The Limits of Choice: A Black Feminist Critique of College “Choice” Theories and Research

Channel C. McLewis

Contents

Introduction ..................................................................................... 106
Neoliberalism and the Contradictions of College Access .................. 106
More Than the Color Line: Institutionalized Forms of Oppression and College Access ..................................................... 107
Incomplete College “Choice” Theories and Models ......................... 110
Review of Literature ............................................................................. 111
Theoretical Perspectives in College-Going and College “Choice” Research .......................................................... 111
New Approaches to Examine the College “Choice” Process .............. 123
The Paradox of Education and the Black Struggle ......................... 127
A Historical Perspective on Black Feminism .................................... 135
Black Feminist Thought ................................................................. 136
Conclusion: New Imaginings and Possibilities .............................. 147
References ....................................................................................... 148

Abstract

Research on the college decision-making process is extensive. However, fewer approaches have employed a critical lens to explore how power and its relation to students, schools, and higher education institutions shape students’ college pathways and trajectories. In this current chapter, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, Social Problems, 33(6):s14–s32, 1986; Collins, Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment, Routledge, 2002) is employed to examine how intersecting systems of oppression (i.e., institutionalized racism, sexism, capitalism, etc.) and power shape the college “choice” process. I extend on previous literature on educational inequities to consider the structural forces that constrain educational opportunities. In particular, through the standpoint of Black women and girls, I rely on constructs such as the matrix of
**domination** and **controlling images** to highlight the limits of college “choice.” The aim is to examine the various ways “choice” is constrained for Black women and girls, in order to develop transformative mechanisms to improve access to adequate education, increase college participation, and enhance life opportunities. Findings include how narrow depictions of Black women and girls and the trope of the advantaged Black woman in education stifle educational opportunity.

**Keywords**

College choice · College access · Black college women · Black students · Black feminist thought · Intersectionality · Feminism · Controlling images · Race and gender in education · Educational inequities · Higher education · Power · AntiBlackness

---

**Introduction**

Increasing the proportion of completed degrees is a national priority for the United States to become the leader in global educational attainment (College Board 2008). Thus, recent higher education inquiries and political agendas have shifted toward college completion, especially for low-income and/or Black and Brown students (Gándara and Hearn 2019). Although degree attainment is a pressing concern, student pathways first and foremost begin at the decision to pursue higher education. Though more Black students are graduating from high schools than in previous years, prevailing neoliberal logics and institutionalized forms of oppression that contradict equity and inclusion stifle their enrollment into higher education institutions. For example, among 18- to 24-year-olds, 93.8% of Black students, and 94.8% of white students completed high school (McFarland et al. 2019). However, 70% of white high school students enrolled immediately into college, compared to 62% of Black students (approximately the same rate nearly 20 years ago) (Hussar et al. 2020).

Situating college access within the context of neoliberalism and antiBlackness exposes the significant challenges to increase Black students’ college entry and degree attainment. Others have begun to point out that “little attention has been paid to applying critical theoretical models of power itself to understanding higher education” (Pusser 2015, p. 61). With a few exceptions, college access research has not typically considered the power dimensions that are embedded in institutional practices and that drive policies harmful to Black progress. Germinal to this chapter is how systemic forms of oppression and the possession of power shape student pathways, and in particular, the college decision-making process.

**Neoliberalism and the Contradictions of College Access**

The notion of access to and through college holds divergent and competing meanings for different stakeholders. On the one hand, there are efforts to enhance college access. For example, the goals of the college completion agenda include improving college
counseling, aligning K-12 learning objectives with college admissions standards, and simplifying admissions and financial aid processes (College Board 2008). On the other, a commitment to broaden college access is not exercised by all institutions and, instead, is disproportionately relegated to community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), other Minority-Serving Institutions (e.g., Hispanic-Serving Institutions), and regional comprehensive universities (Baber et al. 2019; Elliott et al. 2019; National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Mathematics 2018; Orphan 2018). The reduction of state-allocated funds and the rise of the neoliberal university promote institutions to invest in their own sustainability, which threatens higher education’s commitment to public service (Orphan 2018; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004).

Within this market-driven climate, college rankings, institutional performance, and reputation have become lucrative currencies (McDonough et al. 1998; Monks and Ehrenberg 1999; O’Meara 2007). Some colleges and universities are striving toward “the pursuit of prestige within the academic hierarchy” (O’Meara 2007, p. 122) by altering their purposes and making presumptions about student achievement and outcomes to inform their admission decisions (Dougherty and Hong 2005; Orphan 2018). For example, institutions “game the system” (Dougherty and Reddy 2011, p. 38) by ratcheting up admission standards and rejecting competitive candidates to appear more selective (Espeland and Sauder 2007). Restricting college entry indicates how college admissions are a political and economic decision that impacts students’ college destinations. The institution’s fiscal dependency on student enrollment, as well as weeding out students in admissions of those judged unlikely to complete (however determined), produces constraints toward adequately addressing inequitable college access. Further, policies that emphasize the recruitment of students who can pay out-of-state tuition dollars adversely impact not only the admission of in-state students, but also the admission of low-income and/or students of color (Jaquette et al. 2016). However, restrictive pathways into college also reflect racial ideologies and racist institutional practices driven by attitudes about communities of color, particularly Black students. For example, recent research mapping of university recruitment schedules on in-state and out-of-state geographic regions has indicated that high schools in key metropolitan areas where Black and Latinx communities are located receive the least campus visits, regardless of income level (Salazar 2019). Thus, institutional activity is driven by both neoliberal trends as well as racial ideologies that are longstanding and continuously emergent.

More Than the Color Line: Institutionalized Forms of Oppression and College Access

The struggle for adequate educational opportunities for Black students continues to be met with the breach of the social contract, which in theory guarantees basic human rights (i.e., life), while upholding a racial contract that preordains and maintains white political and economic domination over racially minoritized groups (Dancy et al. 2018; Mills 1997). Though affirmative action in higher education was
initially designed to redress racial disparities in educational attainment, enrollment rates into public 4-year institutions for Black college students, particularly selective public institutions, continue to be relatively low (Allen et al. 2018; Espinosa et al. 2019; Harper and Simmons 2019; Nichols and Schack 2019). Although the number of Black undergraduates is increasing, Black college students are concentrated in community colleges and disproportionately attend for-profit institutions, with the proportion of Black undergraduate students at for-profit institutions at 16% (Espinosa et al. 2019). The racial disparities in higher education are driven by the perpetuation of antiBlack racism (Allen et al. 2018; Dancy et al. 2018), which is exercised via not recognizing Black students’ forms of capital, counselors’ and teachers’ low expectations of Black students, the false racial neutrality of college admission policies, and persistent attempts to dismantle affirmative action (Harper et al. 2009; Powell and Coles 2020; Yosso et al. 2004). These structural barriers make it difficult to improve Black students’ college entry, yet reflect the racial and racist ideologies perpetuated by institutions. How college and universities convey their meanings about race and racism are linked to what some scholars describe as an organizational habitus (Byrd 2017; Carter 2012; McDonough 1997) that forms expectations and constrains aspirations regarding college opportunities.

The notion that colleges and universities have an organizational racial habitus (Byrd 2017) is pertinent to the study of college “choice.” Racial ideologies are “the racially-based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo” (Bonilla-Silva 2003, p. 65). Colleges and universities are racialized organizations (Ray 2019) that perpetuate their views of race through their organizational racial habitus (Byrd 2017). Byrd (2017) contends higher education institutions have a “particular set of cultural dispositions and accepted patterns of interactions,” which corresponds with how colleges prescribe “institutional fit” (p. 152). With the perspective that college decisions are an exchange between prospective students and higher education institutions (Byrd 2017; Hughes et al. 2019), further inquiry is needed on the meaning-making process that occurs among marginalized students and communities in making college decisions. Scholarship has demonstrated how ideologies impact how higher education institutions approach the college “choice” process (Byrd 2017); however, less is known on how racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression frame students’ college decision-making processes. While the habitus of students and their families contributes to decision-making, the present chapter expounds on how the intersection of systems of oppression can be an influential factor that shapes college pathways. This research underscores education as a site that reflects the racist and patriarchal ideological paradigms that marginalize Black women, who also are seriously understudied in higher education. Moreover, the challenges that shape Black women’s educational trajectories are often minimized in education research inquiry (Muhammad and Dixson 2008; Patton et al. 2016).

Black girls and undergraduate women are marginalized in education research, policies, and initiatives. Research on women is primarily focused on white women, and research on the experiences of Black people is usually focused on Black men (Hull et al. 1982; Patton and Croom 2017; Smith and Stewart 1983; Winkle-Wagner 2015).
Further, college access and success initiatives like “My Brother’s Keeper” and Black male institutes on college campuses exclusively concentrate on addressing the racial disparities in educational attainment for Black men (Butler 2013; Neal-Jackson 2018). However, there are far fewer similar programs for Black women. The lack of a specific focus on Black women’s educational experiences obscures the understanding of their unique challenges and perpetuates divisive narratives that further marginalize Black women from receiving institutional support toward college-going.

Within dominant discourses about academic success and educational attainment, Black women are represented as magical because of our\(^1\) ability to academically achieve despite the odds we encounter (Patton et al. 2016). This portrait is divisive. As contended by Lori Patton Davis and Natasha Croom (Patton and Croom 2017), “the failure to account for racism/white supremacy and gender/patriarchy when considering Black collegiate women’s experiences is nonsensical at least and absurd at best” (p. 2). I contend that despite considerable empirical data and factual evidence that illustrates how Black women are subjugated in different societal arenas (Crenshaw 1988), the negligence to include Black undergraduate women in higher education literature stems from a broader and retold pathological mythology involving controlling images such as the Black matriarch (Moynihan 1965), welfare queen (Roberts 1999), and superwoman (Wallace 2015), which are utilized to dehumanize and justify the oppression of Black women and girls (Collins 2002). I put forth that the trope of the advantaged Black women is used to evade addressing how intersecting systems of oppression affect Black women’s educational experiences and to justify educational inequities for Black students. Further, “fantasies of academic success and #BlackGirlMagic” (Patton and Croom 2017) do not reflect all the ways Black women and girls are seen in education. Black girls are also disciplined and pushed out of the educational pipeline (Morris 2016), which impacts their college “choice” processes. As researchers contextualize Black women’s educational pathways, it is imperative to examine the various ways systems of oppression shape college access.

In postsecondary education, Black women are disproportionately concentrated at 2-year and for-profit institutions (Iloh and Toldson 2013), a trend that could be related to findings that Black high school girls are overrepresented in vocational curricular tracks (Muhammad and Dixon 2008). However, current analytical frameworks to guide scholarship on college “choice” do not fully account for a range of structural factors that distinctively affect Black women’s process of choosing colleges, such as the reasons behind the limited availability of outreach and mentoring

---

\(^1\)Throughout this chapter, I interchangeably use “our” and “we” for Black women for the reasons articulated by Patricia Hill Collins. I share her view of “inserting myself in the text” in which the “both/and [researcher and lived experiences as a Black woman] conceptual stance of Black feminist thought allowed me to be both objective and subjective” (Collins 2002, ix). I “take up grappling with positionality not as fixed and located in a physical space where research occurs, but rather, as it travels with us, within, and across social and geographic locations and communities” (Roegman et al. 2016, p. 47).
programs tailored to Black girls (Butler 2013; Hardaway et al. 2019; Neal-Jackson 2018), the pervasive misconceptions surrounding Black girls’ talents and capabilities (Collins et al. 2020; Evans-Winters 2011; Ford et al. 2018; Watson 2016), and excessive disciplinary rates in the K-12 system (Crenshaw et al. 2015a; Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews 2017; Morris 2016). Clearly, Black women’s college “choice” deserves more empirical inquiry in ways that take into account the intersections between racialized and patriarchal power structures.

**Incomplete College “Choice” Theories and Models**

Traditional frameworks that address college “choice” center high school students and depict the college decision-making process as a linear sequence of events (Hossler and Gallagher 1987; Hossler et al. 1999). New approaches to college-going literature have pivoted to more inclusive lenses to examine the diversity of students and the variation of their pathways and trajectories (Acevedo-Gil 2017; Gildersleeve 2010; Iloh 2018). For example, though many college “choice” theories focus on students graduating from high school, in fact, 32.7% of Black undergraduates are over the age of 30 (Espinosa et al. 2019). Newer approaches to college “choice” inquiry that recognize the recent shifts in student demographics and students’ multifaceted identities, the processes of how students learn about college, and students’ mobility patterns or entry in and out of many colleges (Acevedo-Gil 2017; Gildersleeve 2010; Iloh 2018), are better positioned to address the holistic factors affecting these students’ postsecondary pathways. While each of these characteristics in college “choice” merits significant consideration, all are affected by larger social forces such as systemic racism, sexism, capitalism, and other forms of domination.

As perspectives on college-going broaden, Black Feminist Theory is suited to grapple with how racism intersects with capitalism, sexism, and other forms of domination, which are perpetuated by various systems of oppression. In examining the role of forms of domination in the college “choice” process, it is imperative to interrogate the meaning and connotation of the word “choice.” As Black feminist education scholar Cynthia Dillard (2006) asserts, language is politically and culturally constructed, and “The very language we use to define and describe a phenomena must possess instrumentality” (p. 3). Therefore, throughout this chapter, I purposely use the terms college-going or “choice” instead of choice, to denote the “complicating conditions” (Cox 2016, p. 10) that have historically and perpetually troubled minoritized students’ postsecondary aspirations and plans, including those of Black women.

In this piece, I argue that the application of Black feminist scholarship from the fields of Black and Africana studies, sociology, law, and gender studies can enhance inquiry about the college “choice,” particularly of minoritized students. In their critique of sociology as a discipline, Patricia Hill Collins (1986) described how “Black women’s outsider within status might generate a distinctive standpoint vis-à-vis existing sociological paradigms” and its benefits for social science research (p. S16). Living within the margins, Black women are granted a way of seeing reality, a standpoint that garners an outlook about the social world. Collins (1986) contended that by placing Black women “into the center of analysis may reveal
aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches” (p. S15). This approach can be applied to research in the field of higher education.

Black women and girls’ perspectives and lived experiences provide mechanisms to perceive a reality that is typically obscured in traditional modes of higher education research. These perspectives, in particular, can reveal the intersections of systems of oppression that limit opportunity structures for not only Black women, but for historically marginalized students in general. Specifically, I contend that grounding conceptual and analytical frameworks from the standpoint of Black feminist theory (Collins 1986, 2002) can illuminate aspects of the college-going process that are obscured in privileged conceptions of “choice” that discount multiple and interlocking dimensions of oppression and power. This premise is fruitful for higher education because it not only positions Black intellectual women as producers of knowledge, but also invites consideration on how insights from Black feminist theory challenge and inform inquiry about college “choice.” For example, how might understanding the college-going experiences of Black girls and undergraduate women illuminate what we know and do not know about the social construction of college opportunities in general?

