ASPIRATIONS REALIZED? EXPLORING THE ROLES OF HIGH SCHOOL

COUNSELORS WHEN DISCUSSING COLLEGES AND AGRICULTURAL

CAREER PATHS WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Fortifying the pipeline of underrepresented African Americans in agriculture can offer a practical solution to the industry's scanty amount of involvement by people of color. The chief purpose of this study was to explore and analyze secondary counselors and their roles when discussing colleges and occupational career paths with African Americans, specific to agriculture.

Counselors play a central role in being a vital resource for African Americans seeking academic and career guidance. Given the vast amount of research available on the academic achievement disparities for African Americans, secondary counselors have a tremendous opportunity to alter these differences.

Data collection was achieved through a series of face-to-face, semi- structured interviews. This qualitative study chronicled each participant's life through rich, thick descriptions. Analysis of data occurred using the constant comparative method, and categorization was best accomplished by open coding which sectioned pertinent data into themes, constructs, and patterns.

The results of the study yielded the following as it related to the reflections of these four high-achieving college African Americans in that they: a) were self-motivated and did not actively seek out the counselors for their advice; b) indicated the counselors were products of the school size rendering them helpless when giving in-depth counsel; c) mentioned, more often than not, counselors tended to align themselves with students of a certain social class, whether in athletics, or according to socioeconomic indicators,

popularity, or academics; d) went to diverse high schools with large, multiethnic

populations in relatively urbanized centers; and, e) revealed that because of the lack of

counselor interaction, they would often accept advice from other individuals, regardless

of experience.

DEDICATION

Literature is indispensable to the world. The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks at reality, then you change it.

—James Baldwin

This research project is dedicated to my valiant grandparents-Robert H. Johnson, Sr., Lucille W. Johnson, Carlton W. Gannaway, Sr., and Ruby H. Gannaway. It was because of their selfless sacrifice that I am able to attend such a prestigious school with no reservations. Their drive, tenacity, and spirit have helped create the man I am today. I offer this small piece of my gratitude to you forever and hope you are smiling down from heaven above.

I would like to also dedicate this to my future offspring. Should the Lord bless us with children, I want you to know that I wrote this with you in mind. Your future is important to me and I hope this research will provide insight as you traverse through life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through Him.

—Colossians 3:17 (New International Version)

I want to humbly thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I owe it all to Him and am simply grateful for giving me the ability to see this research project through. I love you and hope to be a servant and witness for you the rest of my life-Jehovah Jireh!

To my wife Johnitha (Jaybird)-I love you! Words cannot suitably describe what you've meant to me on this journey-but I will try. Proverbs 18:22 states, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains *favor* from the Lord." What more needs to be said? You are my inspiration and the very reason I am blessed. I could not have accomplished this alone. Thank you for being my stalwart—we did it!

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Lastly, I would like to thank the participants for agreeing to be part of this study. Without your candor, none of this could have happened. Good luck to you in your future endeavors and I envision great things for you!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.
>
> —Marcus Garvey

Contemporary demographics show that populations of color have increased across the United States. The latest public release from the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) indicates more than fifty percent of children younger than age one are of color. This explosion of minorities indicates a more diverse population in the United States now than at an earlier age. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2012), over 17 percent, or roughly 23 million people are involved in agriculture in the U.S. in some capacity, which makes it the largest U.S. employer. Although abundant in opportunities, the agriculture industry has evolved into more multifaceted occupations. Newly created agricultural jobs will not affect the number of jobs available to African Americans, but enhance their opportunities. Goecker, Smith, Smith, and Goetz (2010) noted that the USDA affirms that between 2010 and 2015, 54,400 jobs will be available to individuals with a baccalaureate degree and higher within the agriculture, renewable energy, and environmental specialties arena. Many current jobs in agriculture demand a higher acumen in math and science (Shelley-Tolbert, Conroy, & Dailey, 2000). Moreover, the increase in highly specialized occupations over the next few years will intensify the search for competent agricultural professionals.

The increase in population has culminated with an increase in African Americans (Landry, 2002). According to Melguizo and Wolniak (2012), minority students who majored in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), a 25 percent increase in salary was noted. The incentive to acquire a higher salary in a sprawling, stable field should be a central focus of college recruiters when gauging interests of African American students.

Addressing diversity in agriculture is still evolving and remains a burgeoning topic of discussion among practitioners and researchers alike. Figures indicate a bleak outlook regarding the recruitment and retention of African Americans in agriculture. Recent research avows that at least 88% of agricultural educators are White, with 64% also being male (Kantrovich, 2007). At the student level, numbers showing participation for students' of color in agricultural programs are just as dreadful. According to the Future Farmers of America (FFA) (2010) database, 76% of participants were White, 16% Hispanic, 4% Black, and 2% Native American. Even with abundant agricultural jobs available post-graduation, many African Americans are not pursuing agriculture degrees, instead, are matriculating to humanities and education (Melguizo & Wolniak, 2012). This lack of available qualified students has placed potential employers in a quandary when looking to increase diversity. Jones and Larke (2001) state the declining number of African Americans in agriculture is ill-timed with the advent of more readily available agriculture careers.

African American students may lack exposure to agricultural professions. This is particularly evident in students originating from predominantly urban areas, which

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creates a knowledge gap (Bricknell, 1996). Because of this exposure rift, the role of

high school guidance counselors becomes paramount. Espinoza, Bradshaw, and

Hausman (2002) discuss Hossler and Gallagher's 3-stage college selection model and

what role counselors play (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The 3-stage process involves a

framework that encompasses the predisposition stage, a search stage, and a choice stage.

The predisposition stage involves students' decisions or aspirations to continue their

education post-high school (Hossler & Stage, 1992).The college decision making

process often transpires in the *search stage* of development. Espinoza, Bradshaw, and

Hausman (2002) surmise that during the *search stage*, counselors are "…well positioned

to exert an important influence on the attitudes of students and parents" (p. 20). It is

with this idea that the relevance of counselors aiding students in college selection helps

in augmenting the interests of African Americans in agriculture. The choice stage is the

culmination of the college selection process in the actual selection of an institution to

attend (Hossler & Stage, 1992).

Counselors also serve as an influential resource for high school students still

undecided about attending college. Many African American students remain

apprehensive about the college application process (McDonough, 1997). Paperwork

deemed nebulous and lengthy may deter them from completing the forms earnestly.

Students' access to school counselors function as an essential link in the college

informational process inclusive of choice, application, and enrollment opines Bryan,

Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011). Although the roles of

counselors have evolved, they are still considered to be instrumental in assisting students

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with the college application process (Avery, 2010). Counselors are also more inclined to affect student outcomes through helping them apply to college rather than helping with application enhancement (Avery, 2010).

Sociocultural Theory

The theoretical underpinnings of this study were derived from the concept of social capital, which focuses on resources that arise through relationships (Coleman, 1988). It is capital accrued over time through social networks and the intervention of protective agents (Arriaza, 2003). Social capital can be amassed over time and transferred much like economic revenue. As illustrated by Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011), these relationship ties are often viewed through the "microlevel" (e.g. familial relationships, teachers, counselors), or "macrolevel" of social networks (e.g. churches, schools, community gatherings) (p. 190). Information, norms, and support are three vital resources that flow through these relationship ties (Coleman, 1988). School-based social capital can drastically help African Americans improve their social mobility (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). School personnel such as teachers and counselors have the power to eliminate barriers that make acquiring social capital for African Americans problematic (Farmer-Hinton, 2006). Stanton-Salazar (1997) elaborates by indicating these school agents, specifically counselors, can also provide a legitimate network for students when navigating the educational system, thus increasing their social capital. Providing resources and college information benefits those students striving to acquire social capital. Moreover, counselors can help provide early access to information and advice on enduring the transition into college (McDonough, 2004). The

social network of school helps facilitate access to information that will assist students achieve their college goals (Kahne & Bailey, 1999).

In many communities, families are traditionally perceived as the fundamental source of social capital, especially relative to their education (Hetherington, 1998). As children matriculate through the educational system, parents can provide valuable instruction, convey information about educational opportunities, establish and enforce expected behavior, and offer support when their children encounter new situations resulting in success and/or abject disappointment (Crosnoe, 2004). With the decline in traditional, two-parent homes, family social capital remains an essential, seminal component in the development of African Americans (Oseguera, Conchas, & Mosqueda, 2011). Social capital (Figure 1) can be looked at as a bank account full of funds. The more financial latitude one has available to them allows for a better lifestyle. Conversely, students lacking adequate social capital can be placed in a deficit, restricting their ability to excel. Hence, the importance of social capital is that it gives African American students options and resources to lean on for moral, financial and, academic support.

However, despite the critical component families have in students' lives, school remains a central, extra-familial institution, thus a principal source of social capital for K-12 students (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, &Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). According to Allard (2008), high school students spend an average of 7.5 hours a day attending class and doing homework. This indicates school-related activities account for nearly 33% of their daily regimen.

Kahne and Bailey (1999) state social capital is progressively being viewed as a critical determinant of people's ability to meet needs and pursue interests. Readily available social capital is important in inferior socioeconomic schools because of the lack of available resources (Kahn & Bailey, 1999). African American students enrolled in cash-strapped school districts need counselors as a resource because financial constraints limit beneficial college experiences such as pre-college visits. Social capital also works best when the level of trustworthiness between both subjects is high (Coleman, 1988), as would likely be the case between student and counselor.

While capitalizing on the tenets of sociology and economics, social capital is not devoid of flaws. Similar to economic latitude, social capital can be dependent on class structures that frame the accumulation in both social and cultural situations (Bordieu & Passeron, 1990). Acquiring cultural and social capital is easier to attain for the affluent population. When the socioeconomic status is low, acquiring the resources needed to increase social capital can become an obstacle to some African American students. Research with social capital is currently being conducted in education, social sciences, psychology, and economics (Crook, Todd, Combs, Woehr, & Ketchen, 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). This is a burgeoning area that is being keenly investigated because of its capability, and positive benefits, particularly with African Americans mired in disadvantaged situations.
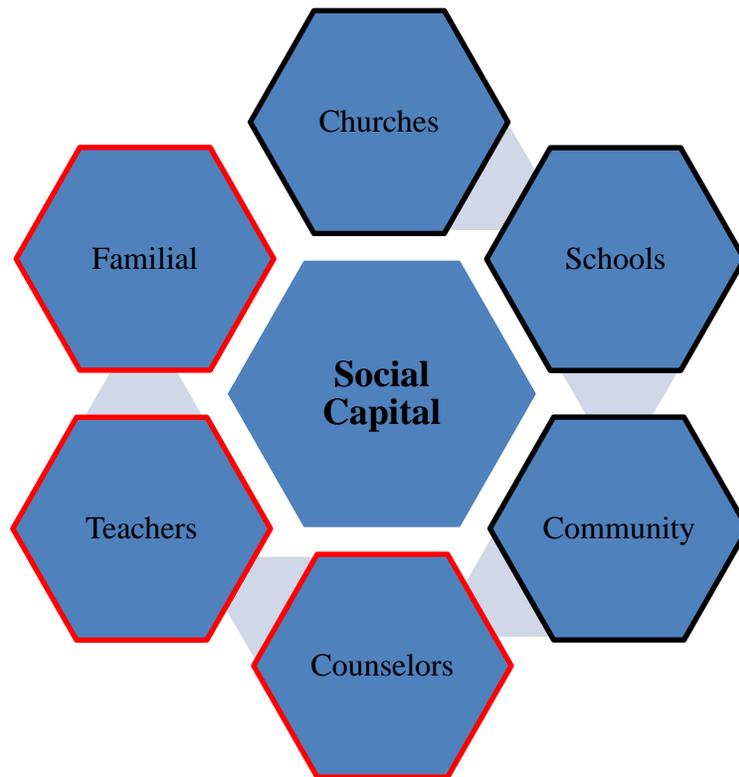
Figure 1. Micro/macrolevel designations of social capital

*Red outline indicates the microlevel; black outline indicates the macrolevel

Personal Story

> Learning is the beginning of wealth. Learning is the beginning of health.
> Learning is the beginning of spirituality. Searching and learning is where the
> miracle process all begins.
> —Jim Rohn (Author, Motivational Speaker, and Entrepreneur)

I could sit here and ponder on the many reasons I decided to entrench myself into

this field called Agriculture. Sheepishly, I have difficulties casually spouting off the

names of the proclaimed "fathers" in this field. So, having declared my ignorance on

seminal things involving one of the nation's most storied occupations, what on God's

green earth piqued my interest enough to write a *dissertation* in the field of agriculture?

Well, in a word, me. You see, I was not raised on a sprawling farm in rural America

teeming with heads of Charolais cattle. My father did not teach me the intricacies of

determining the best fertilizer to use for our wheat crop. I was not privy to the best time

of the day to harvest eggs from our chicken flock; no, in fact, quite the opposite. As a

young boy being raised in the inner city of Houston, Texas my life's experiences were

honed through my family, church, and neighborhood. I realized at an early age how

blessed I was to be reared in a functioning, two-parent household. My mother and

father, both fairly successful in life, knew my younger brother and I needed to be

involved in some capacity in extracurricular activities. Because of the ample

opportunities to seek, and be found by trouble, we were placed in activities such as little

league sports, the Boy Scouts, youth ministry, and other positive, time-consuming

affairs. It was in not until I was in the Boy Scouts that I moderately learned about

agriculture. One of our first badges to pursue was the Animal Science Merit Badge; I

remember it vividly. Here I was a precocious, Black, middle school kid, what did I look

like memorizing the four predominant cattle breeds? Or how about explaining to my merit badge counselor, the schematics involved in building a broiler house? It was all a humongous waste of time. At least that's what I initially thought. Surely, I would never encounter these "breeds" of cattle I'm remembering. Furthermore, the only encounter I would have with a broiler is the meat aisle at the grocery store. I found out later, how naïve my thoughts were.

