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The college choice phenomenon: An exploration of parental perceptions

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THE COLLEGE CHOICE PHENOMENON:
AN EXPLORATION OF PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Southern Utah University
1994

Master of Education
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership
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An Exploration of Parental Perceptions


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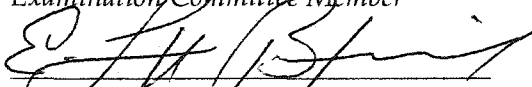

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ABSTRACT

The College Choice Phenomenon: An Exploration of Parental Perceptions

by

Sandra J. Lord Thomas

Dr. Dale Andersen, Ed.D., Doctoral Committee Co-chair
Dr. LeAnn Putney, Ph.D., Doctoral Committee Co-chair
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Napoleon Bonaparte coined the maxim; "The future destiny of the child is always the work of the parent" (Evans, 1971, p. 18). A parent plays a key part in the development and progression of a child. Consequently, children often adopt parental perceptions of the world around them. The college choice phenomenon is no exception; parents perform a critical role. The purpose of this study was to examine the role parents played in the college choice phenomenon. The study employed a qualitative research approach with a quantitative component to explore parental perceptions and the interrelated roles of parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives.

The total population of high school junior students in the Camino River Union High School District was surveyed to obtain supporting information regarding parental influence, involvement, and the relationship between important college characteristics. Using the total population, counselors

identified a maximum variation sample of ten college-bound students and their parents. This sample, along with two counselors and six admissions representatives from the top feeder higher education institutions for the participating school district completed the phenomenological portion of this work. New survey instruments were developed for the purpose of this research. Descriptive statistics and phenomenological analysis indicated current parental roles and the relationships between college choice sets and participants.

Findings reported parents perceived more influence over their students college choice processes than their students designated. Yet, parents felt they were not as involved in college choice as their students indicated.

Phenomenological interviews revealed students perceived added influence and involvement from parents who secured some degree of higher education.

Parents who possessed little exposure to higher education limited their involvement in college choice, but not their general influence for college.

In this study, parents winnowed important characteristics of college choice down to five factors: location, area of interest, campus safety, campus size, campus environment, and college costs. Students, counselors, and representatives report similar choice set patterns. Across participant groups, college websites were the most valuable contemporary source of information.

The research presents an exhaustive phenomenological essence statement, along with a point-in-time parent model of the college choice phenomenon. Implications for higher education institutions, high school counselors, and parents are discussed.

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To protect the anonymity of the participating college-bound students, their parents, high school counselors, and admissions representatives, I cannot name them or the high school district personnel and school principals who spent a significant amount of time and energy immersed in this study. Nevertheless, I am extremely appreciative and grateful to each of them for making this research possible. Beyond these individuals, I must share heartfelt appreciation to my family, friends, and my supportive and inspiring spouse, Michael E. Thomas.

CHAPTER 1

THE COLLEGE CHOICE PHENOMENON: AN UNDERSTANDING OF PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS

Background of the Study

Each year scores of parents begin the process of looking at colleges for their son or daughter. With a checklist of varied criteria in hand, they explore information on numerous institutions and purposefully begin their search.

A college education offers great opportunities, including career mobility, higher salaries, longer working lives, and a better quality of life (Bowen, 1977; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). College graduates report being happier and more satisfied with life (Bowen, 1977). Given the lifetime impact of the college selection decision it is not surprising that college-bound students seldom make the decision of selecting a college alone. A student's selection typically involves dialogue with counselors, teachers, friends, college representatives, alumni, and most significantly parent(s).

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986) confirms the influence of parents in the initial decision to go to college and the final decision of which college to attend. In their *Survey of the Transition from High School to College*,

the Carnegie Foundation found parents served as the most influential people in the college selection process (Boyer, 1987).

Between 1982 and 1986, 28,000 American College Testing Freshman Survey-takers were asked to identify "major" sources of information used in their college choice process (Coward, 1988). Survey-takers listed parents or other relatives (66.5%) as the most influential source of information, followed by friends attending college (56.4%), high school counselors (52.3%), teachers (44.8%), classmates (44.2%), college representatives who visit high schools (37.4%) and college alumni (36.5%) (1988). Coward's research concluded that students often search for college options among the kinds of institutions their close associates, particularly parents recommend.

Outside the United States parents are important to the college choice experience as well. In December 2000, the *London Times Higher Education Supplement* reported, "Market research by the University of Manchester into the role of parents shows how their importance has increased dramatically in recent years. They are now more influential than teachers when it comes to a sixth-former's choice of institution and course."

Parents are crucial partners in the college choice phenomenon. However, as Boyer (1987) explained, both parents and students consider the choice of college difficult and feel lacking in the amount of sound reasoning they possess to make specific college decisions. Parents especially express the need for better information on higher education determinants, such as cost and academic programs (1987). Consequently, colleges that want to communicate effectively

with prospective students must learn to communicate effectively with their parents or guardians.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore, through a phenomenological lens, college choice and the influence of parental perceptions on the phenomenon. At this stage in the research, the college choice phenomenon is generally defined as the overall process of selecting a post-secondary institution.

In light of the established importance of parents and the indications that a majority of student decisions are made with parental assistance, a more precise understanding of parents' views would assist institutions in their recruitment and enrollment efforts. Any policies and procedures designed to direct recruitment that are written in exclusion of such information could jeopardize an institution's ability to effectively maintain or increase enrollments.

Statement of the Problem

Based on college choice literature, it is apparent that the college choice phenomenon from the parental perspective is largely unexplored. Research commonly focuses on student sources of information and their influence on students as they select the colleges to which they apply and subsequently attend. Rarely does college choice research examine parental perceptions.

The Carnegie Foundation Survey of the Transition from High School to College (1985) discovered that the individuals wielding the most influence in the

college selection process, as reported by high school seniors, were parents (51%), followed by friends (23%), counselors (16%), and teachers (10%) (Boyer, 1987). In 2000, a survey conducted by Stamats Communication discovered that parents were the single most potent influence in the college choice process by an overwhelming 64% (Stamats, 2000).

The basic problem then is the lack of knowledge and understanding that higher education enrollment managers, public relations directors, admissions representatives, and recruiters at institutions across the nation possess about the college choice phenomenon, specifically: (a) the role parents play in the phenomenon; and (b) the specific characteristics parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives believe to be most essential in considering an academic institution for and with their college-bound student. Thus, through a qualitative phenomenological lens and a quantitative survey component, this research explored the college choice phenomenon during the 2002-2003 academic year in a rural Arizona school district.

Conceptual Framework

The parental role in the college choice process is complex with varied conclusions drawn from existing research. Historical research on the process lacks a portrayal of the underlying motivations and actions behind the variables of college choice, specifically the involvement and influence of parents (Berdie & Hood, 1966; Chapman, 1981; Maguire & Lay, 1981; Hossler & Bouse, 1991; Hossler & Gallagher, 1992). Over the last 40 years, the study of the college

choice process has escalated as researchers, administrators, and counselors have become increasingly interested in why college-bound students chose specific higher education institutions to attend. At first, the research revealed why certain students attended college in general and what factors were associated with that specific decision. As the number of colleges and universities spread and a heightened competition for students emerged, the research on college choice shifted towards a more comprehensive viewpoint exploring not only the outcomes of college, but specific topics such as college characteristics.

The theories of Pierre Bourdieu suggest an approach for examining the dynamic interaction between students, parents, admissions representatives, and the college choice phenomenon. "Bourdieu's theories provide a framework for understanding how individuals and organizations interact" (McDonough, 1994, p. 430). Using Bourdieu's influence, this research emphasizes his concepts of "cultural capital," "habitus," and "fields."

Bourdieuian theory advocates the notion that if one can understand something one can change it or improve it (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu based most of his research findings on the personal experience of an individual living in a society or in phenomenological terms, "the lived experience." He maintained the results of any research should be principles by which to influence the world one lives in. Further, Bourdieu deduced all human activity was directed toward accumulating capital (1977). Common definitions of the word capital suggest an economic meaning, but for Bourdieu capital meant the attainment of power, status, and prestige. Bourdieu believed the ability and talent of an individual

was primarily determined by the time and cultural capital invested in them by their parents (1977).

Following Bourdieuan theory, this research operationally defines cultural capital as educational attainment. Parents and students seeking high cultural capital attempt to secure the best possible education, hoping the decision to attend augments their chances of employment and other positive public and private outcomes (McDonough, 1994). In this work, parents who hold a "high" level of cultural capital have secured a four-year college degree or higher. Those who hold a "medium" level of cultural capital secured some college and a "low" level denotes the absence of any higher education exposure.

Habitus, as Bourdieu defines is, "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86). Simply put, it is an internalized, permanent system of beliefs about the world that an individual learns from his or her immediate environment; a common set of ideals that shape individual expectations and attitudes (McDonough, 1994). Bourdieu suggests habitus is created by social experiences and influences a human being to act a certain way or make certain decisions (1977). Thus, when selecting a college to attend or making choices about college choice, students systematically look at the people around them and observe their perceptions of what is good or appropriate (1994). Much of the time students look toward an authority in the area, such as admissions representatives, high school counselors, and parents

(Boyer, 1987; Cowart, 1988; Stamats, 2000). McDonough (1997) posits students look at colleges that mirror their current habitus.

Bourdieu's notion of fields is particularly valuable in understanding the interrelationships of students and parents and the college marketplace. Fields designate the areas in which people struggle for capital (McDonough, 1997). Thus, cultural capital is used to establish one's position within a field. Fields are not fixed and monolithic; they are subject to changes and hold different weights in contemporary society. In context, as the number of students attending college grows, competition heightens and the avenues that colleges use to attract students increase thereby expanding the number of field options. Fields are operationally defined in this research as competing higher education institutions.

The main purpose for using the theories of capital, habitus, and fields is to provide a framework for phenomenological analysis of the relationship between social structures and individuals as agents. Bourdieu's theories provide a solid, yet flexible framework to study and analyze college choice (see Figure 1).

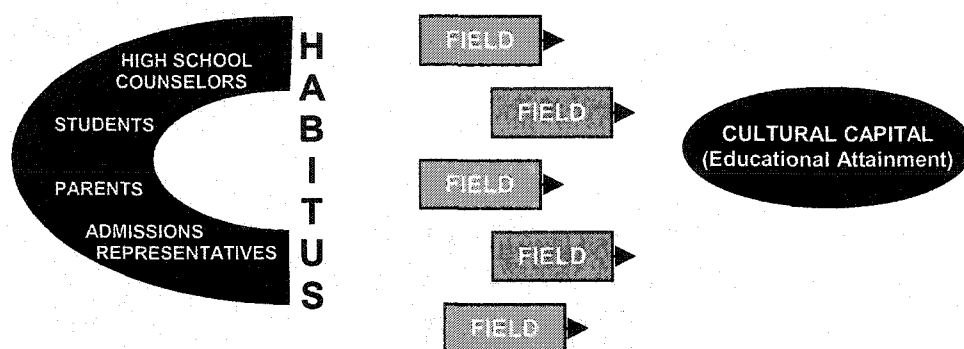


Figure 1. A Bourdieuan Framework for the College Choice Phenomenon

The framework represents Bourdieuan theory as it pertains to the college choice phenomenon. Players within the phenomenon choose among various fields based on their habitus in an effort to reach a level of cultural capital as shown in Figure 1.

Grounded in Bourdieuan theory, this research explored essential processes within college choice and the role of the parent in the overall college choice phenomenon. It identified indicators that differed across two generations and across different social groups by examining perceptions of the essence of the college choice phenomenon through the lenses of parents, junior students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives.

Research Questions

This exploratory, qualitative research incorporated a quantitative survey component to identify important and essential processes and characteristics in the college choice phenomenon. Parents of college –bound students were the principal focus of the investigation. Given the widely acknowledged influence of parents on college-bound students, an overarching question guided this study: what is the phenomenological experience of college choice for parents of college-bound students and the interrelated roles between such parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives?

In order to answer this question a number of sub-questions needed examination:

1. What are the current roles of parents and the relative strength of their influence (high, medium, or low) in the overall college choice phenomenon?
2. What are the current roles of parents and their overall level of involvement (very involved, somewhat involved, not involved) in the context of selecting an institution for and with their college-bound student?
3. What specific characteristics of choice are most important to parents in the phenomenological experience of choosing a college?
4. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by students?
5. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by high school counselors?
6. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by admissions representatives?
7. What sources of college information are most valuable in the college choice phenomenon?

Research Methodology

College choice is appropriately studied through a phenomenological lens. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that answers meaning questions and elicits the essence of an experience. Bruyn maintains (as cited in Creswell, 1998), "Phenomenology serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by entering into their fields of perception in order to see

life as these individuals see it" (p. 275). In order to ascertain the essential structure of the college choice process, it is desirable to learn the perceptions of the processes and the interactions that take place within those processes. The phenomenological approach reveals the meaning of the experience of choosing a college, the cultural knowledge used in the process, as well as the identification of the critical determinants of how one arrives at the decision point of choosing one college over another.

This work examined multiple actors who experienced the college choice phenomenon: students, parents, high school counselors, and admissions representatives. In addition to surveying the entire population of junior students in the Camino River High School District, the qualitative research component employed a purposeful sampling strategy of maximum variation to identify ten college-bound students and their parents for interviewing and arrive at a phenomenological experience in terms of college choice. Throughout this research, pseudonyms were used in place of the actual names of the participating school district and high schools.

For most students, the college search escalates in their junior year of high school (Boyer, 1987; Beyer, 1992). Thus, this research focuses on junior students and their parents immersed in the process of college choice, not senior students and their parents who may have already formalized their college selection. In addition, by using junior students and their parents, the work avoided the need for retrospection and the methodological concerns that can arise with such research.

Each counselor was given specific instructions in assembling the maximum variation sample to ensure the acquisition of the widest possible range of characteristics under the umbrella of college-bound. Most phenomenologists recommend conducting interviews with up to ten individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, for the phenomenological portion participants included, ten college-bound student informants (5 male and 5 female), ten parents (4 male and 6 female), two high school counselors from the two northern Arizona schools, and six admissions representatives from the top feeder higher education institutions serving the Mission County region (Arizona State University, Mohave Community College, Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona, University of Nevada – Las Vegas, Yavapi Community College). Participants involved in the survey portion of this research included the total population of junior students in the Camino River Union High School District, which number 484 (Mission High School, 308; Rio Vista High School 176).

According to statistical data reported by Camino River Union High School District most students from Mission County who attend college after high school choose a regional institution (Silk, 2002). Both high schools in this research are academically average secondary schools where only portions of the students graduate from high school and an even smaller contingency continue directly to post-secondary education (2002).

Semi-formal interviews were conducted with students, parents, and high school counselors. Each interview was tape-recorded, transcribed, coded, and

analyzed. Admissions representatives were interviewed by telephone or optional fax survey. The research process for students, parents, and high school counselors was administered in two phases.

The first phase contained a survey, composed of a number of structured, self-administered, closed-ended questions regarding college characteristics, college information sources, and the primary purposes of college. Unable to identify any study of this nature, which concentrates on the parents of junior students, the survey instruments for each sample population were specifically developed for this phenomenological study. The closed-ended questions contained within each survey instrument utilize components from existing surveys, specifically Beyer's (1992) survey instrument and Buford's (1987) parent survey instrument, information from the review of literature, and assistance from high school and college personnel. Data analysis of the quantitative survey responses employed descriptive methods, which included frequency counts, percentages, and cross tabulations.

The second phase, limited to five Mission High School students and five Rio Vista High School students and their parents or guardians, encompassed a semi-structured interview protocol. This process was grounded in phenomenological methodology, and allowed for exploration of Bourdieu's concept of habitus by interviewing parents, students, counselors, and admissions representatives to untangle the kinds of roles and perceptions each of these individuals assumed in the phenomenon. Prior to conducting the interviews and

as part of the participation in the study, each informant agreed to and signed an official consent form.

Analysis of each transcribed interview followed the phenomenological tradition of description, classification, reduction, interpretation, and representation (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). These processes reduced experiences through the identification of significant statements or meaning units, core themes, and descriptions of the “essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (1994, p. 100). Significant statements consisted of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping interview statements. Each statement was classified into a core theme and synthesized into textural (what) and structural (how) descriptions that collectively shared the experiences of each participant in the study. Vignettes and excerpts culled from participant interviews were used as illustrative evidence of the phenomenological understanding of the college choice process.

“Bracketing” or “phenomenological epoche,” concepts in which the researcher sets aside all preconceived notions or experiences to understand the practice of the participants were used to stabilize validity and reliability issues. Further, to safeguard intersubjective validity a number of specific steps, including outside reader reviews and verification and confirmation of identifying patterns, were implemented.

Significance of the Study

Increasingly, U.S. postsecondary institutions are competing among themselves to secure resources, to enroll enough students to maintain legitimacy

and fiscal security (McDonough, 1994). "Over the last twenty-five years college admissions staffs have grown exponentially and there is an increased stratification of U.S. colleges and universities" (p. 431). This competition continues to lead to differentiated admissions standards and elaborate marketing plans. Burgeoning competition for college students has stimulated a frenzy of marketing within academia (1994). "Fearing threatening enrollment declines colleges increased their marketing budgets by 64% from 1980 to 1986, and on average spent \$1700 to bring in each new student" (p. 432). It is of critical importance to inquire into the parental generation's expectations held for institutions of higher learning.

Knowledge of college perceptions and preferred collegiate characteristics is valuable to institutions as they seek to attract the appropriate "best fit" prospective student. Marketing efforts within colleges often try to match institutions, students, and media to messages as well as align selected organizational attributes to the particular needs of a specific clientele (Litten, 1981). Challenges for institutions come from trying to identify the needs of consumers. Thus, the primary significance of this study is to provide reliable and accurate data for institutional marketing, admissions, and recruitment that assists parents and college-bound students in a way that will increase the probabilities of experiencing success in their search for the "right" college.

However, a more deeply rooted significance for this research exists. Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) suggest student college choice "should be of interest to both policy-makers and researchers for reasons that go

beyond its relationship to aggregate postsecondary enrollments or the effects of attending college upon status attainment" (p. 234). Policy researchers forecast that the importance of student's decisions to continue their formal education beyond high school, as well as where they attend, have "important outcomes for society as well as the individual" (p. 234).

The historian Howard Bowen advocated, "the goals of higher education are concerned with the development of the full potential of human beings and of society" (1977). Higher education serves as a change agent in society to produce not only a well-educated populace but also a more just society. This research provides practical direction in understanding what information is vital to parents and reveals a contemporary look at the essence of the college choice process as a critical social phenomenon.

Assumptions, Limitations, & Delimitations

The study contains three primary assumptions: (a) the participating school district was representative of many rural school districts; (b) the participating school district was cooperative to the research; (c) responses provided by parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives reflected their true perceptions of the college choice phenomenon.

This work was delimited to parents of college-bound juniors in the Camino River Union High School District during the 2002-2003 academic school year.

Consequently, the research targets high school juniors currently enrolled in the district's two high schools: Mission High School and Rio Vista High School.

Other potential limitations in using a phenomenological approach concern the crucial issues of reliability and validity. Some believe qualitative researchers cannot consistently rely on their subjects' stories to depict social realities accurately (Babbie, 2001). However, phenomenological researchers desire to make sense out of the informant's perceptions of the world accurately. Thus, this research takes specific precautions to avoid unreliability by providing accurate documentation and supporting viewpoints.

The issue of validity or trustworthiness is operationalized and ensured in this work by implementing various verification procedures such as triangulation of data, writing with thick descriptions, peer debriefing, and outside reader review (Creswell, 1997).

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used consistently throughout this study:

1. Parent: A father or mother or an individual serving as a mentor or guide for a dependent child.
2. College choice or college choice process: The process of selecting a particular post-secondary institution to attend.
3. College selection process: The process of exploring various post-secondary institutions and identifying important characteristics of each.

4. College-bound student: A student that is intending to proceed with their education by attending a post-secondary institution.
5. Parental influences: preferences, perceptions, or attitudes parents exhibit when advising their children about post-secondary educational activities.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters, finishing with a bibliography of citations and appendices. Chapter one contains the introduction and an overview of the research focusing on these specific areas: background and purpose of the study, statement of the problem, conceptual framework, research questions, methodology, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, definition of terms, organization of the dissertation, and summary. A comprehensive review of college choice literature comprises chapter two. Chapter three or the methodology section includes a brief review of the problem, purpose, and research questions of the study, as well as the design, population, collection of data, and procedures of data analysis. Along with a brief review of the study, the presentation of the results of the analysis of data and serendipitous findings and summary encapsulate chapter four. Chapter five provides a brief review of findings, conclusions based on the results of the research, implications for higher education in general, parents, and high school counselors, along with recommendations for further research.

Summary

Based on the importance society places on higher education, it is not surprising that most studies have found that parents play a strong and active role in the decision-making processes of college choice. Parents traverse the country to take campus tours. Parents stay up late to help their college-bound student fill out applications before deadlines pass. Parents consult with their student on college choice. It is obvious that parents are actively engaged in the process of selecting a college with their child.

The findings of this phenomenological study are intended to assist higher education institutions as they service the growing awareness of the parent population of college-bound students. The utility of this research is to provide reliable and accurate data about the college choice phenomenon for institutional marketing, admissions, and recruitment personnel, who can then use these data to assist parents and college-bound students in a way that will increase the probabilities of experiencing success in their search for the "right" college.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historic Movements of College Choice Theory

Historic research on the study of college choice theory focused primarily on academically successful students who possessed the resources to meet the growing costs of college. As a result, much of the early research is limited to a high socio-economic student populace. These initial studies employed diverse methodological approaches and ranged from single institutional studies to causal models of postsecondary educational attainment (Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith, 1989). This literature review reflects on five decades of college choice research and traces the changing nature of the college choice phenomenon particularly as it pertains to parental involvement.

After World War II, the number of colleges and universities and the competition for students exploded simultaneously. Concomitantly, the study of college choice increased as researchers, higher education administrators, and high school counselors focused their interest on understanding why college-bound students chose to attend a specific higher education institution over another. This activity forced institutions to concentrate on strategic marketing plans to increase enrollment rather than the traditional academic focus of better understanding student choices (Beyer, 1992).

In an attempt to bring organization to the literature on college choice, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section reviews initial college choice theory studies. Subsequent sections focus specifically on research that examines and explores the linkages between students and parents. This is accomplished in two parts, a review of major studies conducted on general college choice factors and models and an exploration of specific studies concentrating on parental involvement and parental factors of choice.

Initial College Choice Theory Studies

In 1959, John Holland conducted a definitive study on college choice theory. Holland analyzed the 1957 National Merit Scholarship students to determine the characteristics that contributed to the selection of a specific college or university. His survey findings, based on a 92% return rate, reported that college choice depended on the student's cultural and personal development within the family background. Holland's results emphasized a growing belief among society that popular colleges were best and students selecting these colleges and universities appeared to be more satisfied with their choice (1959). Furthermore, Holland's research suggested parents believed the more popular colleges were the superior choice (1959).

The next major study on college choice theory, guided by Richards and Holland (1964), studied typical influences of college choice used by high school and college personnel in assisting students. This sample consisted of 8,292 students, which represented 3% of the November 1964 American Council on

Testing (ACT) national sample of test-takers. Richards and Holland's findings established that college choice influences could be categorically grouped as: intellectual (faculty rating, national reputation, scholastic standards); influential (advice of parents, teachers, counselors, alumni); practical (distance from home, cost, convenience); and social (social climate, athletic programs, coeducational status) (Richards & Holland, 1964).

From 1950 to the late 1960's, Ralph Berdie organized several studies related to college choice theory. One of his most significant works, conducted by Berdie and Hood (1966), examined the predictability of college choice attendance by studying student academic ability, along with socioeconomic, cultural, and personality factors. Berdie and Hood found an influential relationship between gender and college plans, but failed to single out a primary predictor variable in assessing which college or university high school graduates attend. They reported, "The same forces tend to be present in each field, parents, friends, teachers, counselors, but the strength of these forces and the manner in which they influence student behavior vary from person to person" (p. 493).

Early studies on college choice cleared the way for broader investigation of specific college choice factors. These factors often involved the role of parents; thus the investigation of parental influence became a novel approach in the total college choice phenomenon.

College Choice Factors

Although much of the research on college choice concluded more than a decade ago, many of the results still apply and relate in conceptualization and methodology. The most commonly documented college choice factors include: quality of education and teaching, facilities, costs, and geographic location. Family income, educational background, occupations, student academic ability, student achievement, and peer influence are other significant factors used to provide a clearer understanding of college choice. Three key studies yield meaningful insight into the history of factors affecting college choice, Bowers and Pugh (1973), Maguire and Lay (1981), Litten and Hall (1989).

The first major work to explore college choice factors from the perspective of both parents and students used a single site study conducted by Bowers and Pugh at Indiana State University. Six factors were identified in this research and labeled as social and cultural, financial, informal advice, geographic location, academic, and formal advice. Results suggested that among the most potent factors for parents in the college decision process were financial, geographical, and academic factors. Students however, indicated social, cultural, and informal advice as more important.

Bowers and Pugh's results indicated that students and parents report different factors as important in the college choice decision (1973). For example, parental advice scored much higher by students than by parents (1973). Bowers and Pugh concluded that a complex interaction occurs between students and

parents, but failed to gauge the actual weight of parental influence in the overall college choice decision.

Maguire and Lay (1981) attempted to differentiate between decision-making and image development among students who chose to attend Boston University. Academics, reputation, athletics, social and spatial relations, costs and size, and quality all emerged as salient image factors affecting Boston University's enrollment. Parental preference, specific academic programs, size of school, location of campus, and social activities were all variables revealing the most significant amount of variance among students' decision-making activities. Although Maguire and Lay's findings are more reflective of the specific institution (Boston University) than general factors that influence enrollment, the factors emerged consistently and supported previous college choice research (Bowers and Pugh, 1973).