In this chapter, I first review traditional theories of college “choice” and highlight aspects of college “choice” models that do not fully capture Black women’s education trajectories. Then I provide an abbreviated overview of the history of Black college access to illustrate the linkages between historical, material, and social conditions. Next, I conduct an overview of theoretical and empirical research on Black student’s college decision-making processes. Subsequently, I provide recommendations on how the application of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) can expand the understanding of students’ college-going processes. I conclude by proposing that new research on students’ college pathways and trajectories must continue to evaluate how power structures and the intersection of systems of oppression shape the higher education context and the experiences of students. In reviewing the literature, I follow Black feminist scholar Jennifer Nash’s (2019) spirit of critique, in that I envision this review of college-going frameworks as a “loving practice” (p. 58) to invite readers to consider and even reimagine perspectives of college-going that better examine power relationships between individual behaviors, institutions, and social structures. Focusing on these multiple levels, and how power is enacted within and between them to expand or limit college opportunity structures, expands possibilities for scholars to influence research and practice in a transformative way that advances social justice.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Perspectives in College-Going and College “Choice” Research

As early as the 1920s, scholars in the United States became interested in how students determine what college to attend and the factors that shape students’ decision-making processes (Comfort 1925). Since the 1990s, the body of research
on college “choice” has grown, advanced by scholars like McDonough (1997), who examined how socioeconomic status interacts with school, family, and community contexts to shape college decisions. College “choice” theories and models are used to describe the influences and processes that shape college matriculation decisions. While college “choice” has traditionally been restricted to frame the steps toward fulfilling one’s higher education aspirations (Hossler and Gallagher 1987), other scholars like Perna (2006) have expanded the construct of college “choice” to include the process of “determining educational and occupational aspirations, which institutions to consider, whether to attend college, and which college to attend” (p. 126). The latter links the college decision-making process to college access in which the decision not to pursue higher education is recognized as an aspect of the college “choice” process (Perna 2006). Within the literature, the underlying assumption of college “choice” theory is that students (and their families and communities) have the autonomy to pursue higher education, and moreover, the “choice” to decide which institution to attend. Though a postsecondary institution must accept a college applicant before that applicant enrolls (a process that Hughes et al. (2019) describe as “institutions choosing students”), the narrative of equal opportunity nonetheless portrays students as having full agency to apply (Byrd 2017).

While scholars problematize the notion that all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, have equal postsecondary opportunities, literature has treated “college choice” and “college access” as two different, though related, areas of study. Gildersleeve (2010) describes how the field differentiates these areas of study in which college access research is framed as a “macro-level orientation that views the problem of educational opportunity as primarily structural” (p. 12), whereas college “choice” “addresses the micro-level processes of individual decision making” (p. 13). Hughes et al. (2019) operationalize college access and college “choice” in which

the term “access” conveys the strong influence of structural forces on patterns of college-going. That is, it suggests that variations in the availability of, and student participation in, educational opportunities predict variations in outcomes. Conversely, the term “choice” focuses on individual determinants of college-going outcomes. Using a choice framing, it is possible to understand how students with functionally the same educational opportunities arrive at disparate outcomes as a result of their own preferences as well as messages communicated by significant others of influence (e.g., parents, siblings, friends, teachers, guidance counselors, and coaches). Studies of choice do not typically focus on how these patterns of disparate outcomes may reflect broader structural inequities (p. 416).

Scholars have contended that “the issues of college access complicate the study of college choice” (Bergerson 2009, p. 2). Yet, the framing of college access tends to focus on the role of social structures in affecting college opportunities, whereas college “choice” research focuses on how individuals and their behaviors shape college pathways. One of the major limitations of the “college choice” premise is that it minimizes how social structures and processes influence individuals’ behaviors. Yet, social structures not only dictate what “choices” are available, and to
whom, but influence student perceptions about various pathways and their “choices.” College decisions entail a meaning-making process in which there is a reflexive interaction between individuals and their social positions with the hierarchical organization of institutions in society.

In this section, I review the evolution of college “choice” scholarship with a focus on traditional and emergent theoretical perspectives that have been used to study college opportunity. By reviewing key frameworks, their scholarly assumptions, strengths, and limitations, this section engages with two questions: (1) How do higher education scholars conceptualize and discuss college choice? and (2) In what ways are social categories (e.g., race and gender) and social structures addressed in the theorizing and development of conceptual models related to college choice?

**Traditional and Alternative Research Approaches**

Scholars have created models to systematically capture the complexity of the college “choice” process and to describe students’ transitions into colleges (Chapman 1981; Hossler and Gallagher 1987; Iloh 2018; Litten 1982; Perna 2006). These researchers have explored the multiple dimensions of the college-going process, including individual, organizational, and ecological influences through various approaches such as economic, psychological, sociological, and integrated approaches. Reviews of the extensive body of college “choice” literature have pointed to the need to better address the inequalities and stratification in college access and “choice” research, policies, and practices (Bergerson 2009; Perna 2006). For the purposes of this chapter, my focus is on the evolution of approaches to examine college decision-making for minoritized students and implicates how these perspectives address the issue of structural barriers in college access and “choice.”

Combining both economic and sociological approaches, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) proposed a model to simplify the complexity of the college decision-making process. Through use of primarily a student perspective, the three-stage model depicts the college “choice” process as a sequence on how a “student develops a predisposition to attend college, conducts a search for information about the college, and makes a choice that leads them to enroll at a particular institution” (Hossler and Gallagher 1987, p. 230). The three-stage model captures the developmental process of college “choice,” in particular, how “students move toward an increased understanding of their educational options as they seek a postsecondary educational experience” (Hossler and Gallagher 1987, p. 208). It underscores how students’ interactions with individual and organizational factors produce student outcomes at each stage of the college “choice” process, which culminates in students choosing a college to attend (Hossler and Gallagher 1987). Individual factors include student characteristics, significant others, educational activities, educational aspirations and values, and college search activities. Germane to race and gender, the authors contend background characteristics are correlated with the predisposition stage and throughout the decision-making process. Organizational factors encompass school characteristics, college recruitment, and college and universities’ courtship activities.

The model was employed in Hossler et al. (1999) study that centered on achievement of educational aspirations. Thus, the model focused on the individual level with
attention to the role of parents, peers, and schools as contributors to students’ information processing. They argued that “students’ searches help them determine what characteristics they need and which colleges offer them” (p. 9). However, this approach is limited in that it misses the role of several social and environmental factors that include context (e.g., state policies on race and gender neutrality, longstanding effects of segregated higher education) and power differentials, and a white and upper middle-class assumption that all students have an equal opportunity to choose a college.

Shifting from Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) emphasis on individual student “choice” at various stages of process, McDonough (1997) adopted a sociological approach, employing sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus to examine how social class status and schools shaped high school students’ college decision-making processes. McDonough (1997) defined cultural capital as “the property that middle class and upper class families transmit...as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations” (p. 8). For McDonough (1997), a college education is a symbolic good that is for “using, manipulating, and investing it for socially valued and difficult-to-secure purposes and resources” (p. 9). In a qualitative study conducted with white high school women from higher and lower socioeconomic status levels, and their parents, friends, and counselors, McDonough (1997) found that the social class and context of families and schools contributed to patterns of and opportunities in college-going behavior. For example, high socioeconomic status parents used their cultural capital as a resource for their white daughters’ college preparation and admission into college. Their participation was further supplemented by school actors. Other parents from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds, however, were not as involved in examining college options, often leaving the college decision-making process more up to their child and/or school personnel. Such cases typically resulted in the child attending a less selective postsecondary institution, even if they were academically qualified for a more selective one.

While the concept of cultural capital has been applied in diverse ways in education research, what is clear from emerging research on educational opportunity is that the forms of capital or wealth that marginalized students possess are often not valued in dominant spaces that are white, cisgender, and upper-class (Bourdieu 1973; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Rios-Aguilar et al. 2011; Sablan and Tierney 2014; Tichavakunda 2019; Yosso 2005). Unchallenged, the devaluing of minoritized students forms of capital reproduces inequities, particularly in schools. McDonough (1997) demonstrates how cultural capital contributes to the reproduction of social inequality in college access. In this instance, cultural capital is a resource for advantaged groups to maximize their privileged social position. In addition to examining the role of cultural capital, McDonough (1997) relied on the notion of personal schemas to describe how students filtered their social worlds and educational opportunities, and on the extension of Bourdieu’s concept of individual habitus to understanding how a high school’s organizational culture, or habitus, could enhance or constrain students’ sensemaking of college opportunities. This approach contributed to the body of research on the role of both individual and organizational habitus in shaping college trajectories.
In comparison to cultural capital, habitus is less applied in general education research (Gaddis 2013) but is more often applied in college-going research (Acevedo-Gil 2017; Griffin et al. 2012; Horvat 1997; McDonough 1997; Nora 2004; Núñez and Bowers 2011; Paulsen and St. John 2002; Perna 2006; Squire and Mobley 2015; Wells and Lynch 2012). Bourdieu (1984) referred to habitus as a “structuring structure” and a “structured structure” (p. 170). Habitus is the “common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group or class that shapes an individual’s expectations, attitudes, and aspirations” (McDonough 1997, p. 9). In other words, “habitus is a result of the social conditions and related practices and interactions of everyday life that shape a person’s perceptions of their location and relationship to others around them, and ultimately provides ‘reason’ for their actions while navigating the social world” (Byrd 2017, p. 148). Put simply, habitus is a set of shared dispositions that are ingrained and derived from one’s environment and social locations.

Some scholars extend the concept of habitus from a familial and communal dimension to an organizational level to argue social institutions have their own set of cultural practices and dispositions (Byrd 2017; McDonough 1997). The organizational habitus of high schools, their contexts and cultures, shape whether and where students pursue higher education. On one hand, schools are a central hub for students to get to know more information about their college options. On the other hand, however, these institutions are “the mediator of collective social class consciousness” (McDonough 1997, p. 10). Based on their organizational habitus, schools transmit and translate “college knowledge” (McDonough et al. 1998) that is tailored to reflect the social positions of the majority of the students and families that they serve. The concept of habitus has provided a lens to make sense of the interplay between social contexts and college destinations. Yet, how larger power structures affect social contexts, and the associated development of organizational and individual habitus that enhance or constrain individual student college “choices,” is less specified and examined in the literature. That is, while many studies of how students’ individual habitus affect college “choice” have been undertaken, far fewer have examined how students’ habitus are situated within institutions or a field (Horvat 1997; McDonough 1997) that is historically designed to privilege opportunities for some groups and to marginalize those of others. That is, far fewer studies apply a structural approach to examine how students’ responses to living in an oppressive society could shape their college “choices.”

Black feminist theory, which analyzes intersecting power structures that perpetuate domination and oppression of minoritized groups, can offer insights about the social reproduction of inequality, which was a central focus of Bourdieu’s original work. In particular, Black feminist theory can offer insights about the construction of the “field.” The field is “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). At the same time, Bourdieu (1973) described habitus as a “system of dispositions which act as a mediation between structures and practice” (p. 487). Consequently, in this perspective, habitus describes how individuals and organizations embody social structures, because this concept defines how individuals relate to each other and the structures of society. Because
habitus “reflects the internalization of structural boundaries and constraints” (Perna 2006, p. 113) regarding college-going, it constructs the rationale for students’ college “choice” behaviors. Without addressing the concept of field that accounts for asymmetrical power relations, the sole application of habitus to phenomena like college “choice” runs the risk of reinforcing deficit orientations and narratives of a culture of poverty about minoritized groups. Even still, Bourdieusian class concepts such as habitus were not originally intended to examine institutionalized forms of power, but rather, the process of internalizing and embodying social structures that reproduce class inequality, including how power relations are centered around symbolic violence and how social beings comply and participate in the maintenance of social division and hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Even as scholars have looked to examine racial and class stratification in college access, social class often becomes focal. College “choice” research has often highlighted academic preparation and social class status as the strongest predictors of college enrollment; however, a predominant emphasis on these factors minimizes the role of race and racism and its intersection with other forms of domination in shaping higher education pursuits (Teranishi and Briscoe 2006). A limitation of habitus as a tool to explain disparate outcomes is that it is a means for singular axis analysis. As a strength of this framework, McDonough (1997) takes into account social class and social context to understand the college decision-making process. However, the focus on class as opposed to its intersection with gender and the omission of race obscures how other social identities could shape students’ trajectories. Byrd (2017) argues that habitus is not limited to class but intertwines with race. The social identities of elite college students influence their social interactions and racial attitudes, and Byrd (2017) demonstrates how habitus shapes students’ views of opportunities and racial inequities.

As it has typically been applied in research, the concept of habitus serves as a useful way to understand patterns among homogeneous student populations. Yet, such applications of the concept may obscure variations of experiences within historically marginalized groups, including those along the lines of race and gender and the intersection of social identities. An emphasis on the perspective that high schools hold an organizational habitus that is class-based does not provide analytical tools to examine students’ experiences with racial and gender discrimination within the same environment. For example, considering McDonough’s (1997) finding that white high school girls and those from higher income backgrounds at a more affluent school (compared with those at a less affluent school) were more prone to attend selective colleges, it is not clear to what extent and how the advantages of attending an affluent school in the college “choice” process were also afforded to its Black students. On the one hand, we may argue that those that possess class cultural capital that is deemed congruent with the school’s organizational habitus reap rewards of college counseling and other support. Yet, studies have also found that schools have an organizational racial habitus (Carter 2012). When considering the disparate outcomes in student postsecondary destinations because of factors like tracking, counselor bias, and military recruitment, current models do not provide a clear framework to examine the full range of factors in an organizational habitus that shape
postsecondary trajectories. Lastly, there are debates about the extent to which actors in Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory have agency to determine their life pathways, or the extent to which these actors’ life chances are already determined by societal structures (e.g., Swartz 1997).

Expanding on the work of St. John et al. (2001) and Paulsen and St. John (2002), Perna (2006) developed a conceptual college “choice” model that conjoined human capital theory and sociological perspectives. Based on their review of prior research, Perna (2006) contended that separately economic and status attainment perspectives did not sufficiently address the college “choice” process, arguing

> economic approaches offer a framework for understanding decision making, but are limited by their failure to examine the nature of information that is available to decision makers. On the other hand, sociological approaches shed light on the ways in which individuals gather information, but do not identify the ways in which individuals make decisions based on this information (Perna 2006, p. 114).