Upon entry to high school, I began to read more and my love affair with agriculture and animal science manifested itself through my dog. Bruiser was my revelation. Years of taking care of him converted me. I was suddenly, and seriously thinking, "Hey, this animal stuff isn't too bad, I could really do this for a living." That's when my love affair began. I started researching colleges that had Veterinary Science programs. I wanted to be a Veterinarian! I knew this was my passion, I had found a career I wanted to do the rest of my life. After settling on Tuskegee University, I enrolled in the College of Agriculture with the intent to enroll in the College of Veterinary Medicine upon graduation.

So, here I am, some ten years later, still not a veterinarian, but in engaged in agriculture in some capacity. As I compose this personal story, I look back at all the influences, mentors, and colleagues and I can truly say, no one spurred me on. Not educationally, but no one took the time to discuss agriculture and what it entailed. I was never shown a professional mentor in agriculture to aspire to be like; my father did not own tons of land; the FFA and 4-H were not options at my high school. It was merely luck, and maybe that one merit badge I barely remember acquiring. Either way, it is

clear to me that something has to change. African Americans need role models. They need to hear how great of a career agriculture can be. If not teachers, who? It was once said to me, in order to make an impact, you have to narrow your focus. I went into this dissertation starting small, but over time I evolved, while remaining committed. By doing these things, African Americans just like me may receive a better introduction than I did with that long, arduous merit badge session some fifteen years ago.

Statement of the Problem

The participation of African American in agricultural education continues to remain pervasive (LaVergne, Jones, Larke, & Elbert, 2012). Organizations geared toward promoting agriculture at the secondary level remain primarily comprised of Whites. Because of this lack of suitable exposure via mentors, African Americans are not being exposed to career options the agricultural arena affords post-graduation. Balancing the job market with a diverse pool of highly-qualified and industrious employees is a key component in the 21st century (LaVergne, Jones, Larke, & Elbert, 2012). African American students provide an untapped source of future qualified candidates for an industry struggling to meet its diversity needs. Focus on recruitment and retention should be a top priority of colleges, especially agriculture departments attempting to bolster their enrollment of African Americans.

The current focus of the literature is aimed at targeting African American students at an early age for agricultural interest. Currently, limited research is being conducted that investigates counselors' role in college and career selection. Current research avows African American students, particularly of low-income origination, often

lack access to the information and guidance needed to negotiate the college selection process (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Students needing guidance are often overwhelmed with the college application process rendering them hapless and discouraged (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). These dejected attitudes may drastically lower the number of African Americans enrolling in college.

African Americans must be aggressively targeted at an early age when they are still evaluating career options. This is the time frame when they can be influenced the most. Across the nation, agricultural jobs are increasingly becoming available as the 'Baby Boomer' generation creeps towards retirement. Gaul and Erika Osmundson, marketing and communications managers for AgCareers.com state that surveys revealed companies expect up to 10 percent of the agricultural workforce to retire in the next three to four years (Ruen, 2012). Hiring students with agricultural experience may be critical for companies intent on filling the impending retirement gap. Addressing the gap at the high school level might allow companies the luxury of identifying and selecting the most qualified candidates for the jobs, while bolstering their diversity spectrum.

High school counselors play an important role in helping high school students make prudent college choices. Exploring their influence on pupils, particularly on African Americans, is intriguing. With their intimate knowledge about the college process, counselors become an essential resource for students ambivalent about their post-secondary options.

High school African American students are enrolling in college in disparaging numbers. As of 2003, only 32 % of African American high school graduates between 18-24 were enrolled in college (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009). According to Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006), "…high school students may not be privy to the means of college access since they disproportionately live in communities with networks of friends and family members who have also had limited experience with the transition to college" (p. 103). High school students need counselors for guidance and counsel they may not otherwise be receiving at home. This speaks to the importance of proficient high school counselors and what they could mean in the lives of African American students with limited social capital.

Purpose of the Study

A large volume of research being conducted examines counselors' effect on precollege selection involving affluent White students in college preparatory academies (Bryan Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). Less research has been conducted on underserved populations where African Americans are less likely to receive substantial college counseling (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze secondary counselors and their roles when discussing colleges and occupational career paths with African American students, specific to agriculture A second purpose was to identify and examine the perceptions of African Americans about their high school counselors and what role if any did they play in college/major selection.

Counselors play a central role in being a vital resource for African American students seeking academic and career guidance. Given the vast amount of research available on the academic achievement disparities for African Americans, secondary counselors have a tremendous opportunity to alter these differences. The researcher also sought to discover what college African American students in agricultural programs had to say about their high school counselors and what role if any did they have in college and/or program selection. The primary purpose of the study was to examine high school counselors' influence when deliberating with students. Additionally, another purpose was to explore the relationships between the counselors and students when incorporating ethnicity, counselor demographics, diversity, and counselor agricultural competence. The following objectives were identified to accomplish the purposes of this research study:

1. Examine the effects of social capital on African Americans and how it influences their college choice;

2. Determine the role counselors played in assisting African American students with college/program selection.

Significance of the Study

Fortifying the pipeline of underrepresented African Americans in agriculture can offer a practical solution to the industry's scanty amount of involvement. The changing demographics in Texas schools reflect an increasing population of African Americans and according to Scheurich and Skrla (2003), by 2020, two-thirds of the entire Texas

population will consist of people of color. Targeting this large pool of students can provide a boon to the agricultural field if implemented early.

Research has shown that when high school students receive appropriate counseling and resources committed to advancing their educational aspirations, they are more likely to enter – and stay in college (McDonough, 1997). McDonough (1997) also indicates that the impact of counselors daily exchanges and provisions they provide help mold and strengthen college aspirations through structural support. Increasing exposure and sustenance, while providing support enhances students' of color interest in college, and may ultimately benefit the agricultural discipline meaningfully.

As the demographics in this country continue to evolve and trend towards a majority-minority culture, the inclusion of people of color in all disciplines will be imperative for success. African Americans represent a robust pool of future employees, and agriculture an advancing profession. The success of students' of color will be dependent on the amount of support and assistance they acquire when making college decisions. It is imperative for counselors to give the soundest advice possible because they may represent the only source of informative guidance African American students obtain.

Elam and Brown (2005) stated it best when they opined that "High school counselors need to bolster the college aspirations of minority students while they help them articulate their own hopes and concerns related to the qualities of the college or university they hope to attend" (p. 15). Counselors encouraging high school students about the different possibilities of college majors will increase the amount of African

Americans entering college. Counselors with their own forever-evolving duties being implemented will have to adopt the most effective way to advise African Americans. Certain occupations, specifically, agriculture depends on these students to fill the employment gaps at their respective companies. Perna et al. (2008) state that a review of the available data and research indicates extreme "…structural constraints on the availability of high school counselors to provide college counseling" (p. 132). Because of fiscal restrictions, many schools cannot hire enough adequate counselors to decrease the student to counselor ratio (Perna et al., 2008). It is because of these deficiencies, many high school African Americans utilize other sources of information for advice and counsel.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are student's perceptions of their high school counselor's effectiveness when discussing career options?

2. From a student's perspective, what interventions can be done to narrow the gap of African Americans entering college agricultural programs?

<div align="center">**Definition of Terms**</div>

The following list of definitions and terms obtained from the literature assisted in framing this study:

High Achieving: a term used to identify college students who have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater (Harper, 2004).

High School Counselors: A certified educator with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, which qualifies him or her to address all students' academic, personal, and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that works with students to build success by addressing academic, personal, social and career development needs (American School Counselor Association, 2009).

Majority-Minority: a majority of people in an area who belong to a minority group overall (Vang, & Elo, 2013).

Student(s) of Color: Hispanic or African American students, and non-European Americans (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). For this study, this term is primarily used to indicate people of African American or Hispanic descent.

Summary

African American students in particular utilize cultural capital for their benefit when looking for assistance in applying to college and other post high school destinations. Critical components of many students' bank of support are parents, mentors, and other influential agents. These individuals can help students with advice, financial support, arranging college tours, and moral provision. Social capital is acquired through two levels-microlevel, and macrolevel. Both encompass family, and can greatly benefit a student's matriculation through adolescence. Given the intrinsic advantages of having multiple sources of social capital, African Americans should utilize these in the best way possible. High school counselors are considered one source of social capital.

On most school campuses, they strive to have the best combination of professional and

educational experience available, to appropriately advise students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

> If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.
>
> —Margaret Mead

This literature review focuses on issues relevant to counselors' perceptions of agriculture and the associated opportunities available at colleges for African American students. This chapter also provides information about the history of agriculture, and secondary counseling in this nation. The historical context identified in this review of literature helps to identify some of the perceptions counselor harbor regarding agriculture for different students.

This review literature serves as a guide to providing perceptions of high achieving African American students towards their secondary urban high school counselors. This literature review is organized into several sections and based on the gaps found in the literature, research questions were used to guide this study. The first section describes a historical context of African Americans in agriculture in the United States. This historical analysis examines the origins of agriculture in this country and its role in shaping our economy. The second section delves into the profession of secondary counseling and how it has evolved into the current function it serves today. This section also entails the institutional pressures counselors feel from administration, the government and other influential sources to effectively juggle all their duties. The

third section looks at the urban school context and how it has evolved within the educational setting. And finally the fourth section expounds on the people who could have the most influence on students entering college. Current literature is saturated with examples of professionally trained individuals that can help students such as mentors, community activists, counselors, and their parents. Section five looks at the focus of counseling and how the profession impacts student decisions such as college selection and other varying decisions. The sixth section of the literature review examines students' of color perceptions about counseling and how it has impacted their lives. The seventh and final part of this literature review will examine the precarious situation African American students often find themselves in when trying to decide on their future. Navigating through life is demanding enough, but when tasked with the decisions upon graduation, it can be quite taxing.

African American History in Agriculture

African American farmers are historically significant contributors to agriculture in the United States. In the Slavery era White landowners used Black farmers as a resource for innovations such as crop cultivation improvements, production proliferations, and animal husbandry to the farming industry (Balvanz et al., 2011). Once the Civil War concluded, African American farmers exploded, particularly in 1920 when almost 1 million Blacks were employed on farms (Balvanz et al., 2011). Still the presence of Black farmers was small when compared to their White cohorts with a one-to-six ratio in the United States (Wood & Gilbert, 2000). The number of African

American farmers decreased after 1920 and is now at an all-time low, with the USDA estimating Black farmer population is less than 41,024 as of 2007 (Balvanz et al., 2011).

The history between people of color and agriculture is one of division and disdain. People of color have always beheld agriculture as a last option when deciding on career paths. According to Foster and Henson (1992), historically, people of color who had the opportunities to pursue professional careers have traditionally chosen a select few options. Foster and Henson (1992) cited people of color lauded education, ministry-related positions, medicine, and law as lucrative, respected professions for minorities. Agriculture was viewed negatively because of its relation to slavery and held an indigent status within the community (Larke & Barr, 1987). Larke and Barr (1987) revealed haunting memories of low, enslaved, and meager economic statuses having an adverse effect on minorities' perceptions about agriculture as a career. With agriculture being a significant employer of a large number of African Americans from slavery until the industrial age, youths of color continue to associate it with meager wages and low prestige (Larke & Barr, 1987).

Blacks have long held adverse feelings towards agriculture stemming from a host of prejudices subjected on suppressed farmers. Cowan and Feder (2010) state:

> On April14, 1999, Judge Paul L. Friedman of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia approved a settlement agreement and consent decree in *Pigford v. Glickman*, a class action discrimination suit between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and black farmers. The suit claimed that the

agency had discriminated against black farmers on the basis of race and failed to

investigate or properly respond to complaints from 1983 to 1997. (p. 2)

For many years, black farmers had been complaining that they were not receiving fair

wages and compensation for their farms and when applying for governmental loans and

assistance (Cowan & Feder, 2010). Among the allegations from the farmers, was the

USDA was forcing them to "…wait longer for loan approvals than were non-minority

farmers." (Cowan & Feder, 2010, p. 1). Unfortunately, the consequences of these

repeated denials by the government placed black farmers in precarious situations and

financial default destroying their legacy (Cowan & Feder, 2010). Moreover, many

claimed that the USDA was unresponsive to inequality claims.

Adding insult to injury, Cowan and Feder (2010) detailed that in 1994, the

USDA commissioned D.J. Miller & Associates to analyze the treatment of people of

color in Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs and disbursements. After looking at data

over a five year period, the report found that people of color participation were very

miniscule and less money was received when compared to their White farmer

counterparts. One can certainly make the case these inequities have translated into

negative feelings over time that has permeated generations of Blacks while tainting

legacies.

Students' of color negative attitudes towards agriculture primarily stems from the

perception that agricultural opportunities are primarily production-based and do not

require extensive training and education (Talbert & Larke, 1995). This lack of basic

understanding of agricultural operations may drastically diminish students' interest.

African Americans exhibit negative feelings towards agriculture before they often enter high school (Talbert & Larke, 1995). The importance of guidance counselors' role in dispelling ill-informed outlooks is critical.

Recruitment of African American Students

What can be done to encourage more African American students to enroll in agricultural programs in colleges across this great nation? Colleges and universities desperate to reverse, or at least in some fashion diminish that trend are also faced with this perplexing inquiry. With African Americans better represented in other disciplines (Talbert & Larke, 1995), this issue must be addressed directly when discussing them in the agricultural discipline.

Since the 1980s, enrollment of African American students in agriculture has dwindled drastically creating a profound effect on our colleges (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Talbert and Larke (1995) mention the number of qualified and capable people available to work in the agricultural field are deficient. Ensuring that a sustainable pool of competent, skilled candidates is continuously supplied has become quite the challenge for colleges of agriculture throughout the United States. Outdated perceptions and old notions stifle the available pool of African Americans in agriculture as many of them view the field with a negative connotation (Talbert, Larke, Jones & Moore, 1997). An overall lack of interest and other ancillary personal factors such as monetary motivations, and peer pressure have contributed to the quandary that many students face when viewing agriculture (Jones, 1978). To offset the damaging stigma associated with agriculture, underrepresented groups, specifically African Americans must be properly

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educated about the vast opportunities available to them in agriculture that many years of bias can eradicate.