Litten and Hall's (1989) landmark research on college choice factors established a framework for researchers examining the linkage between students and parents in the college choice process. They researched how parents of high-ability students viewed quality in post-secondary education. Their sample consisted of students from Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver, and Seattle, who had taken the preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) in 1983 and showed combined scores of 113 or greater, with a score of at least 50 on both tests. Telephone interviews were completed with 54% of the students and 51% of the parents. Each person was given two lists containing 10 -11 characteristics that indicated collegiate quality. Participants were asked to, "select four that were the

best descriptions of quality” (Litten & Hall, 1989, p. 312). From the two lists and eight combined variables, respondents were further asked to narrow the list to three of the best indicators of a top-quality institution.

The results of the study suggested that different people view quality in colleges and universities in different terms. The most frequently cited descriptors included outcomes, program characteristics, faculty behavior, and facilities (Litten & Hall, 1989). Only one item was selected by the majority of parents as one of the three best indicators: admission to top graduate and professional schools (1989). Overall, parents exhibited a greater propensity than did students to select quality indicators that related to faculty (1989). The majority of the students interviewed selected indicators relating to enrolled students and aspects of the institution's programming. Males were more likely to select indicators related to prestige, while females selected indicators dealing with aspects of an institution's program (1989).

Litten and Hall's study concluded that a lack of consensus in determining quality is not surprising when considering the numerous benefits that people seek from higher education. However, the study reported parents tended to select quality indicators related to faculty and programming and students showed a greater interest in measures relating to enrolled students and activities (Litten & Hall, 1989). Litten and Hall's final observation advised, “The education of people who are choosing colleges is an important prelude to helping them choose institutions where they will receive high quality college degrees” (1989, p. 322).

College Choice Models

From the early studies of college choice various models and frameworks populate the literature and corpus of data on the subject. Although few in number college choice models are grounded in extensive research on the college choice process and the changing environment of higher education. Significant factors such as the decline of traditional-aged college students and the increase in enrollment competition led to the development and promulgation of college choice models (Beyer, 1992). These models provide a more comprehensive understanding of the student market and assist higher education institutions in developing effective recruitment strategies (1992). Surprisingly, many of the models in existence overlap one another in one form or another. Some are simplified versions of others. Primary differences between the models of college choice lie in how they define institutional activity (Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith, 1989).

College choice research investigates and identifies critical factors in the college choice process, but few studies support their findings with systematic methods or models. Only four models developed after 1975 attempted to address the need for a pragmatic model to understand college choice.

In 1981, D. W. Chapman developed one of the first derivative college choice models applicable to traditional-aged prospective students (see Figure 2). Chapman's model incorporated a two-fold purpose, "to assist college administrators responsible for setting recruitment policy, to identify the influences they need to consider in developing institutional recruiting policy, and aid

continued research in the area of student college choice" (p. 492). Chapman's review of literature concluded that most studies address decisions to attend college while avoiding the issue of which college to attend (Chapman, 1981). Consequently, he developed a model describing important variable sets and their interrelationships as a means of guiding future student inquiry and decision-making processes.

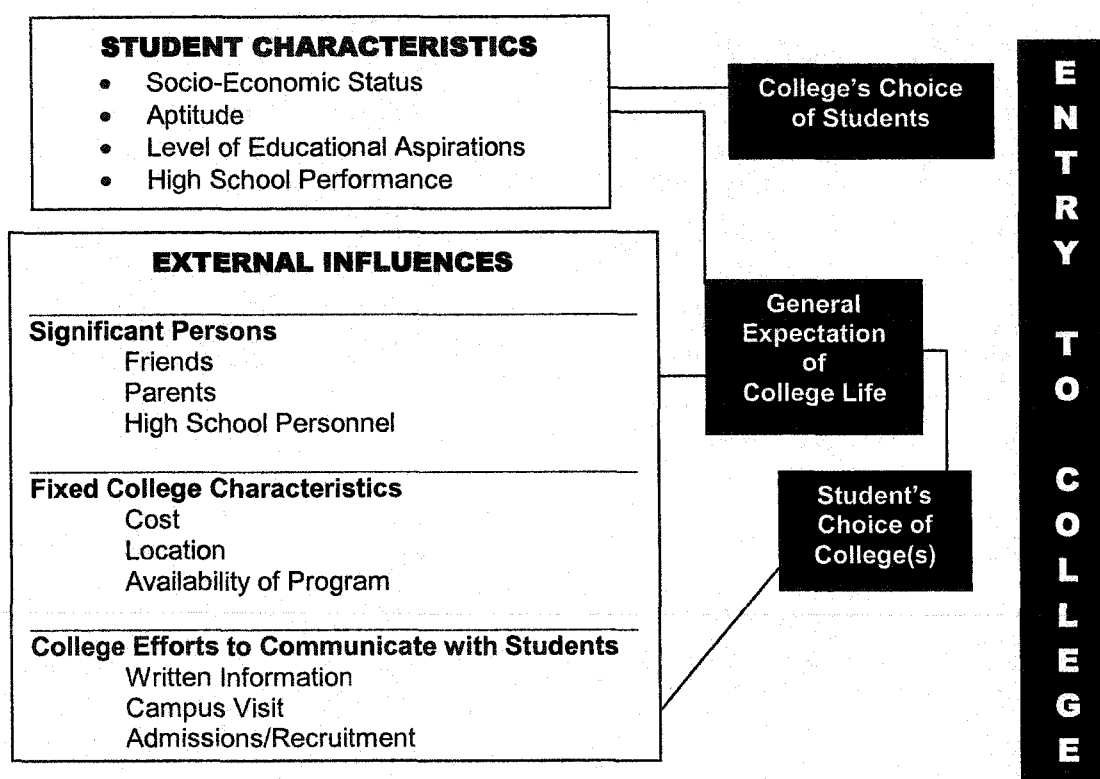


Figure 2. Chapman's Influence of Student College Choice Model (adapted from Chapman, 1981)

The model, as shown in Figure 2, included salient student variables such as socio-economic status, aptitude, level of educational aspiration, and high

school performance in the general category of student characteristics. Chapman claimed students self-select colleges prior to application based on their own assessment of aptitude as demonstrated by their high school performance (1981). Under the heading of external influence, Chapman defined significant persons, fixed college characteristics, and college communication efforts.

Chapman's research supported the notion that parents exert the most influence on college choice along with counselors, peers, teachers, and college admissions officers (1981). Although this model has been described as longitudinal in nature, its author does not presume a progression through discrete stages as do subsequent researchers (Litten, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Nevertheless, Chapman's model demonstrates that college choice is influenced by a set of student characteristics combined with a series of external factors.

Chapman concluded that the choice of which college to attend is influenced by, "the background and characteristics of the student, the student's family, and various external influences such as the influence of significant persons, fixed characteristics of college, and the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective students" (1981, p. 503). The Chapman model serves as a useful framework for all researchers of college choice theory.

Another 1981 study examined consumer-buying roles from the perceptions of parents and students (Murphy, 1981). Murphy developed a college choice model grounded in consumer-buying behavior. His model asked the question: "Who plays the roles of initiator, influencer, and decider with respect to college choice?" Murphy conducted his research by identifying roles

based on responses of high school seniors surveyed from six Milwaukee high schools and interviews of parents of students who had been accepted at a local university (Murphy, 1981). Results of the study concluded the majority of students (52%) made the decision to attend college while in grade school and that students considered academic reputation and cost as major factors in the college choice process (1981). Students and parents agreed that parents had the most influence on the decision to attend college, while students made the final decision about where to attend (1981).

Along with Murphy's marketing approach, Kotler (1976) observed the process of college choice and related activities by paying special attention to the marketing aspect of choosing a college. He proposed seven definitive stages of the student college selection process which included: (a) decision to attend, (b) information seeking and receiving, (c) specific college inquiries, (d) applications, (e) admissions, (f) college choice, and (e) registration.

Later, Litten used Chapman's longitudinal model of college choice and Kotler's process of enrolling in college from the student's perspective in creating an expanded model of the college selection process (1982). Combining the Chapman and Kotler models along with financial aid and financial considerations provided the right grounding for the development of an expanded model. This new model considered various dimensions of college choice through a systematic timing process (1982). Using his model, Litten synthesized three survey data sets of high school seniors in the state of Pennsylvania. Not only did Litten find that the influence of parents was influential, but the selection

process was closely tied to parental education, especially as it related to how information on college was obtained (1982). Litten's comprehensive decision-making model illustrated that the control variables possess a distinct point of impact and they continue to exert influence throughout the entire college choice process (Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith, 1989).

In 1987, Don Hossler and Karen Gallagher developed a significant and highly utilized college choice model. They analyzed previous research to present an overview of the central characteristics of student college choice, develop a three-stage model, and assess the impact of college choice on future policy (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Their college choice model combined three phases: predisposition, search, and choice as shown in Figure 3.

MODEL DIMENSIONS	INFLUENTIAL FACTORS		STUDENT OUTCOMES
	Individual Factors	Organizational Factors	
PREDISPOSITION (Phase One)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student characteristics ▪ Significant others ▪ Educational activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School characteristics 	Search for: a. College options b. Other options
SEARCH (Phase Two)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student preliminary college values ▪ Student search activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ College and university search activities (search for students) 	a. Choice set b. Other options
CHOICE (Phase Three)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choice sets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ College and university courtship activities 	a. Choices

Figure 3. Three-Phase Model of College Choice
(adapted from Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

At each phase the model delineated influential factors, both those specific to the individual student and to the educational organization. The first phase, "predisposition," was a developmental phase where students determine whether they would like to continue their education beyond high school. For those

students who have been reared with the expectation of college attendance, this particular stage was negotiated between student and parent easily and in early years. Other students postponed this decision until application deadlines and other factors force them to make a choice. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) indicated student characteristics, significant others, and the student's educational activities of significant importance at this stage. School characteristics served as the influential "organization factor," a term related to either the student's high school or the college or colleges in the student's selection set.

In the "search" phase college-bound students proactively explored colleges and universities during a specific time period. Students collected specific information about colleges and clarified preferences and needs within their choice set. At the same time organizations were engaged in their own search strategies to enroll students.

The last, the "choice" phase, involved deciding which college or university to actually attend. The choice set the student developed served as the influential individual factor. While students evaluated their choice set, institutions of higher learning engaged in courtship activities. Hossler & Gallagher suggested it is at this point that a student must synthesize the information they have gathered in previous stages and execute a final choice (1987). Hossler and Gallagher's study confirmed two previous conclusions suggested by college choice researchers: (a) parental encouragement plays a very significant role in the college choice process; and (b) important deciding factors include socioeconomic status, student ability, and proximity to campus (1987).

Higher education institutions everywhere depend on the utility of college choice models in predicting and interacting with prospective students and parents. Similarly, these models portray a students' progression from aspiring toward higher education, to exploring options, to the final decision of college selection. Each of the models discussed have yielded proven utility in the development of enrollment tactics and strategies. However, in light of globalization, the advent of the Internet, demography changes, and a host of other factors affecting higher education and higher education consumers, there is a substantial need for new models of college choice.

Parental Influence and Involvement

Parents everywhere share the belief in the utility of higher education. A recent *Gallup* survey of parents with children in their first year of high school found that 97% of parents agreed with the statement, "A college education will enrich the quality of my child's life" (Miller, 1997, p. 9).

Another survey conducted by *Public Agenda*, a non-partisan research organization at Villanova University, emphasized the importance of education as "absolutely necessary," reporting "in the most extensive public opinion survey ever conducted about views on higher education in the United States, two-thirds of parents said they believe a university education is absolutely necessary for their children" (Marcus, 2000, p. 11).

A number of studies conducted on parental involvement and encouragement support the notion that parents strongly influence the college

choice process. One of the first documented works on parents and the college choice process was conducted in the late 1960's but not published until 1981. The longitudinal study, guided by Conklin and Daily (1981), examined whether the presence or absence of the assumption that a child would go to college influenced college entry and college choice decisions. Using multiple-regression techniques to analyze data from a sample of high schools students in New York State communities, they examined, "the consistency of parental encouragement over a four year period, as well as the association between senior year parental encouragement and post high school educational activity" (1981, p. 255). Over 2,700 freshmen from seven public and parochial high schools were surveyed in the spring of 1967. Second and third waves were administered in the spring of 1968 and 1970. The respondents were in 10th grade during the first wave and 12th grade during the last. Survey responses were received from 88% of the initial freshman panel, with 62% of the overall freshman panel completing surveys at all three measurement points.

Conklin and Dailey reported consistency of parental encouragement was positively associated with college entry and with attendance at a four-year college. They claimed, "The consistency and pattern of parental support over the four year high school period is related to the presence or absence of post-secondary activity as well as the type of educational institution attended" (1981, p. 261). Most notably, the researchers found that an individual has a higher probability of attending a four-year school when he or she has positive parental encouragement throughout the high school years than those who do not receive

such positive support (1981). Thus, parental support does have an impact on the decision to attend college and the type of college selected.

The work of Reynolds (1981) sheds light on the importance of parental perceptions and parents' interactions with admission officers. After interviewing over 500 parents about their perceptions of the college admission process, she concluded, "Parents have definite attitudes about college choice developed in the same way as those of students, through informed and intuitive responses to people, places, and situations" (p. 25). Reynolds suggests, "in its broadest sense college selection can be viewed as a partnership in which the parent and child must negotiate an agreement" (p. 27). She also emphasized the need for admission officers to be considerate of parents, warning that the treatment of parents will ultimately affect the college choice decisions their child makes (1981).

Dissertation research conducted by Lynn (1984) surveyed freshman students admitted to the University of Colorado, Boulder for fall semester 1983 and the parents of those students. The study analyzed the differences between students' and parents' perceptions of the parental role at various stages in the college choice process, as well as identified characteristics of importance to very influential parents in the choice process. Lynn not only confirmed earlier studies showing that parents were perceived to exert some influence in the college choice process, but uncovered the importance of considering parents of prospective students in institutional marketing strategies and recruitment techniques. Lynn cautioned, "The absence of previous research concerning

parental influence in the college choice decision may be interpreted as a lack of awareness by colleges of the importance of the parental role in the recruitment of students" (p.100).

Beyer, in his dissertation research on parent perceptions of Colorado community colleges, examined factors and variables which contributed to perceptions and their influence on the college choice process (1992). The study's most important accomplishment posited, "Parents do have a significant role in the college choice process with their high school seniors, there is an apparent need to enhance their knowledge, particularly as it relates to educational quality" (1992, p. 126). Clearly, Beyer's research supported the notion that parents do indeed play an important and influential role in the college choice process, but failed to explore the amount of influence they realistically possess.

The most potent research concentrating on factors affecting the college choice process employed a longitudinal data set of 4,923 ninth grade students attending twenty-one high schools in Indiana and their parents (Bouse & Hossler, 1991). Based on a cluster sampling design, Bouse and Hossler surveyed students eleven times between their freshman and senior years (1986-87 to 1989-90) and interviewed a representative sample of students and their parents four times during their junior and senior years (1991). Bouse and Hossler based their study on Hossler and Gallagher Model of College Choice, which posits three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. Through multiple regression data analysis, the researchers suggested parental encouragement was the best

predictor of the predisposition stage or time when students determine whether or not they will continue their formal education beyond high school. The most valuable finding from this study reemphasized the importance of parental involvement in the college choice phenomenon suggesting, "The results...indicate that parents must be involved early in any intervention designed to increase the number of students enrolling in postsecondary education" (p. 15).

Parental Factors in the College Choice Process

A significant and early study investigating college characteristic factors guided by Litten (1981) assessed primary aspects of colleges important to parents of high school seniors in the selection process. Litten's 1978 survey, conducted in part with the College Board and based at Carleton College, included self-administered surveys mailed to 2,000 parents of whom 47% responded (Litten, 1981). The results of the survey identified important "things to know" about a college from a parental perspective. Financial information headed the list, with 54% of the parents citing it as the most important type of information (1981).

Sanders (1986) work focused on important characteristics of college choice, by researching parent and student perceptions at Washington State University (WSU). During the spring of 1984, WSU's Admissions Department conducted research in Washington's 12th grade marketplace through mail surveys. From the students, parents, and counselors independently surveyed, eight factors were identified and ranked as most important in the college

selection process. In almost every factor, students mirrored their parent's expectations. The highest scoring factors for students, listed in rank order included employment opportunities after graduation, variety of courses, reputation of faculty, cost of attendance, and specific academic programs. Parents identified reputation of faculty, employment opportunities after graduation, specific academic programs, general school reputation, and costs as most salient (1986).

In 1987, Buford gathered data from parents of currently enrolled college freshmen regarding the information they felt was important in making informed college choice decisions (1987). Buford asked parents to indicate characteristics of the "ideal" institution. The 300 mail surveys distributed in the spring of 1987 requested parents to describe the "ideal" institution in a variety of terms. With a response rate of 58%, most parents agreed they valued a high quality program (99.1%). Two thirds of the parent respondents suggested the school's enrollment should be between 2,000 – 3,999 students (1987). The majority (53.8%) considered the ideal college to be 100 to 200 miles from home, and more than two thirds of the parents surveyed suggested the ideal tuition to sit between \$5,000 – \$9,999 a year (1987). In her conclusion, Buford notes, "Whether the child receives financial aid was not a deciding factor in the decision of which school to attend" (p. 15).

Buford's findings are in direct contrast to another study conducted in 1985 in which parents listed information about financial aid high on their list of factors that influence college choice (Sevier, 1987). The Sevier study reported many

parents were equally interested in knowing about drug and alcohol use on campus; these were palpable factors in deciding which college their child attended (1987).

The last significant research to focus specifically on the role of parental influence was published in 1992. Thomas Flint examined parents and eight-grade children embedded in an expanded model of college choice. Using Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) three-phase college choice model as a framework, Flint surveyed a sample of 1300 Illinois parents with a return rate of 27%. The most significant evidence in this study suggested that in the college search phase, "parents are less concerned about costs and more focused on college reputation, especially degree offerings and selectivity" (1992, p. 704). The transitional nature of parental perspectives posits that the college choice phenomenon is constantly evolving.

Summary

From these studies, it is obvious that parents play a role in the college choice phenomenon. However, the specifics of that role are not widely understood. In addition, many of the investigations reviewed in this research, while grounded in pragmatic problems, lack theoretical foundations. Each one assumes a different set of assumptions and varies significantly in survey instrumentation and interview protocol. Consequently, the variance in research findings and results leaves confounding gaps to explore and examine.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) observed the propensity of college choice studies in single institution research. Typically, current college students have been asked to identify variables that attracted them to the institution they are attending. Different attributes are likely to be more or less attractive at different colleges, thus the generalizability of these studies is questionable. Furthermore, the retrospective nature of the data collection methodology in many studies presents problematic concerns in that students must recall those factors that were important to them as they made their college selection.

This literature review reinforces the seminal and persistent role of parents in the processes of college choice. However, few empirical studies center specifically on parental perceptions. Certainly, higher education would benefit from additional college choice research focusing on the parental role from pre-high school and beyond. The variety of college choice models examined in this research present another critical need for a fully developed model of college choice that embraces the multiple components of modern college choice processes. Furthermore, the contemporary higher education environment is greatly influenced by concerns of demographics, economic environments, and competition. These same concerns affect college choice processes and must be carefully monitored by higher education researchers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction & Review of Study

The purposes of this chapter are to identify the methods used and procedures followed in this college choice research. College choice has consistently been in the domain of quantitative analysts (McDonough, 1997). Nonetheless, this work focused on the college choice phenomenon from a qualitative perspective.

The research used a contemporary theoretical approach grounded in the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and organized by McDonough (1997) in her research on how students choose colleges. Bourdieu's cultural capital conceptual framework has served as the foundation for many contemporary sociological and educational studies on educational achievement and college selection (1997). This specific investigation explored contexts of the college choice phenomenon and the essential use of the embedded theoretical constructs of cultural, habitus, and fields.

Statement of the Problem

The fundamental problem this research addressed was the lack of knowledge and understanding that higher education representatives at

institutions across the nation--and specifically institutions serving rural populations—possess about the college choice phenomenon, the role parents play in the phenomenon, and the specific characteristics parents believe to be most essential in considering an academic institution for and with their college-bound student. Despite the considerable evidence that parents are key players in the college selection process, little quantitative and even less qualitative research exists concentrating on parental viewpoints.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore, through a phenomenological lens, parental perceptions within the college choice phenomenon. Further, the work explored the interrelated perceptions of students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives relative to college purposes, characteristics, and information sources. The college choice phenomenon was generally defined as the overall process of selecting a post-secondary institution.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this research asked: what is the phenomenological experience of college choice for parents of college-bound students and the interrelated roles between such parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives? Sub-questions included:

1. What are the current roles of parents and the relative strength of their influence (high, medium, or low) in the overall college choice phenomenon?
2. What are the current roles of parents and their overall level of involvement (very involved, somewhat involved, not involved) in the context of selecting an institution for and with their college-bound student?
3. What specific characteristics of choice are most important to parents in the phenomenological experience of choosing a college?
4. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by students?
5. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by high school counselors?
6. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by admissions representatives?
7. What sources of college information are most valuable in the college choice phenomenon?

E-Mail Pilot Study

In conjunction with this study, an informal electronic mail survey was conducted to gather information that might indicate the role parents play in the college choice process from the perspective of college admissions representatives. The purpose of the survey was to ensure the pragmatism of this research. The three-question survey sent via the internet to a systematic sample

of 120 admissions representatives who recruit at Arizona college fairs and hail from private and public institutions all over the nation, yielded valuable results. The survey produced 48 responses, a 40% return rate. Survey questions included:

1. Do parents play a pivotal role in a college-bound student's decision to attend a specific college or university?
2. Research appears to indicate that parents wield the most influence over a student's decision to select a college other than the student themselves, do you agree (yes or no)?
3. Would it be helpful to know what collegiate characteristics parents look for in assisting their college-bound student?

Over 91% of those responding to the e-mail survey said that parents played a pivotal role in a college-bound student's decision to attend a specific college or university. An overwhelming 81% agreed that parents wield the most influence over a student's decision to select a college other than the student themselves, 17% of respondents indicated they thought other influences were involved, and 2% were not sure. Of the admissions representatives responding 93% agreed it would be helpful to know what college characteristics parents look for in assisting their college-bound student with the college choice process.

Design of the Study

This research posited the question, given the significant involvement of parents in the college choice process, what then is the role of parents in assisting

their college-bound student in college choice? Because there were few studies exploring parent perceptions of the college choice process in the literature, a phenomenological study devoted to understanding parent's "lived experiences" as partners with students lent itself best in examining this question.

The work was exploratory in nature, dominated by a qualitative design and supported by a quantitative component. The qualitative approach, phenomenology, enforced a descriptive component that depicted the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals involved in the phenomenon (Creswell, 1994). The quantitative component appeared in survey form to accumulate descriptive data regarding college characteristics, information sources, and college purposes.

The qualitative phenomenology approach attempted to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied. Edmund Husserl developed the first musing on phenomenological philosophy in 1913. Husserl believed phenomenological researchers search for the "essential, invariant structure or essence or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Furthermore, Husserl's work introduced the concepts of "bracketing" and "epoche." Bracketing is a process in which the researcher sets aside all prejudgments and relies on intuition to obtain a picture of the lived experience(s) (1998). Epoche is a suspension of all judgments about what is real until they are founded on a more certain or stable basis (1998). The

concepts of bracketing and epoche were central to this work. At every step, the researcher bracketed preconceived notions of the college choice phenomenon in order to understand it through the voices of informants.

As a methodology, phenomenology is best described as a detailed description of human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, this qualitative approach provided the basis for a portrayal of the essences of the college choice phenomenon through the experiences and perceptions of several key informants: parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives.

The quantitative component of this work incorporated survey research to explore individual informants' viewpoints. Although numerous studies have been conducted on the college choice process, few have focused specifically on parental perceptions and even fewer included contemporary information sources such as the worldwide web and other forms of technology. The absence of an existing survey instrument with similar objectives necessitated the development of a specific instrument for this research. Thus, four survey instruments were developed for this work as shown in Appendix I, III, V, VII. Each survey was developed by utilizing and modifying existing surveys, specifically Beyer's (1992) survey instrument, Buford's (1987) parent survey instrument, information from the review of literature, and assistance from high school and college personnel.

The development of the common survey design followed Babbie's (2001) survey guidelines, which implements question clarity, relevancy, and simplicity, and survey readability, format, and bias. The questions were designed to obtain information concerning perception, understanding, and knowledge of the college

choice process, college characteristics, college information sources, the primary purposes of college, and the level of parental influence and involvement in the college choice process. The survey instruments supported the phenomenological approach by reinforcing the identification of meaning statements and invariant textural structural themes within the phenomenon.

Population

The primary population for this exploration consisted of the parents of college-bound, junior students in the Camino River Union High School District. To determine the parent population, the student sample was identified first by employing a purposeful sampling strategy of maximum variation. Maximum variation sampling, as Creswell (1998) defined, “documents diverse variations and identifies important common patterns” (p. 119). This type of sampling ensured the acquisition of the widest possible range of characteristics. Thus, under the umbrella of college-bound a range of ethnicity, social involvement, and academic skill was identified and measured. Additionally, the sample mirrored the ethnic populations at each host high school site. Mission High School’s junior class exhibited an ethnic breakdown of White (68%), Hispanic (28%), African American (.97%), Native American (1.6%), and Asian American (1.2%) students (see Table 1). Rio Vista High School’s junior class compiled White (85.2%), Hispanic (10.8%), Native American (3.4%), Asian American (.56%), and African American (0%) students (see Table 2). These populations mirrored the total

school population and served as percentage guidelines in identifying the maximum variation sample.