In bridging these perspectives, Perna (2006) presents an integrated model that “assumes that an individual’s assessment of the benefits and costs of an investment in college is shaped by the individual’s habitus, as well as the school and community context, the higher education context, and the social, economic, and policy context” (p. 101). Through this approach, the model seeks to account for how there can be group differences in college decisions.

Perna (2006) outlines the structural contexts that shape students’ college access and decision-making by capturing how levels of context are embedded and organize student’s pathways. The most internal layer is a student’s habitus which encompasses background characteristics and capital. Layer two is organizational habitus which entails the structures, institutional agents, resources of schools and communities. Next, layer three is the higher education context, which recognizes the place, role, and characteristics of colleges and universities. Lastly, the outlying and all-encompassing layer involves the larger economic, political, and social contexts that influence life decisions like college “choice.” This approach has yielded a deeper understanding on how “situated contexts” shape the differences in educational attainment among social classes and racial groups (Perna 2006, p. 116), and has been advanced in more recent studies (e.g., Deil-Amen and Tevis 2010; Means et al. 2016; Squire and Mobley 2015).

Perna (2006) also expanded their framework of college decision-making to more broadly examine student transitions and success. Drawing from psychology, economics, sociology, and education, Perna and Thomas (2008) developed a conceptual framework to provide a comprehensive definition of student success to encompass how it is a longitudinal process with four key transitions: college readiness, college enrollment, college achievement, and post-college attainment. The integration of human capital and sociocultural aspects underscores the importance of examining individual’s behaviors in their respective social contexts. However, this approach does not provide ways to examine how advantaged and minoritized groups’ differential power and privilege in those contexts could affect students’ trajectories.
As carried out in earlier approaches, Perna (2006) relies on habitus to describe how “the system of values and beliefs that shapes an individual’s views and interpretations” (p. 115). While habitus accounts for the role of social context, the focus is on how individuals embody their social conditions.

However, there is not a clear specification of what constitutes the field in this model to make sense of what social conditions are shaping behaviors. Further, this approach does not address how systems of oppression create social conditions. Examining further the concept of field and its associated systems of oppression could enhance the model, as the model strives to account for “sources of differences in college choices across groups” (Perna 2006, p. 107). For example, Squire and Mobley (2015) focus on the study of college “choice” to better understand how multiple marginalized social identities are negotiated in postsecondary decision-making. They found that, for Black gay men, racial factors shaped their college decision-making, like the decision to attend a predominantly white institution in part because of “larger societal narratives surrounding sexual minorities within Black communities” (Squire and Mobley 2015, p. 478). In another example, a man described experiencing racist remarks during an admission interview for a predominantly white campus, which shaped his decision to attend a HBCU instead. Although the racism evidenced in an admissions interview appeared to affect this student’s college “choice,” the use of Perna (2006) did not provide well conceptualized analytical tools to examine how racism might have influenced this student’s or other Black students’ college trajectories.

A limitation of the employment of habitus in college “choice” frameworks is that it does not recognize the intersection of multiple systems of oppression, including racism and heterosexism, as “superstructures” (Ray 2019) that can circumscribe life chances. Though McDonough’s (1997) work spoke of how a high school’s organizational habitus reflected the broader US social class structure, it did not address how intersecting systems of oppression and power structures could shape college “choice.” Similarly, while Perna’s (2006) model focuses on the role of social contexts in shaping college “choice,” it is important to note that social contexts and the power relations that differentially affect individuals’ life chances based on their social and economic identities are not one and the same. Namely, a given social context involves the “internal dynamics of a given interpretive community” (Collins 2019a, p. 46), while power is exercised “where groups with greater power oppress those with lesser amounts” (Collins 2002, p. 274). More broadly, power also operates as “an intangible entity that circulates within a particular matrix of domination and to which individuals stand in varying relationships” (Collins 2002, p. 274).

From this perspective, social contexts are situated in, but not the same as, the intersection of systems of oppression and power structures that shape experiences and inequities (Collins 2019a). Black women and girls live in a particular political context where the “convergence of race, class, and gender oppression characteristic of U.S. slavery shaped all subsequent relationships that women of African descent had” (Collins 2002, p. 5). While recognizing that accounting for social contexts to enrich analysis of social inequities (Collins 2019a) and to avoid essentializing
individuals’ and groups’ experiences (Patton and Njoku 2019), it is also imperative to recognize the larger structural forces of power that shape those contexts and educational opportunities (Núñez 2014).

Broadly, higher education research overwhelmingly examines students and their experiences, with less attention on the structural components (Hurtado 2007; Hurtado et al. 2012; Núñez 2014), and the structures that inhibit students’ pathways. While Perna (2006) contributes to framing how contexts influence each layer, the model does not account for racialized and gendered elements beyond demographic characteristics. New research on social inequities and social problems cannot be detached from complex theorization of power structures and systems of oppression. Such considerations call for new questions on how systemic forms of power are structuring student and organizational habitus and the ways they are manifested in college decision-making. A different theoretical construct that conceptualizes a “structuring structure” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 170) is the matrix of domination (Collins 2002).

Through a Black Feminist lens, the configuration of society and social life is understood centrally through social and power relations. Collins (2002) approaches the analysis of power in two ways: (1) a dialectical approach that examines oppression and activism, and (2) an approach that examines the interconnected relationships between systems of oppression within their matrices of domination. Collins (2019b) describes how a matrix is a “structuring structure” that “gives structure to dynamic phenomena” but how “intersectionality adds a political analysis to these generic understandings” (p. 173). To conceptualize how power is structured, Collins’ (2002) concept of a matrix of domination shows how power is organized in various contexts via different domains. The matrix of domination “refers to how political domination on the macrolevel of analysis is organized via intersecting systems of oppression” (Collins 2019b, p. 171). According to Collins (2002, 2019b), there are four domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal, that each and together, shape domination. Moreover, this framing provides a lens to analyze the arenas in which subordinate groups resist and seek empowerment.

The structural domain describes how primary social institutions are interlocked and structured to perpetually subordinate Black women and men. The structural domain is defined as

a constellation of organized practices in employment, government, education, law, business, and housing that work to maintain an unequal and unjust distribution of social resources. Unlike bias and prejudice, which are characteristics of individuals, the structural domain of power operates through the laws and policies of social institutions (Collins 2002, p. 301).

Through laws, policies, and procedures, social institutions, like higher education, enforce a social hierarchy that functions to disenfranchise and exclude. For example, higher education has systematically excluded Black students and other racially minoritized students from entering selective white institutions. Historically, this has been orchestrated through laws and judicial decisions that reflected the broader social order of de jure segregation. Today, the confluence of segregated housing, the
placement of higher education institutions, and racial ideology continues the historical pattern of exclusion. Amalia Dache-Gerbino (2018) employed a critical geography analysis to examine how the depopulation of cities where Black and Latinx folks reside impacted college access and “choice.” Within a context of deindustrialization, white flight, and racially biased admission policies, Dache-Gerbino (2018) found Black and Latinx students lived in areas with a “college desert,” lacking 4-year institutions and limited to readily available community colleges and for-profit institutions. This finding is striking, as Dache-Gerbino illuminates, because college “choice” research has confirmed proximity is an influential factor in college decisions (Turley 2009), especially for Black and Latinx students (Braddock 1980; Butler 2010; Hillman 2016; Means et al. 2016). Dache-Gerbino’s (2018) conclusions demonstrate how white patterns of settlement maintain power and domination through the interdependence of social institutions like availability of housing, employment opportunities, and higher education.

The entrenchment and rigid establishment of social institutions presents a challenge to reform, let alone abolish, oppressive social structures. Thus, focal to resisting within this domain is shifting the social order through changing laws of the land or establishing new doctrine. Collins’ (2002) examples of such a redistribution or reconciliation of the social order include revolutions, social movements, and war. Widespread transformation sounded unlikely a decade ago, but we find ourselves in a historic moment for reimagining or abolishing systems due to public outcry over police brutality and antiBlackness, structural inequalities uncovered by the world pandemic, and economic disruption today. These disruptions uncover large inequalities and call into question college “choice” frameworks that do not address the intersection of systems of oppression and the social structures that maintain the status quo.

Where the structural domain organizes domination, the disciplinary domain maintains hierarchies through bureaucracy and surveillance. This encompasses how power relations operate within a social institution, despite the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion. “Discipline is ensured by keeping Black women as a mutually policing subordinate population under surveillance” (Collins 2002, p. 281). With the perspective of “intersectional surveillance,” Simone Browne (2015) contends racializing surveillance is

a technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies, and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a power to define what is in or out of place...reify boundaries, borders, and bodies along racial lines, and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment of those who are negatively racialized (p. 16).

College admissions criteria may be considered a mechanism for surveillance because they serve to detect who belongs and who does not. Studies have demonstrated that admissions criteria like standardized tests are biased against Black and/or low-income students (e.g., Deil-Amen and Tevis 2010), and that performance on these tests is linked with access to material and human resources in one’s high school (Park and Becks 2015), as well as proclivity to stereotype threat (Perry et al. 2003), to which Black and other minoritized students are more vulnerable. Yet, these
standardized tests continue to be used in college admissions, particularly to sort high numbers of applicants in selective public institutions. As a consequence, the doors of higher education are regulated in which access to selective white institutions is privileged and those who are “othered” are cascaded to other institutions (Allen et al. 2018; Contreras et al. 2018).

The use of surveillance is further conspicuous when considering that it has become a common practice for higher education institutions today to purchase the names of students and track their web browsing history to collect information about their demographic background for recruitment and enrollment purposes (MacMillan and Anderson 2019; Selingo 2017; Zinshteyn 2016). Arguably, the use of surveillance technologies can further exacerbate inequalities, because it also informs institutions about whom to privilege or not privilege in recruiting, and the extent to which certain individuals might pose a “risk” to the institution in terms of factors like propensity to graduate (an example that illustrates how Black and minoritized students would be at a disadvantage in such predictive models). Discipline and surveillance occur before students submit their college applications. Extending Foucault’s (1977) notion that schools are disciplinary institutions, Black feminist scholars apply an intersectional lens to examine Black women and girls’ experiences with discipline, punishment, and surveillance within schools. In Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools, Monique Morris argues that, similar to the experiences of Black boys, Black girls are under surveillance in school via mechanisms such as the use of metal detectors as a “security” measure, law enforcement in schools, and zero-tolerance policies (Morris 2016). However, for Black girls, their experiences with surveillance stems from negative perceptions that render them as deviant because their behaviors are deemed “un-ladylike,” because, as I will argue later, their behavior does not conform to narrow standards of white femininity (e.g., Collins 2002; Fleming 1983). As I will later return to, this exercise of power is exhibited through education and warrants consideration on how discipline and surveillance in K-12 schools impact college access and “choice.”

Resistance in this domain is typically achieved through shifting procedures and practices from within a given social institution or system. For example, Black girls are unfairly disciplined in schools because of their choice of hairstyle. The Crown Act (2020) is a campaign to prohibit discrimination against students because of their choice of hair style; the implementation of Crown Act policies could decrease Black students’ receipt of school infractions.

In contrast to the structural forms of power, the hegemonic domain of power involves “ideology, culture, and consciousness” (Collins 2002, p. 284). This domain provides the rationale for oppressive power relations. Collins (2002) describes it as “a popular system of commonsense ideas that support [the dominant group’s] right to rule” (p. 284). Through narrow narratives and controlling images, hegemonic ideologies maintain false constructions about race, class, gender, sexuality, and other identities that are perpetuated by both the ruling class and subordinate groups. Hegemonic ideologies are (re)produced in research, school curriculum, mass media and functions to “shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies” (Collins 2002, p. 285).
In higher education, an example of a hegemonic ideology is the notion of “Pell Runners,” defined as “people who purportedly find filing a FAFSA and enrolling into college an expedient way to obtain a few thousand dollars” (Goldrick-Rab 2016, p. 69). The belief that financial aid recipients are potential scammers who take advantage of financial aid programs subscribes to a narrative to undermine the use of federal resources for students in real financial need (Graves 2019). Hegemonic ideologies justify the use of other domains of power such as discipline because exercise of such power “protects” the social order, in this case, ensuring low-income and/or students of color do not receive money they do not deserve, though there is not sufficient evidence to merit financial verification processes (Goldrick-Rab 2016; Graves 2019). Graves (2019) argues that because it emboldens financial aid officers to implement detrimental policies and practices that delay students receiving their aid, the disproportionate emphasis on the existence of Pell Runners “has become a tool to inform policies such as verification and structured disbursement, which overregulate financial aid for students who need aid to access their higher education” (p. 111). Graves’s (2019) conclusion elucidates how Pell Runners as a controlling image justifies disciplining low-income and disproportionately students of color. Resistance in this domain constitutes subordinated groups reclaiming, creating, and affirming their own self-definitions.

The fourth domain of power is the interpersonal. The interpersonal domain encompasses how power is maintained at the microlevel through daily routines and interactions. According to Collins (2002), this domain involves the “discriminatory practices of everyday lived experience that because they are so routine typically go unnoticed or remain unidentified. Strategies of everyday racism and everyday resistance occur in this domain” (p. 299). In higher education, an example of this is Black respectability politics that manifests within HBCUs and other Black social institutions. Higginbotham (1993) defined the politics of respectability as “reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations” (p. 187). Building on the work of Higginbotham (1993), Harris (2003) describes how “respectability was part of uplift politics and had two audiences: African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable, and white people, who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable” (p. 213). While respectability politics has historically been perceived a mode to empower and used as a strategy for racial uplift, because it emphasizes challenging stereotypes of Black people through acting “respectable.” Yet, there is an argument that emphasizes that Black respectability politics has involved conforming to expectations of respectability defined by the white dominant social order in the USA. Nadrea Njoku, Malika Butler, and Cameron Beatty (2017) contend that Black respectability politics has “helped maintain a racial order and hierarchy” (p. 787). The authors examine how the politics of respectability impacts students at HBCUs and argue that

the admonishment and condemnation of certain cultural esthetics and behaviors further marginalizes Black poor people, Black LGBTQ people, and Black women who refuse to yield to the paralyzing power of Black respectability politics(p. 787).
Though HBCUs have historically and continue to provide educational opportunities to minoritized students, it is also imperative for these campuses to foster environments for marginalized students within subordinate groups. Disrupting the power within the interpersonal domain requires interrogating how individuals and groups participate in subordinating others. Resistance in this domain can take on diverse forms because it is focused on how individuals with different identities interact with one another or how groups interact with reference to one another.