Urban students should be able to perceive the benefits of pursuing a career in agriculture. Residential backgrounds may need to be addressed when looking for quality agricultural students. Jones (1978) defines urban agriculture as activities supporting the enhancement of city inhabitants by providing sustainable food and plants. Because of the unlimited potential of recruiting urban African Americans, increased efforts should be made to reach the non-traditional pool of students in urbanized areas.

Although it can be said that the recruitment of African Americans has increased with many colleges, the numbers are still alarmingly low. In the academic year of 2001 to 2002, 16% of all college graduates from U.S. Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine were from minority groups (Williams, 2012).

A foundational chart instrumental in recruiting underserved populations was established by Talbert, Larke, Jr., Jones, and Moore in 1997. In this model, the scholars established seven foundational items needed at the university level to adequately recruit African Americans. The benefit of an engaged faculty was listed as one of the items. Faculty members who are active in the community and readily visible allow students to establish and maintain personal relationships with a certified professional in the agriculture arena. Proper financial support improved by scholarships and other money streams can entice the students even more. This area is where high school counselors can become a source of cultural capital for the students. In the absence of guardian

guidance, counselors can become that necessary resource for the students when applying for financial provisions. The scholars also indicate the importance of on-campus housing. This source of community and dwelling with like-minded African Americans is instrumental in keeping the students grounded and accounted for. A positive image of agriculture leaves a lasting impression on students at an early age. Putting a favorable spin on what an agriculture career can do for one's life with upperclassmen paving the way will benefit students vastly. All of the aforementioned entities are critical in establishing a successful African American pipeline to agriculture colleges nationwide.

The Urban School Context

Another problem plaguing the overall numbers of African Americans having intimate knowledge about agriculture are the gentrification of many Black families to the urbanized population centers of many large cities. With up to 80 percent of African Americans living in urban areas, many students have no prior experience with agriculture in any facet because of the 'urbanized' way of life (Garkovich, Bunch & Davis, 1992). Esters (2007) outlines the direct impact of this population shift to urban areas when he states the colleges of agriculture have found that their traditional pool of rural students has dwindled dramatically. In an earlier work, Esters and Bowen (2004) indicate that in order for colleges to address the changing demographics, colleges will have to adapt accordingly by actively attracting students to their programs with new and innovative methods. White et al. (1991) mention that urban youth view agricultural careers as suitable options for students with an already lengthy agriculture background. They view farms as distant connotations of slavery, indigence, and backbreaking labor.

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Wiley, Bowen, Bowen, and Heinsohn (1997) opine that African Americans must be more readily exposed to the science dimensions of agricultural and food sciences. This lack of a basic science and math foundation among many African Americans has hindered colleges from recruiting many more of them into their programs.

A new generation of agriculture professionals may have to be recruited from non-traditional sources such as specialized science, math, and agriculture programs (Tarpley & Miller, 2004). Because agriculture is math and science based, African American students may run the risk of struggling initially or becoming disenchanted altogether. Esters (2007) illustrates that over the past two decades, an uptick in specialized agriculture programs has occurred. The quest for educating future agricultural professionals in larger cities has allowed the advent of such schools as the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, the Agricultural Food and Sciences Academy in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the John Bowne High School in Flushing, New York (Esters, 2007) to proliferate. This school model suggests that more urban and African Americans need to be recruited to procure larger college enrollment numbers. Also, the opportunity for an influx of urban students into the agriculture field is possible because of positive perceptions that can exist when introducing agriculture to urban students. White et al. (1991) showed that a high number of urban students have positive frames of mind when it comes to discussing careers in agriculture. They also indicated colleges should be able to capitalize on this zeal by better marketing their programs.

Influential Agents of African American Students

Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) identified seven sources of capital that African American students could best utilize to navigate the post-secondary schooling experience. High school counselor support, high school-based college outreach programs, locally-based college outreach programs, parental support and involvement, mentors, community backing, and self-motivation are all mentioned as suitable outlets for African Americans to depend on when navigating the college process (Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, & Denyszyn, 2011). In order to improve a student's outcome, a host of individuals may play a role in aligning them with the proper information. One of these professionals with the training and personal acumen to appropriately ensure this happens are high school counselors.

Counselors are considered a valuable asset to many secondary schools while functioning as change agents for students alike (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Specifically regarding college admission, McDonough and Calderone (2006) suggest that effective school counselors propagate pertinent resources while establishing a rigorous, yet accurate college culture for upperclassmen, ensuring the students are taking the necessary courses for college entrance, and providing ancillary material that explains the high school to college matriculation.

Outreach programs stationed at local high schools and colleges are excellent sources of insight for students transitioning to college. Students who participate in support programs accrue capital in the form of knowledge and information which helps build a foundation for their college decision process (Gándara, 2002). González, Stoner,

and Jovel (2003) found that emotional and financial support from parents was one of the most impactful aspects of social capital that an underrepresented student could acquire. Parental support is not only beneficial for the development of the students; it also may provide a salient impression on their life especially during such a stressful process.

Parental support has been shown in seminal literature to be an important element in increasing the academic achievement of the African American (Reynolds & Gill, 1994). Within the family, parental involvement and students' perception of their parents has shown to have a demonstrated effect on their academic viability (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Parental support coupled with a continued presence around school, convey a positive message directly and indirectly to students Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, & Haskins, (2010). If a parent develops a strong social support, positive relationships will follow and consequently, a productive learning environment will be established (Watson, Brown & Swick, 1983). Parental support and involvement benefits students enormously and when consistent, allows them to flourish academically.

As with most things, overt parental influence can have negative impacts on students. As indicated by Hofer (2008), explicit parental guidance can strip students of freedom and independence rendering them unprepared for adulthood and successfully maneuvering through imminent decisions. Through his study, he found that college students who kept in constant contact with their parents, a reduction in autonomy and attenuated decision-making was noted.

Mentors can help bridge the widening gap between students in need and the lack of positive role models in many communities. While all forms of mentoring have improved, school-based mentoring (SBM) has seen the greatest jump (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011). According to Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, and McMaken (2011), in 2005, there were 870,000 mentors working diligently with high school students. SBM mentorship may give students another resource on campus and allow intervention to occur immediately.

The old African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child" may often ring true when community support is prevalent for a student. Students who have the allegiance and support of the community garner a sense of pride and representation (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011). The impacts of a supportive community can have an overwhelmingly positive benefit on a student (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011); thus perhaps equipping them with a sense of purpose and determination. The absence of family or mentors may be offset by a strong community enveloping that student during the formative years.

Intrinsic motivation which is innate and propels a student to excel is a very essential characteristic among high school students (Fan & Williams, 2010). Internal fortitude has been directly correlated with the positive curve seen in a student's academic performance (Renninger, Ewan, & Lasher, 2002). Students who exhibited self-efficacy have shown to be leaders, and models of great success in college regardless of background (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). Self-motivation is an essential cog in

developing a student's foundation (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012) and can be a form of social capital.

High School Counselors

According to the ASCA (2008), the high school counselor works in unison with students, parents, teachers, administrators and the surrounding community to help students in the transition between high school and adulthood through an occupation. School counselors are in a good position to benefit African Americans because of their specialized training. Because they are often the lone educational professionals in schools trained to enhance academic achievement, they are an essential source of support (Martin, 2002; Moore, 2006). To understand how high school students can utilize high school counselors as a component of social capital when selecting college career choices, it is essential to look at the evolution of their current roles in a past and present framework. In some cases, counselors are the catalysts in students' decisions to enroll in higher education (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). The National Career Development Association was created in 1913 focusing on the relationship of student counseling and helping students garner a career (Jackson, 1997). Initially, school counseling was viewed in the same vein as career counseling. Parsons (1909) opined there "…was no part of life where the need for guidance is more emphatic than in the transition from school to work—the choice of a vocation, adequate preparation for it, and attainment of efficiency and success." (p. 4). High school guidance counselors were originally created to help students procure a profession through advice and assistance. The term 'guidance counselor' was created in the 1950s correlating with the explosion in

public school attendance (Neukrug, 2011). Providing guidance was the primary role counselors were trained for.

In the 1970s, high school counselors were viewed as caretakers, acting as "sorters, rather than promoters of college attendance" (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011, p. 182). Counseling had evolved from emphasizing college counseling, to a more personal brand of counseling (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). During that time period, many counselors focused on funneling students into academic programs based on their educational merit. Students were identified for programs by such markers as test scores and personal characteristics (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). Counselors were not averse to informing parents their children were not of college-material. Many parents became disingenuous with counselors during this time frame because of their damaging opinions (Rosenbaum, Miller & Krei, 1996). Rosenbaum, Miller & Krei (1996) indicated that at times, counselors became vindictive when parents failed to take heed of their advice. These authors indicated counselors intentionally misinformed the students about the college application process rendering them helpless and naïve. In the 1970s, Zubko (2010) stated that extensive theory building occurred within the realms of counseling. Erford, House, and Martin (2007) highlight this timeframe as a period in which the foundation of counseling materialized focusing on career education, drug abuse prevention, and self-actualization.

The onset of the Reagan administration constrained school counseling through budget cuts, and a drastic reduction in federal spending (Zubko, 2010). With the resource pool dwindling to a trickle, the 1980s and 1990s concentrated the focus of

counseling on child abuse, drug abuse, and truancy prevention (Erford, House, & Martin, 2007). Zubko (2010) described the turn of the century as a period in which counselors were mandated to expend all of their knowledge and energy into the newly-enacted No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created in 2001. NCLB changed the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act, bestowing funds to districts with the need for extra counseling benefits, or ones that conceived the most creative programs (Erford, House, & Martin, 2007).

Counselors also have institutional constraints within the school system that can inhibit their ability to adequately perform their job. Smith et al. (2007) indicate even with the increased demand for counselors and counseling centers nationally, fiscal and administrative policies for student services have become more conservative. This increased accountability has amplified workload. Counselors are being asked to do "more with less", which creates major challenges (Smith et al., 2007).

Accountability in counseling is at an all-time high in schools (Rowell, 2010) and with recent legislative mandates, practitioners are feeling the burden of increased workload. The increased workload set forth by mandated national standards has caused a lot of confusion and *role ambiguity* among school counselors (Stickel, 1991; Thompson & Powers, 1983). Thompson and Powers (1983) reported the definition of role conflict as "…the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role pressures so that compliance with one would make it more difficult to comply with the other" (p. 239).

The Role of School Counseling

The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) mission is to develop today's student to become tomorrow's adult (ASCA, 2009). The ASCA standards were created to identify and establish perceptions, knowledge, abilities, and skills students should be able to model given the availability of adequate counseling (Bethel, 2013). When describing the ASCA's academic, vocation, and personal social developmental standard, Bethel (2013) describes the three part mission in greater detail:

> *Academic Development* : Standard A-Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the lifespan. Standard B-Students will compete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial post-secondary career options, including college. Standard C- Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work and to life at home and in the community (p. 45).

When discussing career building,

> *Career Development*: Standard A-Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions. Standard B-Students will employ strategies to achieve further career goals with success and satisfaction. Standard C- Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the world of work (p. 45).

And, when expounding on the ASCA's expectations about personal/social development:

Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others. Standard B- Students will make decisions, set goals and take necessary action to achieve goals. Standard C- Students will understand safety and survival skills (p. 45).

School Counseling in Precollege Guidance

School counselors as defined by the United States Department of Labor (2006) are individuals that perform as supporters of students while providing them with academic, personal, and social growth. Impacting students' academic and career goals are principal objectives for school counselors. Huggins (2010) further explains the role of counselors when she states,

> The nature of the work of school counselors is explained as helping students evaluate their abilities, interests and talents, and personality characteristics in an effort to develop reasonable and practical career goals. High school counselors provide advice and direction to students about college majors, admission requirements, and financial aid. (p. 44-45).

School counselors have a great role in advising high school students on the college process. To show the importance of school counselors when advising African Americans students, McDonough and Calderon (2006) conducted a study engaging 63 counselors in urban high schools concerning the ongoing dilemma of high school students obtaining essential college funding and guidance. Their qualitative inquiry contended that within urban schools, counselors are critical in assisting students with their precollege needs. Counselors impact the college preparation process at many

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intervals, including, but not limited to consolidating information and activities, assisting with college preparation, and providing assistance on financial aid (McDonough & Calderon, 2006).

Counselors' Impacts on African American Students

For almost three decades, the professional literature has continuously called for increasing counselor accountability (Gysbers, 2004). Dahir and Stone (2009) state that limited funding coupled with the pressure to attain annual academic progress has weakened the impact of school counselors on student educational advancement and assistance. Research clearly indicates African Americans are highly influenced by their high school counselors, but unfortunately, they are also more likely to have counselors that are ill-prepared, while being forced to deal with other administrative-related duties such as test preparation, discipline management, and other non-counseling related responsibilities (McDonough, 2005; Trusty & Niles, 2003).

Arredondo, et al. (1996) specify that counselors should continually be aware of and strive to meet or exceed the standards of multicultural competency. When dealing with African Americans, culturally competent counselors should possess an innate awareness of their own personal biases and ideals (LeBeauf, 2008). Counselors are bound to a professional oath when dealing with African Americans; the American Counseling Association admonishes them to "actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients with whom they work" (American Counseling Association, 1995, p. 2).

Previous research has pointed out school counselors, usually associated within the middle class have constraints working with lower class students due to their differing socioeconomic background (Yogev & Roditi, 1987). These authors go on to indicate that counselors' motives for helping students may be meritocratic in nature and assistance for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be sparse. School counselors and their relationships with African Americans have been varied in nature. Many urban counselors have preconceived notions about African Americans which inhibit their ability to effectively cater to their students (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). School counselor training and practice has unintentionally proliferated the status quo and continuing the vast inequalities that currently exist (Bemak & Chung, 2005). With school systems and administrators having defined their roles for school counselors, many of the issues with student dissent are exacerbated (Bemak & Chung, 2005). These outside influences are often determined on a whim with little to no input from the counselors, creating a large discrepancy. When roles are defined by professionals other than the school counselors, the new roles often "maintain the status quo" (Bemak & Chung, 2005, p. 197).

