reserve (playing more often than not)

\_\_\_\_\_ Bench reserve (playing less than active reserve)

\_\_\_\_\_ Inactive reserve (playing rarely)

\_\_\_\_\_ Injured (continuing to play)

\_\_\_\_\_ Injured and unable to play

\_\_\_\_\_ Ineligible (academic, disciplinary or other reasons)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

25. Please specify your sport playing status at the end of the 2009-2010 or 2010 - 2011 season:

\_\_\_\_\_ Starter (playing most of the time in almost all games)

\_\_\_\_\_ Active reserve (playing more often than not)

\_\_\_\_\_ Bench reserve (playing less than active reserve)

\_\_\_\_\_ Inactive reserve (playing rarely)

\_\_\_\_\_ Injured (continuing to play)

\_\_\_\_\_ Injured and unable to play

\_\_\_\_\_ Ineligible (academic, disciplinary or other reasons)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

26. Did you receive the playing time that you were promised?

27. Did you work during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 basketball season? Yes or No

28. If Yes, how many hours per week?

29. How satisfied are you with your choice? Why?

30. What are your post community college plans? (graduate, transfer, work, etc.)

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## Appendix H: Codebook

ATHIDENT  
ATHSTATS  
CHANESCAPE  
CHILDHOOD  
COACHCARES  
COACHREC  
COACMENT  
COLLPREP  
DISAPPOINT  
FACFORCHOICE  
FUTPLANS  
HSACAPREP  
INCENTIVE  
INSTFACTORS  
MEANING  
MISLEAD  
MULTIPLE COLLEGE EXPERIENCES  
NOCHOICE  
NOCOLPREP  
OTHERREC  
POORACAD  
POORCOACH  
Previous College Athletic Experience  
SECCHANCE  
SELFEFFIC  
STEPSTONE  
STUDIDENT  
SUPRTMOM  
SUPRTNET  
SUPRTSELF