Among Black collegians, researchers have found negative campus racial climates and the lack of racial diversity deters Black students from enrolling into the University of California (Contreras et al. 2018). In the aftermath of racial campus unrest at the University of Missouri (Brewer 2018) the share of first-time, first-year Black undergraduate entrants at the University declined by 35% (Brown 2017), suggesting that some Black students may have decided that it was unsafe to pursue college in such an environment. Further, the pronounced racial hostility on white campuses has some students of color, and Black students in particular, seeking refuge at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Johnson 2019; Mobley 2017; Williams and Palmer 2019) and other Minority-Serving Institutions (Thompson et al. 2019). Student enrollment at HBCUs has steadily declined in the past decade; however, this pattern shifted when the attendance of Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities increased from 223,512 in 2016 to 226,847 in 2017 (NCES 2019d).

Changes in Black students’ enrollment patterns may in part be attributed to perceptions of supportive campus cultures; however, campus climate is not limited to what happens at the college but also shaped by external sociohistorical forces, “the events or issues in the larger society, nearly always originating outside the campus, that influence how people view racial diversity in society” (Hurtado et al. 1998, p. 282). The prevalence of antiBlack racism in US society may also contribute to Black students’ college “choice,” especially given the culture and climate of universities reflect broader society (George Mwangi et al. 2018). Factors like the expected cost of college, the amount of financial aid, and even academic qualifications do not sufficiently explain how students and families weigh safety, well-being, and humane treatment in the context of antiBlackness and other systems of subordination.

New Approaches to Examine the College “Choice” Process

Indeed, more emergent frameworks of college “choice” have interrogated to a greater extent the structural forces that shape students’ college opportunity structures. In Fracturing Opportunity: Mexican Migrant Students and College-Going Literacy, Gildersleeve (2010) examined how Mexican migrant students “come to know college access” (p. 11) with the perspective of college-going as a mediated meaning-making system. Linking college opportunities and sustaining a democratic government in the United States, Gildersleeve (2010) argued college-going can be understood as “pedagogically produced” in the sense that it is a “learned social practice co-constructed by multiple agencies that interact with various social
structures” (p. 2). Their critical inquiry on postsecondary educational opportunity applied cultural-historical activity theory and literacy theories to examine how college access is “a learned activity” that is “accomplished by the development of college-going literacies, which afford students the opportunity to respond to, navigate, and negotiate the complex power-laden processes that interact across college-going activity” (Gildersleeve 2010, p. 34). In sum, college-going can be “taught and enacted” (Gildersleeve 2010, p. 184).

Specifically, in his qualitative research examining how Mexican migrant students practice college-going, Gildersleeve found that for these students, academic preparation, college access, college admissions, and college “choice” were more integrated and mutually constituting processes. For example, Gildersleeve underscored how study participants and their families had high aspirations to attend college. However, the students also had to learn “rules” to attend college, like (in their state of California), the requirement to pass the California exit exam in English to earn a high school diploma. Gildersleeve conceptualized college-going literacy as “a learned social practice” (p. 33), which for participants in this study dependent on a “community of labor.” The racialization of students in particular school contexts (including assumptions about their abilities due to factors like being Latinx or English Learners) and perceptions of financial ability to pay affected their meaning-making about college opportunities. Their motivation and dedication to their communities also shaped how they made sense of their college opportunities. In acknowledging the sociocultural contexts that minoritized students navigate and negotiate, the author focused on the role of higher education institutions, schools, outreach programs, and families in shaping and supporting a culturally relevant college-going identity and college-going literacy.

Incorporating Chicana feminism to existing college-going models, Acevedo-Gil (2017) presented college-conocimiento as a conceptual framework to examine intersecting identities and college pathways. Bridging Perna’s (2006) model and use of habitus with Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2002) theory of conocimiento, Acevedo-Gil (2017) argued college pathways are mediated by students’ intersecting identities and inequitable educational resources. The college “choice” process for Latinx students is complex because of the developmental process of conocimiento, “a theory of epistemological development that entails challenging oppressive conditions through individual consciousness and social justice actions” (Acevedo-Gil 2017, p. 833). The culturally relevant concept of conocimiento draws attention to an individual’s consciousness and its interconnections with family, schools, and community. Consciousness is a compass on how minoritized groups navigate college-going and their social worlds. The college-conocimiento framework reckons with the worlds Latinx students navigate. College-conocimiento is defined as “a serpentine process where Latinx students reflect on the college information that they receive in relation to their intersectional experiences when preparing for college” (Acevedo-Gil 2017, pp. 834–835). Acevedo-Gil (2017) approaches the study of college pathways through a critical lens to “account for racialization, interconnected identities, and multiple contexts” (p. 834).

Where deficit orientations about minoritized students proliferate, college-conocimiento provides a culturally relevant model of college “choice”
With the first space being *el arrebato*, the rupture and birth of something anew, the college-*conocimiento* framework describes an evolving, seven-stage progression toward an orientation of spiritual activism. The college-*conocimiento* framework forges new ground in college “choice” literature in that it captures how aspirations and college decisions can be influenced by cultural aspects of particular social identities. For instance, in the college-*conocimiento* framework, *el arrebato* is conceptualized as the space where Latinx students’ develop college aspirations that stem from their individual, school, and community habitus. Acevedo-Gil (2017) advances college-going literature in connecting aspirational capital, defined as the familial and community motivation to attend college (Yosso 2005), to Perna’s (2006) application of habitus in college decisions. This approach employs a reflexive, asset-based perspective that affirms the agency of students as they process their educational opportunities and navigate oppressive conditions such as under-resourced high schools.

Acevedo-Gil’s (2017) research challenges the linearity of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model by demonstrating the circular and spiral-oriented movement between the predisposition, search, and “choice” stage. Similar to Iloh (2018) (later discussed), both authors underscore the importance of information and perceptions of opportunity; however, Acevedo-Gil takes it one step further in thinking about “the mind-body-spirit connection” (Acevedo-Gil 2017, p. 841). This culturally relevant perspective invites a fresh conceptualization of habitus that incorporates how students’ multifaceted identities and cultures play into their college “choice.” Acevedo-Gil (2019) also applied the college-*conocimiento* framework in an empirical study on the college “choice” process for low-income, first-generation Latinx students. The author found that “participants considered various identities and knowledge of institutional resources to construct narratives about the likely obstacles they would experience in college” (Acevedo-Gil 2019, p. 121). Other scholars have also applied this framework to examine the role of fathers in shaping Chicanas higher education pursuits (Garcia and Mireles-Rios 2019), and first-generation and low-income Latinx students’ summer experiences that present challenges to successfully transition into college such as “summer melt” (Tichavakunda and Galan 2020).

Though the college-*conocimiento* acknowledges oppressive conditions, this framework does not address the intersecting power systems that might constrain Latinx and low-income students’ perceptions of and capacity to pursue a full range of college opportunities. Acevedo-Gil (2017) aligns students’ reflexivity to Perna’s (2006) discussion of habitus and suggests college-*conocimiento* allows a student to reflect on their “intersectional demographics within a deficit institutional context” and how that awareness of multiple identities “facilitates the student internalizing the possibilities of pursuing a postsecondary education” (Acevedo-Gil 2017, p. 840).

While one’s “intersectional demographic” could reflect one’s level of power and disenfranchisement in society, examining the role of intersectional social identities in college “choice” does not necessarily equate to an analysis of systems of power. To this point, Black and Gender Studies scholar Jennifer Nash (2019) articulates a Black feminist perspective that “who people are can never be understood apart from the way things work” (p. 75). Nash further elaborates that
the stark distinctions drawn between identity and structure, distinctions that neglect how experiences of embodiment; projects of self-making, and self-performing; sensations of pleasure, pain, injury, desire, and so on are always fundamentally altered, shaped and constituted by social location, experiences of power and disempowerment (2019, p. 74–75).

Thus, students’ subjectivities and the social structures that shape their experiences are inextricably interwoven.

Acevedo-Gil’s college-conocimiento framework situates one critical factor as affecting Latinx students’ college “choice” as the context of racially segregated high schools with fewer educational resources. However, this model can be expanded to better consider the ubiquitous nature of racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression. For Acevedo-Gil (2017), the crux of the framework is contextualizing how the gross inequities in the K-12 system shape students’ college “choices.” The statistical portrait of Latinx educational outcomes, similar to that of Black students, illuminates how structural inequities (i.e., lack of college guidance counselors, variation in academic preparation, and oppressive learning environments) limit college opportunities. Schools, whether they are public or private, with predominantly white or majority students of color, in urban, suburbia, and/or rural areas, maintain practices that sustain inequities. This is pertinent to understanding the college-going process for minoritized students because scholars have found that even in well-resourced schools, race still matters in influencing college-going outcomes, with Black students attending less selective institutions or receiving less support from their teachers and counselors, despite being equivalently academically qualified as others (Chapman 2014; Lewis and Diamond 2015; Lewis-McCoy 2014). This is important to be mindful of as researchers determine where one might suspect inequities exist, and instead consider how all schools are susceptible in reproducing oppressive conditions.

While arguing that empirical research on college “choice” tends to employ an economic perspective, a “rational process by which an individual estimates the economic and social benefits of attending college” (p. 229) or a sociological perspective in which “the extent to which high schools graduates’ socioeconomic characteristics and academic preparation predispose them to enroll at a particular type of college” (p. 229), Iloh (2018) argues that an ecological approach that takes into account a broader a way of settings is most appropriate to fully understand college decision-making parameters. The author employs an ecosystem perspective to advance considerations on the relationship between individuals, conditions and experiences, and the environments they inhabit. Through her proposed framework, the author is attentive to how the context of information, time, and opportunity ultimately shape enrollment decision(s). In this framework, information describes “both the access to and the quality of information students harness in making college-going decisions” (p. 236), while time is a term employed to encompass the “moments and events that have occurred throughout one’s life as well as an individual’s chronological age” (p. 237). The dimension of context of opportunity is utilized to capture “the perceived and real opportunity any student has in their pursuit of higher education generally and specific institutions in particular” (p. 238). While
Iloh’s framework calls for context-specific data collection to gather deeper understandings of students with diverse backgrounds and their pathways, the theory centers on the roles of the individual and their ecosystem, rather than how broader economic and social structures shape social realities, and therefore, college pathways. That is, although the framework takes into account a broader array of settings and students (including post-traditional students), how oppressive power dynamics shape student college pathways are not made as clear.

Taken together, traditional and new models have aided in advancing the understanding of the complexity of the college-going experience. However, one of the findings from this brief review of theories of college “choice” is that all have limited analytical capability to articulate interlocking systems of power and oppression that can also construct college opportunities. These limitations leave scholars without more precise perspectives, concepts, and language to address how institutionalized forms of oppression and power constitute structures that stifle college opportunity. The central objective of the rest of this chapter is to deepen the understanding about college pathways by applying Black Feminism, broadly, and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) specifically, to put forth an intersectional approach that considers how racism, sexism, and other forms of domination interlock and shape student pathways. The employment of an intersectional approach grounded in Black Feminist Thought can encourage scholars to “engage in more critical analyses of their data and generate more accurate conclusions” (Museus and Griffin 2011, p. 6).

More recently, scholars have underscored the importance of examining larger forces that contribute to shaping students’ experiences and that shape institutional and social contexts (Hurtado et al. 2012; Núñez 2014). However, this is often neglected in higher education research. Núñez (2014) concluded “the application of intersectionality to empirical studies has largely been limited to descriptions of these actors’ experiences, rather than organizational dynamics among social actors or other entities that shape those experiences” (p. 46, emphasis original). The current chapter seeks to further these developments in applying Black Feminist Thought to understand how multiple dimensions of the college “choice” process are affected by intersecting systems of oppression and power structures. To be clear, this is not to suggest Black Feminist Thought as a new college “choice” model, but rather, to position Black Feminist Thought as having the potential to advance understanding of the various factors and forces that constrain and foster equitable access to college for Black women and girls in particular, and minoritized students and systematically advantaged students more broadly.

The Paradox of Education and the Black Struggle

Problematicizing College “Choice”
Moving toward a Black feminist approach to examine students’ college pathways and decision-making processes, I begin this section by problematizing the notion of “choice.” Previous scholarship has used “choice” to denote the inequities in college access for minoritized and nontraditional students (Cox 2016; Goldrick-Rab 2006;
Similarly, I approach the limits of college “choice” from a critical race and Black feminist standpoint that centers on how educational systems in the United States are entrenched with structural impediments that undermine college equity and reflect broader systems of oppression (Collins 2002; Harris 1993; Ladson-Billings 1998; Patton 2016). As contended by Núñez (2014), Collins’s (2002) concept of the matrix of domination provides a lens to examine the intersection of systems of oppression and how higher education shapes and is shaped by power relations. Applying the structural domain of power, how interlocking social institutions dominate through law and policies, entails identifying how power and oppression in higher education has constrained “choice” and evolved over time (Collins 2002). Thus, I take into account a long-term historical perspective of the Black struggle to access education (Mustaffa 2017) that has been fortified by other social institutions such as the US legal system (Chapman et al. 2020), and de jure and de facto patterns of racial segregation and housing (Dache-Gerbino 2018).

Examining the historicity, or “the macro-level role of history in shaping these broader dynamics” (Núñez 2014, p. 52), of “choice” elucidates the importance of taking a historical perspective in understanding how societal structures are constructed and evolve to circumscribe educational opportunities for minoritized groups.

One of the issues that more traditional conceptions of “choice” overlook, particularly in college “choice” of Black folks, is how historical violence has shaped opportunity structures and systematically restricted access to a quality education. The history of Black people in higher education indicates that several interlocking and distinctive societal structures – including chattel slavery, de jure and de facto restrictions on access to postsecondary education – have restricted their post-secondary opportunities (Anderson 1988; Dancy et al. 2018; Evans 2008; Harper et al. 2009; Mustaffa 2017; Rogers 2012). In this section, I discuss the history and concept of educational violence (Mustaffa 2017) to illustrate the limits of college “choice.”

Education violence is a term to describe “how marginalized people both in and outside of formal systems of schooling have had their lives limited and ended due to white supremacy” (Mustaffa 2017, p. 711, emphasis original). This history of white supremacy goes back four centuries before the founding of the United States. As late as 1619, Black folks were abducted, chained, battered, and rendered chattel:

The African was represented as chattel in their economic image, as slaves in their political and social image, as brutish and therefore inaccessible to further development, and finally as Negro, that is without history (Robinson 2000, p. 187).