The rationale for utilizing school counselors as a vehicle of encouragement may be because of their position of latitude within the school setting. School counselors according to Moore, Henfield, and Owens (2008) are in the best position to assist African American students while also being their advocates. Counselors hold the distinction of being the only educational professionals in many schools certified to create

program/curriculum management, encourage career development, and hone personal and social growth of students (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008).

School counselors hold the ability to ensure many African Americans receive the proper educational instruction coupled with their familiarity with the college selection process (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). This invaluable experience can be an immense benefit to African Americans lacking this social capital at home. To better align school counselors with achieving their overall objectives, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) suggests school counselors (a) manage advanced guidance programs for students; (b) support all students; (c) identify the factors within the school setting that impedes students' educational outcomes; (d) apply school data that promotes student success for all demographics; and (e) be zealous as agents of change for students struggling to excel while cultivating strategies that increase the rate of achievement (Colbert & Colbert, 2003). In light of the American School Counselor Association outlining objectives that seemingly target the success of all students, including African Americans, there is still a personal connection lacking among African Americans and counselors (Ford, 2010).

Research has indicated that many African Americans have negative perceptions of school counselors (Moore et al., 2004). Beginning with the complex conundrum that is an increased prevalence of student diversity, many school counselors often are perplexed by the demographic changes occurring in schools (Constantine, 2001; Durodoye, 1998; Lee, 1995). They believe counselors to be unwelcoming and unsupportive of their post-secondary aspirations (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis & Thomas,

1999). Many African American students scoff at the notion that counselors function

adequately in providing appropriate college advice. The overall dissonance associated

with not being accounted for in school has increased in the minds of African Americans

(Sue & Sue, 1990).

Howard (2003) mentions in his research article that African Americans see the

school system as a place of resistance, and abject failure. School does not induce

feelings of a sanctuary where they are supported and respected (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Because of the overcrowding within many urban schools, counselors are often inundated

with more students which affects their ability to effectively disseminate information and

advice. Studies (Lee, 1995) have shown that when counselors work with large

caseloads, many students feel neglected and under advised. The large numbers of

students assigned to each counselor in some school districts is severely restricting the

advice students receive, thus directly impacting African Americans being adequately

prepared for the college application and entrance processes (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez,

& Colyar, 2004).

The African American Student Conundrum

Byrd and Chavous (2011) poignantly state that over the last twenty years spirited

dialogue has mulled over the question of whether strong self-assurance and racial pride

augments or diminishes students' of color academic achievement. Because of this

inherent pride, African American students are not receiving the full benefits of a

counselor's advice. There is a gap in the literature regarding the roles of counselors as it

relates to advising Black students about college exists (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006).

While it is understandable that parents should be the primary source of input for African American students, expecting those parents that lack the educational background and insight to adequately provide insight is duplicitous at best (McDonough, 2004). Parents lacking the requisite educational background and experience often provide little help to their children.

High school African American students are often housed in crowded schools and this is a less than favorable environment for receiving proper counsel. Regarding the abysmal ratio of students-to-counselors plaguing school systems, Perna et al. (2008), state:

> The American School Counselor Association's recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 100:1 admittedly reflects some degree of self-interest, the 2004 national average of 262:1 is…high, especially when considering that this figure includes large public as well as much smaller independent schools (p. 132).

Further expounding on the counselor shortage, Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, and Colyar (2004) interviewed several high school counselors in predominantly large schools with a large African American population. They found that counselors were unable to provide adequate guidance within the "organizational structure" of their schools. Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, and Colvar (2004) also discovered because of these limitations, counselors' effectiveness with individual students was constrained because of other responsibilities.

Summary

African Americans are faced with the burden of deciding whether to continue with their education on the collegiate level, enroll in trade school, join the armed forces, or become involved with a host of other post-secondary endeavors. Current literature has well documented stories detailing the plight of the Black student in the home, community, and school. Fortunately, influential people can have a tremendous impact on students' morale and future plans. School personnel such as high school counselors possess the ability to be a prodigious influence on students lacking proper support at home.

Counselors have a very tangible impact when attempting to assess the college application and financial aid process. Negative perceptions pervade many African Americans when discussing their school counselors. Added administrative responsibilities have become a detriment to the amount of prolonged time the counselors spend with each student. Over the course of a student's high school tenure, these abbreviated encounters have left students devoid of institutional agents such as counselors within the school system. With the role of school counselors aimed in helping students evolve into adulthood through support and guidance, the growing population of African Americans is a critical population to support. A part of developing knowledge, skills, and abilities of the students is to reinforce their foundation with suitable professional support.

In addition to discussing the history of agriculture, this literature review encompassed what research has said about African American students, counselors, and

other sources of encouragement. The potential for employment in agriculture coupled with an industry-wide outlook was discussed. While chronicling the travails of African Americans, this literature review expounded on influential sources and their extensive impacts, including parental involvement. Students that experience consistent parental involvement coupled with a constant presence at school functions exhibited higher academic performance.

Conversely, some research avows that students with substantial parental involvement can inhibit their social development. Some students accustomed to their parents being a consistent presence reported unable to adequately make adult-decisions and reported lessened autonomy over their life. Either way, parental involvement is a delicate balance and too much, or a severe lack of influence can affect students throughout their developmental years.

African Americans are inundated with many factors that can affect their academic performance. With proper influential sources such as counselors in place, the likelihood of becoming successful is magnified. Reduced responsibility and more student-specific counsel can alleviate most concerns students have when applying to college. Fortuitous and daunting to most students with proper resources, counselors can help ease the burden significantly. With the application process being difficult enough, counselors are critical in narrowing the gap of African Americans enrolling in college and establishing careers, especially in agriculture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Agricultural careers are diverse and encompass a myriad of opportunities for African Americans. The ability to capitalize on these long-sustaining careers may depend on how much advice, exposure, and insight these students received during their high school tenure. The employment opportunities can range from those within a multitude of agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the United States Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) agency. The social capital of African American students lie within how much information they receive from outside sources other than family members who can be construed as a positive asset.

The researcher sought to find what college African American students in agricultural programs had to say about their high school counselors and what role, if any, did they occupy in college and/or program selection. The objective was to examine high school counselors' influence when deliberating with students. An additional purpose was to explore the relationships between the counselors and students when incorporating ethnicity, counselor demographics, diversity, and counselor agricultural competence. The following objectives were identified to attend to the purposes of this study:

1. Examine the effects of social capital on African American students and how it influences their college choice;

2. Determine what role the relationship between counselors and African American students have in their college/program selection.

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The need to employ qualitative methodology in this study derived from the probing nature of this inquiry, and a commitment to examine ideologies expressed from African American students and counselors alike when conversing about agriculture. Based on Merriam's (2009) view of qualitative research, it is based on understanding how people construe their experiences, how these interpretations are attributed to their feelings, and what it all means. Utilizing this methodology, this research will enable me to: (a) identify how my experiences as a African American, specifically an African American male, played in me choosing a career path in agriculture; (b) interpret what impression African American college students have regarding their employment opportunities in agriculture; (c) understand the experiences of college African American students and high school counselors when deliberating over career options post high school; and (d) to provide a voice for their diverse experiences within the educational setting.

Researcher's Lens

When reflecting back over my life as to how an African American male from a large metropolitan, urban setting became enthralled with agriculture, I look back on my prior experiences coupled with familial support. Astonishingly, my formative years were partially formed by my participation in the Boy Scouts. Being engaged in such a career-driven and responsibility-laden organization, I learned the value of hard work and perseverance. These two traits ultimately helped guide me in acquiring my Eagle Scout's designation, a proud, humbling moment in my life, even to this day. One of the tenets of this organization was to embrace the world we inhabited, and to practice

stewardship of the environment and land. Learning to love and appreciate my natural environment helped shape my views of agriculture. Unfortunately, many youths of color are seldom afforded the opportunity to become familiar with such a diverse field.

I also believe that my overall inquisitiveness with our pets played a major role in me being zealous about agriculture and animal science. I candidly remember being proud of the fact I was our dogs' caretaker. When growing up, I gained a love affair with all animals, and was intensely invested in maintaining their welfare through any means necessary-even if it meant removing a tumor, of which I proudly performed. Although, not the smartest thing to do, I was gratified of the end result. To this day, my parents had no idea that I performed this 'procedure' on our beloved dog and am sure they would not have approved. I digress however in maintaining my stance on African American students having ample opportunities in becoming familiarized with all things agriculture.

In conducting this research, I understand the plight of the African American attempting to find the right career path specifically for them. It is especially difficult when you have no one equipped and seasoned enough to introduce you to certain fields, especially agriculture. Using my experiences, and background, I hope to better understand the roles of counselors and students while investigating perceptions of African Americans in agriculture.

Being an African American student influenced by prominent agricultural educators and professionals alike has allowed me to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of my plight in this endeavor. Once I entered the agricultural arena, I

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knew I wanted to make a significant impact on other younger Black students searching for rewarding career options.

Population

The concept of purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This means the researcher is targeting a special population and wants to gain a special insight or understanding central to these individuals (Merriam, 2009). The components of analysis for this particular study were African American students who were considered to be high achieving as defined by previously conducted research. Harper (2004) identified high achieving students as having cumulative grade point averages greater than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.

The need for interviewing high-achieving African American students stems from the need of employers wanting to employ the most qualified, academically excelling pool of students. The higher GPA means this pool of students best represents the type of employees major agricultural industries are seeking. This metric for designating high achieving students was utilized because Harper (2004) specifically focused on African American students enrolled in largely predominant White public institutions in a similar research project. As classified by Byrd (2013), Texas A&M is considered a predominantly White institution. Each participant was given a monetary incentive upon conclusion of the study.

Instrumentation

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is utilized as a very important instrument (Brodsky, 2008). The researcher's inherent biases can have an impact at every stage of the inquiry, ranging from research topic, to participant sampling, to interview questions, to data analysis (Brodsky, 2008). Depending on the researcher's personal experiences, they may glean different outcomes from the data. Essentially, data analysis varies from researcher to researcher, and one study may be interpreted in diverging ways altogether. Brodsky (2008) goes on to state the piety of good qualitative research depends on if a researcher has fully utilized all of the skills acquired in their repertoire to create an accurate depiction of the research as observed by the investigator.

To ensure credibility was attained, the researcher utilized peer debriefing to review that the research process was being conducted in a reliable manner. Renowned qualitative inquiry scholars, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described peer reviewers as individuals that performed in the capacity of providing support, challenging the data, questioning the researcher's internal assertions, and asking probing questions about elucidations. The appropriate lens for establishing credibility is to utilize someone outside the study because they can provide constructive criticism while being an important sounding board for concepts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Collection

The data collected in this study was achieved through a series of personal face-to-face, semi-structured open-ended interviews. Through the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research Department (IRB) at Texas A&M, approval to

proceed the research project was obtained. Each participant was interviewed twice with each session lasting approximately one hour to ninety minutes. The participants were asked about twenty questions (Appendix 1).

Selected participants who met the basic criteria of being African American, high achieving (Grade Point Average of 3.0 or greater), and enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences were contacted and interview concerns and protocols were clearly outlined to quell any lingering uncertainties. The participants were also told that their participation in the study was absolutely voluntary. A total of four students, two males and two females chose to participate in this research study. During the interviews, in addition to triangulation, the researcher utilized a tape recorder to obtain thick, rich descriptions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), "thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts…" (p. 83). These descriptions aid the researcher in gaining a higher sense of clarity and give the readers an impression of actually being present during the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These dense, detail-laden accounts help establish credibility through the lens of the readers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Such lucid depictions as recanted by the interviewees help readers better gain a sense of perceptions. In addition to the tape recordings, a journal was kept in a non-descript binder and housed discreetly when not transcribing. Study results were shared with the participants once the study concluded.

Interviews transpired during the months of May, June, and July of 2013. Well-formulated interviews of the students occurred to understand the held perceptions they had about the field of agriculture; specifically, the role their counselors played, if any,

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when aligning them with the college selection and entry processes. The students were asked questions probing their high school experience with agriculture when compared to other occupational options, why they chose to attend Texas A&M, what was their relationship like with high school counselors, and if they felt these counselors had a vested interest in their aspirations. Additionally, the students were asked about social capital especially, parental support, resource allocation, community backing, and funding. Once the interviews concluded, the recordings and notes were transcribed, and then reviewed by participants for accuracy.

Field Notes

The use of field notes can also add validity and reliability to the research (Merriam, 2009). Field notes as described by Merriam (2009) contain the verbal depictions of the setting, actions, and exact quotes from these interview sessions. These are critical in understanding the perception of the occurrences (Merriam, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest all observation records contain clear references to participants and developed habits. Maintaining field notes provided correlative information that aligned with what was observed and heard.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2007). Categorization was best accomplished by a process known as open coding which openly sectioned pertinent data using a wide net. Any potential information was considered, even if repetitious. This method was extensively utilized by the researcher and evolved into what Corbin and Strauss (2007) termed axial coding, which derives from open

coding and is laced with more detail and meaning. After establishing a discernible

pattern, the researcher developed emerging categories, or themes.

After categorizing the various themes, the research used member checking,

another term for respondent-driven validation (Merriam, 2009). This method of

ensuring credibility entailed the researcher soliciting feedback on the emergent findings

from the respondents (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), this is paramount

in ensuring that misinterpretation of data is not occurring. All participants took part in

the member checking process. Modifications were made to the original transcriptions

and subjects again checked the veracity of the notes.