Table 1 Ethnic Percentage Breakdown of High School District

	White	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Asian	
MHS Junior Class	Male: 107 Female: 102 Total: 209 (67.8%)	Male: 0 Female: 3 Total: 3 (.97%)	Male: 43 Female: 44 Total: 87 (28.2%)	Male: 3 Female: 2 Total: 5 (1.6%)	Male: 3 Female: 1 Total: 4 (1.2%)	308
MHS (9-12)	Male: 412 Female: 400 Total: 812 (66.2%)	Male: 7 Female: 11 Total: 18 (1.46%)	Male: 188 Female: 174 Total: 362 (29.5%)	Male: 12 Female: 7 Total: 19 (1.55%)	Male: 7 Female: 7 Total: 14 (1.14%)	1,225
RVHS Junior Class	Male: 76 Female: 74 Total: 150 (85.2%)	Male: 0 Female: 0 Total: 0 (0%)	Male: 9 Female: 10 Total: 19 (10.8%)	Male: 5 Female: 2 Total: 6 (3.4%)	Male: 0 Female: 1 Total: 1 (.56%)	176
RVHS (9-12)	Male: 298 Female: 278 Total: 576 (80.1%)	Male: 2 Female: 1 Total: 3 (.41%)	Male: 57 Female: 44 Total: 101 (14%)	Male: 18 Female: 17 Total: 35 (4.8%)	Male: 1 Female: 3 Total: 4 (.55%)	719

Common to phenomenological studies, access to a population is often limited to finding the individuals who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Thus, in an effort to capture the ongoing process or "lived experience" junior college-bound students were used rather than senior students who had already experienced the phenomenon of college choice.

The high school counselors selected to participate in this study were given detailed instructions to assist them in assembling the college-bound student sample. The potential number of parents involved in this research numbered as many as 20 informants, but the survey instrument and interview protocol required

completion by only one parent, not two. Thus, the primary parent participant was determined from consent forms as well as a student interview question requesting identification of a key parent informant. As a result, the number of parent informants was limited to ten as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Research Informants

Informants	Sampling Strategy	Demographics		Data Collection Procedures
		MHS	RVHS	
Junior Students		308	176	• Survey
Junior Students	Maximum Variation Sampling	5	5	• Interview • Survey
Parent's of Junior Students	Maximum Variation Sampling		10	• Interview • Survey
High School Counselors	Convenience Sampling		2	• Interview • Survey
Admissions Representatives			6	• Interview • Survey

The study surveyed the total population of junior students, which provided insight into the college choice process for all students, not only the high achievers or specific college-bound students as shown in Table 2.

Participating high schools were chosen for three reasons: (a) novelty, very little research has been conducted on college choice in rural settings such as Mission County; (b) generalizability or transferability, the Camino River Union School District possess urban conundrums such as single parent families, latch-key kids, transient population issues, truancy and gangs, alcoholism and substance abuse, not usually found in a rural setting; (c) convenience, the high schools chosen were willing to participate and support the research.

Phenomenological analysis was limited to ten college-bound students, five at Mission High School (3 White, 2 Hispanic) and five at Rio Vista (3 White, 2 Hispanic) (see Table 2). Both high schools suffered from a low graduation rate and college attendance rate. Camino River Union High School District reported in 1998 the total graduation rate in the district as 53.23%, with a dropout rate at 41% (Silk, 2002). Among students of Hispanic origin 46.5% graduated from high school, while over 44% dropped out. Native American students fared better graduating 78.5% with a drop out rate of 25% (2002).

Admissions representatives were the final population explored in this study to understand the interplay of multiple actors in the college choice phenomenon. The study used six admissions representatives from top feeder institutions to the Camino River Union High School District in which students most frequently attend: Arizona State University, Mohave Community College, Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Yavapi Community College (see Table 3).

Table 3 Top Feeder Institutions

Top Feeder Institutions	2000 Carnegie Classification	Location of Institution
Arizona State University	Doctoral Research – Extensive	Mesa, AZ
Mohave Community College	Associate's College	Bullhead City, AZ
Northern Arizona University	Doctoral Research – Intensive	Flagstaff, AZ
University of Arizona	Doctoral Research – Extensive	Tucson, AZ
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Doctoral Research – Intensive	Las Vegas, NV
Yavapi Community College	Associate's College	Prescott, AZ

Both high school counselor participants designated these institutions as top feeder institutions based on a five year review of senior student mobility to college (see Table 3).

Procedures for Collection of the Data

Data collection procedures for this research collapsed into five stages:

1. The first stage focused on the two high school counselors at Mission High School and Rio Vista High School with an initial dissemination of the survey instrument and subsequent phenomenological interview process.
2. The second stage involved the distribution and administration of the student college choice survey to all junior students at Mission and Rio Vista High Schools. The surveys were distributed at both high schools in a similar manner. Distribution occurred during the first part of the required Junior English core course by the homeroom teacher.
3. The third stage comprised the administration of the survey instrument to the college-bound student sample and the subsequent phenomenological interview process of those students.
4. The fourth stage encompassed the connection of parents of the junior student sample and subsequent survey instrument and interview protocol.
5. The fifth and final stage comprised the focus on admissions representatives in which the survey instrument and the subsequent interview protocol was completed through telephone or fax communication.

Before conducting interviews or survey dissemination and as part of the participation in the study, permission from Camino River School District upper administration and principals at both site high schools was granted. Each parent, college-bound student, high school counselor, and admissions representative agreed to and signed official consent forms. Further, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Office of Sponsored Programs and the Social Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board on December 16, 2002 approved this human subjects research.

Qualitative Interviews

In-depth interviews are the primary process for collecting information in most phenomenological study. Experienced phenomenologists suggest interviews with at least ten or more individuals who have experienced or are currently experiencing the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The in-depth interviews in this study were estimated to last as long as two hours per informant or until no further clarification was required to understand the feelings and total interaction the informant had with the phenomenon. Most interviews were held at each high school in small conference rooms adjacent to the counseling office.

Informants included: ten student informants (five male and five female), ten parents (three male and seven female), two (both female) high school counselors from two Arizona high schools, and six (five female and one male) admissions representatives employed by the top feeder institutions serving the Camino River Union High School District.

Semi-formal interviews were conducted with each student, parent, and counselor. Interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. After confirming consent, admissions representatives were interviewed by telephone and sent a fax survey.

Quantitative Survey

Each survey instrument (see Appendix I, III, V, VII) integrated modifications of existing surveys, specifically Beyer's (1992) survey instrument, Buford's (1987) parent survey instrument, information from the review of literature, and assistance from high school and college personnel. The individual questions were designed to obtain information concerning perception and knowledge of the college choice process, college characteristics, college information sources, and the primary purposes of college. The number of questions per survey changed slightly from parent to student and from parent to high school counselor and admissions representative. All surveys were composed of a number of closed-ended questions and two crucial four-point Likert scale questions focusing on college characteristics and college purposes. Each parent and student surveys were matched by identification codes, in order to pair individual students with their parents.

The Camino River Union High School District requested administration of the student survey (Appendix I) to the population of junior students in each high school (Mission High School, 308; Rio Vista High School, 176) in an effort to gather data on the total population of junior students. Four high school English

teachers administered the survey during the first part of a required Junior English course.

To ensure content validity, a draft of each survey instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts comprised of university officials holding terminal degrees in research related fields to determine if the design was adequately matched to the desired outcomes of the research.

Procedures for Analysis of the Data

This work was designed to explore perceptions of parents regarding the college choice phenomenon and discover the overall essence and meaning of the phenomenon. Qualitative and quantitative analyses supported the research.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative research analysis utilized descriptive statistics. The procedures used to analyze the survey instrument questions were determined by their ability to address the research questions. Each coded question was summarized and reported by descriptive methods, which included frequency counts, percentages, and cross tabulations. The two Likert scale questions with four response categories, "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "somewhat disagree," and "strongly disagree," were used to measure the relative intensity of the different listed items and calculate the average mean score for those informants agreeing with each of the individual characteristics or purposes. Subgroup comparisons across each informant group were used to determine if relationships existed between informant perceptions.

The data were prepared for use with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. One data file was built with filters enabling analysis of individual participant groups.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative research analysis was guided by the phenomenological analysis traditions of data managing, reading, memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, and representing or visualizing (Creswell, 1998). Using the Creswell (pp. 148-149) model of data analysis techniques the study employed various strategies to ensure robust findings as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Phenomenological Data Analysis Strategies

Data Analysis Strategies	Phenomenological Steps
Data managing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and organize files or data
Reading, memoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes
Describing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the meaning of the experience for researcher
Classifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find and list statements of meaning for individuals • Group statements into meaning units
Interpreting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop textual descriptions, "what's happening" • Develop structural descriptions "how it is experienced" • Develop overall description of the "essence"
Representing, visualizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present narration of the "essence" of the experience

These analysis strategies rested on the data, which were derived from in-depth interviews of each informant. Once interviews were completed, verbatim interview transcriptions were coded and analyzed to pinpoint how individuals

experienced the phenomenon by highlighting significant statements or nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping invariant themes (Moustakas, 1994). These statements were then grouped or classified into meaning units supported by core themes. Once the data were classified, a subsequent textural (what) description was penned with supportive verbatim examples for each interview question and each participant (Creswell, 1998). The researcher then developed a structural (how) description by combining all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, and varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon to describe how the phenomenon was experienced (1998).

This process of reducing significant statements yielded an exhaustive description of the college choice phenomenon supported by vignettes and excerpts taken from the interviews as illustrative evidence of the phenomenological understanding of the experience. Interrelated themes found within the data of the four subgroups were used to develop clusters of common core themes across the four groups of interviews.

Lincoln and Guba (1985), in defining qualitative evidence in phenomenological research, advocate naturalistic inquiry claims based on adequate selection of the total corpus of data. Thus to safeguard the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the corpus of interview data and ensure overall intersubjective validity the research implemented the following procedures (Creswell, 1998): (a) the data were reviewed by an outside reader who verified the logic of the essence descriptions; (b) the data were reviewed to verify whether the patterns fit together logically; and (c) the preliminary findings of

the study were compared to the raw data to check confirmability. Further, throughout this study the researcher was committed to bracketing personal viewpoints about the phenomenon and relying specifically on the statements supplied by the informants.

Grounded in Creswell (1998) and Moustakas (1994), a specific phenomenological framework was developed for this study to ensure logical and comprehensive analysis of each participant, subgroup, and overall composite synthesis of the interview data (see Figure 4).

		PARTICIPANT	
CLASSIFYING DESCRIBING	HORIZONTALIZATION	Verbatim Interview Transcript	
	Researcher's Question		
	SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS- HIGHLIGHTED		
	MEANING UNITS & CORE THEMES	Core Theme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaning Unit or Invariant Constituents 	
INTERPRETING	COMPOSITE TEXTURAL DESCRIPTION OF CORE THEME(S)	Core Theme – Composite Textural Description	
	INDIVIDUAL TEXTURAL DESCRIPTIONS <i>What was the experience?</i>	PARTICIPANT	PARTICIPANT
	COMPOSITE TEXTURAL DESCRIPTION		
	INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTIONS <i>How was it experienced?</i>		
REPRESENTATION	COMPOSITE STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION		
	TEXTURAL/STRUCTURAL SYNTHESIS OR ESSENCE <i>What is the unique quality?</i>		
	COMPOSITE ESSENCE DESCRIPTION	Exhaustive Description of the Essence of the College Choice Phenomenon	

Figure 4. Phenomenological Analysis Framework

Following the analysis of the phenomenological data, an assessment of the literature review in context with the findings of this research encourages future research projects advancing knowledge on the topic of college choice. Further, the assessment identifies the outcomes of the investigation in terms of social and professional meanings and implications.

Significance of the Study

The popular slogan, "College is for everyone," spread by returning veterans after World War II, not only bolstered the number and types of students attending post-secondary institutions but also increased the number of institutions serving the growing population. The higher education enterprise enjoyed unprecedented public investments and support until the late 1970's. It was in these turbulent years that an invisible wave of worry swept higher education circles causing institutions to begin to market and compete for enrollment.

By the 1980's and 1990's almost every institution in America had implemented comprehensive marketing plans to capture students. Today, issues over enrollment are still common concerns as postsecondary institutions continue to compete among themselves to secure resources and enrollment.

It is of critical importance for institutions to not only identify their market, but also understand it. Knowledge of preferred collegiate characteristics is valuable to institutions as they seek to attract the appropriate "best fit" prospective student(s). This research provides practical direction in

understanding what information is vital to parents, an important influence on students' college selection process, and reveals a contemporary look at the essence of this critical social phenomenon.

Limitations

The results of this investigation were limited by a localized sample; however it should be noted that the research site was a rural area in northern Arizona with certain distinctions. Geographically, Mission County is the fifth largest county in the United States with a population of 133,394 (Silk, 2002). Though clearly a rural consortium service area, the 24-hour gaming industry of Laughlin, Nevada, just across the Colorado River from the Bullhead City community, is the major source of local employment (2002). This particular situation contributes to social problems that resemble those of an urban school district such as single parent families, latch-key kids, transient population issues, truancy and gangs, alcoholism, and substance abuse.

The student body compositions from each high school contained a common mix of ethnicities mirroring the region's demography. The Camino River Union High School District reported, Mission High School's ethnic breakdown for the 2002-2003 academic year as, 66.2% White, 29.5% Hispanic, 31.5% Native American, 1.4% African American, and 1.1% Asian American (2002). The District reported Rio Vista High School's ethnic breakdown for the 2002-2003 academic year as, 80% White, 14% Hispanic, 4.8% Native American, .4% African American, and .5% Asian American (2002).

Summary

This research attempted to go beyond most quantitative studies of what and focus instead on the why and how decisions are made relevant to the college choice phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of parents regarding college choice. The review of literature indicated that the college choice phenomenon was a complex process and a number of factors influence the phenomenon. Significant research also supported the notion that parents play an integral role in assisting their college-bound student and in the ultimate choice of which college to attend.

Results of this research offer needed insight into the role parents play in the college choice experience and how they influence their college-bound student, as well as relevant data on other subgroups interacting inside the phenomenon. The patterns that emerged from these results hold high utility for the higher education community. Namely, the findings provide personnel of higher education institutions pertinent and timely information to modify and enhance marketing, recruiting, and enrollment management strategies.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The analysis and interpretations for this research is presented in subsequent sections. The data were obtained from the responses of 2002-2003 high school junior students and their parents in the Camino River Union High School District as well as the two high school counselors at each district high school and six admissions representatives from the top feeder higher education institutions serving the area's college-bound student population.

Review of the Research Questions

This exploratory research sought to identify important parental perceptions of essential processes and characteristics in the college choice phenomenon. The overarching question guiding the research asked: what is the phenomenological experience of college choice for parents of college-bound students and the interrelated roles between such parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives? Sub-questions included:

1. What are the current roles of parents and the relative strength of their influence (high, medium, or low) in the overall college choice phenomenon?

2. What are the current roles of parents and their overall level of involvement (very involved, somewhat involved, not involved) in the context of selecting an institution for and with their college-bound student?
3. What specific characteristics of choice are most important to parents in the phenomenological experience of choosing a college?
4. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by students?
5. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by high school counselors?
6. What is the relationship between college characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by admissions representatives?
7. What sources of college information are most valuable in the college choice phenomenon?

Review of the Strategies for Analysis of the Data

The research exploration was rooted in phenomenology, a qualitative research approach and complimented by a descriptive quantitative methodological component. The primary data collection procedures included phenomenological interviews with subsequent data synthesis and analysis and a quantitative survey instrument employing descriptive data analysis.

Phenomenology attempts to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied. The concepts of bracketing and epoche were

central to this research. Both concepts are processes in which the researcher set aside all prejudgments and relied on intuition to obtain a picture of what the essence of the experience was for each participant. This methodology was appropriate for college choice as it provides the basis for a portrayal of the essences of the college choice phenomenon through the experiences and perceptions of several key informants.

Review of Research Participants

Participants involved in the phenomenological portion of this research included parents and their junior college-bound students, high school counselors and admissions representatives as presented in Table 5. All participants were matched with an identification label to protect anonymity. The labels corresponded with participants individual subgroups, "P" meaning parent, "S" meaning student, "HSC" meaning high school counselor, and "A" meaning admissions representative. Subsequent numbers not only distinguished between participants inside each participant group, but paired parents with their students, such as P1 was the parent of S1. Participating school district, high schools, and all participants were protected throughout this research by pseudonym names.

Six female parent participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9) and three male parents (P2, P7, P10) participated in this study (see Table 5). Of those parent participants, three were Hispanic (30%) the remaining participants were White (70%). The level of cultural capital obtained by parent participants varied: three parents possessed master's or graduate degrees (P2, P3, P9), three had

experienced some college (P4, P6, P8), one parent secured a four-year degree in Mexico (P1) and three held either a high school graduation diploma or the equivalent (P5, P7, P10). The occupations of the ten parent participants included: a restaurant owner, a lawyer, a middle school principal, a high school secretary, a casino telephone operator, an elementary school teacher's aide, a construction worker, an administrative assistant, a high school teacher, and a parent retired due to a disability (see Table 5).

College-bound junior student participants included, five male (50%) and five female (50%) as listed in Table 5. Five students (S1 – S5) attended Rio Vista High School (RVHS) and the remaining five participants (S6 – S10) attended Mission High School (MHS). The ethnic breakdown of this maximum variation sample of student participants mirrored the district population with a slightly larger Hispanic population participating, four Hispanic students (S1, S3, S7, S8) and six White students (S2, S4, S5, S6, S9, S10).

Two high school counselors (HSC1 & HSC2), one from each of the district high schools (Rio Vista & Mission) participated in the research (see Table 5). Both counselors were White females and both held four-year degrees.

Admissions representative participants included five females (A1, A2, A3, A5, A6) and one male (A3) with an ethnic composition of two Hispanic (33%), two White (33%), one African-American (17%), and one participant who listed "other" (17%) (see Table 5). Degree attainment within this subgroup included four four-year degrees (66%), one two-year degree (17%) and one participant listing "some college" (17%). Occupational titles of the admissions representatives

spanned from admission counselor, recruiter, assistant director of admissions, and supervisor of admissions.

Table 5 Summary Descriptions of Participants

Subject	Gender	Ethnicity	Relationship	Occupation	Degree Attainment
<u>College-bound Student Participants</u>					
S1	Male	Hispanic	Mission HS	Junior Student	Law Degree
S2	Male	White	Mission HS	Junior Student	Engineer
S3	Female	Hispanic	Mission HS	Junior Student	Psychologist
S4	Male	White	Mission HS	Junior Student	Business/Golf
S5	Female	White	Mission HS	Junior Student	Pediatrician
S6	Female	White	Rio Vista HS	Junior Student	Undecided
S7	Male	Hispanic	Rio Vista HS	Junior Student	Medical Field
S8	Male	Hispanic	Rio Vista HS	Junior Student	Medical Field
S9	Female	White	Rio Vista HS	Junior Student	Undecided
S10	Female	White	Rio Vista HS	Junior Student	Pediatrician
<u>Parent Participants</u>					
P1	Female	Hispanic	Mother of S1	Business Owner	4-year Degree
P2	Male	White	Father of S2	Lawyer	Graduate
P3	Female	Hispanic	Mother of S3	School Principal	Master's
P4	Female	White	Mother of S4	Secretary	Some College
P5	Female	White	"Aunt" of S5	Waitress	HS Graduate
P6	Female	White	Mother of S6	Teachers Aide	Some College
P7	Male	Hispanic	Father of S7	Const. Worker	HS Graduate
P8	Female	White	Mother of S8	Admin. Assistant	Some College
P9	Female	White	Mother of S9	HS Teacher	Master's
P10	Male	White	Father of S10	Dis. Retirement	HS Graduate
<u>High School Counselor Participants</u>					
HC1	Female	White	Mission HS	Counselor	Bachelors
HC2	Female	White	Rio Vista HS	Counselor	Bachelors
<u>Admissions Representative Participants</u>					
A1	Female	Hispanic	ASU	Counselor	4-year Degree
A2	Female	Other	MCC	Recruiter	Some College
A3	Male	Hispanic	NAU	Recruiter	4-year Degree
A4	Female	White	U of A	Counselor	4-year Degree
A5	Female	African-Amer.	UNLV	Assist. Director	4-year Degree
A6	Female	White	YCC	Supervisor	2-year Degree

Quantitative data were acquired from the total 2002-2003 junior student population of Camino River Union High School District. Of the total population of 486 junior students in the school district, 351 juniors filled out the survey

instrument, a total response rate of 72%. Rio Vista High School's total junior population numbered 176 of which 151 students filled out surveys, a response rate of 86%. Mission High School's total population of juniors numbered 310, of which 200 students filled out surveys, a response rate of 65%. The gender composition (163 males and 187 females) and ethnic breakdown of the total population of juniors aggregated into 12 African American (3.5%), six Asian American (1.7%), 232 White (66.9%), 75 Hispanic (21.6%), nine Native American (2.6%), and 13 (3.7%) students who indicated the "other" category as listed in Table 6. Gender compositions of junior students surveyed aggregated as 46.6% male and 53.4% female.

Table 6 Summary of Total Population of Junior Student Participants

Gender		Ethnicity					
Male	Female	African American	Asian American	White	Hispanic	Native American	Other
Mission High School							
87	113	9	6	132	49	3	6
43.5%	56.5%	4.4%	2.9%	64.4%	23.9%	1.5%	2.9%
Rio Vista High School							
76	74	3	0	109	29	6	7
50.7%	49.3%	1.9%	0%	78.8%	18.8%	3.9%	4.5%
Totals							
163	187	12	6	232	75	9	13
46.6%	53.4%	3.5%	1.7%	66.9%	21.6%	2.6%	3.7%

As in most social science research, the measurement of a single variable may not be obtained for every survey respondent. The statistical program (SPSS) provided for this common occurrence by identifying and discarding all

cases with missing values for the specific variables under analysis. Thus, the number of cases reported within the quantitative analysis portion of this research fluctuated depending upon the missing values of the variables analyzed.

Results of the Analysis of Data by Sequential

Responses to each Research Question

Data analysis of the quantitative survey responses employed descriptive methods, which included frequency counts, percentages, and cross tabulations. Results of the analysis were calculated using the statistical program SPSS. The qualitative analysis that guided this research attempted to discover the essence of the college choice phenomenon through a phenomenological research approach. By so doing, the phenomenological analysis answered the posited overarching research question and sub-questions. Additionally, the identification of a thematic portrayal of the essence of the phenomenon as well as a new point-in-time parent model developed from the results of the research.

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question One

Research sub-question one asked: what are the current roles of parents and the relative strength of their influence (high, medium, or low) in the overall college choice phenomenon? This question was addressed by both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Quantitatively, the total population of junior students indicated the level of influence they gave their parents regarding college matters. Further, parent participants indicated the level of influence they felt they

possessed with their college-bound student. High school counselors and admissions representatives gauged how involved parents were in the college choice process. The level of parental influence was analyzed by using cross tabulations to report frequency counts within each subgroup as presented in Table 7. These data emphasized the relative strength and level of parental influence in the college choice phenomenon.

Table 7 Parental Influence Subgroup Cross Tabulation

			PARENTAL INFLUENCE			
			High	Medium	Low	Total
Participant Group	Junior Student	Count	88	191	65	344
		% within Participant group	25.6%	55.5%	18.9%	100.0%
		% of Total	24.3%	52.8%	18.0%	95.0%
Parent		Count	7	3		10
		% within Participant group	70.0%	30.0%		100.0%
		% of Total	1.9%	.8%		2.8%
Counselor		Count	1	1		2
		% within Participant group	50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
		% of Total	.3%	.3%		.6%
Admissions Representative		Count		6		6
		% within Participant group		100.0%		100.0%
		% of Total		1.7%		1.7%
Total		Count	96	201	65	362
		% within Participant group	26.5%	55.5%	18.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	26.5%	55.5%	18.0%	100.0%

Overall, 55.5% of the total participant base in this study listed

parental influence at a “medium” strength. Equally so, of the total junior population that included the 10 matched student pairs, 55% reported parental influence at “medium” strength. The two high school counselors indicated parental influence held a “high” to “medium” influence. While 100% of admissions representative participants gauged parental influence at a “medium” level. These findings confirmed earlier studies showing that parents were perceived to exert some influence at all stages of the college choice process (Conklin & Daily, 1981; Reynolds, 1981, Lynn, 1984; Bouse & Hossler, 1991).

Parents of the matched junior students in this study indicated a much different viewpoint, 70% of parents listed parental influence at “high” strength, while 30% listed their influence as “medium” (see Table 8).

Table 8 Parental Influence in Matched Pairs

			PARENTAL INFLUENCE		Total
			High	Medium	
Participant group	Junior Student	Count	2	8	10
		% within Participant group	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	10.0%	40.0%	50.0%
	Parent	Count	7	3	10
		% within Participant group	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	35.0%	15.0%	50.0%
Total	Count		9	11	20
	% within Participant group		45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
	% of Total		45.0%	55.0%	100.0%

However, only 20% of the matched junior student participants designated a "high" level of parental influence with the remaining 80% listing "medium" strength. In contrast, earlier research suggested parents felt confident they assumed "some" influence over their student's college choice (Beyer, 1992; Berdie and Hood, 1954; Murphy, 1981).

Table 9 Gender Differences in Parental Influence

Participant Group				PARENTAL INFLUENCE		
				High	Medium	Total
Junior Student	Gender	Male	Count	1	4	5
			% within Gender	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	10.0%	40.0%	50.0%
		Female	Count	1	4	5
			% within Gender	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	10.0%	40.0%	50.0%
	Total		Count	2	8	10
			% within Gender	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Parent	Gender	Male	Count	1	2	3
			% within Gender	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
			% of Total	10.0%	20.0%	30.0%
		Female	Count	6	1	7
			% within Gender	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
			% of Total	60.0%	10.0%	70.0%
	Total		Count	7	3	10
			% within Gender	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%

Adding gender and ethnicity to the cross tabulation breakdown of the matched pairs suggested no major difference in male or female student subgroups. Most students felt the relative strength of their parents influence was "medium" despite gender as shown in Table 9.

Table 10 Ethnic Differences in Parental Influence

Participant group	Ethnicity			PARENTAL INFLUENCE		Total
				High	Medium	
Junior Student	Caucasian	Count			6	6
		% within Ethnicity			100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total			60.0%	60.0%
	Hispanic	Count		2	2	4
		% within Ethnicity		50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		20.0%	20.0%	40.0%
	Total	Count		2	8	10
		% within Ethnicity		20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Parent	Caucasian	Count		4	3	7
		% within Ethnicity		57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
		% of Total		40.0%	30.0%	70.0%
	Hispanic	Count		3		3
		% within Ethnicity		100.0%		100.0%
		% of Total		30.0%		30.0%
	Total	Count		7	3	10
		% within Ethnicity		70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		70.0%	30.0%	100.0%

Survey results implied female parents felt they had more influence than male parents as shown in Table 9. In fact, 85.7% of the females in this study felt they held a “high” level of influence with their college-bound student, while only 33.3% of males designate a “high” level. Overall, 70% of parents felt they wielded a “high” level of influence over their student.