The process of racializing and dehumanizing “the Other” (Collins 2002) in instituting chattel slavery laid the foundation for the formation of a racialized capitalist state. Those who survived the gruesome transatlantic voyage to the eastern shores of colonial America were forced into slavery. Enslaved African people were subjected to dehumanization, including being prohibited from and criminalized for learning how to read and write. In fact, it was deemed a crime to teach an enslaved or free Black person (Anderson 1988).
As the institution of slavery expanded into occupied Indigenous land, the birth of US higher education institutions to serve the white ruling classes began. It is no mere coincidence that the same decade enslaved African people arrived in Massachusetts, the first higher education institution, Harvard University, was founded in Cambridge in 1636. Foundational to the development of colonial colleges was a dependency on the institution of slavery; exploited labor was instrumental in the construction of colleges. Harvard University, then Harvard College, was bestowed as the locale to train and prepare the elite class of white men for clergy and leadership positions, while enslaved African people were subjected to serve the constituents of the college (Wilder 2013). That is, “Black people erected the buildings, cooked the food, and cleaned the dormitories and yet were not understood as laborers, but as property” (Dancy et al. 2018, p. 182), while Black women who maintained the campus were abused, sexually assaulted, and raped on college grounds by students (Wilder 2013).

The history of the development of the first US colleges exposes exclusion as a fundamental feature of higher education in the nation. Since the founding of the colonial colleges, the “choice” to attend college was not afforded to racially minoritized groups and white women. For Indigenous populations, the college served as grounds to impose evangelism (Wilder 2013). It was not until 1823, 187 years after the first colleges were established, that Alexander Lucius Twilight became the first Black American to earn a college degree from Middlebury College (Slater 1994). For Black women, receipt of a college education first occurred decades later, with Lucy Ann Stanton earning a certificate in 1850, and Mary Jane Patterson earning a degree in 1862, followed by Fanny M. Jackson and Frances J. Norris in 1865, all from Oberlin College in Ohio (Commodore et al. 2018; Evans 2008; Perkins 1993; Rogers 2012; Slater 1994).

During the nineteenth century, it was disputed whether college participation should be afforded to Black people, for we were viewed other than human (i.e., Dred Scott v. Sandford) (Anderson 1988). Amidst controversy and during an era when the majority of Black Americans were enslaved, Oberlin College was one of the first higher education institutions to admit Black students (Perkins 1993; Waite 2002). Under Plessy v. Ferguson, however, de jure segregation maintained “separate but equal” educational institutions in theory, a position supported and sustained by both Northern and Southern politicians and judges. Oberlin College was made available to Black folks from its inception (Waite 2002), whereas the majority of historically white institutions did not accept Black students until the 1950s and 1960s (Allen and Jewell 2002; Slater 1994). The need for racially segregated institutions was affirmed in the Morrill Act of 1890, which established “land” grants to establish Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Allen et al. 2007).

The exclusion of Black students from higher education in these times reflected a “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz 1995) in which higher education and the right for white people to exclusively enjoy its benefits functioned as a form of “whiteness as property” (Harris 1993; Ladson-Billings 1998). In the aftermath of slavery, the education of Black people was perpetually perceived as a threat to white dominance and the social order (Browne 2015; Hartman 2007). For example, Rogers (2012) describes how the expansion of Black higher education through the Great
Depression, particularly the Atlanta University Center Consortium, was met with white resentment: “For many whites who did not attend college, and most did not, the presence of articulate, confident, polished black students oftentimes undermined their sense of superiority and thus their sense of self” (p. 23).

After the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling that overturned the conception of “separate but equal” established in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case, racial injustice and separation of postsecondary opportunities through segregation in higher education persisted. For instance, the case of Adams v. Richardson (1973) found that ten states were noncompliant to adhering to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because of their failure to desegregate their higher education systems (Allen et al. 2018; Egerton 1974). Today, scholars have shown how antiBlack racism thwarts equitable access to education (Allen et al. 2018; Dancy et al. 2018; Dumas and Ross 2016; Mustaffa 2017), citing as evidence affirmative action bans (Okechukwu 2019), opposition of school integration and the aftermath of desegregation policy (Dumas 2016), overdisciplining Black students in schools (Powell and Coles 2020; Wun 2016), and hostile racial climates in schools and universities (Abrica et al. 2020; Chapman 2014).

An especially notable example is the perpetual underfunding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which provide significant and unique educational opportunities for Black and other minoritized students (Williams et al. 2019). HBCUs constituted 2.2% of degree-granting institutions and 1.48% of total college enrollment in 2017 (NCES 2019a, c). In 2017–2018, these institutions served approximately 9% of today’s Black college enrollment population, and conferred 13.5% of the bachelor’s degree conferred to Black students in 2017–2018 (NCES 2019e, f). Yet, they continue to receive far less funding than other institutions, although they provide educational opportunities to students who require much more academic and financial support than those at more well-funded institutions (Carnevale and Strohl 2013; NASEM 2018). The historical patterns of yesterday continue to impede the present educational conditions for Black students, restricting access to full college “choice” for Black students.

Despite the sociopolitical conditions that have limited Black Americans’ post-secondary opportunities, Black students, their families, and communities have always highly valued and strived to pursue higher education (e.g., Freeman 2005). Formerly enslaved Black Americans seized their freedom and immediately sought education as a mechanism to improve their social position. Education was yearned by free and formerly enslaved Black people because education was viewed as a portal toward liberation (Anderson 1988; Collins 2002). Collins (2002) describes how Black women’s support for education encompasses how “education has long served as a powerful symbol for the important connections among self, change, and empowerment in African American communities” (p. 210). Black women in particular were instrumental in using education as a tool for racial uplift (Perkins 1993). For instance, Lucy C. Laney, a graduate of Atlanta University, founded Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in 1886. In 1904, Mary McLeod Bethune, Laney’s protege, opened the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School, now Bethune-Cookman College (Giddings 1984). For Black students, pursing higher
education has been a site of struggle, but also perceived as a tool for liberation (Horvat and Davis 2011; Sojoyner 2016). This tension is worth exploring further when exploring the disparity between Black students’ higher education aspirations and attainment rates (Freeman 2005).

Racial Theories in Higher Education and Empirical Research on Black Student’s College-Going Processes

Early empirical research on college “choice” found that Black Americans “choose” postsecondary education pathways in ways that incorporate racial concerns. To investigate the role of race in the college “choice” process, McDonough et al. (1997) expanded on Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-phase model to incorporate Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus as class- and race-specific constructs that impact how and where Black students decide to attend a college or university. Specifically, the authors compared factors that influenced Black students’ college “choice” process to attend HBCUs or predominantly white institutions. They framed college “choice” as a “result of a complex relationship (not a simple matching) between background characteristics, high school activities, aspirations (which are affected by perception of available opportunities), college choice behaviors, and self-concept” (McDonough et al. 1997, p. 12). This model emphasizes how Black students convert their cultural capital into what the authors describe as “social profits” (McDonough et al. 1997, p. 15).

This study’s descriptive and regression analysis compared the characteristics and predictors of Black student’s enrollment into a HBCU or a predominantly white institution. It found that student religion, schools’ reputation, parents’ wishes, referrals, and belief that alums obtain good jobs positively influenced decisions to attend a HBCU. Its findings were consistent with more recent findings that HBCU alumni in students’ families and communities positively influence decisions to attend a HBCU (Johnson 2019). Moreover, McDonough et al. (1997) found a positive relationship between students’ individual aspirations and self-concepts and subsequent decisions to enroll in a HBCU. In comparison, college guidance counselors, athletic involvement, the close proximity of the college to their home, availability of financial aid, and college’s academic reputation and specialized programs were key indicators for matriculation into white institutions. The authors contended that students who are interested in promoting racial understanding may be more interested in improving race relations by attending a predominantly white institution (McDonough et al. 1997).

In conducting research about the disconnection between Black students’ high education aspirations and their low participation in higher education, Kassie Freeman (2005) advanced the Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model to include her concept of predetermination. Specifically, she explored how environmental “circumstances that are outside of the students’ control” (p. 111), such as the culture and characteristics of one’s high school, influence college decisions. Freeman found that school officials’ low expectations of Black students negatively shaped students’ perceptions of their ability, and, in turn, what higher education institutions they were “channeled” into. Further, she found that culturally relevant curricula, services, and
resources to support and guide college decision-making for Black students were missing from schools. This finding highlighted the importance of structural factors, including differential resource allocation to schools, in shaping college “choice.”

Further, Freeman (2005) found that familial influence plays a significant role in college decisions, but not in the ways considered in preexisting “choice” frameworks. She found that, regardless of their educational attainment, Black families instilled in their children high academic aspirations. In cases where these families had low or no postsecondary attainment, a central motivation for instilling these aspirations was for the students to achieve an educational level never before obtained in the family. Considering that having higher parental educational attainment confers fewer benefits (including transmitting income and wealth) for Black students than white students (Bumpus et al. 2020), it is important to expand consideration of how the role of educational attainment may differ for Black students compared to other groups.

Black and Latinx students are stratified in lower selectivity schools that provide fewer resources to encourage their persistence and completion, and trends indicate that, in recent years, the most “elite” colleges have become more predominantly white (Carnevale and Strohl 2013). These findings have long-term occupational, income, and wealth implications, as Black students who graduate from selective institutions are more likely to enroll in graduate school and earn higher salaries (e.g., Bowen and Bok 1998). Therefore, akin to the perpetual patterns of Black exclusion in higher education, some studies on Black students’ college decisions have rightly focused on the factors that shape the type of institutions they attend (Freeman 1999; Johnson 2017; Tobolowsky et al. 2005). For example, Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, and Clarke (2009) conducted a quantitative study with 167 Black undergraduates of a HBCU to provide insight on the race-related factors that influenced their decisions. They found that racial composition and the opportunity to develop one’s racial identity were two factors positively influencing Black students’ decisions to attend a HBCU. In another study, Van Camp et al. (2010) examined the role of race in the college decision to attend a HBCU. The authors found that students with fewer Black intragroup interactions prior to college were more likely to attend a HBCU. In a similar vein, Freeman (2005) found that Black students who attended predominantly white high schools were more likely to want to attend a HBCU, because of a desire and sense of obligation to learn more about their culture and roots. Such an opportunity might not have been available in their high schools. Holland (2020) found that the quantity and quality of cross-racial interactions in high school and perceptions of how a college environment would prepare them to navigate diverse environments influenced Black students’ college “choice.”

Van Camp et al. (2010) found Black high school students whose race was central to their identities were more likely to attend HBCUs. Likewise, in their study of Black gay mens’ college “choice,” Squire and Mobley (2015) found that participants who self-identified more with their race ultimately attended the HBCU. Those who self-identified more as gay or neither identity attended the PWI” (p. 476). The authors also found students’ perceptions of the campuses climates as an influential factor, in that some Black gay men did not attend a white campus because of how
they perceived the racial climate, and concluded that attending HBCUs would enable them to feel more a part of a scholarly community, at an institution that valued their contributions (Squire and Mobley 2015).

The larger body of college “choice” literature also indicates that geographical proximity to a student’s family of origin shapes college decisions. Research about Black college “choice” further indicates how geographical proximity or location interacts with systems of oppression and identity that shapes Black students’ college destinations. For example, a study on Black gay men’s college decisions found that their assessments of a college’s location was linked to their perceptions of being able to “come out” (Strayhorn et al. 2008). Butler (2010) conducted a quantitative study to examine the relationship between the process of college “choice” and segregation. He interpreted the resulting association between being Black and attending a HBCU in Texas (where he conducted his analysis) as related to the disproportionate proximity of the HBCUs to Black students’ homes in that state, itself a product of historical residential segregation in that state.

In their study of Black rural students’ college “choice,” Means et al. (2016) found that these students aspired to attend college, but were concerned about leaving home and being away from their families. Participants in this study lived in a “college desert” (Dache-Gerbino 2018), with even the “local” community college being 45 min away (Means et al. 2016). Geographical location is also a reason why Black students matriculate into community college and for-profit institutions. For example, Lowry (2017) investigated the factors that led Black students to “undermatch,” that is, attend a community college, although they were academically eligible to attend a 4-year institution. Students expressed how concerns about responsibilities to their families of origin, the capacity to pay for college, geographical proximity to their families, and potential to adjust smoothly to college shaped perceptions of where they could enroll. These considerations led them to perceive that community college was their only enrollment option. While lack of information about college options also played a role in these particular students’ “choices,” other research indicates that even among Black high school students whose teachers and counselors encourage their higher education pursuits, some students still lack college-going knowledge or accurate information about financial aid because of the limited resources at their schools (Means et al. 2016), including limited access to school personnel (Corwin et al. 2004). Studies have also found that, even when Black students have demonstrated high academic ability, high educational aspirations, and high support and encouragement from their families, Black students tend to be stigmatized by their high school teachers and counselors (Chapman 2014; Goings and Sewell 2019; Muhammad 2008).

Many scholars have interrogated the underutilization of racial theories to examine racial disparities in society (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi 2001; Omi and Winant 2014). Similarly, higher education scholars have argued that the development of educational theories that incorporate racial theories could significantly enhance the understanding of racial disparities in school inequities and student outcomes (Harper 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Patton et al. 2007). In response to these critiques, Thandeka Chapman et al. (2020) developed a model “for African
American college choice and agency” (p. 12). Previous scholarship has in fact utilized Critical Race Theory to examine college “choice” (Acevedo-Gil 2015; Comeaux et al. 2020; Muhammad 2008; Teranishi and Briscoe 2008). However, the strength of Chapman and colleagues’ framework is that it integrates Critical Race Theory to develop a college “choice” framework that examines institutional and political forms of exclusion that circumscribe the said “choice.” Further, by recognizing the assets and community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) that Black students hold in the “choice” process, their model challenges deficit frames of Black underachievement.

Research on Black Women and College “Choice”

While research on Black women’s college experiences has emerged (Chambers and Sharpe 2012; Commodore et al. 2018; Patton et al. 2016; Patton and Croom 2017; Porter et al. 2020; Winkle-Wagner 2015), there were only 48 publications on Black collegiate women in higher education-related research from 1991 to 2012 (Patton et al. 2016). Within higher education journals, Everett and Croom (2017) surveyed 49 higher education journals and found that within the last 10 years, only 14 articles within 7 journals have publications focused on “Black undergraduate womyn.” The dearth of education research focused on Black collegiate women warrants considering the theoretical implications and practical consequences when there is a vast erasure of a student group. At the minimum, we are obligated to question the breadth of what we think we know about these students and interrogate what is taken for granted.

Though literature on college “choice” is extensive, empirical research on Black women’s college “choice” is far less common. Within the scant literature, empirical studies on Black women’s college decisions have focused on the roles of parental influence and schools (Butner et al. 2001; Horvat 1997; Muhammad and Dixson 2008; Muhammad et al. 2008; Smith 2008). Notably, most studies on Black women’s college decision focus on the differences in college enrollment between Black women and Black men (Smith and Fleming 2006). Using the National Longitudinal Study of Youth and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to examine gender differences in the college-going process, Jez (2012) found that Black women were more likely to come from low-income households, have higher academic achievement, apply to college, have higher expectations to complete college, have parents that are more confident that they will complete college, and discuss their college plans with their parents. To further examine these differences, Jez (2012) controlled for habitus, cultural capital, and social capital by selectivity of institution and found no gender differences. Jez (2012) concluded

that differences in academic achievement, household characteristics, expectations, peer group influences, parent involvement, and school type do not explain the gap in application and attendance rates between African American females and males (p. 54).