Peer debriefing (Merriam, 2009) is when a colleague evaluates the data, methods,

and interpretations. The advantages of peer debriefing is that it allows an external audit

to occur without compromising the data. Scanning the raw data will give the researcher

a better idea of plausibility within their findings (Merriam, 2009). A fellow cohort

member, also a doctoral candidate, was used as a peer reviewer. This peer was

instrumental in helping the researcher attain another perspective and her proficiency in

agricultural systems was invaluable. Her expertise helped me identify possible gaps in

the data, while implementing better approaches in asking probing questions.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent in which findings can be accurately repeated

(Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) explains that in qualitative research, researchers seek

to "…describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (p. 220). To

establish reliability, an audit trail as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a method

that was established to document the inquiry process through note taking, keeping

research logs, using data collection chronology (Creswell & Miller, 2000), and recording

data analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the elements in the researcher's

audit trail include raw data in the form of transcripts, audio recordings, documents, and

field notes. A reflexive journal was also utilized for dependability. The audit trail

provided documentation and a "running account" of the daily findings of the research

inquiry (Erlandson, 1993, p. 34).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was achieved by triangulation, which as defined by Miles and

Huberman (1994) is a combination of methods and techniques used to study cultural and

social singularities from different perceptions. Triangulation of data is used to identify,

explore, and comprehend variable layers of the study, which fortifies the findings and

enrich the analyses gleaned from a research study (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation can be

accomplished by participant interviews, member checking, and reviewing relevant

literature. In the research project, the researcher used peer debriefing, member checking,

prolonged engagement and audit trails. The audit trails were used for establishing rigor

and recounting the research procedures (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

To ensure all ethical considerations were within the prescribed guidelines,

specific hurdles needed to be cleared before research was to begin. This study was

submitted for review by the Office of Research Compliance at Texas A&M University,

specifically the Institutional Review Board. As a result, this research project met the

standards of the Human Subjects Protection Program garnering an exempt status. The participants were given aliases in an effort to protect their identities.

The data collected for this research project is considered confidential. Knowing this, the researcher and committee advisor were the only two individuals with access to the information. Per qualitative inquiry protocol, the transcriptions were coded and secured in an undisclosed location, and all written documentation concerning this research project was shredded.

Researcher's Role

In qualitative inquiry, Merriam (1998) wrote that the researcher is the central instrument for gathering and analyzing data and can improve the situation by capitalizing on opportunities for obtaining impactful information. Non-verbal/verbal behavior can influence the research process greatly (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). It is up to the researcher to be aware of their mannerisms, and try to be as inconspicuous as possible (Taylor, 2005). Establishing rapport with the participants is critical, they should be as candid as possible, and the only way to effectively connect with them is to be transparent (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). As the researcher, my role was to engage the participants in deep, thought provoking conversations. Building a substantial connection between the participants and me was critical in obtaining prevalent information (Taylor, 2005).

As the source of data collection and analysis, I, the researcher am the instrument for this study. Merriam (1998) vies: "In a qualitative study, the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and can respond to the situation by

maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful data. Conversely, the investigator as a human instrument is limited by being human-that is, mistakes are made, opportunities missed, and personal biases interfere" (p. 20). Human instruments are fallible as any other research instrument according to Merriam (1998).

Summary

The research study consisted of four high academic achieving African American students currently enrolled in a college agricultural program. These students were interviewed using the latest qualitative techniques and data analyzed using various recommended techniques endorsed by scholars such as Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The qualitative method was utilized in this study because of the ability to acquire their experiences through rich, thick data. Each student was allowed to converse freely without hindrance. Their candor would be used to convey prevailing thoughts while lived experiences was also taken into account. The researcher's role as an instrument was to gather findings and analyze data that is essential in adding to the overall scope of research when discussing African American students and counselor influence.

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CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

> When you stand and share your story in an empowering way, your story will heal you, and your story will heal somebody else.
>
> —Iyanla Vanzant

The researcher sought to find what college African American students in agricultural programs had to say about their high school counselors and what role they had in college and/or program selection. This study sought to understand the perceptions of high achieving college students when discussing the roles and involvement of their high school counselor. The researcher attempted to tell each student's story through data obtained in interviews, facial expressions, and ancillary archived data. To find an accurate meaning for the data procured, it is organized accordingly: (a) a brief introduction of each student, (b) a litany of themes derived categorically from the conducted interviews, and, (c) an alignment of data with the research questions. Each participant was given a pseudonym of their choice to protect their confidentiality. In channeling their inner alter-egos, Vanessa, Roy Rogers, Theopolis, and Kayla came alive.

The results of the study were generated from structured interviews. Many of the questions posed to the participants were procured from researching and composing the literature review. Data from the interviews allowed an understanding to take place between the participants and researcher. Once rapport was established, each participant navigated through the list of questions with ease. The students spoke with a sense of

self-assurance unseen in most 19 to 20 year olds—with a hint of apprehension. Many of them spoke about being driven and wanting to be able to remain self-sufficient while leaving a legacy. Several themes emerged from the conversations with the students regarding their high school counselors and their impact, or lack thereof, on their college/major selection. Overall, the participants, a) were self-motivated and did not actively seek out the counselors for their advice; b) indicated the counselors were products of the school size rendering them helpless when giving in-depth counsel; c) mentioned, more often than not, counselors tended to align themselves with students of a certain social class, whether in athletics, or according to socioeconomic indicators, popularity, or academics; d) went to diverse high schools with large, multiethnic populations in relatively urbanized centers; and, e) revealed that because of the lack of counselor interaction, they would often accept advice from other individuals, regardless of experience.

In my quest for articles, and other forms of literature that focused on high school African Americans and the impact of their counselors, I was shocked at the lack of such material. The research found, primarily focused on African Americans, specifically Blacks and students of Hispanic descent. Many of the articles I read discussed students in affluent areas, and how impactful the relationships they'd fostered with their students had become. A good volume of the research discovered discussed high school African Americans from a negative deficit.

Research Participants

Vanessa

Born in southwestern Louisiana, Vanessa, at an early age learned the values of hard work from her father who was in the military. He taught discipline, structure, integrity, and tenacity to Vanessa and her siblings. He also taught her rural industriousness and how to appreciate the land; a lesson his father taught him in the mid-1960s. The product of a military family, Vanessa and her family relocated to central Texas when she was approximately 10 years of age. Vibrant, diverse, and sprawling described her newly adopted home, one vastly different from her Louisiana roots.

Vanessa attended a large metropolitan high school located in the city's poorer neighborhood. Her aspirations led her to this high school because of its renowned engineering technology program. Although in the ghetto, Vanessa's school encompassed a diverse student population. She recounted attending school with the wealthy, poor, and middle class. As a high school student, agriculture was far from Vanessa's mind. Her high school did not have any agricultural enrichment programs, but plenty of engineering activities to become involved with.

Following her engineering dreams, Vanessa enrolled in a prestigious university and majored in engineering. Bright eyed, precocious, and ready to conquer the world, Vanessa attacked her engineering coursework with vigor. Unfortunately, it took only one shortened semester for Vanessa to realize her passion rested in an area other than engineering. Now a senior at a prestigious agricultural university, Vanessa has excelled through the agricultural curriculum with no major barriers.

Roy Rogers

People tend to associate Nigerian Americans with power, pride, and drive—according to Roy Rogers. But at the heart of it all I observed a different world from Mr. Rogers (and I do not mean the neighborhood). Roy was reared in a suburban region in southeast Texas known for its schools, food, and culture. This region in Texas was the perfect playground for Roy to hone his charm.

Blessed with athletic talent, Roy played high school football and ran track. It was easy for him to adapt at his new high school, because like Vanessa, his school was diverse and academically sound. Roy's high school was in an affluent area; therefore, he acquired the opportunity to befriend students of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Reared in a two-parent household, Roy's parents had his future mapped out. They wanted him to become a doctor, engineer, or attorney. Lucid in their intentions, Roy knew that any deviation from that would result in a stern admonishing. At this point, Roy was concerned with keeping his parents happy and staying active in sports, too, as he so humorously coined, "meet women." In high school, agriculture was the last thing on young Roy's mind.

Theopolis

Theopolis was the only true green thumb of all the participants. He was born and raised in rural central Texas. At an early age, Theopolis learned to get dirty in the field. His paternal great-grandparents owned land stocked with pigs, chickens, cattle, and a lush garden from which to harvest fresh fruits and vegetables. Moreover, they worked

as sharecroppers and passed down their knowledge and land to awaiting generations. Theopolis relished spending time with his grandfather, outdoors, honing his agricultural acumen.

With agriculture never far from his mind, Theopolis attended high school in the neighboring community. His high school was large, moderately diverse, and agrarian. Theopolis was very engaged in agriculturally-themed school organizations such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), and the Horticulture Team, and also showed animals at the county fair. Theopolis took his love of agriculture to college. Currently a junior at a Historically Black University and majoring in agronomy, Theopolis is enthusiastic about partaking in an agricultural career and becoming a mentor.

Kayla

Kayla was raised in a single-mothered household in a southern metropolitan city in Texas. The elder of two children, Kayla spent most of her time helping her mother entertain and rear her autistic brother. To further occupy her time, Kayla desired to join her high school's varsity cheerleading squad. Observing her mother work long hours and witnessing most of her friends struggle with poverty, Kayla knew early on she desired to perform well in high school and graduate from college.

Kayla's high school was known as a football powerhouse and offered a stellar fine arts program. Inclusive of different races, Kayla's high school was truly a melting pot. Family incomes ranged from wealthy to indigent. She enjoyed the company of her racially and socially diverse cohort and being in the hub of high school life. Although this school had a prominent agricultural program, Kayla never considered agriculture as

a possible career option. Because of her affinity for doing hair in her spare time, she had planned on working as a beauty consultant, but determined the likely salary would not offer the lifestyle she desired. These financial constraints pushed her to exploring other career options. Consequently, she explored and majored in an agricultural field.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant	High School Characteristics (size, location, demographics, socioeconomic)	Initial Major	Current Major	Age, Gender
Vanessa	*Large, urban, diverse, indigent	Radiological Health Engineering	Biological Engineering	21, Female
Roy Rogers	Large, urban, diverse, affluent	Political Science	Agricultural Economics	22, Male
Theopolis	Large, semi-rural, middle-class	Agronomy	Agronomy	21, Male
Kayla	Large, urban, diverse, affluent	History	Family and Consumer Studies	20, Female

*Large denotes a high school with a student population > 1,500

Analysis

While Vanessa, Roy Rogers, Theopolis, and Kayla's characteristics (Table 1) appear dissimilar, their lives reached a crescendo when considering their high school student-counselor experiences and later declaration of agriculture as a career choice. Each participant offered a uniquely rich perspective detailing their counselor-student interactions. After rereading and meticulously combing through the data, the following themes emerged: (1) inherent motivation; (2) the counselors may have carried too many duties to be completely effective; (3) the counselors showed preferential treatment; (4) the participants went to diverse high schools with large multiethnic populations in urbanized centers; (5) the lack of counselor interaction could lead to students accepting advice from numerous individuals.

Inherent Motivation

Each participant indicated their high school academic success and major in agriculture was primarily due to their inherent motivation. The participants wanted nothing in life but to be successful, and demanded something greater for themselves. That is, they fervently believed that working hard and aspiring to be greater than their parents would propel them in life. To avoid being byproducts of their community, all participants cited financial gain as one of their driving forces.

Vanessa. Vanessa's pragmatism influenced her to independently research different colleges that fit her career interests. While she believed her high school counselor was accessible and knowledgeable, she opted to risk going to school in a poor area. An academic achiever, she earned A's and B's throughout middle and high school.

Jovial and confident, Vanessa stated, "…although it was a ghetto school in our district, I went there because of the magnet engineering technology program." Vanessa knew what she wanted and had no problem aligning with the necessary resources and professionals to help accomplish her goals. When prodded, Vanessa indicated she knew her passion would be something in the engineering field but wanted to ensure her foundation was fortified. Choosing to attend a magnet school in a lesser known area of her city, Vanessa knew that there could be baseless stigmas associated with her because of the school selection, but her mind was made up.

Vanessa was vested in her academics and knew the damage of failing to fulfill her educational obligations would have on her life. When discussing her passion for school and striving to be the best, Vanessa said, "…when it came to college, I knew that I needed to make good grades to get into the colleges of my choice, I also knew that in order to obtain scholarships, I needed to do a lot of the legwork on my own…" This mentality fueled Vanessa to graduate towards the top of her class and have multiple options when it was time to select a college. Coming from an established two-parent household, Vanessa knew the expectations placed upon her, but seemed to indicate she relished the challenges. She knew that a high value would be placed on the fact that she was the eldest and needed to set an example for her siblings.

Having two supportive parents enabled her to focus on her schooling without any outside stressors. Vanessa summed up her feelings about excelling in school when she stated, "…I remember knowing what I wanted to be in life, so it was easy working towards my goals. I grew up with a focus that was passed down from my father." This

straightforward mode of thinking enabled Vanessa to remain studious in high school even though many of her peers were in a different place mentally. Vanessa knew in order to achieve the college of her choice she needed to take care of business in school so that financially she was taken care of and would not have to depend on school loans. This drive and desire to be the best arose multiple times in our interview. Vanessa seemed to be wise beyond her years and attacked her life's plan with aggression and focus. In retrospect, going to a high school laden with an immense math and science program, this type of ferocity is necessary, especially if you have specific plans post-graduation. Vanessa needed to make good grades because her colleges of choice were rigorous, but she relished the challenge. When asking her to expound, she candidly stated, "I knew what I needed to do and being in this high school made it easier because I knew I wanted to pursue engineering. I gained a true appreciation for the field."

Roy Rogers. Young, aggressive, eclectic, and self-assured, Roy Rogers seemed to have the inner-motivation trait in spades. Roy Rogers knew he was destined for greatness and had no reservations expressing that. Roy Rogers stated that his inner drive was mainly derived from his desire to set his parents up for life. Roy wanted to ensure his parents never had to work again. He really aspired to take care of them so they could enjoy the fruits of their labor. Roy, when asked about what keeps him motivated, simply stated, "My goals in life are to retire my parents, I want to make sure they are taken care of and have no worries in life." Roy knew that if he took care of his business in college, he would be well on his way to making sure that happened.