In this study, more Hispanic students gauged the influence of their parents as “high” than White students who consistently list parental influence as “medium” (see Table 10). Concomitantly, Hispanic parents indicated they held a “high” level of influence among their students regarding the college choice phenomenon, while White parent responses were equally distributed between “high” and “medium” levels as presented in Table 10.

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question One

The requisite strength of parental influence was more comprehensively understood through a qualitative approach. In the analysis of the phenomenological data each participant groups textural and structural descriptions of parental influence provided essential insight into understanding the level of influence parents in this study held within the phenomenon.

High school counselors witnessed incremental levels of parental influence. Many parents wielded their influence over college matters by becoming pushers, as HSC1 explained, “pushing them [students] to make sure they’re in the honors classes and taking the appropriate classes.” Others leave the college process up to the student, usually because they don’t know the processes themselves. These unexposed parents were as HSC1 observed, “completely helpless.” In

these cases, students most often relied on the high school counselor for guidance.

In this study, parental levels of influence fluctuated depending on the gender of their student. Male student participants often chose their fathers as the main influencers and female students chose their mothers, if they were from traditional family backgrounds. In special situations, the influencer might not have been a parent at all, like S5, "my Aunt [Sharon] is the one that pushes college...they [Dad and Sharon] call each other brother and sister since they've known each other so long, but they are not really."

Additionally, a parent's educational background held weight in how much influence they maintained with their college-bound student throughout the phenomenon. In this study, the most significant tool for parents in influencing a student to attend college was their example. Many parents talked with their child about, "not ending up" like them and becoming "something better." Parents communicated this by telling stories of their own life or the lives of friends and other family members.

Most parent participants participating in this research admitted they decided their child was going to attend college before they were born; only two suggested it was in grade school when they realized their student had academic potential; one parent (P9) preferred to allow the child the choice, "I didn't want to put that on my child's shoulders because I've seen success without college and I would hate to think I was forcing my child to do something he or she was not really good for." P9's college-bound daughter reiterated this notion in her

comment, "it is more of a personal choice 'cause I really want to go to college. They [parents] support me in my decision but it's my decision, I think."

Parental influence for college began at young ages for these college-bound students. For P7, the decision was made, "...before I had kids. My children were going to be raised differently than I was, with different values than I did." His college-bound student (S7) claimed there was no other choice but college, "Ever since ever you know, all my life, you're gonna go to college, you're gonna get an education before anything else." P5 revealed, "From the moment she was born I was gonna make sure she went to college. None of us ever have." P5 served as a female guardian for S5 who when talking about college suggested, "They don't want me to end up like them. They just want me to be something better."

Comprehensively, the parents in this study perceived their influence in the lives of their students to be strong. Yet, some students perceived lower levels of parental influence as commensurate to their level of educational attainment. As exemplified by S6's comment, "I don't...that is just something that I don't think that they are really educated about seeing as my Mom goes to a community college now and my Dad went to a four-year college for like semester and a half." Even S5 stated, "None of them went to college so they don't really know for a fact or anything. My Dad dropped out of high school and then went into the military and finished high school there. My Mom dropped out the last two weeks of her senior year to marry my Dad, how stupid is my mother!" Parents of these students supported their student's comments, as exemplified by P5's point, "We

[her Dad and I] don't have any knowledge being never been on a college campus before. We don't know what to look for, we know what she wants to do. ...we're not really smart."

High school counselors and admissions representatives both felt parents possessed significant influence. However the influence was relegated to specific matters such as college costs, as A2 commented, "...mainly from the financial viewpoint...the majority of students will go to the college that their parents pay for."

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Two

Research sub-question two, what are the current roles of parents and the overall level of involvement (very involved, somewhat involved, not involved) in the context of selecting an institution for and with their college-bound student, was assessed by using descriptive cross tabulations of frequency counts and percentages as presented in Table 11.

As indicated by the data, 46.3% of the total junior student population felt their parents were "somewhat involved" in their college choice process (see Table 11). High school counselors indicated an equal weight of parents as "very involved" or "somewhat involved" in their child's choice processes. Admissions representatives in this study, unanimously indicated that parents were consistently "somewhat involved" in college choice.

Table 11 Parental Involvement Levels in Subgroup Cross Tabulation

Participant Group		PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT			Total
		Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved	
Junior Student	Count	112	161	75	348
	% within Participant group	32.2%	46.3%	21.6%	100.0%
	% of Total	30.6%	44.0%	20.5%	95.1%
	Count	5	5		10
	% within Participant group	50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
	% of Total	1.4%	1.4%		2.7%
Counselor	Count	1	1		2
	% within Participant group	50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
	% of Total	.3%	.3%		.5%
Admissions Representative	Count		6		6
	% within Participant group		100.0%		100.0%
	% of Total		1.6%		1.6%
Total	Count	118	173	75	366
	% within Participant group	32.2%	47.3%	20.5%	100.0%
	% of Total	32.2%	47.3%	20.5%	100.0%

Matched parents of college-bound juniors in this study, paralleled their students' responses with 50% listing they felt "very involved" with their student's college choice selection, the remaining 50% felt "somewhat involved" in the selection as shown in Table 12. College-bound students affirmed the

involvement of their parents, with 50% indicating "very involved," 40% "somewhat involved," and 10% "not involved," in their college choice process.

Table 12 Parental Involvement in Matched Pairs

Participant group			PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT			Total
			Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved	
Participant group	Junior Student	Count	5	4	1	10
		% within Participant group	50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	25.0%	20.0%	5.0%	50.0%
	Parent	Count	5	5		10
		% within Participant group	50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
		% of Total	25.0%	25.0%		50.0%
Total	Count		10	9	1	20
	% within Participant group		50.0%	45.0%	5.0%	100.0%
	% of Total		50.0%	45.0%	5.0%	100.0%

Inside the matched pairs of students and parents, gender played an opposing role as shown in Table 13. In this study, 80% of male junior students felt the level of parental involvement in their college choice selection sat at "very involved," while only 20% of female juniors felt their parental involvement was at a "very involved" level.

As for parents in this study, 33.3% of male parents revealed they were "very involved" and 66.7% indicated "somewhat involved," in their student's college choice (see Table 13). A marginally higher percentage of female parents (57.1%) listed "very involved," in the selection process, while 43% of female

parent participants designated "somewhat involved." Concomitantly, other researchers concluded female parents were more involved than male parents with the college choice phenomenon (Boyer, 1987; Sevier, 2000).

Table 13 Gender Differences in Parental Involvement

Participant group				PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT			Total
				Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved	
Junior Student	Gender Male	Count		4	1		5
		% within Gender		80.0%	20.0%		100.0%
		% of Total		40.0%	10.0%		50.0%
	Female	Count		1	3	1	5
		% within Gender		20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		10.0%	30.0%	10.0%	50.0%
	Total	Count		5	4	1	10
		% within Gender		50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Parent	Gender Male	Count		1	2		3
		% within Gender		33.3%	66.7%		100.0%
		% of Total		10.0%	20.0%		30.0%
	Female	Count		4	3		7
		% within Gender		57.1%	42.9%		100.0%
		% of Total		40.0%	30.0%		70.0%
	Total	Count		5	5		10
		% within Gender		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
		% of Total		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%

In this study, ethnicity within the college choice phenomenon served as a salient variable in the level of parental involvement as shown in Table 14.

Hispanic student participants denoted a higher level of involvement from parents than White students, yet White parents felt they held a higher level of involvement than did Hispanic parents. Sixty-six percent of White students indicated a parental level of involvement as "somewhat involved."

Table 14 Ethnicity Differences in Parental Involvement

Participant group				PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT			Total
				Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved	
Junior Student	Ethnicity Caucasian	Count		1	4	1	6
		% within Ethnicity		16.7%	66.7%	16.7%	100.0%
		% of Total		10.0%	40.0%	10.0%	60.0%
	Hispanic	Count		4			4
		% within Ethnicity		100.0%			100.0%
		% of Total		40.0%			40.0%
	Total	Count		5	4	1	10
		% within Ethnicity		50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Parent	Ethnicity Caucasian	Count		4	3		7
		% within Ethnicity		57.1%	42.9%		100.0%
		% of Total		40.0%	30.0%		70.0%
	Hispanic	Count		1	2		3
		% within Ethnicity		33.3%	66.7%		100.0%
		% of Total		10.0%	20.0%		30.0%
	Total	Count		5	5		10
		% within Ethnicity		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
		% of Total		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%

Conversely, 100% of Hispanic students determined their parents were “very involved” in the college choice process (see Table 14). Parent participant involvement levels diverged from student patterns, with 57% of the White parents at a “very involved” level and only 33% of Hispanic parents signifying the same level.

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Two

The level of parental involvement was more conclusively explored through a qualitative approach. In the analysis of the phenomenological data, it was found that parental levels of involvement depended largely on educational background or the level of cultural capital attained by the primary parent informant. In the analysis of the phenomenological data, each participant groups textural structural perceptions provided essential perceptivity into understanding parental involvement.

Admissions representatives in this study believed parental involvement was important; A3 suggested parent should know, “what’s going on with their child.” Admissions representatives posited a parental involvement level was predicated on how involved their student was with the college choice process, as A3 claimed, “Depending on the student and their preparation...that’s how involved parents are.” Representatives perceived some parents positively reinforced the college choice path their student embarked on and others stood as obstacles due to their lack of knowledge about college. A5 claimed the involvement of parents, “Depends on the education level of the parents, their information is often skewed based on their educational experience,” and parents

without college experience, “they just don’t know, they’re reluctant to even enter the process and wait till the last minute to do anything.” A6 asserted, “Most parents don’t have the accurate information about attending college.”

Both high school counselors in this study agreed parents should be involved in the college choice process. However, they differed on the level of involvement. These levels -- from involved to not involved and, as HSC2 suggested “some parents are almost overly involved,” -- provided parameters for parental involvement. HSC2 noted, “I see some that actually come in here, they come in... the student, I never even see the student, I see the parent.” These types of very involved, maybe over involved parents were also the ones, “signing them [students] up for the ACT or SAT...picking up the scholarship forms... picking up the college applications.” For counselors this type of involvement was not appropriate. Involvement was an issue each counselor prioritized highly because they felt, as A1 stated, “parents being involved can reinforce what the schools saying, in school they can reinforce it at home about how important an education is...they’ll understand that education is important while their in high school and maybe even do better in high school.”

Both counselor participants in this study have constructed their own perceptions of what appropriate parental involvement should look like. Consequently, these counselors were limited by their own educational experience in assisting students and parents enlarge college choice sets. Forums in which parents could be involved in college choice processes were not yet in place at either one of the high schools in this study. Thus, parents had

little choice but to limit their involvement in the guidance of their college-bound student. Furthermore, few structured experiences were available to juniors and their parents regarding college, primarily due to the organizational structure of the high school guidance system. The ratio of students to counselors was extreme at both high schools and prohibited personalized college counseling with college-bound students and parents.

Most college-bound student participants in this study felt their parents were either relatively involved or very involved in the processes of college choice. Only S10 posited a different viewpoint, "They [my Dad and Step mom] don't really talk to me so much, I've just always told them that I'm going to college and nobody is stopping me. It's just been me, the whole things has been me...I don't want to say that they're not supportive, it's just that they've never really had to be."

Most student participants agreed their parents allowed and encouraged them to attend an institution that fit their educational goals, as S6 commented, "they [my parents] are gonna let me do it how I want...if I want to go to Harvard, it's not gonna make any difference as long as I'm reaching my goals." Other students wished their parents would distance themselves from the process like S7, "It doesn't really bother me that they want to be part of it, but sometimes it's like I can do it myself." The involvement of parents yielded either comfort or discouragement for college-bound students. Student participants suggested parents who had exposure to college could easily dismiss concerns or unfamiliar

processes and terms, as exemplified by S9, "My Mom went to college my Dad didn't so she knows more about it."

Parent participants felt involved with their college-bound student. Some more involved in the processes of college choice than others. Involvement levels fluctuated with the educational exposure of the parent. Every parent participant in this study expressed their continual interaction and enforcement of the importance of college. Parents revealed they had been touting college since their children were young, as P4 illustrated, "We've been planning it [college] since he was about six."

A majority of the parents in this study tended to be very involved and "pushed" to be more involved in the processes they knew about, especially those who had secured some college experience. The very involved parents functioned more like coaches in the process, taking the time to study the plays of college choice and explore on their own. Other parents, mostly those without college degrees, simply relegated their role to one of cheerleader. They were involved with their student and cheering hard, but from the sidelines.

Overall, the involvement level of parents was consistent. Parents advocated higher education suggesting as P1, "I want him to be different in everything...if he goes to the school, he'll have a different job, a different kind of life not like me," and P8, "Because I want him to have a better life than I do," and even S10, "So she can get ahead in life and do better than her Dad."

As for parental involvement in college selection most parents allowed their students to choose as exemplified by P9, "I want her to make the final decision..."

I want my daughter to be happy and that's the bottom line," and P8, "I'm real big on what makes him happy because if he's happy he'll stay in school and finish."

In this study, parents perceived their involvement at a much higher level than their students. For example, even though his daughter S10 suggested that the level of involvement her father (P10) had in her college selection was quantitatively, "not involved," and stated, "...it's all up to me," her father, P10 claimed, "...my feelings are and I think probably more my feelings and that's the way she leans is I don't want her to go there and just see if she can get a general education, that's not what we're after."

High school counselors and representatives believed parents must be involved in college choice and worried some parents were not as involved as they should be and others were too involved and may discourage the student in college matters. HSC2 exemplified, "I have a student right now who...she's trying to get all her college stuff filled out, she's trying to do her FAFSA and her parents are just not really cooperating. They say... we'll get around to it, around to it as far as the tax forms...and that is really discouraging to a student."

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Three

What specific characteristics of choice are most important to parents in the choosing of a college? This third research sub-question was answered through quantitative analysis of descriptive measures using scores on a 1 to 4 Likert scale with "1" meaning "strongly agree," "2" implying "somewhat agree," "3" implying "somewhat disagree," and "4" meaning "strongly disagree." Ranked college characteristic variables included: social life, tuition costs, room and board

costs, available financial aid, available programs, availability of residence hall or on-campus housing, academic reputation, location of the college, job availability at college, size of student body, size of classes, transferability of classes, number of computers on campus, graduation rates, crime on campus, and job placement rates as presented in Table 15.

In this study, parents either "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with the importance of every characteristic listed on the survey. This observation was evident by the group means which fell between 1 and 2.10 on each characteristic listed on the survey. All ten parents ranked "strongly agree" to available programs as an essential college characteristic (see Table 15).

Table 15 College Characteristics Important to Parents

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Available programs	10	1.00	.000
Crime on campus	10	1.10	.316
Transferability of the classes	10	1.20	.422
Tuition costs	10	1.30	.675
Room and board costs	10	1.30	.675
Available financial aid	10	1.40	.516
Academic reputation	10	1.40	.516
Graduation rates	10	1.40	.516
Job placement rates	10	1.40	.516
Size of classes	10	1.50	.527
Number of computers on campus	10	1.60	.843
Available residence hall or on-campus housing	10	1.70	.675
Job availability in college	10	2.00	.471
Size of studentbody	10	2.00	.943
Social life	10	2.10	.994
Location of college	10	2.10	.876

Similarly, Beyer (1992), Bowers and Pugh (1972), and Reynolds (1981) found parents most frequently considered the availability of courses and programs as very important in college choice process.

Other high-ranking characteristics included: crime on campus, transferability of the classes, tuition costs, and room and board costs. As indicated by the standard deviation very little variance in rankings occurred in the top tier characteristics. Social life and location of the college held the highest means, with the greatest variance in standard deviation scores suggesting that some parents indicated the importance of these factors as either “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” (see Table 15).

Since all parent participants ranked availability of programs as an important characteristic they “strongly agree” with, a closer examination of this factor within each participant subgroups was warranted. Thus, as shown in Table 16, both parent and admissions representative participants reported available programs as the highest-ranking characteristic regardless of gender.

Slightly more female junior students (55.2%) implied the characteristic's importance, as “strongly agree,” than male junior students (47.5%). Only 5.1% of all junior students listed “strongly disagree” to the importance of the program characteristic. The two high school counselor participants disagreed as to the importance of availability of programs with one listing “strongly agree,” and the other listing “somewhat agree.”

Table 16 Subgroup Cross Tabulation of Highest Ranking Characteristic

			AVAILABLE PROGRAMS				Total
			Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree	
Male	Junior Student	Count	75	60	15	8	158
		% within Participant group	47.5%	38.0%	9.5%	5.1%	100%
	Parent	Count	3				3
		% within Participant group	100.0%				100%
	Admissions Representative	Count	1				1
		% within Participant group	100.0%				100%
	Total	Count	79	60	15	8	162
		% within Participant group	48.8%	37.0%	9.3%	4.9%	100%
Female	Junior Student	Count	101	63	14	5	183
		% within Participant group	55.2%	34.4%	7.7%	2.7%	100%
	Parent	Count	7				7
		% within Participant group	100.0%				100%
	Counselor	Count	1	1			2
		% within Participant group	50.0%	50.0%			100%
	Admissions Representative	Count	5				5
		% within Participant group	100.0%				100%
	Total	Count	114	64	14	5	197
		% within Participant group	57.9%	32.5%	7.1%	2.5%	100%

In an attempt to more clearly understand perceptions of important reasons to attend college for participants in this study, survey responses to a Likert scale question using scores on a 4-point scale with "1" meaning "strongly agree," "2" implying "somewhat agree," "3" implying "somewhat disagree," and "4" meaning "strongly disagree," were analyzed using descriptive measures as presented in Table 17. Variables ranked included: to get a better job, to become a well-rounded person, to become a more thoughtful, responsible person, to avoid having to get a full time job, to make life-long friendships, there is nothing better to do, to meet and marry a successful person, to learn more about things of interest, to become an authority in a specialized field, to become a well-known person, to gain a well-rounded education, to be with friends, to prepare for a specific occupation, to get away from home, to develop talent and ability, to clarify values and beliefs.

In the analysis of this survey question, the parent column lists the mean scores of the ten parent participants (see Table 17). The remaining columns list the total junior population mean score for each reason and a ranking of those means. Both students and their parents in answering the most important reasons to attend college consistently listed "to get a better job" as "strongly agree." Parents and junior students also "strongly disagree" that "there is nothing better to do," as not an important reason to attend college. Other "somewhat disagree" or "strongly disagree" mean scores included, "to get away from home," "to avoid having to get a full time job," and "to meet and marry a successful person" as listed in Table 17.

Table 17 Reasons for College Attendance for Parents and Juniors

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Junior Student	Junior Student Rank
To get a better job	1.00	1.23	1
To become a well-rounded person	1.00	1.66	6
To gain a well rounded education	1.10	1.55	3
To become a more thoughtful, responsible person	1.20	1.78	8
To prepare for a specific occupation	1.30	1.44	2
To develop talent and ability	1.40	1.65	5
To become an authority in a specialized field	1.60	1.74	7
To clarify values and beliefs	1.60	2.29	9
To learn more about things of interest	1.80	1.64	4
To make life-long friendships	2.20	2.44	11
To become a well-known person	2.60	2.33	10
To be with friends	2.60	2.45	12
To get away from home	2.90	2.48	13
To avoid having to get a full-time job	3.20	2.89	15
To meet and marry a successful person	3.70	2.83	14
There is nothing better to do	3.80	3.18	16

Beyer (1982) found parents identified similar reasons for college attendance but in a different priority order (to gain a well-rounded education, to get a better job, to prepare for a specific occupation, to become a well-rounded person). Boyer (1987) in his work with the Carnegie Foundation identified yet another preference order for college characteristics (to gain a well-rounded education, to have a more satisfying career, to develop talents and abilities, to prepare for a specific occupation, and to get a better job).

Table 18 Reasons for College Attendance for Matched Pairs

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Paired Junior Students	Paired Junior Students Rank
To get a better job	1.00	1.10	1
To become a well-rounded person	1.00	1.90	7
To gain a well rounded education	1.10	1.60	4
To become a more thoughtful, responsible person	1.20	2.00	8
To prepare for a specific occupation	1.30	1.40	2
To develop talent and ability	1.40	1.70	5
To become an authority in a specialized field	1.60	1.70	5
To clarify values and beliefs	1.60	2.50	10
To learn more about things of interest	1.80	1.50	3
To make life-long friendships	2.20	2.50	10
To become a well-known person	2.60	2.60	12
To be with friends	2.60	2.90	14
To get away from home	2.90	2.30	9
To avoid having to get a full-time job	3.20	2.90	14
To meet and marry a successful person	3.70	2.70	13
There is nothing better to do	3.80	3.30	16

Within the matched parent and college-bound student pairs similar results surfaced as shown in Table 18. College-bound student participants tended to rank learning experiences such as “to learn about things of interest,” or “to prepare for a specific occupation” as stronger reasons to attend college than their parents. Both parent and student participants ranked “to get a better job” as the most salient reason to attend college.

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Three

Using a phenomenological approach assured descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon and its particulars. Characteristics of college choice is a topic that is repeatedly investigated, but nearly always from a quantitative lens. Following the phenomenological analysis steps of Moustakas (1994), a synthesis of the interview data from parent participants suggested that parents winnowed the choice set down to five key characteristics: campus safety, location, area of interest, campus environment, and costs. However, following close behind were issues such as quality of academic programs and campus size. Size was a salient issue, but for different reasons. Some parents sought a large enough institution that offered a wide range of programs especially for a student who was "classically undecided," others looked for a smaller campus that ensured personalization, a place where, "she can get a lot of attention and have a closeness with the whole school." Some, as P7 illustrated believed, "Basically...you know the bigger the school the better the programs are, you know, the more that their gonna offer for him to learn."

Concomitantly, parents posited their students primarily looked at the academic program and their specific area of interest. Most of the college-bound students in this study had chosen a specific career path, which their parents supported. For example, P4, suggested her son, "...doesn't care about the size of the school, he doesn't care about the costs, he wants to make sure he can play golf and get a degree for business and golf." When examining characteristics, P10 asked, "can she go there and become what she wants to

become...her goal is not just go there like a lot of kids who go and don't know what their going to major in and that sort of thing, she already has a goal and it has to go that way or she's not gonna look at it."

Few parents believed students looked at social life and even fewer thought they displayed concern for campus safety. As P5 illustrated, "She doesn't seem to care so much about the social life, she just wants to get a good job." Campus safety was a salient issue for parents of contemporary college-bound students, as P8 admitted, "I've always been a paranoid mother, safety is a concern for me." P5 revealed, "...where you feel safe sending her there without...she's always been under our care, so you know it's like were giving her to someone else's care and I want to make sure it's a good care." Parents concerns for campus safety escalated if their college-bound student was female, as P10 illustrated, "I don't want her going somewhere, 'cause she is a girl, I do not want her in an area, go' in to ah...wherever...and it's not safe for her. Female students suggested similar feelings, as demonstrated by P8's comment, "Well definitely my dad [worries] crime rate for me because I am a girl."

The unavoidable topic of financing college permeated the minds of many parent participants. Some suggested paying for college would be strenuous. These parents hoped their college-bound student received either a scholarship or financial aid to defray some of the financial burden, but as one parent claimed, "...he's gonna go no matter what." Other parents either provided the funding or helped as much as their knowledge base allowed to, "shake the trees," as one parent participant described, to find college monies. P1 suggested, she'll get

another job, “and I think even if I have to take another three jobs for you, you’re gonna go to the college.” For the most part, parents who were concerned about financial issues tried, as P8 shared, “not to let him know my worry about the money.”

Parent participants in this study identified ideal characteristics for their college-bound student based on their educational experience. For example, both female parents (P3, P9) who held four-year degrees insisted as demonstrated by P3, “the difficulties I had my first year in college ‘cause I went straight to a four year college and so did my husband...I don’t want her to have... so probably small college.” P9 speculated, “I think she’ll need structure, so a traditional university would probably be best for her. She also needs friendliness so if it’s too large of a university I think she’ll be a bit lost and won’t be able to develop to the amount she could.” While P6, who secured some college emphasized, “I don’t know...whatever [she] wants, I just want her to be happy.”

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Four

What is the relationship between characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by students? Research sub-question four was answered by using quantitative analysis of descriptive measures. Participants indicated important college characteristics by scores on a 1 to 4 Likert scale with “1” meaning “strongly agree,” “2” implying “somewhat agree,” “3” implying “somewhat disagree,” and “4” meaning “strongly disagree.” Using the entire junior data set inside a mean ranking of important characteristics to parents, the data yielded significant similarities in response sets as illustrated in Table 19. The total

population of junior student survey takers indicated the characteristic "available financial aid," as important and ranked it with the high mean score of 1.58 as illustrated in Table 19.

Table 19 College Characteristics Important to Parents & Junior Students

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Junior Student	Junior Student Rank
Available programs	1.00	1.65	2
Crime on campus	1.10	1.97	8
Transferability of the classes	1.20	2.10	13
Tuition costs	1.30	1.66	3
Room and board costs	1.30	1.77	4
Available financial aid	1.40	1.58	1
Academic reputation	1.40	1.98	10
Graduation rates	1.40	2.10	12
Job placement rates	1.40	1.93	6
Size of classes	1.50	2.28	14
Number of computers on campus	1.60	2.36	15
Available residence hall or on-campus housing	1.70	2.05	11
Job availability in college	2.00	1.96	7
Size of studentbody	2.00	2.54	16
Social life	2.10	1.98	9
Location of college	2.10	1.87	5

As a whole, juniors denoted, "size of student body," as a characteristic of the least consequence in the choice of colleges. The largest variance in mean scores was found with the characteristic, "location." Students felt location was of slightly more importance than parents, surprisingly negating past research that

suggested, campus setting was a most significant factor by students and parents (Litten, 1981; Buford, 1987). "Crime on campus," was a college characteristic perceived by parents as marginally more important than to junior students.