Such statistical analyses may not be able to account for exogenous factors that are not measured in these data sets, including factors found to be salient in other
qualitative research in Black women’s college-going processes. Put differently, such findings and conclusions can obscure other factors that employing a Black feminist lens in the study of college “choice” can bring to light.

A Historical Perspective on Black Feminism

The history of Black exclusion from postsecondary education indicates that higher education institutions are racialized institutions (Ray 2019). This history calls on college “choice” scholarship to address the racialization of college opportunity structures. A Black feminist approach is well-positioned to address this racialization because it illuminates the processes that create conditions of subordination and the unjust effects such processes have on minoritized groups’ lived experiences. A Black feminist perspective underscores the complex confluence of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation of origin, religion, disability, and other social identities and forms of domination that circumscribe life chances. In this section, I will provide a brief explanation and history of Black Feminism, followed by analyzing how concepts in Black Feminist Thought provide conceptual tools to study the racialization of the college “choice” process. I will argue that Black Feminist Thought provides an analytical apparatus to identify and examine “racialization” in college “choice” through concepts such as controlling images. Such controlling images include the common positioning in research and in popular media of Black women as a comparatively advantaged and resilient “model minority,” despite considerable evidence otherwise. I also address how Black Feminist Thought’s concepts of self-definition and self-valuation can serve as a corrective to challenge stereotypes about Black women that influence how they are supported (or not) in their educational advancement and postsecondary pursuits.

The application of Black Feminism emphasizes that “if you could free the most oppressed people in society, then you would free everyone” (Taylor 2017, p. 5). Black Feminism is an endeavor that offers a way of knowing (Dillard 2006), being (Collins 2002), and reimagining (Davis 2012) that might be pragmatic and/or radical in that it centers Black perspectives as key to shaping the future. Black feminist ontology and epistemology call for examining history as a perspective to inform how to navigate onward. The genealogy of Black Feminisms ties together Black women’s history of subjugation, invisibility, and empowerment with their contemporary social conditions, experiences, and activism. Though often unnamed, unacknowledged, and “behind the scenes,” Black women were the architects in shaping social movements such as the Civil Rights, Black Nationalism (Blain 2018), and the Black Power and Freedom movements (Farmer 2017; Ransby 2003; Spencer 2016). The lineage of Black women’s crusade for liberation can be traced to their leadership in resistance in slave quarters on plantations (Davis 1972; Hartman 2016). Black women were not mere bystanders of the process of their dehumanization but actively challenged their oppressions, in that they participated in slave rebellions and uprisings, or resisted enslavement through various forms, including death (Davis 1972). For the current chapter, I situate Black Feminism in the historicity of Black women’s
development and engagement with antiracist and antisexist discourses and their involvement in social movements and social justice projects, which are inextricably intertwined (e.g., Collins 2019a).

Among the concepts in Black Feminism, that of intersectionality may be more familiar to a wider audience, because of its “travels” to various disciplines, including the field of higher education (Harris and Patton 2019). The concept of intersectionality foundationally reflects a larger Black feminist intellectual and activist tradition (Collins 2019a; Cooper 2016; Hancock 2016; Nash 2019). Common accounts denote the 1960s and 1970s as when the concept of intersectionality was initially developed (e.g., Harris and Patton 2019).

However, before critical legal scholar and Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term that emerged in academic and legal discourse as intersectionality in the late 1980s (Collins 2019a), Black women were describing and documenting how the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality shaped their treatment in US society. In 1861, Harriet Ann Jacobs introduced the enslaved Black woman as the subject while exposing the ills of American slavery in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Early narratives and writings of scholars and activists like Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Frances Beal, and Angela Davis also addressed the structural oppression of Black women based on race and gender (see Hancock 2016, for an account of the evolution of Black feminist theory and intersectionality since the 1800s). In 1974, the Combahee River Collective, a collective of Black lesbian feminists, called for the “development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Hull et al. 1982, p. 13). In framing this activity as Black feminist theorizing, Cooper (2016) states

this body of proto-intersectionality theorizing advanced the idea that systems of oppression—namely, racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism—worked together to create a set of social conditions under which black women and other women of color lived and labored, always in kind of invisible but ever-present social jeopardy (p. 5).

As evidenced in the teachings and praxis of Black feminists, intersectionality is a social justice project that is invested in a political struggle against multiple systems of oppression that constrained those with marginalized identities’ life chances (Collins 2019b). This chapter considers how the application of Black Feminist Thought can be expanded beyond the concept of intersectionality to examine equity in higher education.

**Black Feminist Thought**

Black Feminism includes intellectual lines of inquiry that incorporate diverse disciplinary origins, political connotations, and purposes. Specifically, Black Feminism encompasses Black Feminist Thought (Collins 2002), Critical Race Feminism (Wing 1997), intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), and womanism (Walker 2004).
As such, Black Feminist Thought is an “arm of Black Feminism” (Collins 2019a) and is applied here to theorize college-going pathways. As outlined by Collins (1986, 2002), there is not one prescriptive method on how to apply Black Feminism, but Black Feminism approaches center antiracist and antiseXist research and activism (Evans-Winters 2019; Guy-Sheftall 1995).

Black Feminist Thought is a critical social theory that “encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black women as a collectivity” (Collins 2002, p. 9). Put differently, Black Feminist Thought is the “ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women (Collins 1986, p. S16). As a theory and methodological process, Black Feminist Thought is a framework to analyze race, class, gender, and sexuality within a system of power and oppression. Black Feminist Thought relies on Black women’s standpoints to analyze the construction of structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power that hinder life opportunities for Black women. It postulates that analyzing these constructions can also lead to transformation and undoing of oppressive structures.

As a theoretical approach, Black Feminist Thought has the potential to advance the field of higher education and student affairs. Scholars have applied Black Feminism to examine the experiences of undergraduate and doctoral students, faculty and administrators, and education leadership. In arguing that Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory can be applied to enhance theories of student development and socialization, Howard-Hamilton (2003) contends that “the use of a single lens or perspective, even one including a “melting pot” view of diversity, cannot help all students, particularly African American women, to feel secure about immersing themselves in the university environment” (p. 20). Following Howard-Hamilton’s perspective that Black Feminist Thought can enrich the field of higher education, I apply it to the study of college “choice.”

For this theoretical contribution, I apply three concepts of Black Feminist Thought: (1) self-definition and self-valuation, (2) the interlocking nature of oppression, and (3) the importance of Black women’s culture to make sense of the factors that constrain Black girl’s and women’s college “choice.” In relation to these themes, I first discuss the importance of the Black Feminist concept of controlling images that necessitate self-definition and self-valuation as interventions to affirm the agency of Black women and girls to draw on their cultural strengths to navigate college and life pathways, expanding their capacity to reach their highest potential. In the following section, I begin by describing what controlling images are to interrogate how various stereotypes about Black women and girls influence institutional behaviors that shape college “choice.”

**Controlling Images**

Black feminist critics contend that controlling images are mechanisms to control, dehumanize, and exploit Black women and Black womanhood (Collins 2002). Defined as external, socially constructed stereotypes, controlling images are used to objectify Black women and justify discriminatory practices. As such, controlling images “make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to
be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Collins 2002, p. 69). Taken for granted, the stereotypes of Black women and girls are hegemonic, ideological symbols that shape individual consciousness, relationships with others, and societal values. Though often examined in public policy, cinema, and media (Bogle 2002; Hancock 2004; Wallace-Sanders 2008), I apply the concept of controlling images to understand Black women’s educational experiences that are relevant to college “choice.”

Historical and contemporary controlling images of Black women include the mammy, the matriarch, the sapphire, and the Black lady. The mammy is a stereotype of jolly Black mothers that sacrifice their family and self (Wallace-Sanders 2008). The mammy “symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power” because she knows and accepts her subordinate position (Collins 2002, p. 72). Within the context of the exploitation of Black women’s labor, the mammy as a controlling image depicts Black women as aggressive, independent, asexual, and overly devoted to their work (Collins 2002).

Within the white gaze, the working status and position of the Black matriarch within familial households emasculates Black men, and Black women’s work commitments are also perverted to suggest how they are unable to properly care for their children and their educational needs (Collins 2002). Originating in pioneer Black sociologist Edward Franklin Frazier’s (1939) book The Negro Family in the United States, the concept of the Black matriarch or “matriarchate” was invoked to describe Black women’s survival response to subordination under racism and capitalism. As pointed out by scholars, however, Frazier’s lack of specificity in defining this concept left it open to deficit interpretations and applications (Allen 1995; Collins 2002), as evidenced in Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s (1965) study, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, commonly referred to as the Moynihan Report. The Moynihan Report popularized an ideology that Black women who failed to fulfill their traditional “womanly” duties at home contributed to social problems in Black civil society (Collins 2002, p. 75).

Through the pervasiveness and durability of the controlling image of the Black matriarch, “black women became scapegoats, responsible for the psychological emasculation of black men and for the failure of the black community to gain parity with the white community” (Dill 1979, p. 548). In the higher education setting, Jacqueline Fleming (1983) found that Black undergraduate women on predominantly white campuses developed confident and assertive traits that could be associated with the Black matriarch controlling image. In her interpretation, having to navigate and negotiate white supremacy and patriarchy in historically white institutions required Black women to develop confidence and assertiveness.

A contemporary version of a controlling image that bridges the mammy and matriarch is the Black lady. Black ladies are assertive Black women that “stayed in school, worked hard, and have achieved much” and who have become “middle-class professional Black women who represent a modern version of the politics of respectability advanced by the club women” (Collins 2002, pp. 80–81). Similar to how Collins (2002) demonstrates how the depictions of “welfare queen” and “Black lady” work together to construct classed images of Black women, their femininity,
and work, the construction of Black girls as either “loudies and ladies” (Morris 2007), “good and ghetto” (Jones 2010), and/or ratchet girls are controlling images that stigmatize and limit educational opportunity (Morris 2016; Watson 2016). Previous scholarship has also drawn connections between these deviant characterizations of Black girls and the controlling image of the sapphire. The sapphire is described as “emasculating, loud, aggressive, angry, stubborn, and unfeminine” (Epstein et al. 2017, 5).

There is evidence to indicate that controlling images of Black women adversely shape Black women and girls’ educational experiences in the United States (Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010). In the schoolyard and in the classroom, Black girls are often rendered as ghetto, “a euphemism for actions that deviate from social norms tied to a narrow, white middle-class definition of femininity” (Morris 2016, p. 10). Sociologist Nikki Jones (2010) argues that the construction of ghetto Black girls is juxtaposed to a Black respectability politics that instructs and deems what is acceptable behavior, and Black women following this respectability politics “distance themselves from behavioral displays of physical aggression or overt sexuality” (Jones 2010, p. 8).

Black respectability politics may impose expectations to conform to certain standards of behavior, including those of white femininity, but Black girls, especially those who live in neighborhoods with pervasive structural and interpersonal violence, encounter myriad challenges to survive and defend themselves (Jones 2010). Such conditions of economic deprival and exploitation, gendered racism, segregation, and gentrification necessitate resistive responses for protection and survival. Locating “ghetto girls” outside the caricature of being a “Black lady” or a “good girl” pervades school officials’ perceptions about Black girls and how they should behave. In schools, the image of Black girls as ghetto is read as nonconformity, and there is evidence that it can be utilized to exercise what has been well documented as excessive discipline of Black girls in the K-12 system (e.g., Morris 2016). Moreover, Black girls tend to be viewed as loud and abrasive when they are assertive in the K-12 classroom (Fordham 1993; Morris 2007). Howard-Hamilton (2003) contends that the application of stereotypes of Black women in higher education to educational practices can infringe on Black women’s educational and career opportunities.

As a remnant of historical caricatures of Black women and their roles in the community and wider society, including the trope of the Black matriarch, Black women have come to be portrayed as advantaged in comparison to Black men, a framing that, as described below, encompasses terms like “resilience” and “model minority.” Here Black girls and women are commonly framed as being “resilient,” while Black boys and men are perpetually in a “crisis” (Neal-Jackson 2018) or “endangered” (Butler 2013) state. In a related vein, Black women have come to be viewed as a “model minority” within their race (discussed in more detail below), and this phenomenon adversely affects resources for Black women’s education. Interventions for Black boys and adolescents have become well-funded to address their needs (Dumas and Nelson 2016), for example, the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, which aimed “to improve measurably the expected educational and life outcomes for
and address the persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color” (Office of the Press Secretary, White House 2014), has received at least $200 million in funding (Neal-Jackson 2018). By contrast, although significant evidence indicates that Black women face unique and comparative challenges to Black men, the investment in the similar initiatives to serve Black women and girls and women is estimated to be less than 1 million dollars (Cooper 2014; Neal-Jackson 2018). Disparate resources afforded to Black men and women’s educational advancement initiatives circumscribe Black women’s college “choice.”

In association with the resilient controlling image, the model minority controlling image has also been applied to Black women. The model minority image is a stereotypical image of high achievement and success that functions as a tool in “discrediting one racially minoritized group’s real struggles with racial barriers and discrimination through the valorization of oversimplified stereotypes of another racially minoritized group” (Poon et al. 2016, p. 474). Usually applied to Asian Americans in the media and popular discourse, the model minority myth has been critiqued by scholars (Chang 2011; Museus and Kiang 2009) because it is an “insidious racial device used to uphold a global system of racial hierarchies and white supremacy” (Poon et al. 2016, p. 474).

More recently, the model minority controlling image has been applied to Black women in understanding their educational experiences and outcomes. For example, Kaba (2008) states

the model minority concept could now be extended to include Black American women, because even more than Asian Americans, they have been the subgroup to have suffered the most in the history of not only the USA, but the entire Western Hemisphere or the New World. However, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Black American women are among the most productive members of the American society (p.331).

Headlines of popular news media have crowned Black women as the “most educated group” in the United States, although, as indicated earlier, the evidence distorts the realities of Black women’s educational attainment (Bronner Helm 2016; Davis 2016). For example, across all racial groups (not just among Black folks), women are more likely to be enrolled in college compared to their male counterparts (NCES 2019b), yet, as discussed earlier, there is an emphasis in research and policy on this enrollment gap among Black students in particular. Further, analyses of Black women’s college enrollment patterns reveal that they disproportionately attend for-profit institutions in comparison to other groups, a pattern that can adversely affect their educational attainment and college debt (Davis et al. 2020; Espinosa et al. 2019). Moreover, Black women’s 6-year graduation rates from 4-year institutions are among the lowest of all racial groups, with the exception of those of Indigenous students (NCES 2019f).