Roy Rogers also indicated that since his roots demand excellence, he was raised to not settle for mediocrity. He mentioned that his community has a lot of high expectations and that these demands placed on him has made him a driven person that wants nothing but the best. When I interviewed him, he was currently on a summer internship with a very profitable agriculture company in the midwest region of the United States. Roy Rogers did not seem concerned with being transient in his quest to secure the perfect job. When prodded about how his plans to retire his parents, he specified, "I have no problems with moving to different places to get that promising job…I feel that in order to take care of my parents, I will have to make sacrifices early and I am prepared to do that." Roy knew that in order to procure a stable financial future for himself and his parents, he needed to make sacrifices. Although his love for his city was great, Roy Rogers knew that earning an abundant salary relatively quickly would occur in the Midwest where agriculture is a prominent sector of the economy. This financial aspect was also paramount in Roy Rogers choosing to do well in school.

Theopolis. Theopolis proved that students from rural areas have big dreams regardless of origin. Theopolis learned the value of hard work at a young age and was taught to appreciate everything in life. He knew early in his youth that being responsible and working hard for your keep was the honorable thing to do. Theopolis saw that if he dedicated himself and stuck to his plan without any hindrances, he could do well. He was driven to excel and become the responsible son. Using his grandfather as source of inspiration and a role model, Theopolis said, "I would often use my mom's dad as a mentor. He really showed me how to farm and appreciate the land so that when I got

older, I loved farming." He indicated that his interest and desire to be the best grew on those long days out in the field. It was really in these moments that Theopolis gained some clarity about his life's mission. Raising animals and learning responsibility at a young age gave him the tools needed to be an overachiever.

Theopolis said that when his dad would go work for people at his side jobs, he would take him along. It was in these moments that he realized that hard work and dedication would be the keys to his long-term success. He mentioned that in school, he was very involved in different organizations because he wanted to establish himself with the students that were excelling. Theopolis knew the game and was conscientious about the expectations his parents had for him. Theopolis did not want to disappoint his parents and wanted to reward them by doing his best in school. He came from a lineage of industrious men, and in his mind he was a continuation of that storied legacy.

Theopolis beamed when he thought of his grandfather. He spoke of wisdom, pride, and satisfaction in knowing he was in the lineage of a great man. When reflecting on his grandfather's lasting legacy, Theopolis said " …I know he wanted my father to do great things, I saw it when I was younger. My dad would talk about how his dad instilled such good values in him; he was able to carry on these traits. I wanted to be successful just like them." I listened with great intent because not only was talking about his grandfather therapeutic for Theopolis, it was also paying homage. Theopolis seemed to be almost beaming over the phone. I could hear his pride and dignified tone change when asked about what his lineage meant to him.

***Kayla*.** Kayla knew she did not want to endure a life of poverty and doing without. She indicated from the onset that her motivation to not be in her neighborhood the rest of her life drove her to do well in school and now college. When asked about her future aspirations, before getting in depth, she mentioned to me, "First of all, I know that not having an education will take you nowhere I look around and see people in my 'hood' and they are all doing nothing positive." She indicated, "… they don't really want anything in life and the thing that drives are the finer things in life. I want it all. Looking at my friends that did not go to college, it's a big difference." She knew the benefits of college and made a hard, vested decision to not follow the same path her friends had trekked.

Kayla said she knew in high school that college was going to be her next step. She figured this was the best way to change her current situation. She witnessed her mother struggling to raise her and her autistic brother, and did not want the same fate. Kayla felt that even though she was statistically from a family unit that was considered by some scholars as a major factor in poverty contributors (Mather, 2010), she would not be deterred.

When Kayla was much younger, she often had to babysit her younger, autistic brother for many hours because of her mother's hectic work schedule. Kayla vividly remembered her past and noted that she would think about all the alternatives to her life and how securing a good education would keep her from repeating the cycle. She says that is when she learned to fix hair. She said initially it was as a hobby she would do for her friends on the side, but later found that she enjoyed the independence of fixing hair.

Kayla said she was always told to have a second way to earn income should your primary dreams not come to fruition. She was proud of the fact she was self-taught and was doing something she enjoyed. She smiled at the fact she had a lucrative "side hustle" as she called it.

Analysis

It has been proven that motivation is an 'indisputable' factor in students' commitment, learning, and success within the academic setting (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008; Wolters, Benzon, & Arroyo-Giner, 2011, p. 298). The most skilled and meticulously-prepared student will not perform at an optimal level without the presence of inner-fortitude. The participants all exhibited a heightened sense of self-worth which pervaded their responses when asked about drive. They relished in the fact their success would hinge on how much dedication they put forth. Each participant realized their high-achieving standing was directly correlated to their hard work. Learning the value of hard work and commitment from their predecessors, the participants knew the legacy and lifestyle they desired would come to fruition only with academic devotion.

School Counselors Spread Thin

It has been shown by previously conducted research that school counselors have become too inundated with other responsibilities thus diluting their ability to be effective (Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994; McCarthy et al., 2010). Counselors with larger workloads begin to feel the impacts of fatigue, stress, and ineffectiveness over time and their ability to perform at an optimal level may be diminished. All of the participants alluded to the fact that their high schools were very large and in many instances, the

counselors were assigned a block of students based on last name, and/or grades. The participants would only interact with their counselors on an as-needed basis, it was never indicated the counselors would take the initiative to check on them, rather it was mainly how often they sought out advice. Larger high schools, of 4a and 5a classification, average according to the State of Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL) range from 1,005 to over 2,090 students (UIL, 2013). With so many students, counselors are allotted with the enormous task of performing all of their requisite skills seamlessly. The participants in some ways felt that the counselors had too many duties to be effective.

Vanessa. Vanessa said that her high school was large but the counselors were specialized for her magnet program. This made interaction more frequent, but in many instances, the counselors would favor group sessions, over student-specific meetings. Vanessa also mentioned that her counselors were actively involved with them, but as far as the general student body was concerned, they did not assist them. She said that the non-magnet students had their section of counselors but because of the high school size, the same problems with lack of interaction were prevalent. Vanessa noted that the magnet students enjoyed frequent conversing and progress updates with their counselors but acknowledged this was not the norm.

Vanessa said that many of her friends in the other campus felt the sting of not having an engaged counselor because many of them were left in limbo when the time came to register for college and financial aid. The quandary that many counselors faced

at Vanessa's school were a microcosm of what appeared to be occurring statewide. The students that did not benefit from the counselors certainly were left out.

Roy Rogers. Roy Rogers went to an even larger school than Vanessa and his issues with counselor interaction were more sporadic. Roy Rogers told me that his counselors were always performing other duties and when he would go visit with them it was always abbreviated. Going into greater detail, Roy mentioned that, "…my counselor was always in charge of scheduling courses for the upcoming semester so when I would meet with her, it would basically be about that." Roy Rogers also said that since the student–to-counselor ratio was so high, he always used a "systematic approach" when meeting with them. "When I went into their office, I would get what I needed and leave. I did not really need them early on because they were good about giving us passes to get out of class…you know, to move around." Using the counselors as sources of truancy seemed to be the normal routine for athletes and people of prominence at his school. The issue of being assigned to so many duties allowed the counselors to be taken advantage of. If not entirely vested in the students' affairs, it was not uncommon for things like this to occur, according to Roy Rogers.

Theopolis. When discussing his issue with counselors and their availability, Theopolis was very frank. "If the counselors were busy, they would tell you. You would just have to reschedule the meeting. It was understood that they had set times we could go in and talk with them…" he stated.

Surprisingly, there were more counselors in Theopolis's school than in the larger schools of the other participants. There were a total of eight counselors housed in his

school. They were assigned to grade level as well, but the major difference was his school had male counselors. The counselors all made a conscious effort to actively engage all the students, but again, the population rendered that virtually impossible. According to Theopolis, his peers felt that some of the counselors were not really helpful. He opined that it was because of their drive and the counselors knew the students who wanted to become successful and if the counselors felt it was a waste of their time, they would not be as helpful. Theopolis in his candor sounded disappointed that some of his friends did not take advantage of the individual counseling sessions and nonchalantly went about their future aspirations.

Theopolis in his candor sounded disappointed that some of his friends did not take advantage of the individual counseling sessions and nonchalantly went about their future aspirations. "I believed the counselors were there to help us, but if you showed no initiative, it would be telling them you didn't care so why should they?" He then reiterated the counselors were obviously busy with other "…stuff so anytime you could get their opinion it was cool."

Kayla. Kayla had a bad opinion about her counselors from the onset so her responses when prompted would be unfiltered. She really despised the fact that her counselors really did not have any role in her choosing a college or assisting with any financial aid filing. "When I went in to find out about colleges, the counselors would always be busy with other stuff or they would just give us basic paperwork altogether…", she stated. When asked about what type of counsel did they give out, Kayla retorted by saying her counselor was only "…concerned with course load and if

you did not fit into their circle, they would kind of you know, dismiss you." This type of feeling permeated her whole interview as she was genuinely disappointed in how much of a nonfactor her counselor was in helping her gain college acceptance. Kayla's prevailing thoughts led me to another question in which I asked if she felt the school size had anything to do with how involved her counselors were and she succinctly said, "Yes, in some way but it shouldn't have made them that unconcerned with us." The counselors at her school according to her were useless and provided no real value other than course assistance for the upcoming semester/year.

Analysis

Working at larger schools or having tremendous amounts of duties as assigned can have an adverse effect on the amount of time counselors spend with the students. After interviewing my participants, I heard them recount the number of times their counselors were overwhelmed by the number of kids needing help. Hearing their stories led me to believe each counselor may have been suffering from burnout. Performing extra duties mandated from administration such as testing, counseling, taking disciplinary action, and administrative responsibilities drew the counselors in many different directions. Fair or not, counselors were expected to have an impact on their students while carrying out their auxiliary duties impeccably. Unfortunately, it sounded like the participants were unconcerned with the other tasks of counselors, the expectations as with other students were that you handled your business. This stress to perform at a peak level may have caused the counselors to be ineffective.

The participants were aware of the inundation the counselors faced, but again, the expectation was for them to be advised appropriately. It became evident over the course of my interviews that the students felt hapless because they were not able to take advantage of the professionals' wisdom when needed most. This seemed to be a burgeoning issue with each participant interviewed. There needs to be a better way of allocating counselor time for students so that their primary job of assisting and advising will be the major job duty regardless of outside obligations.

Counselors Exhibited Preferential Treatment

The participants were all fortunate to be well-liked students who were highly favored by many of their peers and school administration but they still noticed the inequality. All of the participants indicated overtly or subtly that the counselors seemed to be more apt to help those students with certain labels. Athletes, popular kids, and affluent students were often the beneficiaries of frequent counselor interaction. The participants talked about how their counselors would use the students who could represent them the best for certain projects such as helping with seminars, disseminating information, and other activities.

Vanessa. Vanessa started by telling me her counselor was all about helping the students in her magnet program. She said, "My counselor was always present when we needed her, she would make it a point to help all the Engineering Technology students but as far as the other block of students, they weren't responsible for them." Even though the students in the magnet program had their own counselors the same could not be said for the regular population of students. While admirable that the magnet school provided

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counselors for both groups of students, it became even clearer that Vanessa thought her counselors were doing a great job with her cohorts while the other students may not have been receiving the same level of advising.

Roy Rogers. When talking about students receiving certain privileges not afforded to regular pupils, it was easy to attain Roy Rogers' opinion on the matter. Being an athlete engaged in many school sports, Roy was very keen on the benefits that he and his contemporaries received. Counselors would almost bend over backwards to ensure they were completely satisfied with their schedules, and whatever else they had control over. Roy acknowledged that many of the counselors had favorites and would be eager to assist when beckoned. He said, "The counselors had favorites, and would cater to the students they knew. It was never a doubt who they would assist because those were the ones such as me that played sports." This favoritism exhibited by the counselors was inevitably noticed by the other students because Roy indicated the other students not in certain categories could tell and were not as open to go visit with the counselors.

Theopolis. Theopolis had the same feelings as he was not entrenched in a group of extremely popular students but was affable enough that he was not affected by counselor neglect. He mentioned that the students who were not active in school and not really part of any organizations did not have the same benefits as he and his friends. Theopolis led me to believe that the popular crowd was not necessarily the athletes, but the students very involved and engaged. He told me those students were looked at as ideal students, ones capable of excelling thus the recipients of sound counsel. The counselors left it up to the students to "police themselves" as recounted by Theopolis.

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The ones that showed motivation and ambition would be met with vigor. The counselors at Theopolis' school seemed to be willing to help students who had some inclination about where they wanted to attend college. He told me, "A lot of us had our minds already made up and knew where we wanted to go; it was just good to have the counselors assist us."

Kayla. Kayla was also a popular student who felt her counselors treated some of the students differently. She recounted how being on the cheerleader team afforded her many benefits other students did not receive. Although in her opinion not really involved with the students like they should, she understood certain students found favor. Counselors in her school had to deal with athletes of all calibers and getting them into college was an arduous task that required all their resources. Oftentimes, this would take them away from the other just as deserving students. She responded when asked, "Being on the cheer team, I saw a lot of athletes taken care of by the counselors and teachers. Many of them got a lot of help that other students may not have received; fortunately I had our Cheer Coach." It was obvious the staff took great pride in their athletes, but other students needed the advice as well.

Analysis

Being engaged and attentive to African American students meant getting in the trenches and discovering what motivates them. It is hard to be accurate in your assessment when counseling sporadically, or is devoid altogether. Students sense who is being treated fairly and respond accordingly. The participants many times over indicated the counselors were not as effective because of ancillary duties including helping certain

students. Separate of their administrative functions, counselors are tasked with the burden of ensuring students' needs are being met when it comes to gaining college entrance.

The counselors at participants' schools seemed to be drawn to students who had a certain socioeconomic, and/or athletic standing. Although a natural reaction to align oneself with likeminded individuals, counselors have to become beacons of support for all students. In my participants' high schools, many African American students did not fall within the desired category and had no other alternatives. Using school counselors as a means of social capital works best when counselors equitably govern students without overtly choosing favorites. The disadvantaged students in need most are the neglected ones that cannot acquire advice on their own volition. Even exhibiting miniscule forms of favoritism does not benefit the students who need counsel the most; it can be a detrimental flaw.