Concomitantly, Sevier (2000) discovered the same campus safety emphasis from parents, rather than students.

College-bound student participants in the matched pair subgroup, mirrored many of their parents' perceptions, with a few slight differences as shown in Table 20. The characteristic, "tuition cost" ranked as number one (1.40 mean) with more students agreeing it was an important characteristic in the college selection process than any other factor.

Parents, on the other hand, ranked "tuition costs" as fourth, but with a mean score of 1.30, a rank slightly higher than their students. Characteristics, "crime on campus," and "transferability of the classes," ranked high on parent lists, but somewhat lower on student lists. "Size of student body" was marginally more important to parents than it was to their children and "location of college," was slightly more important to students than to their parents (see Table 20).

Survey results revealed that characteristics important to parents in assisting their child in choosing a college to attend differed slightly from those of their college-bound students. The most noticeable differences occurred as parent participants "strongly agree" and most student participants "somewhat agree" to the importance of "crime on campus," and "transferability of the classes."

Table 20 College Characteristics Important to Matched Pairs

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Paired Junior Students	Paired Junior Students Rank
Available programs	1.00	1.80	4
Crime on campus	1.10	2.00	8
Transferability of the classes	1.20	2.30	12
Tuition costs	1.30	1.40	1
Room and board costs	1.30	1.90	7
Available financial aid	1.40	1.80	4
Academic reputation	1.40	1.50	2
Graduation rates	1.40	2.30	12
Job placement rates	1.40	1.60	3
Size of classes	1.50	2.20	9
Number of computers on campus	1.60	2.50	15
Available residence hall or on-campus housing	1.70	2.40	14
Job availability in college	2.00	2.20	9
Size of studentbody	2.00	2.60	16
Social life	2.10	2.20	9
Location of college	2.10	1.80	4

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Four

Phenomenological analysis of the interview data from student participants suggested area of interest or program area and location as the most essential characteristics in the college choice process.

For the most part, each college-bound junior participants in this study previously identified an area of study and thus, looked closely at the resources of the institution in their particular field. Location was a commonly cited characteristic for varying reasons. Some students (S3, S8, S9) wanted to be

closer to home, others (S2, S5, S10) believed in-state tuition was cheaper than out of state and therefore planned on staying close to home to curb college costs. Some students (S6, S7, S8) looked at the size of the campus because they sought a smaller campus with a more "personal educational experience." Overall, important college characteristics paralleled the academic goals of the student, with few suggesting crime rate and social life as important characteristics in their personal college selection.

Student participants in this study did not usually talk with their parents about specific characteristics of college choice. Students, whose parents didn't attend college, believed their parents as S5 stated, "just don't know...none of them went to college so they don't really know for a fact or anything." These students felt their parents supported them in the general notion of college, but as illustrated by S6, "I don't think that they are really educated," about college characteristics.

Costs of college was not a salient issue for these students, they were aware of the costs and most felt assured either by parents or by their own willpower that all would "work out somehow." S4's father told him, "... just pick where you want to go and we'll talk about money afterwards. Don't think of money as a restriction." S3's not concerned about financial issues because as P3 stated, "my parents or my Dad and my husband's parents have always told the kids that money would be there for them for college."

On the other hand, S8 felt his mom was, "really stressing that I need to keep my grades up and stay at the top where I can get massive scholarships to

pay for almost everything so it doesn't have to be a burden on her shoulders."

Similarly, S10 admitted, "...it is going to be expensive and they [my dad and stepmother] can't help me pay for it." S10's father revealed, "We've talked about this from day one that that I'm on disability and I'm on social security so it's like...I've had to raise them and I've used everything that I had saved just to raise them just because I've been on disability for twelve years. So everything I had saved twelve years ago is gone and so we've talked about that...ah...an 'A' isn't good enough." Just as P10, other parents (P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10) in this study placed pressure on their students to achieve high grades in an effort to offset the costs of college. Such as, P6, "We've always talked about them excelling in school so that they can get scholarships," and P9, "We aren't wealthy and we are looking at the girls need to get scholarships if they are going to college. They need to be aware that we can't just write a check."

Students and parents agreed that the program area or area of interest was the primary characteristic they searched out in the college choice process. The most obvious difference between perceptions of students and parents was with campus safety. Parents were much more concerned about campus safety than their students.

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Five

What is the relationship between characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by high school counselors? Research sub-question five was answered in the same manner as the foregoing two questions. Participants indicated important college characteristics by scores on a 1 to 4 Likert scale with

"1" meaning "strongly agree," "2" implying "somewhat agree," "3" implying "somewhat disagree," and "4" meaning "strongly disagree."

Some homogeneity existed between parents and counselor characteristic preferences. Every participant in this study, whether parent or counselor indicated either "strongly agree" or somewhat agree" on each characteristic listed on the survey instrument as presented in Table 21.

Table 21 College Characteristics Important to Parents & Counselors

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Counselor	Counselor Rank
Available programs	1.00	1.50	3
Crime on campus	1.10	2.00	8
Transferability of the classes	1.20	1.50	3
Tuition costs	1.30	1.50	3
Room and board costs	1.30	1.50	3
Available financial aid	1.40	1.00	1
Academic reputation	1.40	2.00	8
Graduation rates	1.40	2.50	14
Job placement rates	1.40	2.50	14
Size of classes	1.50	2.00	8
Number of computers on campus	1.60	2.50	14
Available residence hall or on-campus housing	1.70	2.00	8
Job availability in college	2.00	2.50	3
Size of studentbody	2.00	2.00	8
Social life	2.10	2.00	8
Location of college	2.10	1.00	1

The most distinct difference between counselor and parent perceptions was found in the ranking of "location of the college." Both counselors "strongly

agree" to the importance of the characteristic "location of the college," while parent preferences reflected additional variance within the mean scores (see Table 21). The most significant similarity existed between characteristic preferences of "tuition costs" and "room and board costs." Counselor participants ranked "graduation rates," "job placement rates," and "number of computers on campus," with the lowest mean score of 2.50, while parents indicated higher mean scores for all three characteristics (see Table 21).

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Five

Using a phenomenological approach, the essence of the phenomenon and its interrelatedness with high school counselors' was explored. Drawing upon the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenological interview analysis, clearly both high school counselors created and implemented a response to college choice, which in some cases broadened the scope of institutional choice for many students and parents and for others narrowed the scope.

Of the numerous college characteristics that exist, high school counselors in this study named three consistently, campus safety, campus location, and campus environment. HSC2 thought of safety first, "I try to look at it as any place can be dangerous and any place you have to take your own precautions no matter where you are, but as a parent, of course, that's one of the first things I'm going to think of." HSC2 continued by emphasizing the ultimate outcome, "what is it that they want to do and is it a good place for them to be," and revealed a concern for location or "how far away it is."

HSC1 asserted environment of the school, quality of programs, and financial aspects as top characteristics and explained, "You know if I have a student that hates cold weather then we're probably not going to look at NAU in Flagstaff. If they don't like a big school, then we're probably not going to look at ASU cause that is one of the bigger schools." HSC2 suggested the academic quality of the programs was most important, but stressed the need for parents to assist their students in finding a place that fits, maintaining "I don't care how strong their program is, if you're not comfortable and happy there you won't do well no matter what." Additionally, HSC2 warned, "Some kids, they think they want to go to some big place and they get down to ASU in Phoenix and they just can't handle the hugeness of it. They get totally lost and overwhelmed." Reflecting on her own collegiate experience, she (HSC2) remembered that a lot of her class came home after a year or two and most never finished a degree program.

Counselor's perceptions of important characteristics for parents were limited by their own involvement with parents of college-bound students. HSC1 believed parents look for, "safety and financial and location being how far away from home are they if they need to come home." HSC1 confirmed class size and warned, "we are a smaller high school and it can be really overwhelming for our student to go to the large universities where there's a thousand kids in an auditorium, when they are use to...a large class for them is 35." Further, HSC1 described the costs of college as salient stating, "we aren't a wealthy community

so...and most schools especially state universities all offer the same sort of programming and things like that so you don't have to worry about that."

HSC2 admitted most parents and students were concerned with college costs and, "how they are going to afford college." Nonetheless, HSC2 believed, "there is always money somewhere," and "price has to be a strong consideration but it shouldn't be your first consideration." She contended that students and parents worry about how they are going to afford it, especially, "parents who haven't been through college... they think automatically I can't afford it. I've helped students before who their parents just say well your not going to college we can't afford it, if we could afford it we would. And then when I sit down and show them, I think a lot of them just really have no true concept of what it really costs."

The role of the high school counselor in providing college information to students was demonstrated in this study, however the reality of the counselor's responsibilities precluded her ability to provide the kind of complete college guidance needed by students and parents. Counselors possessed limited time and resources. The two counselors in this study have slipped into a pattern of making college recommendation from a very limited list of schools with which they were most familiar. Parents with limited exposure to college or a low to medium level of cultural capital used the high school counselor more than those with a college degree. As, P5 demonstrated, "We talk to her counselor a lot," but P6 observed, "if counselors weren't so...I mean their just like pick a number, they just look at you as a number instead of you as a person."

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Six

What is the relationship between characteristics chosen by parents and those chosen by admissions representatives? Research sub-question six was analyzed in the same manner as the previous three questions (see Table 22).

Table 22 College Characteristics Important to Parents & Representatives

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Admissions Representative	Admissions Representative Rank
Available programs	1.00	1.00	1
Crime on campus	1.10	1.50	3
Transferability of the classes	1.20	1.67	6
Tuition costs	1.30	1.50	3
Room and board costs	1.30	1.83	8
Available financial aid	1.40	1.17	2
Academic reputation	1.40	1.67	6
Graduation rates	1.40	1.50	3
Job placement rates	1.40	1.83	8
Size of classes	1.50	1.83	8
Number of computers on campus	1.60	2.00	11
Available residence hall or on-campus housing	1.70	2.00	11
Job availability in college	2.00	2.50	16
Size of studentbody	2.00	2.17	14
Social life	2.10	2.17	14
Location of college	2.10	2.00	11

Participants indicated important college characteristics by scores on a 1 to 4 Likert scale with "1" meaning "strongly agree," "2" implying "somewhat agree," "3" implying "disagree somewhat," and "4" meaning "strongly disagree" as listed in Table 22.

The data set of parent and admissions representative participants revealed incremental differences in perceptions of important characteristics. In fact there existed more college characteristic similarities within these two subgroups than any other subgroup comparison. Parents and representatives in this study both “strongly agree” that “available programs” was a significant characteristic in the college choice process. Representatives “somewhat disagree,” with job availability in college as an important characteristic indicated by a mean score of 2.50 as listed in Table 22.

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Six

Drawing upon the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenological interview analysis, it was clear that admissions representatives and parents answered with some across-case commonality.

The majority of admissions representatives confessed that the most essential characteristic in choosing a college for them centered on program area, which included the availability of a degree program and the quality of that program. A1 suggested the primary question in investigating characteristics as, “Does it have the program that my child wants?” In addition, admissions representatives (A1, A4, A5, A6) recommended student services such as career services, student support services, and academic advising, as important characteristics which parents know little about. Along with parents, campus safety was an issue for admissions representatives (A1, A2, A6) in identifying essential characteristics of a college of choice. A2 asserted, “Overall, in light of

today's violent society, I would like to make sure my child is safe and will survive in college."

Examination of the interactions between admissions representatives and parents contributed in understanding the roles played by each individual. Although this interaction was limited to certain venues such as high school fairs, campus visits, and the occasional e-mail or phone call, there existed identifiable questions parents asked admissions representatives. Often these questions were not necessarily the ones representatives felt parents should be asking in assisting their college-bound student. For example, admissions representatives in this study agreed the primary question parent's asked regarding college matters concerned costs of college, which included the topic of financial aid. A5 claimed, "Eighty percent [of the questions] are about financial aid and how are they going to afford it." A1 believed parents wanted to know about statistics, "any statistic you got," especially ones explaining graduation rates, placement rates and crime rates. A3 commented that parents often asked about size of institution because, "sometimes parents who have attended college and went to a large institution where they felt lost and just a number, they want their child to go to a place where their not just a number." Most admissions representatives (A1, A3, A4, A6) acknowledged parents asked questions about campus safety, which as representatives confessed has become a significant issue among parent circles.

As for the questions admissions representatives felt parents should be asking about college, most representatives retreated to traditional variables. A5 claimed, "parents need to be asking the real questions...they should be looking

at the cold hard facts.” On the other hand, A1 believed parents should be asking more about the community of the campus, for example, “how is my student gonna benefit from coming here...not just...numbers don’t do it.” A1 continued by suggesting the choice of institutions depends on the student and their various attributes, because as she stated, “a school is not for everyone.” Paralleling A1’s thought process, A4 suggested parents should ask, “What institution will be a good fit for my child?” Other notable questions included topics such as employment on campus and after graduation, health insurance availability and costs, academic advisors, and class sizes.

Admissions representatives played a significant role in the college choice process; they served as informants for parents, for students, and for high school counselors. What they reveal about their institution was what was known and shared; they created the educational habitus for the institutions they represented and in so doing constructed and shared a habitus for higher education.

Quantitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Seven

Research sub-question seven asked: what sources of college information are most valuable in the college choice phenomenon? Thus, a quantitative analysis identifying key sources of information with the most utility for all participant groups follows.

Survey-takers checked the sources of information most valuable to them in the college choice process from a list of 15 variables which included: college web sites, college guidebooks, college digital publications, personal contact with a college representative, e-mail to a college, phone call to a college, visit to a

college campus, high school sponsored college night or college fair, high school counselor, friend, your mom, your dad, and other as listed in Table 23.

Table 23 Information Source Rankings for Parents and Junior Students

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Junior Student	Junior Student Rank
College websites	.90	.62	1
Your son or daughter	.80		
E-mail to a college	.60	.29	9
Visit to a college campus	.50	.57	2
Personal contact with a college representative	.50	.38	5
High school sponsored college night or college fair	.40	.25	11
High school counselor	.40	.46	3
College print publications	.40	.41	4
Personal educational experience	.30		
Friend	.30	.38	5
College guidebooks	.30	.17	13
Teacher or coach	.20	.02	16
College digital publications	.20	.22	12
None of the above	.10	.06	14
Phone call to a college	.10	.29	9
Other family member	.00	.03	15
Your Mom		.37	7
Your Dad		.30	8

Parent, high school counselor, and admissions representative survey question variables varied slightly in two responses, "your mom" and "your dad." These variables were changed to "mother" and "father," or "your son or daughter"

and “your educational experience.” The survey alterations were reflected in the absence of a mean score within the appropriate subgroup as shown in Table 23.

Using parent responses as a framework, 62% of the total junior student data set revealed “college websites” as the most valuable source of college information. As well, college websites was the number one source of information for 90% of parent participants in this study (see Table 23). The top five most valuable sources of information for parents in rank order included: college website (90%), your son or daughter (80%), e-mail to a college (60%), visit to a college campus (50%), and personal contact with a college representative (50%).

The total junior population sampled suggested information source rankings in the following order: college websites (62%), visit to a college campus (57%), high school counselor (46%), friend (38%), your mom (37%) and your dad (30%) as listed in Table 23. These juniors used high school counselors as college information sources more than parents or friends. Contrarily, Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper’s multivariate findings failed to indicate that counselors impacted college choice processes (1999).

Information sources inside the matched pairs of parents and students revealed college websites as the number one source for college information (see Table 24). Equally so, 80% of student participants ranked high school counselor as a main college information source. Parents ranked high school counselors seventh, with 40% of parents suggesting counselors as information sources, but 80% suggested their son or daughter served as an important source of college information.

Other significant sources of information for student participants included your mom (60%) and college print publications (60%). Dad pulled in 50% of the votes from paired students, a much higher percentage than the 30% from the juniors population as shown in Table 24. More than half the college-bound participants considered their parents as information sources, a 30% increase over the total junior population. As well, college-bound participants did not use their friends as information sources as often as the total junior population.

Table 24 Information Source Rankings for Matched Pairs

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Paired Junior Students	Paired Junior Students Rank
College websites	.90	.80	1
Your son or daughter	.80		
E-mail to a college	.60	.40	7
Visit to a college campus	.50	.50	5
Personal contact with a college representative	.50	.40	7
High school sponsored college night or college fai	.40	.10	12
High school counselor	.40	.80	1
College print publications	.40	.60	3
Personal educational experience	.30		
Friend	.30	.10	12
College guidebooks	.30	.20	10
Teacher or coach	.20	.20	10
College digital publications	.20	.10	12
None of the above	.10	.10	12
Phone call to a college	.10	.30	9
Other family member	.00	.00	16
Your Mom		.60	3
Your Dad		.50	5

Both counselors in this study suggested the following four variables as important sources of information for college-bound students: mother, father, visit to a college campus, and personal contact with a college representative as presented in Table 25. As for every other variable the two counselors disagreed as to the variables importance, even the factor high school counselor.

Table 25 Information Source Rankings for Parents and Counselors

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Counselor	Counselor Rank
College websites	.90	.50	5
Your son or daughter	.80		
E-mail to a college	.60	.00	11
Visit to a college campus	.50	1.00	1
Personal contact with a college representative	.50	1.00	1
High school sponsored college night or college fair	.40	.50	5
High school counselor	.40	.50	5
College print publications	.40	.50	5
Personal educational experience	.30		
Friend	.30	.50	5
College guidebooks	.30	.00	11
Teacher or coach	.20	.00	11
College digital publications	.20	.00	11
None of the above	.10	.00	11
Phone call to a college	.10	.50	5
Other family member	.00	.00	11
Mother		1.00	1
Father		1.00	1

In analyzing the data sets of parents and admissions representatives,

Information sources listed by parent participants paralleled admissions representative responses as illustrated in Table 26.

Table 26 Information Source Rankings for Parents and Representatives

Mean	Participant group		
	Parent	Admissions Representative	Admissions Representative Rank
College websites	.90	1.00	1
Your son or daughter	.80		
E-mail to a college	.60	.50	9
Visit to a college campus	.50	1.00	1
Personal contact with a college representative	.50	1.00	1
High school sponsored college night or college f	.40	.83	4
High school counselor	.40	.67	6
College print publications	.40	.83	4
Personal educational experience	.30		
Friend	.30	.50	8
College guidebooks	.30	.17	13
Teacher or coach	.20	.00	14
College digital publications	.20	.33	11
None of the above	.10	.00	14
Phone call to a college	.10	.50	9
Other family member	.00	.33	10
Mother		.67	6
Father		.67	6

Every representative indicated college websites, visit to a college campus, and personal contact with a college representative, as valuable information sources in the process of college choice and cited counselors, mothers, and fathers 67% of the time. The Carnegie Foundation (1986) supported the

counselors and parent perceptions of admissions representatives, suggesting that college representatives were informative and useful in the college choice process.

Clearly, the quantitative analysis culled college websites as the key source of college information for students and parents. Admissions representatives and high school counselors listed college visit and college representative as valuable sources, not utilized well by parents or students as the rankings illustrated.

Qualitative Analysis of Research Sub-question Seven

To understand parents, colleges and universities must understand their perceptions and informational needs. Parents in this study suggested the internet as the most valuable resource in the college choice process. College websites are easily accessible and as many parent participants suggested, one can find “anything” on a website. However, some parents like P8 observed, “I’ve gone to websites, but it’s not enough, I need simple information.”

The majority of parent participants in this study felt college mailings were valuable, but others suggested the publications were “a bunch of hype.” A personal invitation to visit the campus was more inline with parental priorities as P4 suggested, “...some kind of informal letter saying, you know, we’re here, you’re welcome to come. Not just open houses or parent weekends, just have students available on campus whenever you want to come to tour the campus or just get a feel of it.” P4 maintained it would be nice if the invitation was personalized. Similarly, P5 wished the college mailings were more personal, like “we want your child because we think she’ll do good and this is what we have to

offer.” P2 claimed he would, “...prefer to go talk to the other parents who have kids in college who are a little older than my kids. I get feedback that way, I don’t pay a whole lot of attention to the brochures and mailings.”

Each participating high school hosted a college night or day, in which parents and students peruse booths of nearly fifty colleges and universities. The parents in this study believed this activity was beneficial but should be held more often to fit a wide range of schedules, as P3 advised, “a couple times throughout the year rather than just one time.” P7 revealed, “I wish they had more recruiters at the high school...they had more of those days and nights that basically they can get more in touch with the parents and we could get a better feel ‘cause... you know these are our kids.”

Triangulation of Data

By triangulating the data from participant subgroups, summary patterns emerged in each sub-question topic. Analysis reported the top percentages within parental influence and involvement per subgroup and the five highest-ranking mean score factors concerning college characteristics, reasons for college, and information sources.

Parental influence triangulation, as shown in Figure 6, displays the commonalities within the perceptions of parental influence levels between each participant subgroup. Most students, whether designated college-bound or not, indicated their parents held a “medium” level of influence over college matters. However, the majority of parents felt they wielded a much higher level of

influence than their students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives. The majority of counselors and representatives reported parents wielded a “medium” level of influence as shown in Figure 5.

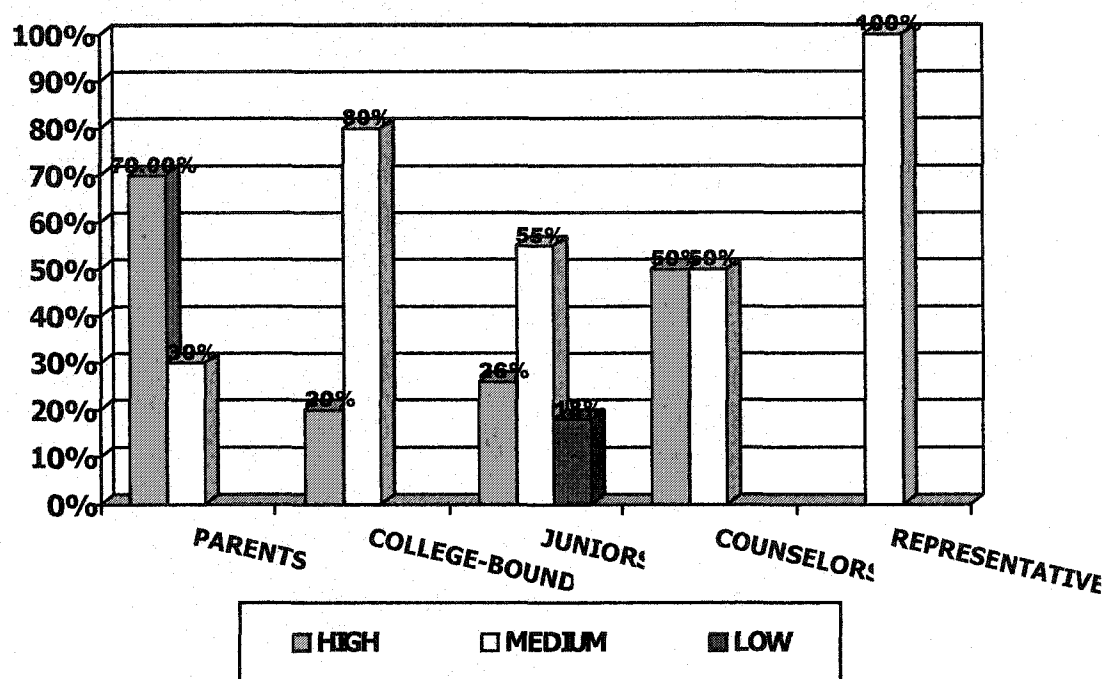


Figure 5. Triangulation of Parental Influence Levels

Perceived parental involvement levels varied slightly among subgroups. Most participants reported parents were “somewhat” involved in the process of college choice as presented in Figure 6. Only the parent subgroup suggested considerably higher levels of parental involvement in college selection. Admissions representative participants unanimously reported parents as “somewhat” involved in college choice.

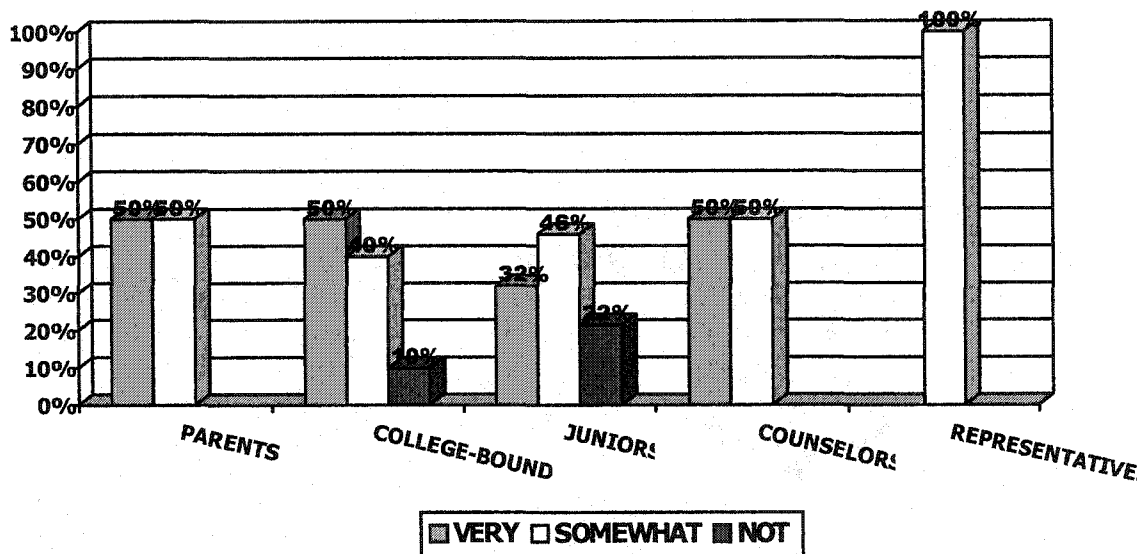


Figure 6. Triangulation of Parental Involvement Levels

In triangulating the college characteristic data from each subgroup, available programs and tuition costs spanned participant answers as the highest-ranking mean characteristics in the choice set as presented in Figure 7.