Further, the research on Black women’s and girls’ experiences in the United States carceral state disrupts the dominant narrative that Black girls are shielded from gendered racism and state-sanctioned and education violence (Wun 2016, 2018). In reference to the murder of Tamir Rice, Morris (2016) provides a particularly vivid portrayal of how Black girls are adversely affected by police violence:
Even in high-profile cases involving boys, we often fail to see the girls who were right there alongside them...officers tackled his fourteen-year-old sister to the ground and handcuffed her. Not only had she just watched her little brother die at the hands of these officers, but she was forced to grieve his death from the backseat of a police car (p. 2).

Assertions that Black women, or any racially minoritized group, are an exemplar for other disenfranchised groups to emulate obscure how white supremacy, including that related to state sanctioned violence, impacts the everyday lives and opportunities of minoritized groups. The argument of a “new model minority” inflicts harm to Black women and men because it implies that accountability for societal equity rests on the individual and/or status group to overcome institutional barriers, instead of interrogating how systems of oppression impede on the potential for equitable livelihoods across race and gender.

As noted earlier, critics have pointed out that “the failure to account for racism/white supremacy gender/patriarchy when considering Black collegiate women’s experiences is nonsensical at least and absurd at best” (Patton and Croom 2017, p. 2). While the rhetoric of a “new model minority” may be absurd, given the evidence cited earlier, its implications nonetheless extend into empirical research as well as popular media. For example, Black men are currently the most researched racial group in education studies (Harper and Newman 2016). Such research is warranted and definitely needed. Yet, too often the rationale for research with Black men and boys centers comparing their plights to Black women and girls’ educational attainment and perceived academic success. As noted before, the constant portrayal of Black men and boys in crisis dominates social science literature and influences or reinforces the proliferation of outreach, policies, and initiatives that almost exclusively focus on enriching the education and life opportunities for Black (and Latinx) men (Butler 2013; Dumas and Nelson 2016), while initiatives to support Black women are hardly resourced at all in comparison.

The advantaged Black woman trope, as a descendant of the Black matriarch controlling image, reflects the accumulation of persistent trends to pathologize Black woman and to misinterpret statistical data on educational attainment, including data related to college access and “choice.” The failure to see Black women and girls beyond hyperbolic caricatures of educational success results in inadequate approaches to address expanding Black women’s college access and cultivate enriching experiences that support their aspirations to reach their highest potential, thus compromising Black women’s potential for college “choice.” In examining the historical and ideological underpinnings of the educational advantage of Black women, we can identify the limitations of incomplete portrayals and move toward a research agenda that reframes Black women and girls worthy of an education and a life that does not necessitate taxing endurance and resilience against adversity. Further, organizing policy and programmatic approaches to address Black girl’s and women’s unique needs can expand their potential to pursue a wider range of postsecondary possibilities and to expand their college “choice” options.
Interlocking Nature of Oppression

Evidence about the consequences of the prevalence and enactment of these controlling images of Black women and girls indicates how these stereotypes perpetuate interlocking racialized, gendered, and class systems that can channel Black girls’ and women’s opportunities into narrower confines of college “choice.” For instance, studies have found how school officials and educator’s negative perceptions of Black girls are biased in that they reflect the personnel’s preconceived notions about students, and yet penalize students and disrupt their educational pursuits (Crenshaw et al. 2015a; Morris 2016). From this perspective, controlling images of Black girls in the K-12 education can influence how institutional agents and teachers in schools treat these girls. In essence, this treatment embodies the enactment of interlocking systems of power in schools which can affect whether these girls are pushed out of the education system, pursue higher education, seek vocational training, in the criminal legal system, or follow other alternative life paths.

One critical case where interlocking systems of power is exercised involves the disproportionate disciplinary rates of Black girls by school officials and administrators (e.g., Morris 2016). Morris and Perry (2017) have found that disciplinary action imposed on Black girls is typically conducted through ofﬁce referrals, and that Black girls are often cited for dress code violations, disruptive behavior, and disobedience, which are offenses that open to ofﬁcials’ interpretation and susceptible to ambiguity, subjectiveness, and implicit bias. In their analysis of disciplinary data of Denver Public Schools, Annamma et al. (2019) found that Black girls were suspended at rates higher than other girls, than white and Latino boys, and more than the school district average. These researchers concluded that excessive discipline and policing practices are exercised through filters of controlling images and dominant narratives about Black women and girls (Annamma et al. 2019).

The punitive inequalities experienced by Black girls are perpetuated by the dominant discourses about Black girlhood and Blackness. Black girls often challenge hegemonic notions of docile femininity (Morris 2007), and behaving outside of white norms of femininity (e.g., Collins 2002; Fleming 1983) can lead school ofﬁcials to render Black girls outside of femininity itself. In such cases, “Blackness compromises and modifies perceptions of appropriate femininity, which is coded as white” (Morris and Perry 2017, p. 144). Interlocking with racism and sexism, other systems of power including classism, heterosexism, able-bodiedness and colorism preclude Black girls from conforming with narrow cis-white narratives of girlhood that are privileged in schooling. For example, Morris (2016) found that a gender nonconforming Black youth was characterized as a “distraction” and “disruptive” by their teachers, a characterization which led to excessive disciplinary measures against the student. Such policing reﬂects a desire to surveillance and punish Blackness and othered genders. And even more so, excessive and inappropriate policing deprives Black girls of experiencing a full childhood (Morris 2016).

Historical analyses and current research indicate that over time, in contrast to their non-Black peers, Black girls have often not been perceived as children, but rather, as adults. Adultiﬁcation is a term that “comprises contextual, social, and developmental processes in which you are prematurely, and often inappropriately, exposed to adult
knowledge and assume extensive adult roles and responsibilities within their family networks” (Burton 2007, p. 329). For Black children, adultification has historical lineages to the institution of slavery. For example, enslaved Black children were expected to work and live under the same repressive conditions as enslaved Black adults and elders (Dumas and Nelson 2016). Further, enslaved Black children were often separated from their families and auctioned to different plantations as a method to control and alienate the Black child. The Black child was systematically denied a “childhood.” Reflecting and mirroring the horrors of the past, there continues to be systemic cultural prejudice that becomes operationalized in social policy and everyday institutional practices. But more than prejudice, Black children are subject to a process of dehumanization. While prejudice signifies negative attitudes that can lead to discrimination, dehumanization involves something far more dangerous: a construction of the Other as not human, as less than human, and therefore undeserving of the emotional and moral recognition accorded to those whose share humanity is understood. (Dumas and Nelson 2016, p. 29)

In a report, Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood, researchers conducted a community survey to elicit data on perceptions about children’s innocence and adultification. Among 325 adults, with 74% of participants being white, the survey data indicated that Black girls are viewed by adults as knowing more about sex and adult topics than other girls (Epstein et al. 2017). They are also perceived as having independent personality characteristics, a perspective associated with school officials’ views that Black girls need less support and protection to navigate school. Taken together, the educational violence that Black girls endure in school contribute to a “spirit murdering,” which is “the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism” (Love 2016, p. 2).

The intersection of systems of oppression adversely impacts college-going pathways and decision-making as revealed in Black women’s educational experiences: “The criminalization of Black girls is much more than a street phenomenon. It has extended into our schools, disrupting one of the most important protective factors in a girl’s life: her education” (Morris 2016, p. 3). The unfair disciplinary practices that target Black girls restrict their educational opportunities. As contended by Annamma et al. 2019, “channeling Black girls out of schools and into carceral institutions, schools are protecting education for the most privileged...education is a property right instilled by Whiteness, with the absolute right to exclude those outside of Whiteness” (p. 217). The school-to-prison nexus indicates how disciplinary practices and punishment within schools can lead to educational pushout and incarceration.

The sanctioning of students via suspension, expulsion, or grade retention is the strongest predictor of incarceration among adolescent girls (Annamma et al. 2019; Wald and Losen 2003). Previous college “choice” studies have found repeating a grade (often necessitated with incarceration) is associated with being pushed out of high school and not pursuing college. Further, incarceration can have a lasting impact on an individual’s college and career aspirations. For example, incarceration and/or one’s conviction can be used to deny college admissions (Annamma 2018) and to restrict or deny financial aid eligibility for federal and many state programs
(Custer and Akaeze 2019). This is important, given that the provision of financial aid has been shown to influence decisions for low-income, Black students and the growing population of formerly incarcerated students and students in prisons (Castro and Zamani-Gallaher 2018).

Moreover, the excessive exercise of school discipline interrupts academic and college preparation. Even when punishment does not necessarily involve law enforcement, detention in school detracts from students’ educational time to pursue required academic coursework for college. This is especially concerning given research that has shown academic and college preparation is the strongest predictor of college enrollment (e.g., Cabrera and La Nasa 2000). Excessive discipline also informs the biases of teachers and counselors on the extent to which certain students are provided college knowledge and who receives alternative options, if any at all. Muhammad and Dixson (2008), addressing the well-documented fact that Black girls are overrepresented in vocational tracks, questioned whether this condition is due to a “…concerted effort on the part of these students to get ahead in the workforce…or whether these women, who are most likely ‘average’ students, are being pushed out of the general curricular track on to tracks where more success for people ‘like them’ is perceived” (p. 171). In sum, academic and disciplinary trends regarding Black girls in K-12 schooling can shape the extent to which these girls have full agency in college “choice.”

**Black Women’s Culture, Self-definition, and Self-valuation**

Black women’s culture refers to “the ideological frame of reference – namely, the symbols and values of self-definition and self-valuation – that assist Black women in seeing the circumstances shaping race, class, and gender oppression” (Collins 1986, S22). With the contention that Black girls’ socialization and identity development is racialized and gendered, consideration on how students come to know who they are, their social positions, and how to navigate their social worlds is imperative.

Research has expanded to apply an intersectional lens to examine the identity development and socialization of Black women and girls (Mims and Williams 2020; Porter 2017; Porter et al. 2020). Lauren Mims and Joanna Williams (2020) applied the multiple worlds model (Phelan et al. 1991) to examine how families, peer groups, classrooms, and schools shape what and how Black girls learn about race and racism. The authors approached the study with the assumption that Black girls navigate different worlds that may or may not be congruent with each other (i.e., homelife and school). Examining identity development within the context of systems of oppressions, the authors found Black adolescent girls’ understandings of race were based on their social interactions that predominantly occurred within schools. The prevalence of dehumanized portrayals of Black women in the curriculum and experiences of being ridiculed by peers because of those of images influenced students’ understandings of race and their own racial identity development. Mims and Williams (2020) concluded that “Black girls’ discussions of what being their own race meant to them indicated that they were connecting race with social processes related to bias and discrimination” (p. 118).
The interplay between oppression, consciousness, and activism that is so salient to Black women’s lives and ways of knowing (Collins 1986) could also be salient to their college “choice.” Collins (1986) argues that

Black women’s culture suggests that the relationship between oppressed people’s consciousness of oppression and the actions they take in dealing with oppressive structures may be far more complex than that suggested by existing social theory. Conventional social science continues to assume a fit between consciousness and activity; hence, accurate measures of human behavior are thought to produce accurate portraits of human consciousness of self and social structure (p. S23).

Because Black women and girls are not monolith, their college decisions and the processes that shape those decisions may vary. Such processes may be attributed to the various ways that students exercise their agency as they navigate their social worlds.

Considering Black women’s potential to enact the agency in their educational pathways, the appeal of advancing a new positive trope in place of limiting and controlling images to apply to their educational experiences is captivating. However, Collins (1986) asserts that “replacing negative stereotypes with ostensibly positive ones can be equally problematic if the function of stereotypes as controlling images remains unrecognized” (p. S17). To truly expand Black women’s college “choice” possibilities, it is critical to develop research and praxis perspectives and approaches that fully and authentically honor their humanity and well-being.

Accordingly, the Black feminist concepts of self-definition and self-valuation are of particular relevance to understanding the capacity to broaden Black women’s educational opportunities. Self-definition refers to affirming Black women’s lived experiences as fully human (Collins 1986). Self-valuation “stresses the content of Black women’s self-definition – namely, replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female images” (Collins 1986, p. S17). This concept centers on Black women as subjects – persons who are shaped and shaping their social context and the lives they live on their own terms.

As noted, in her education research on the experiences of Black collegiate women, Fleming (1983) challenged the Black matriarch controlling image, asserting that the persistence of this stereotype resulted from biased research that implicitly or explicitly compared the experiences of Black women to those of white women with respect to work and labor:

Perhaps the real truth is not that black women are stronger or more dominant than black men, but rather that they are less passive and dependent less “feminine,” in terms of white stereotypes than white women. (p. 43)

Her findings suggest the importance of understanding Black women’s postsecondary experiences on their own terms – rather than in relationship to an inappropriate and unrealistic (and in this case majoritarian) standard. Thus, Fleming’s (1983) findings confirmed the necessity of self-definition and self-valuation in examining women’s experiences in domains such as higher education (Collins 1986, 2002).
One recent example of self-valuation and self-definition can be found in a recent scholarly, praxis-oriented, and activist response to the pervasiveness of inaccurate narratives around how the carceral state affects Black women and girls. The African American Policy Forum founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Luke Charles Harris have developed initiatives (i.e., #WhyWeCan’tWait) and campaigns (i.e., #SayHerName) to address the status of Black women in education and their suffering at the hands of state violence (Crenshaw et al. 2015b). This includes combatting the invisibility of Black women in My Brother’s Keeper and public discourses surrounding the Movement for Black Lives (Black Lives Matter) (which contradict controlling images of Black women as advantaged). Their report, Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected analyzed how school discipline impacts Black girls and has deepened the knowledge on the prison-to-school nexus (Crenshaw et al. 2015a). This form of knowledge production is linked to praxis that works to dismantle oppressive power relations and transform public policy and discourse.

In the context of Black women and girls’ college “choice,” self-definition and self-valuation challenge narrow orientations that reinforce intersection systems of oppression that subordinate Black women and girls in education and society. As the evidence discussed in this review indicates, controlling images and tropes like “ladies and loudies” (Morris 2007) or “good and ghetto” (Jones 2010), and the associated surveillance and over policing of Black girls forecloses the capacity to obtain a full range of educational options in K-12 schooling, with significant consequences in constraining college “choice.” Conversely, when Black girls are inappropriately perceived as being advantaged, their specific challenges become invisible, and opportunities are missed on how to fully address the challenges they may be encountering. A Black feminist perspective and associated concepts can be applied to inquiry about college “choice” about populations beyond Black women and girls. Engaging with questions such as the following can expand considerations of how power structures enhance or constrain students’ postsecondary options:

(1) What controlling images and stereotypes affect a population’s access to college-going resources? How do practices related to these controlling images expand or constrain such resources? For example, how does the model minority myth regarding Asian Americans affect the support offered by teachers and school personnel to Hmong students and other Asian American ethnic subgroups with far lower than average college-going rates? (e.g., Museus et al. 2016).