Participants Attended Diverse Urbanized High Schools

The high schools of each participant were uniquely enormous and sat precisely in the middle of urban, modern communities. Each participant stated their high schools were in heavily populated parts of their city but offered a host of cultural experiences for the students. This rich diversity enabled each student to become cultured and fostered an environment of competitiveness within. They knew their classmates would be striving to become successful, and the participants indicated to me they knew the challenge. The tribulations and temptation of living in such a thriving area never seemed to divert the participants. They were strong willed and had a plan of attack. The participants schools

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were large and had a lot of activities available, but curiously only one took advantage of the agriculture enrichment program. Three of the four schools had an agriculture program but only one of my participants chose to become active. The availability of different organizations for such a heavily populated school could have contributed to the lack of interest in agriculture. Being a member of these agriculture groups were not at the top of the priority list for my participants.

In my literature review, I highlighted the differences between urban and rural students when it comes to agriculture. In the urban school, students are less inclined to take an interest in agriculture because of their inherent perceptions and exposure. The urban high school needs to find creative ways to incorporate agriculture into its curriculum and activities. Programs geared toward agriculture will certainly engender more interest if innovative enough. Urban and rural schools have increasingly become more diverse; with the changing culture in this country becoming more evident, school districts will have to adapt. As seen in this research study, students are enrolling in more culturally diverse schools than ever, and it will be incumbent on the leaders to become visionaries.

Vanessa. When asked about the diversity of her high school, Vanessa recounted students of all demographics matriculating to her school. She said that although her school was not in an affluent area of town, the magnet program attracted a student population from across the city. "We had all kinds of students at my school..", she opined. "Although the students in the engineering magnet program were accepted under a different set of circumstances, the diversity was still present." Her classmates came

from all walks of life and it was this variety that made her high school experience invaluable.

Roy Rogers. Roy Rogers was probably the most well rounded of the four participants. He was involved in many activities that engendered him to mingle with various races. Being an athlete, scholar, and involved in student organizations, he had the unique opportunity to develop relationships with different people. Roy Rogers' school seemed to have everything he needed to excel academically and socially. "My school was cool…we had Indians, Blacks, Whites, Asians, and Hispanics." This diversity allowed him to become friends with students in different socioeconomic ranges as well. "I was good with some rich kids also; some of my friends had money and had no problem showing out. This was cool because we got to hang out with them and stuff." These different associations connected him with an advantageous group of students thus enriching his high school experience.

Theopolis. The high school Theopolis attended was the least diverse of the four. His school was in a rural area bordering a major city. The students in his school were primarily White, but included Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. "My school was White for the most part…the minority students were there, but for the most part, it was primarily White…," Theopolis stated. Even though his school had a smaller percentage of diversity, Theopolis benefited from his rural upbringing and close relationship with students of all races to augment his learning environment. Even though he was reared in the least diverse and smallest city of the four participants, one could opine his

multicultural network of friends allowed him to develop relationships with associates in agriculture at a much earlier age.

> ***Kayla.*** Kayla's high school was in the heart of one of the more affluent areas in her city. Being active in such popular organizations such as cheerleading, she was able to develop relationships with students from all walks of life. Kayla mentioned to me her high school was so attractive because of the diversity. Kids from all over the city wanted to attend this school because of its social scene and educational reputation. It was an athletic, academic, and social haven for students such as Kayla looking for that holistic atmosphere.

Analysis

Structural diversity within the educational setting has shown to be infinitely beneficial to all students. My participants thought their involvement with classmates of different racial backgrounds in high school prepared them for their current college experience. They wholeheartedly believed their ability to interact and successfully navigate across various racial sects refined them significantly. I noticed when discussing race, all of them seemed comfortable with talking about their lived experiences in high school. The attraction in learning about different races and socioeconomic backgrounds gave them a sliver of social capital under the umbrella of *community*. It was in this setting, their evolution as well-rounded students began to materialize.

Limited Counselor Interaction Encourages African American Students to Accept Advice from a Myriad of People

I found it fascinating that the participants had someone other than a counselor give them advice on choosing a profession. Counselor interaction lacking, whether intentional or not, they received some sort of insight from people in various positions. It seemed as if they took this advice as collateral in case their routine sources of guidance, failed them. The participants talked about how these people offered casual advice and made it sound influential thus impacting their post high school decision in some way. It was interesting in the fact they used other people as a source of social capital for their benefit especially when some of the people were not considered traditional resources.

Vanessa. Vanessa seemed to be in the best shape of my participants when it came to counselor influence. Although not as prevalent in her high school years as she'd liked, the counselor still tried to be helpful. Vanessa told me of how her counselor would take them on trips and expose them to various engineering colleges across the state. She said that her counselor would also make presentations and get them in touch with advisors on various campuses. Vanessa alluded to the fact that because her counselor was specifically assigned to her magnet program, the interaction was very different.

Roy Rogers. Roy Rogers mentioned that his unusual source of inspiration was an instructor at a local community college. He was taking extra courses when the instructor from a different department altogether recognized him and talked with him in great detail about agricultural economics. The instructor told him about the different fields that an economist could pursue and how the influence of agriculture was sure to grown over

time. The instructor gave him such good insight that when he got to college, he changed his major to Agricultural Economics after initially being in Political Science. The community college instructor although probably not trained as an advisor gave Roy Rogers invaluable information about a career he had no prior knowledge of. This instructor filled the role that his counselor may have neglected and it was taken seriously by a young man eager to find his niche in school.

    Theopolis. Theopolis although very familiar with agriculture because of his background still needed someone to give him insight about the types of careers available to him. Along with his great-grandfather and father, he learned about the versatility of agriculture through a summer internship at a local college. The program was influential to him because it allowed him to work in a certain agriculture occupation as an understudy for an extended period of time. During this internship, he received an intimate understanding of what his field entailed. The program helped him figure out which agriculture-specific discipline he wanted to pursue, and gave him a plan of action academically. Theopolis said that, "The program helped me build a foundation, I was able to meet a lot of good people and contacts and being in the program helped us build a bond." Theopolis told me the program was so successful that twenty percent of the students that attended ended up enrolling in the agriculture program at the same college. Enrichment programs like the one Theopolis mentioned helped the participants get an introduction to agriculture from a source other than a book or piece of paper.

    Kayla. Kayla found a resource in her Cheer Coach. As weird as it may seem, Kayla's coach was so invested in helping her that she assisted with the financial

paperwork as well. This coach according to Kayla, "Helped with advice, filling out applications, financial aid and other stuff." The cheer coach was so instrumental to Kayla that she has kept in touch with her to this day. The advice of Kayla's cheer coach was valuable to her because it came from a genuine person with whom she became close.

Analysis

Adhering to the advice of non-traditional sources as a resource seemed to be a common theme for my participants. They determined the value of people that seemed interested in helping mold their career aspirations to be very important. The social capital model indicates that outside sources can have an impact on the decision making process of a student's academic curve. The contributions of these various professionals were positive for my participants because they were functionally beneficial in helping these students become high achievers. The community effect provided a supporting network for the participants. They appreciated the helpful advice these individuals gave them and eagerly remain in contact today keeping them informed of their academic progress.

Research Question One

Research question one: What are student's perceptions of their high school counselor's effectiveness when discussing career options? In essence, I wanted to know if college agriculture students believed their high school counselor played a major role in selecting a college major. Because all of the participants had dreams of enrolling in college, their interpretation of this question was significant. The findings revealed that

the participants used every available avenue, including their counselor, to gain more insight about their college choices. However, their counselor did not play a major role. All participants had multiple colleges to choose from but needed a better way of discerning which colleges would be specific to their major of choice. Even though three of the four participants interviewed changed majors shortly after enrolling, their approach was the same—they procured whatever social capital they could obtain for more information about certain colleges. Resources such as community college instructors, enrichment program coordinators, grandparents/parents, and cheer coaches were sought out. Although arising from different backgrounds in occupation, these entities helped the participants in this study immensely. The participants took what little or extensive advice was offered and used it ultimately to help form a decision.

Research Question Two

Research question two: From a student's perspective, what interventions can be done to close the gap for African American students entering college agricultural programs? This question was important because it directly sought out the students' opinions regarding improvement. The participants believed that more genuine interaction from counselors was the key component for closing the gap. Because each participant attended a robust, diverse high school, they all felt that each student's personal needs needed to be met. The counselors in their high schools, according to the participants, seemed heavily inundated with other responsibilities, and were therefore ineffective in helping students. The participants discussed such expanded counselor roles as test monitors, curriculum schedulers, and administrative substitutes. While essential

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to a school's functionality, these roles demanded a large allotment of time and dedication.

By all accounts, according to the participants, the counselors seemed to be prime candidates for burnout (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010) and worker disenchantment. The students all recommended that counselors reduce their roles and find a way to engage each student more by becoming intimate with their future plans, rather than providing a generic, broad-stroked pamphlet.

Asking college students to reflect on their feelings concerning their high school counselors brought a multitude of responses. Two of the participants surprisingly still shared a relationship with their counselors, while the other two forgot about them once their high school tenure concluded. The two students who still remain in contact with their counselors had the best relationship, comparatively, and indicated they benefited the most from their counselors' assistance. Now older and better able to reflect on what their counselors could have done to improve and help them choose a college, the common sentiment was time. Forging a relationship demanded time, finding out what each student needed to succeed took time, being able to perform their duties effectively required-time. Each of these issues in the participants' estimation could have been avoided if the counselors did not have to be spread out among so many responsibilities. When looking at the populations of the four schools, on average, there were an estimated 500 students for every counselor. No matter how dependable a counselor, this ratio simply, and obviously, will not work. The recommended ratio of students to counselors should be 100:1, according to the American School Counselor Association

(McDonough, 2005). An equitable allotment of professionals in this area was the most authentic suggestion my participants offered.

Summary

Confident, driven, and conscientious, each participant realized the ramifications their decisions would have on their future aspirations. Although supported by someone in their personal circle, each participant depended on the advice of other people not named their high school counselor. They also felt that while unfairly given sometimes insurmountable added duties, at times, counselors were still inadequate when giving college insight. The counselors did what they could when possible, but the participants attended very large high schools which had an influence on the amount of intimate counsel they received. The notion that counselors were there for them on an individual basis was fleeting. It was because of this sporadic guidance that the participants sought other sources of social capital.

Each participant envisioned that in order for African American students to begin receiving adequate advice, counselors and administrators needed to revise the current system. This was one of the reflective answers participants mentioned when prodded at the conclusion of the interviews.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter includes discussion and recommendations, conclusion and implications for future research. This qualitative study was designed to investigate the perceptions of four high achieving college African American students when discussing their high school counselors' effectiveness. In an attempt to let the voices of the college students be heard, the researcher began with two prevalent research questions:

1. What are student's perceptions of their high school counselor's effectiveness when discussing career options?

2. From a student's perspective, what interventions can be done to narrow the gap of African Americans entering college agricultural programs?

Social capital theory was used to frame and guide my research agenda. Utilizing the inherent resources African American students depended on allowed me to develop a greater understanding of their ambitions and sense of accomplishment. I investigated the two research questions by incorporating in-depth interviews, face-to-face dialogue, and field notes. The research participants, four high-achieving college students, were selected through recommendations from credentialed personnel and personal contact. I collected and transcribed the data, and then analyzed the data for relevant findings. Conducting the literature review allowed me to read seminal and current research relevant to school counselors, African American students, agriculture, and factors contributing to the participants' college selection process.

After categorizing and confirming emergent themes, the findings indicated African American students were inherently motivated to excel regardless of background. The participants were resolute in their approach to academics while attaining what they needed to excel. Each participant had a mentor to depend on in the absence of a counselor or advisor. They determined the counsel of someone wiser than them to be a critical component in being successful. While growing as students, they exhibited very high levels of self-assuredness. The participants were high-achieving and knew their future depended on getting to the pinnacle with hard work and dedication. These characterizations led me in uncovering the following themes: (a) inherent motivation; (b) the counselors may have carried too many duties to really be effective; (c) the counselors showed preferential treatment; (d) the participants went to diverse high schools with large multiethnic populations in urbanized centers; and, (e) the lack of counselor interaction could lead to students accepting advice from numerous individuals.

Findings' Connection to Previous Research and Sociocultural Theory

Participants were asked to share their perceptions about their high school counselors' capabilities and overall influences regarding college entrance. The posed questions also focused on gathering responses about other social capital sources in their lives and the bearing their advice had on each students' program selection.

African American Students in Agriculture

A number of negative perceptions were expressed by the participants when discussing their initial feelings about the profession of agriculture. With the initial prevailing thoughts about Blacks and their indigent status within the agricultural arena in

this country's early history, one can deduce the adverse feelings have been passed down generationally. Highly astute African American students are not harboring promising feelings about agriculture as their rural associates. One participant blatantly said this (agriculture) was a field that really catered to Whites and was something "country white folks" participated in. Only one of the participants had a positive initial understanding of what a profession in agriculture could represent.

Amazingly, despite the undesirable perceptions about agriculture at least initially, all of the students ended up being enrolled in Colleges of Agriculture. They indicated this was the right choice, but it took a trusted person as a resource and more influential guidance for them to fully invest themselves in agriculture. The stereotypes each student exhibited when discussing agriculture corroborated the literature when discussing Blacks' overall feelings about such a storied industry.

Despite agriculture being associated with poverty and overly laborious work, an intimate knowledge of agriculture was devoid in a majority of the participants. They did not know what many professions of agriculture entailed early in their college career and did not really consider it to be a career option until subsequent semesters. With three of the four residing in predominantly urban settings, agriculture was not woven into the everyday fabric of their lives. They did not have any idea of how prevalent it was even within their own community. The lack of knowledge lends itself to believe agriculture was not a central or even minuscule topic of discussion in these students' homes.

The African American family as indicated in the research primarily focused on professions most familiar to the parents, or careers most commonly associated within the

Black home such as educators, physicians, and other non-scientific options. Perhaps these students would have been better suited for a career in agriculture had some dialogue occurred within the home. The relationship between students deciding on a professional career in agriculture bolstered with prior knowledge/experience of this career as an option has proven to be critical in Black students enrolling in agricultural programs.