Parents	College-bounds	Juniors	Counselors	Representatives
Available Programs 1.0	Tuition Costs 1.40	Available Financial Aid 1.58	Available Financial Aid 1.0	Available Programs 1.0
Crime on Campus 1.10	Academic Reputation 1.50	Available Programs 1.65	Location of College 1.0	Available Financial Aid 1.17
Transferability of Classes 1.20	Job Placement Rates 1.60	Tuition Costs 1.66	Available Programs 1.50	Crime on Campus 1.50
Tuition Costs 1.30	Available Financial Aid 1.80	Room & Board Costs 1.77	Tuition Costs 1.50	Tuition Costs 1.50
Room & Board Costs 1.30	Available Programs 1.80	Location of College 1.87	Transferability of Classes 1.50	Graduation Rates 1.50

Figure 7. Triangulation of Top College Characteristics

Students, counselors, and representatives listed available financial aid in the top five highest scoring characteristics. Parents and representatives added crime on campus to their lists. Location of college was a high-ranking characteristic for the total population of junior students and counselors, but not for college-bound students and their parents as shown in Figure 7.

Parent participants, their college-bound juniors, and the total population of juniors reported similar responses to reasons to attend college. All three subgroups indicated to get a better job, to prepare for a specific occupation, and to gain a well-rounded education, as salient reasons for college (see Figure 8). Additionally, college-bound juniors and their classmates indicated the same responses but in a slightly different order as illustrated in Figure 8.

Parents	College-bounds	Juniors
To get a better job 1.0	To get a better job 1.10	To get a better job 1.23
To become a well-rounded person 1.0	To prepare for a specific occupation 1.40	To prepare for a specific occupation 1.44
To gain a well-rounded education 1.10	To learn more about things of interest 1.50	To gain a well-rounded education 1.55
To become a more thoughtful, responsible person 1.20	To gain a well-rounded education 1.60	To learn more about things of interest 1.64
To prepare for a specific occupation 1.30	To develop talent and ability 1.70	To develop talent and ability 1.65

Figure 8. Triangulation of Top Reasons for College

In triangulating the data regarding college information sources from each participant subgroup, clearly the most utilized and important sources of college

information were college websites and campus visits (see Figure 9). College websites served as quick and easy information for parents, as P2 reminded, "you can find anything on a website." However, the medium was often difficult to navigate and understand as illustrated by P8, "I've gone to websites, but it's not enough, I need simple information."

Parents	College-bounds	Juniors	Counselors	Representatives
Websites 90%	Websites 80%	Websites 62%	Campus Visit 100%	Websites 100%
Son or Daughter 80%	Counselor 80%	Campus Visit 57%	Rep Contact 100%	Campus Visit 100%
E-mail 60%	Mom 60%	Counselor 46%	Mom 100%	Rep Contact 100%
Campus Visit 50%	Print Publications 60%	Print Publication 41%	Dad 100%	College Night 83%
Rep Contact 50%	Dad 50%	Rep Contact 38%	Websites 50%	Print Publication 83%
	Campus Visit 50%	Mom, 37% & Dad, 30%		

Figure 9. Triangulation of Top College Information Sources

Parents listed son or daughter as an important information source as well as representative contact. Student participants reported print publications as a significant source of college information, yet parents and counselors failed to list print publications as one of their top information choices as shown in Figure 9.

Quantitative and Qualitative Juxtaposition

This study sought to understand the perceptions of parents of college-bound students from a rural school district immersed in the college choice

phenomenon. A juxtaposition of qualitative and quantitative data within the matched pairs of students and their parents illustrate the findings of this study and provide additional perception cognition as presented in Table 27.

The juxtaposition reveals the level of cultural capital attributed to each parent participant (see Table 27). A “high” level of capital indicates the attainment of a four-year degree or beyond. A “medium” level of cultural capital denotes some college and a “low” level indicates no experience in higher education. In this study, parents possessing a high level of cultural capital were somewhat involved in their student’s college choice and ranked their influence in medium to high ranges. Parents holding low levels of cultural capital reported they wielded a much higher influence than most parents and were very involved in college choice, yet their students indicated different responses (see Table 27).

All parent participants implied a higher level of influence than their students reported, and an involvement level that usually matched their student’s portrayal (see Table 27). S10 suggested her main influencer holds a medium level of influence and was not involved in the process of college choice, “...I don’t think they’ve ever really been too involved.” Conversely, P10 believed he carried a “high” level of influence about college matters with his daughter, and a “very involved” level of involvement, “what we’ve talked about and look at is that it is gonna have to help her direct toward the medical field and if she can’t do what she wants to do by going straight into the medical field through everything...I don’t want her to go there and just see if she can get a general education, that’s not what we’re after.”

Table 27 Quantitative and Qualitative Juxtaposition

	Gender	Ethnicity	Cultural Capital Level	Influence Level	Involvement Level	Top College Characteristics	Motivation	Communication
S1	M	Hispanic		Medium	Very	Area of Interest	Verbal	Daily
P1	F	Hispanic	High	High	Somewhat	Location – Close to Home		
S2	M	White		Medium	Somewhat	Location – In-state	Verbal	Bi-weekly
P2	M	White	High	Medium	Somewhat	Size – Big		
S3	F	Hispanic		High	Very	Safety	Verbal & Action	Daily
P3	F	Hispanic	High	High	Somewhat	Safety		
S4	M	White		Medium	Very	Location- Far away	Verbal & Action	Daily
P4	F	White	Medium	Medium	Very	Size – Small		
S5	F	White		Medium	Somewhat	Location – In-state	Verbal	Daily
P5	F	White	Low	High	Very	Safety		
S6	F	White		Medium	Somewhat	Area of Interest	Verbal	Weekly
P6	F	White	Medium	High	Somewhat	Size – Small		
S7	M	Hispanic		High	Very	Size - Small	Verbal	Daily
P7	M	Hispanic	Low	High	Very	Location – Close to Home		
S8	M	Hispanic		Medium	Very	Area of Interest	Verbal & Action	Daily
P8	F	White	Medium	High	Somewhat	Safety		
S9	F	White		Medium	Somewhat	Location – Close to Home	Verbal & Action	Weekly
P9	F	White	High	Medium	Somewhat	Area of Interest		
S10	F	White		Medium	Not	Safety	Verbal	Bi-weekly
P10	M	White	Low	High	Very	Location – In-state		

Based on phenomenological interviews, college characteristics individual parents placed the greatest emphasis on such as campus safety, campus location, campus size, and academic program or area of interest, were not necessarily what their student deemed important as listed in Table 27. For example, P9 suggested, "We look at where the best program for her... it's not just a place for product it's a place for learning, and for growing, and for developing ideas, and I don't think people realize a college isn't just a college...it's bigger than that." P9's college-bound daughter selects, "location because I kinda want to be close to home for a couple years."

S1's mom emphasized campus location, yet her college-bound son stated, "I'm looking at schools with good law programs...location doesn't matter, size doesn't scare me." P6 claimed, "I would like to see her go to a small, rural college where she can get a lot of attention and have a closeness with the whole school, instead of being at such a big one where she's just a number," her daughter (S6) hoped to, "find a school with available courses that meet my interests... the size of the school is kinda important 'cause I mean you do want small classes but then again if you have a high reputation school that you'll be attending that has a known good education and that's kind of important."

P3 asserted, "it's a whole different situation when you're talking about a son versus a girl, a daughter. And so, you know, certainly we look at security for her." P3's daughter felt the same way, "Crime rate is definitely one thing I am kind of iffy about colleges...like I'm scared you know being a girl and everything."

P5 stated, "Yeah, this is gonna sound weird, but sometimes when we're looking at the pictures and everything like that. It's like I don't know the neighborhoods around there look a little scary," but S5 asserted, "I'm really looking to go to an in-state college 'cause they are a lot cheaper ...they can't be the lowest college, but they don't have to be the highest." Further, P10 suggested, "the overall look and feel of the university or college is my main concern. 'Cause I don't want her going somewhere, 'cause she is a girl, I do not want her in an area, go' in to ah...wherever and it's not safe for her. "

P7 claimed, "I would like a school close to home," his son (S7) admitted, "the size of the classes, the size of the school...I think that better if it is more one on one schooling. Location...I'd rather go somewhere where it is not to busy...maybe a little town."

Motivation and communication regarding college choice varied for each parent and student pair. Parents who held a higher level of involvement communicated with their child daily about college matters. Additionally, students who reported a high level of involvement and influence from their parents also felt verbal (words) and action (acting or doing) motivation and participated in daily conversations about college issues as illustrated in Table 27. Male students consistently reported conversing more often with their parents about college matters than female students. Contrarily, Hossler et al. found female students conversed more with their parents regarding college matters than male students (1999).

Composite Essence Statement of Phenomenon

The essence of the college choice phenomenon synthesized into six core themes: Influence, Involvement, College Characteristics, College Importance, Encouragement, and Communication. Each theme was a compilation of clustered significant statement and invariant constituents from participant interviews and captured the living descriptions of the college choice experience for each participant. The interrelated roles of parents, college-bound students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives embedded within the core themes produced an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. On the exterior participant groups seemed homogeneous; however each group was intensely heterogeneous.

The textural and structural structures, which permeated how each individual interacted in the college choice phenomenon, hinged on one's educational background and experience. Educational background or cultural capital, especially for parents, represented the foundational knowledge of the phenomenon. High school counselors and admissions representatives agreed parents who secured little exposure to higher education "just don't know," and because of this information gap, were often "reluctant to even enter the process and wait till the last minute to do anything."

For parents who were familiar with the process of college choice either through their own educational experience or from the exposure of experiencing the phenomenon with older children, there was a sense of knowing what to expect and a comfort that did not exist for parents who possessed little exposure

to the phenomenon. Parents in this study who did not attend or only attended some college felt an essential need to share the importance of college with their children, yet knew little of the steps of college choice. In a way these unexposed parents, “pushed” their children to attend college by explaining their own circumstances, even their failures as P1 described, “I want him to be different in everything, because if you don’t go to the college or you don’t go to the school, you’re gonna be like me you know, work’ in the kitchen and stinky all day long.” P6 asserted, “I have not gone and finished and I feel that I did myself a disservice by not doing so prior to getting married and I don’t want her to feel that way.” Collectively, parents with or without college degree attainment felt higher education directed their student towards “a better life.”

A line in a popular movie “A Knight’s Tale” holds a seminal introduction to the essence of the college choice phenomenon and an understanding of parental perceptions. As it goes, William Thatcher’s father, ready to release him to intern with a knight of nobility, urged his son, “Now go, change your stars and live a better life than I am” (Helgeland & Van Rellim, 2001). This scenario is much like the one lived by parents of college-bound students. In this work, the six core themes of the college choice phenomenon included: Influence, Involvement, College Characteristics, College Importance, Encouragement, and Communication. Distinctive attributes characterized each theme.

Influence

The title of “main influencer” was attributed to one parent more than the other. In this study, the parent who served as the main influencer in the

phenomenon depended on the gender of the college-bound student, as well as the education background of the parent as S9 explained, "My Mom, she went to college my Dad didn't so she knows more about it."

The data supported the notion that male student participants often selected their fathers as the main influencers and female students selected their mothers, if from traditional two-parent families. Almost half of the participating students (S2, S3, S7, S9) in this study were from traditional families as presented in Table 28. If not, such as one with divorce or a single parent household, the main influencer was the parent who the student resided with. Of course there were special circumstances, as S5 explained, "my Aunt [Sharon] is the one that pushes college."

Table 28 Main Influencer for College

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Mom	X		X	X		X		X	X	
Dad		X					X			X
Other					X (Aunt)					

In this study, parental influence was measured in levels. The data revealed that a parent's level of influence correlated with their educational background or level of cultural capital. Parents (P3, P9) who attended college remembered their parents influencing college attendance; consequently they attended college and felt an obligation to carry on the tradition. Parents who possessed a low level of cultural capital encouraged the general notion of college

but did not hold the necessary knowledge to carry that influence throughout the entire process of college choice. As S5 stated, "she doesn't really care what colleges, she just wants us to go."

Undoubtedly, the college selection was decided with guidance from parents and others. However, as many of the parents in this study revealed they hope their child makes the ultimate decision of which college to attend, as P8 explained, "I'm real big on what makes him happy because if he's happy he'll stay in school and finish."

Involvement

The level of involvement gauged by parents, students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives suggested a medium level of parental involvement. Parent participants perceived more involvement than any other participant group. Yet, high school counselors and admissions representatives felt parents should involve themselves much more in the processes of college choice. As HSC1 advised, "With college financial aid nights, and also with making sure 'cause you have to have certain requirements to get in to college that are different than graduation requirements, so pushing them to make sure they're in the honors classes and taking the appropriate classes." At the same time, high school counselors admitted, "overly involved," parents, who fill out the scholarship applications, even sign up their student for college entrance examinations existed and hindered student decision-making processes.

For students, many parents possessing high cultural capital were more like coaches in the choice process. Other parents, often those with low cultural capital, acted as cheerleaders, cheering from the sidelines. These roles, if set on a sliding continuum, could be considered as a guideline in measuring the proper amount of parental involvement in the phenomenon as illustrated in Figure 10.

Counselors and admissions representatives hoped parents, especially those with little post-secondary exposure or cultural capital, would immerse themselves in learning the processes of college choice in an attempt to assist their student, not only in the choice to attend college but also in which college to enroll to ensure the right fit.

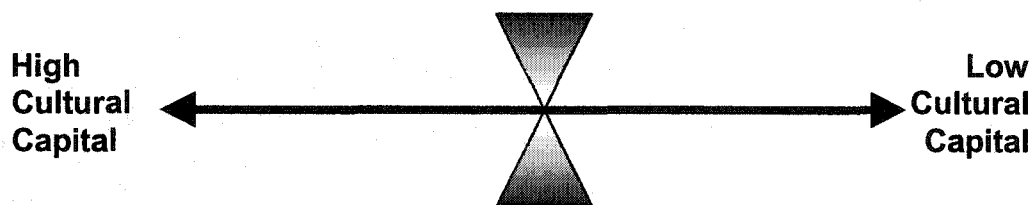


Figure 10. Involvement Continuum

College Characteristics

The phenomenological data revealed six main characteristics influence parent participant's perception of college selection: (1) location of institution and its relevant distance from home and geographical setting; (2) area of interest or program interest of their college-bound student; (3) campus safety; (4) campus size as it pertains to personalization and one-on-one interaction with professors;

- (5) campus environment including the overall feel of the campus community; and
- (6) costs of college.

Location was the most commonly talked about characteristic, cited more times across participant groups than any other factor. Location was salient for two primary reasons, distance from home and in-state locale. Both issues of location related to two other characteristics, campus safety and costs of college. Campus safety was rooted in location as P7 illustrated, "I want to feel safe, knowing that he's safe. I think that's the biggest thing I don't want him to go into a big city and say that he goes to a school that he's gotta take the subway across town and you know go through these bad neighborhood just to go to a classroom."

Concomitantly, costs of college were related to location, for many student participants implied in-state institutions were more economical than out-of-state or far away locations. Financing higher education was constructed as a puzzle in which each participant group held a piece. The puzzle could only be completed when all participants are willing to put the pieces together. Parents, especially parents with little educational background, often misunderstand costs of college. As HSC2 believed, "...parents who haven't been through college, they think automatically I can't afford it...I think sometimes they just really have no concept of how much it really costs, they just think of it as out of their reach." As illustrated by P5's comment, "...it's gonna be hard for her to go to a really good one [college], ya know, one that I would like to see her go to, because it is gonna be to expensive and a lot of the financial aid will not pick it up."

For the majority of parent participant, concerns of costs were present but most did not want costs to be a prohibiting factor, as S1 believed, "I think they don't really care what the cost is they just want me to go." P8 shared, "I like to know what he's thinking about and I try hard not to let him know my worry about the money." But, her college-bound son worried, "Mom is really stressing that I need to keep my grades up and stay at the top where I can get massive scholarships to pay for almost everything so it doesn't have to be a burden on her shoulders."

Much like other college-bound students S5 claimed, "I'm not going to leave it up to them. I think that, ya know, as a child it is my responsibility to help out," and S7 stated, "I know they would help me support and do the tuition and everything, but I'm hoping for the financial aid and scholarships, hopefully a full scholarship." Thus, at this point in their students junior year, parents did not specifically identify costs of college as a primary concern or obstacle, yet students were more aware of the issue than their parents.

Counselors felt the majority of parents simply did not understand the tuition puzzle and operationalized in their own mind huge prices with little financial assistance. HSC1 believed, "I think they [parents] think it is financial, but I think when it comes right down to it, it is really a psychological thing and they are using the finances as an excuse." HSC2 maintained if she was able to sit down and talk to parents about college costs, she could extinguish a lot of fears simply by showing parents how they can afford college.

College Importance

For many, college importance conjured dreams of success and money complimented by a lavish and autonomous lifestyle. Although in part it is true that college graduates tend to make more money than those who do not graduate from college (Boyer, 1987), higher education's societal importance is much more robust than this imagery. The historian, Martin Trow (1989) claimed, "Higher education is the key institution in American society, the source of many of its most important ideas, values, skills, and energies."

Indeed, this study affirmed that across participant groups the reasons for attending college surfaced at the idea of "a better life," which included "to get a better job," and "make more money." The meanings derived from participants suggested that college was an opportunity for individuals to reach their highest potential.

For students in this study, college importance was as S5 explained, "They'll [her parents] support me in whatever I do. But, the only thing is they'll make me go to college, they want me to get an education, to be something in life," or S7 when he remembered, "It's like, you're gonna go to college after that you can do whatever you want, so they [his parents] know that they gave me what I needed for life."

Parents were equally as committed to the importance of college as P1 commented, "So, I know he really wants to go to the college and I think even if I have to take another three jobs for you, you're gonna go to the college." Parent participants gleaned their perceptions of college importance by their own

individual habitus as P6 illustrates, “I have not gone and finished and feel that I did myself a disservice by not doing so prior to getting married and I don’t want her to feel that way.” Although perceptions of college importance varied, most with low to medium cultural capital believed they had “missed out” on an important opportunity.

Encouragement or Motivation

It was with consistent encouragement that many parent participants successfully guided their child towards college opportunities. Parents in this study started encouraging college attendance when their children were young. Consistency rates the amount and steadfastness of encouragement or motivation students feel from parents. Subsidiaries or types of encouragement discovered in this study included verbal and action encouragement. Verbal encouragement was operationally defined in this work as usage of words, while action encouragement was defined as the state of acting or doing. College-bound student participants believed their parents verbally encouraged by talking to them, sharing personal experiences, and checking up on their academic progress. Parents and high school counselors corroborated these verbal actions.

Parents who demonstrated action encouragement were those who made students study, attend school functions, visit with counselors about college matters, attend high school college nights, and even visit college campuses. For example, S4 distinguished, “My Mom makes me do my work, she just like keeps me up on my grades and makes me go to school. My Dad just encourages me, he always asks me how my grades are doing and how I’m doing in school.”

Verbal and action encouragement were rarely synonymous, but often found complimented one another. However, one without the other was programmatic as HSC2 commented, "I think most parents, they want to say, oh of course you should go to college, you should get a great career and this and that but how many actually carry it through."

Many of the college-bound participants enjoyed both verbal and action encouragement from their parents as summarized in Table 29. Yet, most students were more aware of the verbal encouragement their parents shared with them than the action encouragement. Parents who provide both types of encouragement most often secured a high level of cultural capital.

Table 29 Common Types of College Encouragement

S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Verbal	Verbal	Verbal & Action	Verbal & Action	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal & Action	Verbal & Action	Verbal

Communication

Parents and students communicated weekly, some everyday about college matters as presented in Table 30. Forums in which college discussions occurred were commonly casual and informal. Parent and student participants alike believed that the frequency in which they communicated about college matters increased in the last year due to the student's own interest in college topics. Conversations were stirred by frequent mailings and electronic mail from colleges and universities.

Table 30 Frequency of College Communication

S1/P1	S2/P2	S3/P3	S4/P4	S5/P5	S6/P6	S7/P7	S8/P8	S9/P9	S10/P10
Daily	Bi-weekly	Daily	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Bi-weekly

Within communication specific informational needs of both students and parents existed regarding college choice processes. Sometimes high school counselors assisted in filling informational needs, but more often for the college-bound student rather than their parent. College websites and college mail publications served as important sources of information for parents and students and helped in bridging informational gaps.

Further, communication encompassed the needs of parents in the phenomenon. P4 demonstrated a parental need cited by many parents, "I'd rather talk to people individually than just read their catalogue, 'cause a lot of the time they make it look a lot better then it really is, but if you go on campus and just kind a wonder yourself and talk to the students, sit in on a class or two, just to get the feel of the school, see if it feels right." Actual needs of parent participants in this study were often unmet by the higher education community because they were unknown. However, these needs do exist and must be addressed in order to disseminate accurate and up-to-date information on college matters.

Forums within high school contexts, in which parents could be involved in college planning with their college-bound student, were not in place at either one

of the high schools in this study. Consequently, parents had little choice but to limit their involvement in the college guidance of their children. This issue of partnership with high school processes demanded attention by all parties. For parents, the conundrum was simply the need to stay in touch with how their student was progressing academically, because as one parent noted, "you know, these are our kids."

Parents played a critical role in the lives of their college-bound students. They served either as a successful or unsuccessful example of the benefits of higher education. A student's earliest inculcations of college aspirations came from a parent. High school counselors and admissions representatives agreed parents made a significant impact in the directions followed within the college choice phenomenon. In this study, college-bound students wanted their parents involved, they needed their guidance and support, but they also wanted to feel they had made the final decision of which college to attend on their own.

Concomitantly, parents felt their student's should make the ultimate college choice autonomously. Most important, parents possessed a personal interest in assuring their student found happiness and ultimate success through a venue they believed in, higher education.

Parent Model for Phenomenon

Part of the data for this research explored a matched set of students and parents, two high school counselors, and six admissions representatives all of which were intimately involved with the same college choice phenomenon.

Through the qualitative and quantitative analyses, a snapshot of the parent's role in the college choice process emerged providing the opportunity to create a point-in-time parent model of the phenomenon as presented in Figure 12.

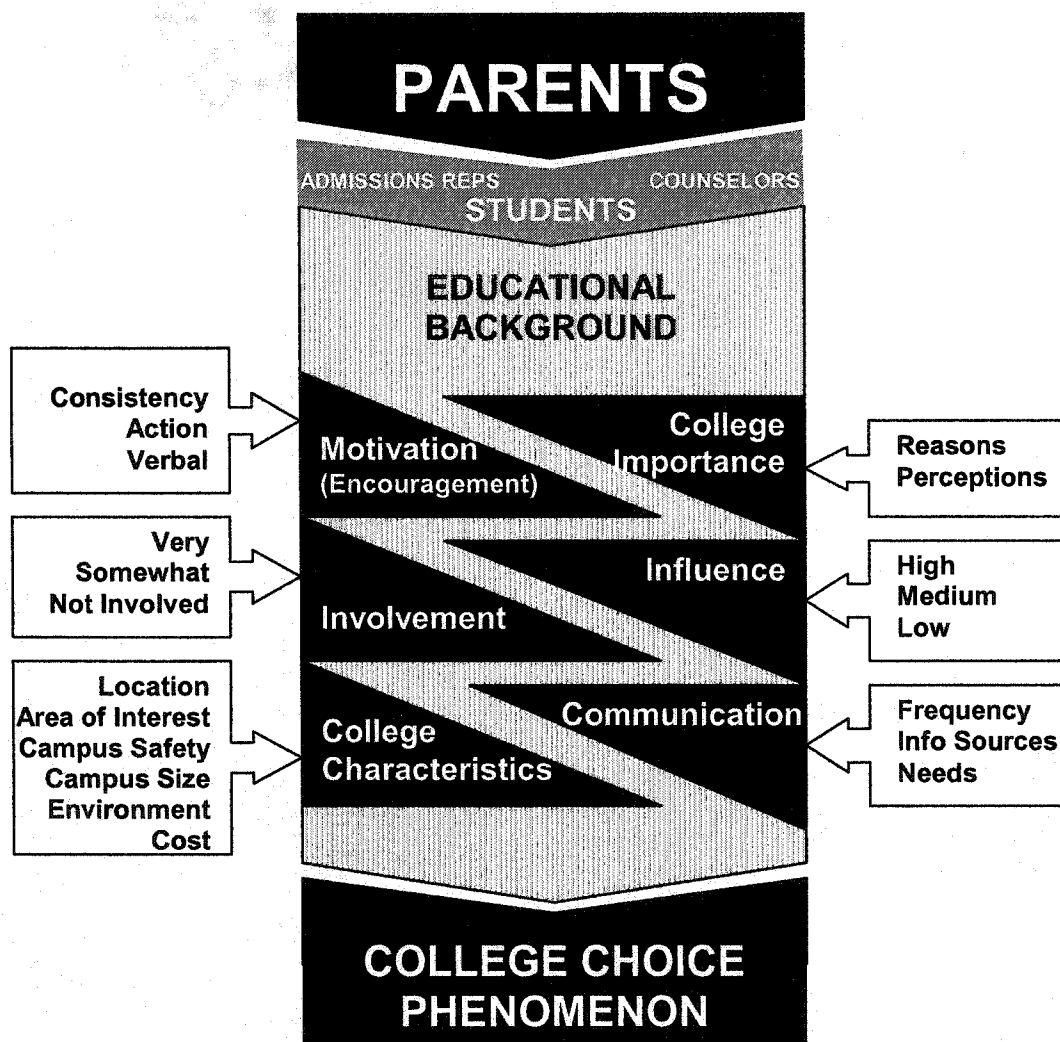


Figure 12. Point-In-Time Parent Model of The College Choice Phenomenon

The model, constructed to describe parental perceptions and participation in the junior year of their college-bound student's college choice process, is appropriate in understanding and further exploring interrelationships within the phenomenon and vital variables influencing decision-making methods.

Numerous researchers (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith; 1989) have suggested the junior year as a critical time period for college-bound students and their parents. Consequently this model, despite slight parental differences exhibited in many components of the model, illustrate a myriad of consistent themes and patterns appropriate for transferability.

The parent model incorporated the interrelated roles explored in this research. The actors (students, high school counselors, admissions representatives) served as informants for parents. Obviously, students (as indicated by a larger font) functioned as the primary informant for parents.

The phenomenological core themes represented decision-making factors within the phenomenon along with distinct attributes or issues inside each theme gleaned from the qualitative and quantitative analysis portions of this research. Theme or decision-making factor positioning within the model depicted a specific hierarchical order as shown in Figure 12. For example, parents must first believe in the importance of higher education before becoming involved in the phenomenon. Thus, college importance was positioned as the first decision-making factor within the model. Followed by motivation for college, influence regarding college matters, involvement in college exploration and selection, and

communication focusing on college information sources and needs. College characteristics denoted the last theme or decision-making factor for once the final characteristics were identified, the choice of where to attend was solidified.

Embedded behind these themes lies the grounding for the entire model, educational background (see Figure 12). Every decision made within the college choice phenomenon was based on an individual's educational background or level of cultural capital. In this model, educational background contributed to an individual's habitus and acted as a filter through which all six decision-making factors were sifted through solidifying parent's perceptions and ideas about the phenomenon as illustrated in Figure 12. Once the decisions and explorations of each core theme were completed by the parent the model collapsed engulfing the decision-making factors and leaving parents to navigate with their students a clear course within the college choice phenomenon.

Serendipitous Findings

This research resulted in three significant serendipitous findings. The first finding enforced the utility of contemporary information sources such as college websites. Across all participant cases, college websites were consistently cited as a valuable information source in the college choice process. Traditional marketing techniques, such as print publications, do not meet the totality of needs the new generations of college-bound students nor their parents display. Institutions of higher learning must find ways to personalize this mode of communication rather than allowing it to continue as a one-size-fits all approach

to recruiting. If marketing persists in this manner, students will forsake finding the best "fit" institution and fail to persist to degree attainment.

Second, high school structures and organizational patterns or habitus limited access to college opportunities. The importance of college was either affirmed or denied in the high school setting by counselors, teachers, and even coaches. These structures often prohibited the involvement of parents in the guidance of their children and in the opportunities of college. High school counselors were confined to the organizational habitus of their high school, and thus were of little value to parents who did not know how to involve themselves in the lives of their students, especially in their academic preparations.

The third deals with the economic state of the nation. Recently, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported, "Then there's September 11...many experts fear that layoffs will force parents to rethink plans for sending their children to college" (Brownstein, 2001, p. A52). Validation of the economic impact of 9-11 was demonstrated by HSC1, when she reported, "I've been doing my senior credit checks and the kids that were adamant that they were going to ASU, or NAU, or U of A, now that they are looking at the tuition rates going up...are now talking about going to MCC [Mohave Community College] because they can get two years at a lower price and transfer to an in-state university." Further HSC2 suggested, "And the parents are looking at it especially with a lot of the parents who have been laid off or cut back." The junior students in this study were aware of the costs of college and understood that many of their parents would not be able to assist them financially if they chose to attend

college. This is an invisible warning to higher education that students are cost conscious and may feel they cannot afford to attend college. Although not significantly present in this study's college-bound participants, it was a concern cited by both high school counselor participants.

Summary

The results of this research are intended to assist higher education institutions as they service the growing awareness of the parent population of college-bound students. The analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data suggested students, parents, high school counselors, and admissions representatives were each confined by their own habitus or set of dispositions about the world around them. Cultural capital played a significant role in understanding the processes of college. Parents who secured a high level of cultural capital were more helpful and involved with their college-bound student in the college choice process than those with low cultural capital. Yet, the student participants in this study yearned for high cultural capital levels no matter what traditional education levels dominated their family background and all parent participants enforced the overall importance of college attendance.

Primarily, parents aligned with the thinking of their students; few cases suggested differently. For example, P4 knew her son S4, "wants to run a golf course and be a professional golfer...so he needs the business aspect of it. In order to fulfill his dreams he's got to attend college he can't do it out of high school and he realizes that." Her son, S4 conferred, "They want me to go

wherever I want to go... I want to be a PGA professional golfer, teach people how to play, run a golf course. I'll major in business and then take a PGA course that'll certify you as a professional."

In this study, parents thought of issues of cost as secondary while their students thought of costs as primary. The most influential college characteristic cited by all subgroups was program area. Other essential factors for parents included campus safety, campus environment, campus size, and location. Overall, parents yearned for their child to succeed and live "a better life."

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research explored the perceptions of parents in the college choice phenomenon. Chapter five reviews the structures, methodology, conclusions and recommendations of this exploration. The findings of this research are briefly summarized with explanations for the results postulated, as well as a list of research limitations. Finally, conclusions based on the results of the present study, the implications for the study, and recommendations for further research are discussed.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to examine, through a phenomenological lens, college choice and parental perceptions of the phenomenon. The study was exploratory in nature, dominated by a qualitative design and supported by a quantitative component. The qualitative approach, phenomenology, depicted the meaning of lived experiences of parents, college-bound students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives. Survey research, the quantitative component, accumulated descriptive statistics regarding college characteristics, information sources, and purposes of college across participant groups.

Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital, habitus, and fields explored contexts of the phenomenon and the essential use of these embedded theoretical constructs within each participant group. To determine the parent population, a maximum variation sample of college-bound junior students in the Camino River Union High School District was identified with subsequent counselors and admissions representative participants.

Unable to identify any study of this nature, which concentrated on the parents of junior students, the survey instruments for each population were specifically developed for this phenomenological research. The closed-ended questions contained within each survey instrument utilized components from existing surveys, specifically Beyer's (1992) survey instrument, Buford's (1987) parent survey instrument, information from the review of literature, and assistance from high school and college personnel. Each instrument was tested for validity and reliability prior to use.

The quantitative research analysis based on descriptive statistics, analyzed survey responses to determine their ability to address the six research sub-questions. Survey questions were analyzed by descriptive techniques: frequency counts, percentages, and cross tabulations. Average means were calculated for each Likert scale questions identifying informants' level of agreement on a four-point scale for each of the individual college characteristics or purposes.

The qualitative phenomenology approach attempted to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied. A maximum

variation sample of college-bound students and their parents, the two high school counselors and six admissions representatives from the districts top post-secondary feeder institutions participated in formal interviews which were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed and coded. Analysis of each interview followed the phenomenological tradition of classification, description, reduction, interpretation, and representation (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). These processes reduced experiences through the identification of significant statements or meaning units, core themes, and descriptions of the "essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, p. 100).

Subsequent reduction of meaning units resulted in the textural (what) and structural (how) meanings of each participant and participant group. Eventually this mitigation led to a composite and exhaustive essence statement of the college choice phenomenon incorporating all subgroup essence statements.

The researcher employed phenomenological bracketing and epoche to stabilize validity and reliability issues as well as triangulation of the corpus of data. Further, to safeguard intersubjective validity an outside reader verified and confirmed identifying patterns of each textural and structural synthesis descriptions and the overall across case essence statement.

Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data the following findings were identified as significant and grouped under each sub-question topic.

Quantitative Findings for Parental Influence

1. On a three-point scale of "high," "medium," and "low" 55% of all junior students surveyed indicated parents held a "medium" level of influence in their student's college choice process.
2. On a three-point scale, 70% of parent participants in this study listed their level of influence as "high," while the remaining 30% ascertained their influence as "medium."
3. High school counselors, in this study estimated the level of a parent's influence over college choice processes as equally distributed between "high" and "medium" levels.
4. Of admissions representatives, 100% of the participants ascertained parental influence at a "medium" level in matters of college choice.
5. Female parent participants, 70% estimated they held a "high" level of influence over college matters, while only 33% of males denoted the same level.
6. Within the college-bound participants, Hispanic students judged the influence of their parents as "high," while White students estimated the influence of their parents as "medium" in college matters.
7. All Hispanic parents in this study estimated the level of influence they held with their college-bound student as "high," while only 57% of White parents claimed a "high" level of influence with their college-bound students.

Qualitative Findings for Parental Influence

1. Parents who encouraged their children from a young age to think about college were more likely to see their child on a college-bound track.
2. A parent's educational background held weight in how much influence over college matters they maintained with their college-bound student. In the minds of many students and parents, educational experience equated with influence and knowledge of college processes.
3. High school counselors witnessed two kinds of parents: those who had influence over college matters and used it, and those who felt they had little influence, usually due to limited higher education exposure or low cultural capital.
4. Students who reported low parental influence regarding college matters most often relied on the high school counselor for guidance.
5. In traditional families, male students relied on their fathers as main influencers for college, while female students relied on their mothers. In single parent or divorced families the main influencer was most often the parent the student resided with full-time.
6. The most significant tool in influencing a student toward college was parental example, often shared by stories or by lived experiences.
7. The majority of parents in this study decided their child would attend college before they were born, some in grade school.
8. The majority of parents in this study felt the relative strength of their influence about college matters was strong. While the majority of students

felt their parent's influence was at a medium level, allowing them to "make the ultimate decision" of college selection.

9. Students in this study perceived the level of their parents influence as commensurate to the level of their education or cultural capital.
10. High school counselors and admissions representatives felt parents wielded a medium level of influence over their child, especially in financial matters.

Quantitative Results of Parent Involvement

1. On a three-point scale of "very involved," "somewhat involved," and "not involved," 46% of the total junior population in this survey indicated their parents were "somewhat involved," with their college choice planning processes, 27% reported "very involved," while 22% indicated "not involved."
2. On a three-point scale, high school counselors estimated an equal distribution of parental involvement from "very involved" to "somewhat involved" levels.
3. On a three-point scale, 100% of admissions representative participants denoted parents were "somewhat involved," in college choice processes.
4. Parent participants estimated their level of involvement as equally distributed between "very involved" and "somewhat involved," and 50% of the college-bound students felt their parents were "very involved," with 40% indicating "somewhat involved" in college choice, and only 10% or one participating student reporting, "not involved."

5. Among male college-bound participants, 80% estimated their parents were “very involved” in the college selection process, while only 20% of female participants indicated the same level.
6. The majority of male parent participants (67%) felt “somewhat involved,” with their student’s college choice, while 57% of female parents indicated a “very involved” level of involvement and 43% indicated a “somewhat involved” stance in their college-bound student’s college choice.
7. Among Hispanic students, 100% reported their parents were “very involved” in the college choice process, compared to only 67% of White students who suggested parental involvement at a “very involved” level.
8. Among White parents, 57% felt they wielded a “very involved” level of involvement over their college-bound students, yet only 33% of Hispanic parents suggested the same “very involved” level.

Qualitative Results for Parental Involvement

1. Admissions representatives believed parental involvement in college choice was predicated on the involvement of the college-bound student.
2. Admissions representatives distinguished parental involvement as either positively reinforcing the college path their student embarks on or standing as obstacles because of their own limited knowledge of college matters.
3. Both high school counselors in this study agreed parents should be involved in the college choice process to enforce the importance of education, and “maybe even do better in high school.”

4. Parents limited their involvement in the academic guidance of their college-bound student because forums that involved parents in college choice processes were not in place at either of the high schools in this study.
5. The majority of parent participants placed significant pressure on their college-bound student to secure high grades in order to offset college costs.
6. Few structured experiences were available to parents and their junior college-bound students regarding college opportunities.
7. The majority of college-bound students felt their parents allowed them to make their own decisions about college choice, but not about the option of attending college, "it's not an option."
8. Parents who experienced some college were more involved in the specifics of college choice than parents who did not attend college. These parents felt they had more to contribute to the process of college choice than parents with little higher education exposure.
9. Every parent participant in this study communicated with his or her college-bound student about college matters at least weekly, over half discussed matters everyday.
10. Parents perceived their involvement in the phenomenon at a higher level than their students.
11. High school counselors and admissions representatives believed parents must be involved in the process and preparation of college. However,

they feared parents were either not involved or too involved and in both cases discouraged their college-bound student.

Quantitative Results for College Characteristics

1. Among parent participants, 100% indicated they “strongly agree” the characteristic, “available programs” was important in college choice, followed by a mean ranking of, “crime on campus” (1.10), “transferability of the classes” (1.20), “tuition costs” (1.30), and “room and board costs” (1.30).
2. When aggregated, the characteristic availability of program yielded no significant difference between gender or participant groups. Every participant in this study suggested they “strongly agree” to the importance of the characteristic in the college choice process.
3. Of the college characteristic list, parent participants lowest mean ranking characteristics included: location of college (2.10), social life (2.10), and size of student body (2.00). Standard deviation calculations indicated the greatest variance between “agree” and “disagree” in size of student body and social life.
4. Using scores on a 4-point Likert scale with “1” meaning “strongly agree,” “2” implying “somewhat agree,” “3” implying “somewhat disagree,” and “4” meaning “strongly disagree.” Parent participants in this study indicated two characteristics, “to get a better job,” and “become a well-rounded person,” with the highest mean and top ranking.

5. Across all participant groups, the reasons to attend college scoring the lowest means or least importance included to avoid having to get a full time job, to meet and marry a successful person, and there is nothing better to do.
6. The total population of junior students indicated on a four-point Likert scale they "strongly agree" to the importance of the following characteristics in the choice process: available financial aid (1.58), available program (1.65), tuition costs (1.66), room and board costs (1.77), and location of college (1.87).
7. The population of junior students gauged the lowest ranking mean characteristics as size of student body (2.54), and size of classes (2.28).
8. College-bound junior participants mean scores differed compared to the total junior population. They indicated, "strongly agree," to the importance of college characteristics: tuition costs (1.40), academic reputation (1.50), job placement rates (1.6), available financial aid (1.80), and available programs (1.80).
9. College-bound juniors noted the lowest mean ranking characteristics in the choice process as size of student body (2.60), number of computers on campus (2.50), and available resident hall or on-campus housing (2.40).
10. College-bound students and their parents differed on two characteristics, crime on campus and transferability of the classes. Parents "strongly agree" the two factors were important in college choice, yet their students

“somewhat agree” to the importance of crime on campus and transferability of classes.

11. Parents and high school counselors either “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree “ on the importance of every characteristic listed on the survey instrument.
12. In the ranking of the characteristic location of college, both counselors “strongly agree” to the importance of the factor, while parents “somewhat agree” that location is salient in college choice.
13. Crime on campus, another factor parents “strongly agree” on the importance of, ranks as “somewhat agree” with high school counselors.
14. Both high school counselor participants ranked the importance of graduation rates (2.50), job placement rates (2.50), number of computers on campus (2.50), and job availability at college (2.50) as “somewhat agree.”
15. Counselor participants ranked the following characteristics with the highest mean scores: location of college (1.0), available financial aid (1.0), available programs (1.50), transferability of the classes (1.50), tuition costs (1.50), and room and board costs (1.50).
16. Admissions representatives and parents yielded the highest percentage of similarities within means than any other subgroup comparison.
17. Parents and representative both “strongly agree” that the characteristic available programs was most important in the college choice selection.

18. Admissions representatives paralleled parental perceptions in the lowest mean ranking or "somewhat agree" characteristics: size of student body (2.17), social life (2.17), and job availability at college (2.50).

Qualitative Results for College Characteristics

1. Parent participants in this study winnowed the choice set down to six key characteristics: campus safety, location, area of interest, campus environment, campus size, and costs of college.
2. Campus safety was a heightened concern for parents of college-bound females and for parents of most male students.
3. Campus size was a concern for parents of college-bound students for two reasons: (a) parents sought smaller institution for increased personalization; or (b) parents sought larger institutions which offered a wider range of academic programming and opportunities.
4. Cost of college was a characteristic many were concerned with, but all were committed to finding financial solutions to ensure college attendance for their student.
5. The parent participants in this study consistently encouraged their student to keep their academic record high in order to secure scholarships and other financial aid to offset the total cost of college.
6. College-bound student participants indicated the key college characteristics for them included location of campus and area of interest.

7. Student participants gauged location as an important college characteristic for two reasons: (a) students want to be closer to home; and (b) students want to take advantage of lower in-state tuition rates.
8. A majority of student participants cited campus size because they sought a smaller campus with smaller class sizes and a more personalized educational environment.
9. Parents and their college-bound students rarely talked of college characteristics as a specific topic. However, they talk weekly, some everyday about exploration of college options, college mailers, grades, and school progress.
10. Student participants whose parents have little higher education exposure felt their parents did not know enough about college to assess the importance of one characteristic over the other.
11. For student participants, costs of college was an important characteristic but not one that would prohibit them from attending the institution of their choice.
12. High school counselors agreed to the importance of three key characteristics in choosing a college: campus safety, campus location, and campus environment.
13. Location of campus was a primary characteristic for high school counselors and college-bound students for the same two-fold reasons students cited, closeness to home and lower in-state tuition rates.

14. Counselors advocated in-state institutions because they believed in-state tuition rates were less than out-of-state and the programming was “essentially the same.”
15. Counselor participants felt the environment and class size of the institution was important in matching student needs and wants so students don’t become “overwhelmed,” and quit college.
16. Both counselors indicated costs of college as an important characteristic to understand, but not to place priority emphasis on in college selection. Counselors in this study felt assured that costs of college were relative and if understood could be managed.
17. Counselor participants overall involvement with parents and college-bound students was limited by the organizational context or habitus of the high school.
18. Both counselor participants in this study made college recommendations to parents and students from a very limited list of schools in which they were most familiar.
19. The majority of admissions representatives confessed that important characteristics in the college choice process should include program area and quality of the program.
20. Along with parent participants, admissions representatives felt campus safety was an important issue especially if they were the parent of a college-bound student.

21. Admissions representatives suggested parents ask “real questions” about characteristics like institutional fit, employment on campus and after graduation, health insurance, academic advisors, and size of classes.

Quantitative Results of College Information Sources

1. Across parent and student subgroups, the most valuable source of college information was college websites.
2. Parents in this study indicated the most important sources of college information as: college websites (90%), your son or daughter (80%), e-mail to a college (60%), visit to a college campus (50%), and personal contact with a college representative (50%).
3. Only 46% of the total population of junior students listed high school counselor as a primary information source for college topics. Yet, 80% of the college-bound matched pair students suggested high school counselor as a primary source of information.
4. Top information sources for the total population of junior students in this study included: college websites (62%), visit to a college campus (57%), high school counselor (46%), friend (38%), your mom (37%) and your dad (30%).
5. As a whole, students indicated the high school counselor served as a more important source of college information than their parents or friends.
6. Of parent participants, only 40% listed high school counselors as a resource in the college choice phenomenon, but 80% of their students felt counselors served as a primary resource for college information.

7. Parents designated 80% of their students served as information sources for them. As for their students, 80% of them cited counselors as a source of information. Thus, indirectly counselors served as a main source of information for parents.
8. College-bound student participants indicated their key sources of information as: college websites (80%), high school counselor (80%), your mom (60%), your dad (50%), and visit to a college campus (50%).
9. Both counselor participants unanimously agreed personal contact with a college representative (100%), visit to a college campus (100%), mother (100%), and father (100%) were top sources of college information.
10. Admissions representative participants unilaterally suggested college websites, visit to a college campus, and personal contact with a college representative as the highest-ranking information sources for college information.
11. Of representatives, 67% indicated high school counselors, mother, and father as equally valuable college information sources.

Qualitative Results of College Information Sources

1. Parent participants in this study were involved and wielded influence in the college choice phenomenon and should be included in the marketing strategies of any higher education institution.
2. Parents, especially those with low cultural capital, supported the overall notion of college, but relied on their college-bound students to learn about college processes.

3. Parents sought more involvement with college representatives in order to be more active with their college-bound student's decision-making processes.
4. Parent participants used college websites as the primary information source for exploration of college matters.
5. The majority of parent participants reviewed college mailers, but many felt they may not provide an accurate picture of the college; one parent suggested college publications were a "bunch of hype."
6. Parents felt college publications could be personalized so as to secure the right fit between student and institution.
7. Parent participants required simple information about college costs, specific programs, and the step-by-step processes of college attendance.
8. Parents desired their children to attend college regardless of their educational background or exposure and were committed to helping their college-bound students find "a better life" through higher education.

Limitations

This study recognized two primary limitations. First, the results of this investigation were limited by a localized sample. However, the sample, extracted from the fifth largest county in the country and influenced by a 24-hour gaming industry, deals with societal problems that resembled those of an urban city. Thus, the data, though gathered in a specific location, were significantly stratified.

Second, the college choice survey instrument designed for college-bound students failed to ask the question of whether or not the survey-taker intended to attend college. When the sample population adjusted to encompass the total population at the request of the participating school district the survey was not updated to incorporate the change. Thus, a junior student may have filled out a survey that did not intend to attend college. This limitation may have affected his or her survey answers.

In redesigning the survey for further follow-up research, a question indicating college-bound status should be added along with clearer questions regarding mother and father parental levels of education. A significant amount of junior students indicated "other" in answering this survey question because the option most closely resembling their own situation was not available. Listing "other" for students meant: (a) the student did not know the level of education their mother or father possess; (b) the student's parent(s) dropped out of high school; (c) the student's parent(s) joined the military; or (d) any combination of these options.

Conclusions Based on the Results of the Present Study

In comparing the findings from the survey data with the phenomenological data a high degree of concordance was found along with a myriad of results and perceptions of parents. The most relevant conclusions culled from this research encompassed: identification of important contemporary college characteristics, identification of the parent as a main influencer in college choice processes,

validation of the involvement of parents in the phenomenon, primary sources of college information, contemporary reasons to attend college, and informational needs of parents in the phenomenon.

Underlying the conclusions of this research was the significance of educational background. The educational experiences of parents impacted student choices. Similarly, researchers have suggested, "parental education and values appear to exert a strong influence over every aspect of the college choice process" (Bouse & Hossler, 1991, p. 15). In this study there existed a tangible difference between parents who secured a college education and those who did not. For example, parents with low to medium levels of cultural capital believed as P6 asserted, "I have not gone and finished and I feel that I did myself a disservice by not doing so prior to getting married and I don't want her to feel that way...now a days it's the norm, I mean, it use to be if you didn't have a high school diploma you were never gonna get a job, but know it's like if you don't have a college education you're not going to." P10 pointed out he desired his daughter (S10) to, "be able to achieve more in life and be able to do the things in life that I wasn't able to achieve in my life because I had to work from the bottom and work my way up. I wasn't allowed the opportunity to go to college, I lost my opportunity to go to college." Even P8 suggested, "I want him to have a better life than I do. I want him to be able to use his talents, he's a smart kid, and work at something he likes and he's good at."

Similarly their students agreed as S6 shared, "she didn't go to college right after, she got married and so she really has it in for us that we need to get our

education and our alone time and our independence,” and S10 stated, “My Dad...he lost his chance... he didn’t get to go to college, he wants me to go to college because he knows in this day that education is important,” and even S8 asserted, “She always tells me that I need to keep getting an education and keeping getting this amount of knowledge so I don’t wind up like her.”

Differences were apparent in every aspect of the phenomenon, yet none of the participating parents stifled the overall importance of attending college for their college-bound student.

Parents winnowed the college choice set down to six key characteristics of importance: campus safety, location, costs of college, area of interest or program area, campus size, and campus environment. Additionally they demonstrated concerns for transferability of classes and specific college costs such as room and board. Students agreed with parents on the importance of most characteristics except campus safety and transferability of classes. These two characteristics were not salient issues for students. Further, students in this study seemed slightly more concerned with costs of college and securing enough scholarships and financial aid to meet those costs than their parents. However, students of college-educated parents were less concerned about how their college education would be funded and freer to consider other aspects of the college experience.

This work substantiated previous research indicating parents were main influencers in college choice (Conklin & Daily, 1981; Reynolds, 1981; Lynn, 1984; Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Beyer, 1992). One parent was usually more involved in

college choice then the other. With few exceptions, the majority of male participants in this study suggested their fathers were the “main influencer” for them in their college processes. Female students indicated their mothers as the main influencer. Differences to this rule were found in single parent homes and divorce situations. Comprehensively, parents felt they held more influence over their student than their college-bound child admitted. Female parents reported they possessed more influence than their male counterparts. Hispanic students, in this study weighed the influence of their parent as “high,” while White participants listed “medium.” Equally so, Hispanic parents indicated they held a “high” level of influence with their student and White parents measured an equal distribution of “high” to “medium” levels of influence.

Students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives all vouched for the involvement of parents in the phenomenon describing the overall level of involvement as “medium.” Aggregated, the majority of male student participants felt their parents were “very involved,” in college choice. The majority of female students suggested their parents were “somewhat involved.” Hispanic students felt their parents were more involved in college choice, then White students. Yet, White parents felt they held a higher level of involvement than Hispanic parents.

Across all participant groups in this study, college websites served as the primary source of college information. Additionally important sources for parents included their son or daughter, e-mail to a college, visit to a college campus, and personal contact with a college representative. Students on the other hand,

implied high school counselors, friends, and their mother or father as key sources of college material. High school counselors included mothers and fathers, visits to a college campus, and personal contact with a college representative.

Admissions representatives implied college websites, personal contact with a college representative, visit to the campus, high school sponsored college night or college fair, and college print publications as primary sources of college information. Overall, more students selected mothers as information sources than fathers.

For parent and student participants in this study college attendance meant "a better life." A better life comprised a better job, more money, more leisure time, and more "happiness." Parents reported the primary reasons for attending college included to get a better job and to become a well-rounded person.

Students' ranked to get a better job, to prepare for a specific occupation, to learn more about things of interest, and to become a well rounded person as most significant in college attendance. Parents shared the value of higher education with their students by explaining their own personal situation and using themselves as an example such as, "do better than her Dad," and "I want him to have a better life than I do," even "I want her to be happy and I think she'll only do that with an education."

Despite parental level of education or cultural capital, parents exercised influence and involvement in the choice process through communication and encouragement of college. This research suggested the concept of cultural capital infused a sort of screening or filter through which parents decided if they

had enough knowledge to help their student in specific college choice processes. Likewise, students believed the level of cultural capital their parents secured was commensurate with their knowledge of college. Students of parents with low to medium levels of cultural capital felt a strong need to secure a high level of cultural capital. Surprisingly, these students' individual habitus, constructed through parents first and then other socializing agents (McDonough, 1997), was not limited because of their parents educational level; it seemed strengthened in the notions of college importance and opportunity.