The absence of intrinsic interest in agriculture because of parental and generational biases may be considered an initial impediment in keeping African Americans from having promising opinions of agriculture. Constant reminders of inequalities were manifested through the Pigford v. Glickman case in 1997. This settlement was the fitting crescendo on a long and unfortunate chapter in American history. African American students are indirectly affected by the negative perceptions of agriculture. Pejorative associations with slavery and racial injustices passed down as family narratives have crippled the views of what agriculture can represent in Black youth. This damaging impact must be restored. The participants in this study may not have displayed such negative feelings about agriculture if they became more familiar with it in the home and through other positive resources. It was not until they became engaged in agriculture in some capacity albeit in college that their perceptions and realizations were altered.

Urban School Influence

All the participants arose from a primarily urban city. The amount of diversity and sheer number of alternate activities they could engross themselves in were

astronomical. Statistics show that the numbers of people of color migrating to urban

areas are rapidly increasing (Esters, 2007). All of my participants were from relatively

urban centers of the population and this experience was found to have shaped their

opinions about a lot of things. Having no prior experience to agriculture in their homes,

neighborhoods, and schools made them ignorant concerning agrarianism. They relished

living in their urban cities because they could experience diversity and opportunities in

acquiring new tastes. Living in urban areas really hampered their ability to become

intimate with agriculture and when encountered with it, they associated it with less than

desirable characteristics. The literature found that students in urban areas with no real

knowledge of agriculture often grow up with negative associations and choose to enter

other career options. The amount of exposure and visibility concerning agriculture is

noticeably absent in urban centers. Having the ability to relate agriculture to everyday

functions is the challenge that many purists face. The participants relished practicality in

their lives. Using relative examples of agriculture was not beneficial and real to them

until they encountered direct experiences. An internship or school trip can go a long

way in helping allay any concerns students may have about the field. The implications

would be very impactful. In some responses, the participants displayed a sense of

resentment when recalling their earliest memories of agriculture. They felt that the

urban areas did not cater to young people interested in a perceived 'outside' degree such

as agriculture. Many of their friends decided to study more traditional majors amongst

Blacks, such as education, political science, medicine, and liberal arts. The extreme

pressure they felt was exacerbated from realizing the environment they resided in would not be able to give them the necessary positive experiences associated with agriculture.

Social Capital

Current data have shown that African American students are not receiving the full benefits of counselors because of multiple obstacles. The benefits of having a source of influence, such as a mentor or other capable professional can help African American students immensely. Some sources of inspiration can be found through individuals labeled as social capital constituents.

Social capital theory was established as the sociocultural theory for this study. Social capital theory focuses on the benefits acquired from personal relationships (Coleman, 1988). Personal relationships are extremely beneficial to African Americans, especially ones from broken homes with no real parental guidance. Stanton-Salazar (1997) defines personnel in schools who provide some sort of positive value as institutional agents. These professionals can include teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff. Through the relationships established, these agents can become the student's pseudo family. Social capital agents on African American students have shown to be very been beneficial to their growth and development. Coleman (1988), states that the two levels of social capital-microlevel and macrolevel are very different in function but can impact a student in the same ways. Social capital provides an additional resource for students lacking the proper guidance in their lives. Professionals and mentors in various communities provide the beneficial missing component for students seeking advice about a host of adolescent complications.

The participants openly discussed the sources that had a great impact on their college decision, financial advice and other pressing needs. It was discovered that even though counselors may have been deficient in their primary professional duties, each participant found solace in an alternative source. Kayla for example found insight from her Cheer Coach. Although an unlikely resource, her social capital influence helped her with financial paperwork and advice on what colleges she should pursue.

High School Counselors' Effect

One of the social spheres as described by Stanton-Salazar (1997) that can have the greatest impact on a student is school staff. Adolescents may look to these individuals as a resource that can help them navigate through life. In the interviews conducted for this study, I found that the participants depended on someone for insight. The participants believed their counselors would be the best resources to use when needing information and guidance about college. They wanted to use the counselors because of their professional experience and ability to help complete paperwork related to financial aid. In the participants' case, their counselors were not always available and it showed. To supplement the lack of proper counsel, the participants looked to other professionals for guidance. Influences such as other teachers, mentors, and family members were used as sources of social capital.

When analyzing social capital and how it relates to African Americans benefiting from other social networks, using available alternatives seemed to be the best method to acquire advice. The participants found out that in order to meet their goals, they would need to use every obtainable resource. In lieu of the counselors being overwhelmed by

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school size, student population, and other administrative duties, the participants used other people for the advancement of their academic careers. Social capital was used as support for the participants in that the advice from these alternate professionals impacted them significantly. I found that the other professional individuals imparted their wisdom on these participants in ways the counselors failed. It was this secondary counseling that I discovered was just as meaningful to the participants because it had relevance and authenticity.

Recommendations

Findings warrant one to consider several questions regarding high school counselor responsibility. First, how do counselors guide students toward majors for which they (counselors) have little knowledge or wherewithal? Participants indicated their counselors lacked knowledge in the agricultural field and therefore offered minimal assistance. Consequently, participants sought and adhered to sources of information outside their school or family. Given that some African American students lack the social capital required to make prudent college decisions, the counselors are the essential final step in pushing students.

Second, how do administrators assess counselor competency in facilitating students' college interest and entrance? Participants indicated counselors offered preferential treatment to athletes and wealthy students. One could presume the students who needed the most counsel did not fit into these exclusive groups. This leaves other students in the perilous situation where they depend on other professionals, if available, to give them important college and vocational advice. This is especially so in

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predominantly urban schools where counselor shortage has steadily increased since 2001 (Latham & Vogt, 2007). Additionally, worker burnout is primarily attributed to stressful work environment (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin 2012). High job demands suggest counselors become overwhelmed with the workload and seek employment elsewhere. This high turnover leads to extreme shortages in schools nationwide. Thus, based on the results from this study, I recommend that counselors be cross-trained in multiple disciplinary backgrounds. For instance, counselors should not have to take engineering courses but should be familiar with the process of becoming an engineer in a certain field; after taking the training; counselors should be paired with students according to their college and vocational interests rather than their last name. Currently, high schools counselors work with students according to name or grade groupings. However, the above suggestion is more impactful. Districts should develop a metric for assessing counselor competency and accountability in college and vocational placement. A metric could give administration and counselors a visual representation of perceived gaps and areas of needed improvement. The aforesaid suggestions appear the most critical to address in future research.

Counselors need more prioritized foci that utilize their professional training. Additionally, they likely need an assistant to handle the less rigorous, prioritized duties such as preparing for character training, and scheduling. These additional responsibilities take vested time and manpower to correctly accomplish. A third component to counselors being more available to students is advanced training in locating colleges that have programs that may be of interest to their students. Many

colleges come to career fairs and other gatherings promoting their academics. It would be a great benefit if the counselors had intimate knowledge of the area colleges' programs relative to their student interests. This would allow counselors to be prepared for whatever majors the students declare and be well-informed.

The emerging themes and findings in this inquiry validate the need for more focus on counselors and the great impact they can have on African Americans and their college selection. With the agricultural field depending on future professionals for its significance and viability, counselors' roles need to be restructured. In providing the foundation for counselors to better advise African American students, future research should focus on implementation of better strategies in urban school settings. Using data and findings from trial runs of studies investigating impactful counseling, future research should focus their efforts on employment of a counselor-student matriculation matrix. This matrix would be critical in establishing tangible proof of counselor progress, or unproductiveness. It would help administrators discern what strategies are working best with African Americans when looking to counselors for assistance. This matrix would consist of a chart illustrating student progress and matriculation into college.

Using the voices of students in college and professionals about their high school counselor or other experiences will help enlighten the field. Also, in the field of agriculture, decision makers and researchers alike should come to a consensus about their roles in impacting the career knowledge of high school African American students. Of the participants interviewed, three of the four had no prior knowledge about agriculture whatsoever. Moreover, they thought of it as a primitive, antiquated field

obscure to African-Americans. Agricultural professionals and school counselors have a responsibility to change perceptions and stigmas associated with such a storied industry.

With the changing demographics of the United States, it will be imperative that future research focus on other emerging racial groups such as the Latin community. As now recognized as the dominant minority in the United States, agricultural professionals have to find suitable methods for recruiting this prolific population.

With the implementation of these recommendations combined with other emergent research, the agricultural field will grow immensely. It is imperative we find ways to make the profession even more meaningful and not just another boring field for country folks.

What I Learned Conducting This Study

This study began as an inquiry delving into the minds of four precocious, decisive, and driven African American college students. I wanted to know what could be done at the ground level of education to help increase the numbers of African Americans entering college programs, specifically and what were the glaring deficiencies being noted by students. While reviewing the literature, it was apparent that not enough frontline training was being done. Extenuating factors such as administrative pressure, counselor burnout, racial disengagement, and large student population seemed to be significant factors in precluding counselors from effectively advising students.

This lack of true engagement combined with African American students' natural indifference towards agriculture kept arising with each participants' candor. My own perceptions, void of any research, was aligned with the belief that African American

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students such as myself did not have a natural affection for agriculture and that a mental evolution would need to occur in order for agriculture to even be a contender. The more literature I studied, the more I realized that my views were not that distant from the national perception of other younger Black students. They, like me thought agriculture was a once illustrious but stale career choice for African Americans. It was a field in dire need of a youth infusion, but I was not fully prepared to invest a career.

After intently listening to their stories, I began to feel that there was a sense of intrigue about agriculture, but someone needed to bring out the zeal. Each participant was spurred on by outside forces and mostly from untraditional professionals and other sources. They found out the beautiful advantages of agriculture not from their counselors, or even parents, but from other people interested in seeing them succeed. Social Capital has no traditional boundaries; it can arise from the most unexpected personalities. In my assumptions and hasty efforts to generalize, I never envisioned other students benefiting from Social Capital like I did. It was not until I began interviewing these motivated students that the revelations began to surface. The assumptions I made were a reflection of my perceptions that African American students needed lots of prodding to show an interest in agriculture. I did not measure the importance of social capital agents in their lives; which ironically was the driving factor that led me to this point in my life. It was because of my Boy Scout introduction to agriculture that I knew I wanted to make this a lifelong decision. I took my Social Capital agent for granted. The participants were in a better place because of the advice and counsel they received from various resources. Moreover, I paradoxically felt the

achievements of these intellectual giants were due to the conscious choice to depend on an outside source for advice. They trusted in these alternative forms of social capital agents unequivocally, and never deviated from having their dreams compromised.

Conclusion

The conclusion is aligned with the sociocultural theory presented in the literature review by examining what impact social capital had on African American students when mapping future college plans. Social capital was paramount in the decision making process when deciding on a college to attend, procuring financial assistance, and in some instances, declaring a major. This study adds to the scholarship regarding the experiences and perceptions of high achieving, motivated African American students and their school counselors' impact. Given the lack of professionals of color employed in agriculture, this research will inform decision makers regarding the necessary modifications for the school-counselor arena. Given the lack of available mentors of color, what will be the expectations of decision makers when evaluating enhancing African Americans' participation? It is perplexing when professionals and researchers do not aspire to fully engage themselves in this needed discussion. The agricultural arena will benefit immensely from a well-represented employee spectrum. Perceptions will change, opportunities seized, and tolerance amplified when agriculture more adequately represents our national demographics.

The antiquated thinking of well-educated professionals must adapt to accommodate their evolving population. Racial barriers and perceived problems will continue to pervade the agricultural field if agricultural programs do not change morale

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while being more innovative. The participants recognized the lack of viable mentors, and readily acknowledged it was indeed a problem. They even suggested starting early with African American students by incorporating agricultural programs into community centers, visiting elementary schools, and actively seeking out younger targets. The agricultural community would benefit from dialogue and displaying a concerted effort to *want* to address the problem. Developing afterschool programs in urban centers would also increase exposure. I have seen mentorship work exquisitely when correlated with engagement.

Participants were concerned with counselor motives, availability, and ability to interact effectively with them about their future. Being motivated, many of them did not need counselors to perform in this capacity. However, other students with no help may need this form of social capital to advance. Surrounding students with efficient counselors who make a difference translates into colleges benefiting, agricultural programs expanding, and the profession broadening. Realizing the fact that African Americans may need alternative engagement techniques would help produce more desirable results. Administrative pressure has shown to lead to counselor burnout. It is incumbent that a reduced, more streamlined function of duties be created for counselors at the local, state and federal level. Seeing that they may not have much wiggle room in negotiating lessened responsibilities, perhaps the greatest challenge will be on the stakeholders to bring about reform. The enormous pressure counselors feel does not benefit African American students and others in any way. It in fact severely diminishes

the counselors' ability to be tersely effective in what should be their primary duty—*advising*.

Redefining the system and holding counselors accountable for their efforts in college placement for African Americans will create a baseline standard sorely needed in academia. Shifting the burden of ancillary duties to other professionals will also help alleviate counselor stress. With lessened work duty, counselors can give African American students more individualized support without fretting over passed down responsibilities mandated from administration. Perhaps in the words of renowned professor, Dr. Geneva Gay, administrators and counselors alike should become more culturally responsive and not so rigid in practice. Opening up themselves to a new diaspora would allow them to be better leaders and professionals. The participants revealed their counselors were sometimes dismissive and short. While not directly linked to racial biases in my study, these types of encounters negatively impact students and make them more susceptible to receiving advice from others. The students want to be able to depend on suitable role models, someone with the astute knowledge to assist them in their career goals. This is a critical and essential component of a counselors job. The participants in my study indicated the importance of counselors; they just wanted more engaged, tangible impact. They felt if the counselors had more time, who knows how impactful they could have been with my participants and other students of color in need. The opportunities of influence are grand. Change and stimulus will only occur if practitioners alter their outlook and truly attempt to make strides in attracting a new wave of aspirants to such a recognized career like agriculture.

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