In this study, high school organizational structure played a significant role in shaping and limiting students' and parents' college choice sets. The basic college information and guidance available through the guidance offices at both high schools offered only limited information on the preponderance of college options and alternatives available to students. Each high school counselor in this study constructed preconceived norms of parental involvement. One counselor experienced little interaction from parents, the other reflected marginally more; however their own habitus' defined and limited the involvement of parents in college processes.

To return to the point-in-time parent model, parents in this study differed in how they weighed various factors in the college choice phenomenon. These differences were most easily explained by the parents' educational background. For some parents in this study, possessing no exposure to college or little cultural capital meant they were less involved in the processes of college choice and overly concerned with issues such as safety, costs, and program area. For

others parents who had secured college degrees, involvement levels were higher as was their perceived level of influence. As well, their students sought their advice on college matters and attributed a high level of influence to them.

Beyond the levels of involvement and influence, the characteristic sets, informational sources, and reasons of attending college, parents desired their children to find "happiness" and "a better life." The parents in this study were convinced the path to a better life routed through higher education.

Implications for the Field of Study

It is apparent that the college choice phenomenon has a profound effect on the lives of those most intimately involved and on their relationships with others in the phenomenon. The insights and understandings that emerged as a result of this research have tremendous potential utility on a personal and professional as well as societal level. Specifically, this research based in a rural school district in Arizona, pointed to specific conclusions regarding the wider populations of college-bound students and their parents.

A plethora of primary implications for each participant group exist. Thus, this study provides specific implications for parents, high school counselors, and the higher education community immersed in the college choice phenomenon.

Parents

The research clearly indicated that parents influenced and were involved in the phenomenon and that college choice was a critical social experience.

Students reported that parents were at least somewhat important to all aspects of

the phenomenon, but more so in the choice to attend college rather than which college to attend. The majority of parents in this study were willing to give guidance and expertise in college choice, but felt it was a student's choice, as P10 advised, "...we're gonna lean the way her goal is," or P9, "I just want her to make the final decision." However, parents never want to be left out of the decision-making process, after all, "these are our kids."

Parents in this study began encouraging their students to attend college at young ages. Students reflected on parent comments such as "you're gonna go to college, you're gonna get an education before anything else," or "she really has it in for us that we need to get our education and our alone time and our independence," or "it's always been your gonna go to college...so they know they gave me what I needed for life," even, "she always tells me that I need to keep getting an education and keeping getting this amount of knowledge so I don't wind up like her."

Parents of college-bound students need to be willing to invest time and effort in assisting their students with college matters. Although students want to make the "ultimate decision," they seek approval, support, and guidance from their parents. The decision to attend college is one of the most significant choices a student makes in their teenage years. The emphasis of importance parents place on college guides students to investigate and explore college opportunities. Parental encouragement, communication, influence, and involvement, no matter what level of educational exposure or cultural capital, suggests support for a students' college aspirations. From surfing college

websites together, to visiting a college campus, these activities assist students in making the choice that is the right fit for them.

High School Counselors

Although confined by the organizational structures that exist within the high school, high school counselors must find avenues to provide structured experiences for students and parents to learn about college opportunities. In truth, students and parents yearn for guidance. Group counseling may be a viable alternative for counselors to share appropriate college options with specific types of students (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999).

Other activities to stimulate college exploration and attendance include summer mini college camps hosted by the school district in between a student's sophomore and junior years and after-school academic support programs for parents and student on specific college processes such as preparation for standardized testing. Whatever preparatory activity counselors can incorporate into their school structures that share college opportunities would be of significant utility for parents and students. However, these activities must be accessible to all students and parents regardless of college-bound status. Higher education should be for everyone who desires to take advantage of such opportunities.

Furthermore, counselors must be sensitive in advising students from their own limited college choice sets. College-bound students and their parents, especially those parents with low to medium levels of cultural capital, think of high school counselors as important resources in the college choice process. Thus, realization of their limited choice sets and own individual habitus will assist

counselors in providing for their students and parents wider college choice sets and a broader educational habitus from which to explore college options.

Higher Education

The notable absence of research focusing on parental perceptions in the college choice process suggests a lack of awareness by the higher education community as to the importance and utility of parents in the recruitment and enrollment of their college-bound students. In contemporary higher education, where declining enrollments and monetary pressures to keep enrollment steady are constant concerns, these findings carry substantial weight in the areas of admissions, recruitment, marketing, and enrollment management. Parents are often an afterthought for most college representatives and little attention is given to their involvement in the overall college choice phenomenon.

Since the late 1960's, when *in loco parentis* or in the place of parents disappeared from college campuses and students were held responsible, "parents have been ignored by college administration" (Lynn, 1984, p. 101). This research suggests that attention regarding college matters must not only be directed to students but to parents, as they together make the decisions of college choice. Thus, those higher education institutions seeking to assist not only college-bound student but also their parents may guarantee a better institutional fit for the student and a persistent enrollee for the college or university.

The point-in-time parent model presented in this research encapsulated parents decision-making processes inside the college choice phenomenon. The model provides a more precise understanding and portrayal of parents' views of college choice to assist institutions in their recruitment and enrollment efforts. Any policies and procedures designed to direct recruitment that are written in exclusion of such information could jeopardize an institution's ability to effectively maintain or increase enrollments.

Several easily implemented institutional activities gleaned from this research, to secure enrollment stability and ensure the "right fit" for prospective students may include: (a) web pages especially designed to assist parents in the step-by-step processes of college choice; (b) internet chatroom dialogues in which parents of potential students can link with parents of current students; (c) continuous mini on-line media presentation regarding important characteristics such as available programs, costs of college, and campus safety; (d) on-campus visitation programs for junior students and their parents; (e) print publications specifically designated for parents highlighting issues of importance such as costs, financial aid, campus environment, and campus safety; (f) personalized invitations to visit college website and specific pages within the site designed to meet the needs of parents and their college-bound students; (g) added evening programming run more than once in specific areas to provide personal contact with college personnel assigned to the specific recruitment area; and (h) early intervention programs such as career fairs for junior high students and their parents involving local community colleges.

Further, high school counselors may need training by the higher education community in how to understand parental perceptions thus enabling them to serve the parent population who yearn to be involved with their student's college experience. Most parents, need guidance on what they need to know about college in general, even those who attended themselves. Counselors could serve as the link to information about college possibilities.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although a substantial amount of research exists regarding the impact of higher education and college choice, additional studies are warranted. It is important to continue to update the research record to determine whether the previous patterns persist or change over time.

A focus on assisting students and parents in the identification of the higher education institution that is the best match or fit for them is of critical need. Admissions representative participants in this study suggested significant diversity within college communities and as A5 revealed, "one school is not for everyone." Parents and students should be engaged in steps implemented by higher education institutions and high schools that will help them ensure the right fit. This topic is blaringly absent from any research on college choice yet would assist higher education institutions in persistence and retention issues.

The role of financial aid and scholarships in college choice is poorly understood. Parents and students alike possess limited knowledge about such important issues. As Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith suggested, "Qualitative

methodology may be particularly well suited for research on the process characteristic of each stage of college choice” (1989, p. 281).

Another element that impacts this phenomenon is the advent and use of information technology in enrollment management. Both students and parents cited college websites as the top source of college information. Students strongly support technology, recognize the need for exposure to up-to-date technology, and “demand the convenience and intellectual extension that IT can offer” (Foster & Howell, 1999, p. 16). This new development suggests further studies be conducted on how technology influences the college choice phenomenon.

Further, analysis of the relationship between perceived parental influence and parental education level as reported by students and parents in this study might reflect measures in which parents with little educational background need assistance and eventually confidence in topics that encapsulate the college choice phenomenon. As well, the differences between first-generation and second-generation students and parents and their perceptions of college choice may allow for added understanding into the habitus assumed by each distinct group. Even research analyzing ethnicity as a factor in parental involvement and influence of college choice may assist counselors and college personnel to meet the needs of the up and coming ethnically diverse college-bound cohorts.

Researchers exploring parental involvement in college choice processes must move beyond nuanced statements of the identification of parental

involvement and explore specific activities leading towards college choice and ultimately higher education attainment.

Summary

The world of choosing a college is complex and few college choice models, theories, or studies have comprehensively captured this unique phenomenon. Critical to the empirical nature of this research was the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative results in an attempt to capture the essential experience of the primary actors of college choice.

This research used phenomenological inquiry to understand the lived experiences of the parent within the phenomenon. The findings reported and the qualitative methods in general added a much more fine-grained analysis to understand and conceptualize this critical social experience.

Through this research, a glimmer of parental perceptions was captured in the attempt to understand the parental role and the roles of other primary actors within the college choice phenomenon. Parents, in this study, were heavily invested in college choice. Every student participant felt some level of parental influence in all phases of the phenomenon.

Parental involvement level within the processes of college choice was contingent on educational background or cultural capital level. Yet, parental encouragement and motivation for the importance of a college education was strong and communicated consistently in the early years of a child's life.

Parents explored similar characteristics in college choice as do their students, high school counselors, and admissions representatives. For parents the most important factors in college choice included: campus safety, location, area of interest, campus size, campus environment, and costs of college.

Parents leaned on sources such as college websites for specific college information, but would welcome venues in which they could be more involved in college planning with high school counselors and admissions representatives.

In the past two decades, admissions and enrollment professionals and educational researchers have engaged in the study of college choice. From this research effort and further investigations the ability to portray parental perceptions of the college choice phenomenon provide an understanding of college choice processes for the education community. In any case, culled from this research was a perception of the quintessential goal of higher education--to ensure "a better life"--a simple statement that captures the timeless and engendering slogan of higher education in America.

APPENDIX I
STUDENT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

COLLEGE CHOICE SURVEY

1. Please indicate your gender:

1. Male

2. Female

2. Please indicate your ethnicity:

1. African American

2. Asian American

3. Caucasian

 4. Hispanic

5. Native American

6. Other (please specify):

3. What is your academic performance average?

1. A

2. B

3. C

4. Other:

4. Do you have brothers and sisters who have attended or are attending college? (Please check one answer only)

1. Yes, two-year college(s) only

2. Yes, four-year college(s) only

3. Yes, both two-year and four-year colleges

4. No

5. I do not have any brothers or sisters

5. The following characteristics are important to me in choosing a college to attend.

(Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each characteristic)

STRONGLY AGREE 1.	AGREE SOMEWHAT 2.	DISAGREE SOMEWHAT 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.	
				a. Social life
				b. Tuition costs
				c. Room and board costs
				d. Available financial aid
				e. Available programs
				f. Availability of residence hall or on-campus housing
				g. Academic reputation
				h. Location of the college
				i. Job availability at college
				j. Size of student body
				k. Size of classes
				l. Transferability of classes
				m. Number of computers on campus
				n. Graduation rates
				o. Crime on campus
				p. Job placement rates
				q. Other:

6. Please check the sources of information most valuable to you in your college selection process?

a. College web sites

b. College guidebooks such as *Peterson's*, *Barron's*, or *Lovejoy's*

c. College print publications such as catalogues or view books

- ☐ d. College digital publications such as CD's or videos
☐ e. Personal contact with a college representative
☐ f. E-mail to a college
☐ g. Phone call to a college
☐ h. Visit to a college campus
☐ i. High school sponsored college night or college fair
☐ j. High School Counselor
☐ k. Friend
☐ l. Mother
☐ m. Father
☐ n. Other: _____
☐ o. None of the above

7. The following reasons are important in my decision to attend college. (Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each reason)

	STRONGLY AGREE 1.	SOMEWHAT AGREE 2.	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.
a. To get a better job				
b. To become a well-rounded person				
c. To become a more thoughtful, responsible person				
d. To avoid having to get a full time job				
e. To make life-long friendships				
f. There is nothing better to do				
g. To meet and marry a successful person				
h. To learn more about things of interest				
i. To become an authority in a specialized field				
j. To become a well-known person				
k. To gain a well rounded education				
l. To be with friends				
m. To prepare for a specific occupation				
n. To get away from home				
o. To develop talent and ability				
p. To clarify values and beliefs				
q. Other:				

8. How involved would you say your parents are in your college selection process?

- ☐ 1. Very Involved
☐ 2. Somewhat Involved
☐ 3. Not Involved

9. What level of influence do you give your parents regarding college matters?

- ☐ 1. High
☐ 2. Medium
☐ 3. Low

10. Please indicate the highest level of education attained by your father?

- ☐ 1. High school graduation only
☐ 2. Some college
☐ 3. Two-year college degree
☐ 4. Vocational or trade school

- _____ 5. Four-year college degree
- _____ 6. Master's degree
- _____ 7. Doctorate degree
- _____ 8. Other

11. Please indicate the highest level of education attained by your mother?

- _____ 1. High school graduation only
- _____ 2. Some college
- _____ 3. Two-year college degree
- _____ 4. Vocational or trade school
- _____ 5. Four-year college degree
- _____ 6. Master's degree
- _____ 7. Doctorate degree
- _____ 8. Other

END OF SURVEY

APPENDIX II
STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENT INTERVIEW

Time of interview:
Interviewee:

Date:
Place:

Open-ended Questions

1. Is your parent a main influencer in the choice to attend college?
 - a. Why do you feel this way?
2. When was the first time your parent or guardian talked with you about college?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. What was the situation?
3. Do you feel your parents or guardian want you to continue your education after high school? Why or why not?
4. How do your parents encourage you to attend college?
5. Do you feel emotionally supported enough to go to college? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel financially supported enough to go to college? Why or why not?
7. What are the characteristics you look for in choosing a college to attend? Why?
8. What are the characteristics your parents look for in choosing a college for you to attend? Why?
9. What do you think about the involvement of your parent in your selection of a college or university?
 - a. Have your parents read any college material with you?
 - b. Have your parents visited college campuses with you?
 - c. Have your parents discussed the characteristics of a good college with you?
 - d. Have they discussed costs of college with you?

APPENDIX III
PARENT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

PARENT SURVEY OF COLLEGE CHOICE

1. The person completing this survey:

- _____ 1. Mother/Female guardian of high school junior
 _____ 2. Father/Male guardian of high school junior
 _____ 3. Other: _____

2. Please indicate your ethnicity:

- _____ 1. African American
 _____ 2. Asian American
 _____ 3. Caucasian
 _____ 4. Hispanic
 _____ 5. Native American
 _____ 6. Other (please specify): _____

3. Please indicate your highest level of education:

- _____ 1. High school graduation only
 _____ 2. Some college
 _____ 3. Two-year college degree
 _____ 4. Vocational or trade school
 _____ 5. Four-year college degree
 _____ 6. Master's degree
 _____ 7. Doctorate degree
 _____ 8. Other: _____

4. My high school junior is:

- _____ 1. Male
 _____ 2. Female

5. What level of education would you like your high school junior to attain?

- _____ 1. Some college
 _____ 2. Two-year college degree
 _____ 3. Vocational or trade school
 _____ 4. Four-year college degree
 _____ 5. Graduate degree
 _____ 6. Doctoral degree
 _____ 7. Other: _____

6. What is your high school junior's academic performance average?

- _____ 1. A
 _____ 2. B
 _____ 3. C
 _____ 4. Other: _____

7. Do you have other children who have attended or are attending college? (Please check one answer only)

- _____ 1. Yes, two-year college(s) only
 _____ 2. Yes, four-year college(s) only
 _____ 3. Yes, both two-year and four-year colleges
 _____ 4. No

8. The following characteristics are important to me in assisting my college-bound student in choosing a college to attend. (Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each characteristic)

STRONGLY AGREE 1.	AGREE SOMEWHAT 2.	DISAGREE SOMEWHAT 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.	
				a. Social life
				b. Tuition costs
				c. Room and board costs
				d. Available financial aid
				e. Available programs
				f. Availability of residence hall or on-campus housing
				g. Academic reputation
				h. Location of the college
				i. Job availability at college
				j. Size of student body
				k. Size of classes
				l. Transferability of classes
				m. Number of computers on campus
				n. Graduation rates
				o. Crime on campus
				p. Job placement rates
				q. Other:

9. Please check the sources of information most valuable to you in assisting your student in the college selection process?

- ☐ a. College web sites
☐ b. College guidebooks such as *Peterson's*, *Barron's*, or *Lovejoy's*
☐ c. College print publications such as catalogues or view books
☐ d. College digital publications such as CD's or videos
☐ e. Personal contact with a college representative
☐ f. E-mail to a college
☐ g. Phone call to a college
☐ h. Visit to a college campus
☐ i. High school sponsored college night or college fair
☐ j. High School Counselor
☐ k. Friend
☐ l. Mother
☐ m. Father
☐ n. Other: _____
☐ o. None of the above

10. The following reasons are important in the decision of my college-bound student to attend college. (Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each reason)

	STRONGLY AGREE 1.	SOMEWHAT AGREE 2.	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.
a. To get a better job				
b. To become a well-rounded person				
c. To become a more thoughtful, responsible person				
d. To avoid having to get a full time job				
e. To make life-long friendships				
f. There is nothing better to do				
g. To meet and marry a successful person				

h. To learn more about things of interest				
i. To become an authority in a specialized field				
j. To become a well-known person				
k. To gain a well rounded education				
l. To be with friends				
m. To prepare for a specific occupation				
n. To get away from home				
o. To develop talent and ability				
p. To clarify values and beliefs				
q. Other:				

11. How involved would you say you are in your child's selection of a college to attend?

- ☐ 1. Very Involved
☐ 2. Somewhat Involved
☐ 3. Not Involved

12. What level of influence do you feel you have with your college-bound student regarding college matters?

- ☐ 1. High
☐ 2. Medium
☐ 3. Low

13. Please check your total 2001 household income before taxes (please indicate only one).

- ☐ 1. 000 - \$14,999
☐ 2. \$15,000 - \$24,999
☐ 3. \$25,000 - \$34,999
☐ 4. \$35,000 - \$44,999
☐ 5. \$45,000 - \$54,999
☐ 6. \$55,000 - \$64,999
☐ 7. \$65,000 - \$74,999
☐ 8. \$75,000 +

END OF SURVEY

APPENDIX IV
PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PARENT INTERVIEW

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewee:

Place:

Open-ended Questions

1. Is your child going to college?
 - a. How do you know this?
2. Why is having your child attend college important to you?
3. What is the most important aspect of going to college?
4. Describe how you've motivated your child to go to college?
 - a. What have you done in the past?
5. When did you, as a parent decide your child was going to college?
6. How often do you talk with your child concerning college matters?
 - a. Is the experience formal or informal?
 - b. Does your child know your views on college matters? Why or why not?
7. Does your income play into how much you influence your child to attend college? Why?
8. What characteristics do you think your college-bound student is looking for in a college to attend? Why?
9. What characteristics do you look for when assisting your college-bound student in choosing a college to attend? Why?
10. How can you tell if one college is better than another?
11. Reflect for a moment on what you think the ideal college is for your child, share your thoughts when you're ready.
12. How can college matters be more effectively communicated to you to help you assist your college-bound student?

APPENDIX V
HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR SURVEY INSTRUMENT

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR SURVEY OF COLLEGE CHOICE

1. Please indicate your highest level of education:

- ☐ 1. High school graduation only
☐ 2. Some college
☐ 3. Two-year college degree
☐ 4. Vocational or trade school
☐ 5. Four-year college degree
☐ 6. Master's degree
☐ 7. Doctorate degree
☐ 8. Other

2. Please indicate your gender:

- ☐ 1. Male
 ☐ 2. Female

3. Please indicate your ethnicity:

- ☐ 1. African American
☐ 2. Asian American
☐ 3. Caucasian
☐ 4. Hispanic
☐ 5. Native American
☐ 6. Other (please specify): _____

**4. The following characteristics should be important in choosing a college to attend.
(Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each characteristic)**

STRONGLY AGREE 1.	AGREE SOMEWHAT 2.	DISAGREE SOMEWHAT 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.	
				a. Social life
				b. Tuition costs
				c. Room and board costs
				d. Available financial aid
				e. Available programs
				f. Availability of residence hall or on-campus housing
				g. Academic reputation
				h. Location of the college
				i. Job availability at college
				j. Size of student body
				k. Size of classes
				l. Transferability of classes
				m. Number of computers on campus
				n. Graduation rates
				o. Crime on campus
				p. Job placement rates
				q. Other:

5. Please check the sources of information you believe to be most valuable in the college selection process?

- ☐ a. College web sites
☐ b. College guidebooks such as *Peterson's*, *Barron's*, or *Lovejoy's*
☐ c. College print publications such as catalogues or view books
☐ d. College digital publications such as CD's or videos

- ☐ e. Personal contact with a college representative
☐ f. E-mail to a college
☐ g. Phone call to a college
☐ h. Visit to a college campus
☐ i. High school sponsored college night or college fair
☐ j. High School Counselor
☐ k. Friend
☐ l. Mother
☐ m. Father
☐ n. Other: _____
☐ o. None of the above

6. The following reasons are important in the decision to attend college. (Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each reason)

	STRONGLY AGREE 1.	SOMEWHAT AGREE 2.	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.
a. To get a better job				
b. To become a well-rounded person				
c. To become a more thoughtful, responsible person				
d. To avoid having to get a full time job				
e. To make life-long friendships				
f. There is nothing better to do				
g. To meet and marry a successful person				
h. To learn more about things of interest				
i. To become an authority in a specialized field				
j. To become a well-known person				
k. To gain a well rounded education				
l. To be with friends				
m. To prepare for a specific occupation				
n. To get away from home				
o. To develop talent and ability				
p. To clarify values and beliefs				
q. Other:				

7. How involved would you say parents are in their college-bound student's selection of a college to attend?

- ☐ 1. Very Involved
☐ 2. Somewhat Involved
☐ 3. Not Involved

8. What level of influence do you feel parents have with their college-bound student?

- ☐ 1. High
☐ 2. Medium
☐ 3. Low

END OF SURVEY

APPENDIX VI
HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR INTERVIEW

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewee:

Place:

Open-ended Questions

1. In your experience as a high school counselor, are parents important in the college process? Why?
2. From your perspective should parents be involved? Why?
3. If parents are involved, how are they involved?
4. From your perspective, how can parents help their college-bound student?
5. From your experience, do parents encourage their children to attend college?
 - a. Is there a certain type of parent that does and does not?
 - b. Does the educational attainment of the parent have anything to do with it?
6. From your experience, how do parents encourage students to go to college?
7. What characteristics of a college are most important to you when helping students choose an institution to attend?
 - a. What do you think are important characteristics for students? Why?
 - b. What do you think are important characteristics for parents? Why?
8. If you were a parent, what are the three most important things that you would want to know about the colleges in which your child applied?

APPENDIX VII
ADMISSIONS REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY

ADMISSIONS REPRESENTATIVES SURVEY OF COLLEGE CHOICE

1. Please indicate your highest level of education:

- ☐ 1. High school graduation only
☐ 2. Some college
☐ 3. Two-year college degree
☐ 4. Vocational or trade school
☐ 5. Four-year college degree
☐ 6. Master's degree
☐ 7. Doctorate degree
☐ 8. Other

2. Please indicate your gender:

- ☐ 1. Male
 ☐ 2. Female

3. Please indicate your ethnicity:

- ☐ 1. African American
☐ 2. Asian American
☐ 3. Caucasian
☐ 4. Hispanic
☐ 5. Native American
☐ 6. Other (please specify): _____

**4. The following characteristics should be important in choosing a college to attend.
(Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each characteristic)**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE SOMEWHAT	DISAGREE SOMEWHAT	STRONGLY DISAGREE	
1.	2.	3.	4.	
				a. Social life
				b. Tuition costs
				c. Room and board costs
				d. Available financial aid
				e. Available programs
				f. Availability of residence hall or on-campus housing
				g. Academic reputation
				h. Location of the college
				i. Job availability at college
				j. Size of student body
				k. Size of classes
				l. Transferability of classes
				m. Number of computers on campus
				n. Graduation rates
				o. Crime on campus
				p. Job placement rates
				q. Other:

5. Please check the sources of information you believe to be most valuable in the college selection process?

- ☐ a. College web sites
☐ b. College guidebooks such as *Peterson's*, *Barron's*, or *Lovejoy's*
☐ c. College print publications such as catalogues or view books

- ☐ d. College digital publications such as CD's or videos
☐ e. Personal contact with a college representative
☐ f. E-mail to a college
☐ g. Phone call to a college
☐ h. Visit to a college campus
☐ i. High school sponsored college night or college fair
☐ j. High School Counselor
☐ k. Friend
☐ l. Mother
☐ m. Father
☐ n. Other: _____
☐ o. None of the above

6. The following reasons are important in the decision to attend college. (Please check either column 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each reason)

	STRONGLY AGREE 1.	SOMEWHAT AGREE 2.	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE 3.	STRONGLY DISAGREE 4.
a. To get a better job				
b. To become a well-rounded person				
c. To become a more thoughtful, responsible person				
d. To avoid having to get a full time job				
e. To make life-long friendships				
f. There is nothing better to do				
g. To meet and marry a successful person				
h. To learn more about things of interest				
i. To become an authority in a specialized field				
j. To become a well-known person				
k. To gain a well rounded education				
l. To be with friends				
m. To prepare for a specific occupation				
n. To get away from home				
o. To develop talent and ability				
p. To clarify values and beliefs				
q. Other:				

7. How involved would you say parents are in their college-bound student's selection of a college to attend?

- ☐ 1. Very Involved
☐ 2. Somewhat Involved
☐ 3. Not Involved

8. What level of influence do you feel parents have with their college-bound student?

- ☐ 1. High
☐ 2. Medium
☐ 3. Low

END OF SURVEY

APPENDIX VIII

ADMISSIONS REPRESENTATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

ADMISSIONS REPRESENTATIVE INTERVIEW

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewee:

Place:

Open-Ended Questions

1. Do you believe parents serve as an important informant for their college-bound children in the college choice process?
2. When assisting their college-bound student, what general questions are parents asking about college?
3. When assisting their college-bound student, what questions do you think parents should be asking?
4. If you were a parent, what college characteristics would be most essential to you in assisting your college-bound student in choosing an institution to attend?
5. If you were a parent, what are the three most important things that you would want to know about the colleges in which your child applied? Why?

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