(2) What interlocking systems of power affect a population’s capacity to pursue a full range of college options? For example, how do systems such as racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and nativism constrain or enhance postsecondary options for Afro-Latinx students who might be considering attending HBCUs, where they might encounter distinctive kinds of microaggressions? (Palmer and Maramba 2015).

(3) How do members of minoritized communities draw on their cultural resources such as college conocimiento in the case of Latinx students (Acevedo-Gil 2017) to challenge and navigate interlocking and oppressive power structures that constrain college “choice”?
How do self-definition and self-valuation based on a student’s cultural background affect college “choice”? For example, how does an emphasis on “giving back” to one’s community, as evidenced in U.S. Native and indigenous communities (e.g., Reyes 2019), influence where, how, and for what purpose members of these communities pursue postsecondary education?

As evidenced in this review, such applications of Black Feminist Theory show great potential to help scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and activists specify dimensions of economic, political, and social power structures that can serve as sites for interventions to expand college “choice” for minoritized groups and to identify and develop institutional processes that foster greater equity in college opportunity.

**Conclusion: New Imaginings and Possibilities**

Looking to advance college “choice” research, policy and practice, Bergerson (2009) called for increased attention to the specific experiences of groups with different social identities as they move through the college choice process...[and] solutions for the stratification of higher education in educational systems, social contexts, and policies...enhancing the ability to identify and address the barriers (p. 113).

This review extends college “choice” research on the connection between racial identity and college pathways to invite examining Black and minoritized students’ college “choice” in ways that situate college decisions within structural systems of power and oppression. Examining whether and to what extent students account for forms of domination like racism, patriarchy, classism, heteronormativity, and nativism when making a college “choice” can expand the understanding of how students construct a “consideration set” (McDonough 1997) of college options. Simultaneously, such an examination can also illuminate how these systems of power contribute to constructing – and often limiting – that set of college options.

Like other critical social theories that focus on the role of institutional and societal power in affecting life chances, Black Feminist Thought provides analytical tools to examine the oppression of minoritized students and to draw on the resulting knowledge to develop equitable pathways into higher education for all students, particularly Black women and girls. Black Feminist Thought provides a lens to examine power relations and the intersection of systems of oppression as forces that have shaped and continues to shape the higher education and who has access to college participation.

Realizing equity in educational and life opportunities requires transformative change in which systems that infringe upon minoritized groups are dismantled and abolished. Collins (2002) argued that “... becoming empowered requires more than changing the consciousness of individual Black women via Black community development strategies. Empowerment also requires transforming unjust social
institutions that African-Americans encounter from one generation to the next” (p. 273). Her concept of the matrix of domination illuminates how societal power structures work in tandem to circumscribe college pathways and “choice.” Collins’s (2002) concept of matrix of domination recognizes a full range of individual, cultural, and structural factors intertwined with interlocking systems of power shown to affect Black students’ college “choice” in this chapter’s review. Future studies can employ Black Feminist Thought and other critical lenses to examine how racialized and gendered violence, homelessness, and criminalization contribute to limiting postsecondary opportunity structures for minoritized students (Edwards 2020; Huerta et al. 2020).

As of 2020, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has raised significant uncertainty about how higher education will serve students with diverse backgrounds. Further, the consequences of the pandemic could exacerbate the already widespread economic, social, political, and educational inequality. Simultaneously, through worldwide protests, Black folks and others are challenging how global antiBlack racism, racial capitalism, and white supremacy have asymmetrically distributed life opportunities toward historically advantaged groups. It is a pivotal time for higher education scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to redress the various ways postsecondary inequities have been maintained through the construction and maintenance of racist, gendered, capitalist, nativist, and associated power structures. Rapid responses to the pandemic’s consequences in higher education that have necessitated quick shifts to online learning in 2020, or to some universities waiving their typical SAT and ACT testing college admissions requirements, ought to illustrate that historically resisted innovations can be implemented quickly, when the political will is there. Such lessons can be applied to future innovations to expand equity in higher education.

References

Abrica, E. J., García-Louis, C., & Gallaway, C. D. J. (2020). Antiblackness in the Hispanic-serving community college (HSCC) context: Black male collegiate experiences through the lens of settler colonial logics. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 23*(1), 55–73.

Acevedo-Gil, N. (2015). Critical race case study on college choice. In G. Q. Conchas & B. M. Hinga (Eds.), *Cracks in the schoolyard-confronting Latino educational inequality* (pp. 37–53). Teachers College Press.

Acevedo-Gil, N. (2017). College-conocimiento: Toward an interdisciplinary college choice framework for Latinx students. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 20*(6), 829–850.

Acevedo-Gil, N. (2019). College-going facultad: Latinx students anticipating postsecondary institutional obstacles. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 18*(2), 107–125.

Allen, W. R. (1995). African American family life in societal context: Crisis and hope. *Sociological Forum, 10*(4), 569–592.

Allen, W. R., & Jewell, J. O. (2002). A backward glance forward: Past, present and future perspectives on historically Black colleges and universities. *The Review of Higher Education, 25*(3), 241–261.

Allen, W. R., Jewell, J. O., Griffin, K. A., & Wolf, D. S. S. (2007). Historically Black colleges and universities: Honoring the past, engaging the present, touching the future. *The Journal of Negro Education, 76*(3), 263–280.
Allen, W. R., McLewis, C., Jones, C., & Harris, D. (2018). From Bakke to Fisher: African American students in US higher education over forty years. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 4*(6), 41–72.

Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*. University of North Carolina Press.

Annamma, S. A. (2018). Mapping consequential geographies in the carceral state: Education journey mapping as a qualitative method with girls of color with dis/abilities. *Qualitative Inquiry, 24*(1), 20–34.

Annamma, S. A., Anyon, Y., Joseph, N. M., Farrar, J., Greer, E., Downing, B., & Simmons, J. (2019). Black girls and school discipline: The complexities of being overrepresented and understudied. *Urban Education, 54*(2), 211–242.

Anzaldúa, G. (2002). Now let us shift: *Conocimiento...the path of inner work, public acts*, in Anzaldúa, Gloria and Analouise Keating. *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. Routledge.

Baber, L. D., Zamani-Gallaher, E. M., Stevenson, T. N., & Porter, J. (2019). From access to equity: Community colleges and the social justice imperative. In M. B. Paulsen & L. W. Perna (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 203–240). Springer.

Bergerson, A. A. (2009). Special issue: College choice and access to college: Moving policy, research, and practice to the 21st Century. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 35*(4), 1–141.

Blain, K. N. (2018). *Set the world on fire: Black nationalist women and the global struggle for freedom*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bronner Helm, A. (2016). Black women now the most educated group in US. *The Root*. https://www.theroot.com/black-women-now-the-most-educated-group-in-us-1790855540.

Brown, S. (2017). *Mizzou’s freshman enrollment has dropped by 35% in 2 years. Here’s what’s going on*. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/Mizzou-s-Freshman-Enrollment24036.

Browne, S. (2015). *Dark matters: On the surveillance of blackness*. Duke University Press.

Bumpus, J. P., Umeh, Z., & Harris, A. L. (2020). Social class and educational attainment: Do blacks benefit less from increases in parents’ social class status? *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 6*(2), 223–241.

Burton, L. (2007). Childhood adulftification in economically disadvantaged families: A conceptual model. *Family Relations, 56*(4), 329–345.

Butler, D. (2010). Ethno-racial composition and college preference: Revisiting the perpetuation of segregation hypothesis. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 627*(1), 36–58.
Butler, P. (2013). Black male exceptionalism? The problems and potential of Black male-focused interventions. *DuBois Review, 10*(2), 485–511.

Butner, B., Caldera, Y., Herrera, P., Kennedy, F., Frame, M., & Childers, C. (2001). The college choice process of African American and Hispanic women: Implications for college transitions. *Journal of College Orientation and Transition, 9*(1), 24–32.

Byrd, W. C. (2017). *Poison in the Ivy: Race relations and the reproduction of inequality on elite college campuses*. Rutgers University Press.

Cabrera, A., & La Nasa, S. (2000). Understanding the college-choice process. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 27*(3), 5–22.

Carnevale, A. P. & Strohl, J. (2013). Separate and unequal: How higher education reinforces the intergenerational reproduction of white privilege. Georgetown University. https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/SeparateUnequal.FR_.pdf.

Carter, P. L. (2012). *Stubborn roots: Race, culture, and inequality in US and South African schools*. Oxford University Press.

Castro, E. L., & Zamani-Gallaher, E. M. (2018). Expanding quality higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated people: Committing to equity and protecting against exploitation. Association for the Study of Higher Education-National Institute for Transformation and Equity Paper Series. https://prisoneducationproject.utah.edu/research/expanding-quality-higher-education-for-currently-and-formerly-incarcerated-people-committing-to-equity-and-protecting-against-exploitation/.

Chambers, C. R., & Sharpe, R. V. (Eds.). (2012). Black female undergraduates on campus: Successes and challenges. Emerald Group.

Chang, M. J. (2011). Battle hymn of the model minority myth. *Amerasia Journal, 37*(2), 137–143.

Chapman, D. W. (1981). A model of student college choice. *The Journal of Higher Education, 52*(5), 490–505.

Chapman, T. K. (2014). Is integration a dream deferred? Students of color in majority white suburban schools. *The Journal of Negro Education, 83*(3), 311–326.

Chapman, T. K., Contreras, F., Comeaux, E., Martinez, E., Jr., & Rodriguez, G. M. (2020). High achieving African American students and the college choice process: Applying critical race theory. Routledge.

College Board. (2008). *Coming to our senses: Education and the American future*. Report of the commission on access, Admissions and success in higher education. https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/advocacy/admissions21century/coming-to-our-senses-college-board-2008.pdf.

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems, 33*(6), s14–s32.

Collins, P. H. (2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (2019a). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Duke University Press.

Collins, P. H. (2019b). The difference that power makes: Intersectionality and participatory democracy. In O. Hankivsky & J. S. Jordan-Zachery (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of intersectionality in public policy* (pp. 167–192). Palgrave Macmillan.

Collins, K. H., Joseph, N. M., & Ford, D. Y. (2020). Missing in action: Gifted Black girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. *Gifted Child Today, 43*(1), 55–63.

Comeaux, E., Chapman, T. K., & Contreras, F. (2020). The college access and choice processes of high-achieving African American students: A critical race theory analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 57*(1), 411–439.

Comfort, W.W. (1925). The choice of a college. The MacMillan Company.

Commodore, F., Baker, D. J., & Arroyo, A. T. (2018). *Black women college students: A guide to student success in higher education*. Routledge.

Contreras, F., Chapman, T. K., Comeaux, E., Rodriguez, G. M., Martinez, E., & Hutson, M. (2018). African American students’ college choice processes in a post 209 era. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 31*(8), 747–768.
Cooper, B. (2014). *Black girls’ zero sum struggle: Why we lose when Black boys dominate the discourse*. https://www.salon.com/2014/03/06/black_girls_zero_sum_struggle_why_we_lose_when_black_men_dominate_the_discourse/.

Cooper, B. (2016). Intersectionality. In L. Disch & M. Hawkesworth (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of feminist theory* (pp. 1–23). Oxford University Press.

Corwin, Z. B., Venegas, K. M., Oliverez, P. M., & Colyar, J. E. (2004). School counsel: How appropriate guidance affects educational equity. *Urban Education, 39*(4), 442–457.

Cox, R. D. (2016). Complicating conditions: Obstacles and interruptions to low-income students’ college “choices.”. *Journal of Higher Education, 87*(1), 1–26.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1988). Race, reform, and retrenchment: Transformation and legitimation in antidiscrimination law. *Harvard Law Review, 101*(7), 1331–1387.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.

Crenshaw, K. W., Ocean, P., & Nanda, J. (2015a). Black girls matter: Pushed out, over policed, and under protected. *African American Policy Forum*. https://aapf.org/recent/2014/12/coming-soon-blackgirlsmatter-pushed-out-overpoliced-and-underprotected.

Crenshaw, K., Ritchie, A. J., Anspach, R., Gilmer, R., & Harris, L. (2015b). *Say her name: Resisting police brutality against black women*. African American Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, Columbia Law School. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b080451158d8c/t/5edc95fba357687217b08fb8/1591514635487/SHNReportJuly2015.pdf.

Custer, B. D., & Akaeze, H. O. (2019). A typology of state financial aid grant programs using latent class analysis. *Research in Higher Education, 59*, 1–31.

Dache-Gerbino, A. (2018). College desert and oasis: A critical geographic analysis of local college access. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 11*(2), 97–116.

Dancy, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Davis, J. E. (2018). Historically white universities and plantation politics: Anti-Blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education, 53*(2), 176–195.

Davis, A. (1972). Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the community of slaves. *The Massachusetts Review, 13*(1/2), 81–100.

Davis, A. Y. (2012). The meaning of freedom: And other difficult dialogues. City Lights Publishers.

Davis, R. (2016). New study shows Black women are among the most educated group in the United States. *Essence*. https://www.essence.com/news/new-study-black-women-most-educated/.

Davis III, C. H. F., Mustaffa, J. B., King, K., & Jama, A. (2020). Legislation, Policy, and the Black Student Debt Crisis. Washington D.C.: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Deil-Amen, R., & Tevis, T. L. (2010). Circumscribed agency: The relevance of standardized college entrance exams for low SES high school students. *The Review of Higher Education, 33*(2), 141–175.

Dill, B. T. (1979). The dialectics of black womanhood. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 4*(3), 543–555.

Dillard, C. B. (2006). *On spiritual strivings: Transforming an African American woman’s academic life*. SUNY Press.

Dougherty, K. J., & Hong, E. (2005). *State systems of performance accountability for community colleges: Impacts and lessons for policymakers*. Jobs for the Future. https://academiccommons.columbia.edu doi/10.7916/D87M0HFF/download.

Dougherty, K. J., & Reddy, V. T. (2011). The impacts of state performance funding systems on higher education institutions: Research literature review and policy recommendations. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. https://academiccommons.columbia.edu doi/10.7916/D8XW4SSZ.

Dumas, M. J. (2016). Against the dark: Antiblackness in education policy and discourse. *Theory Into Practice, 55*(1), 11–19.

Dumas, M. J., & Nelson, J. D. (2016). (Re)Imagining Black boyhood: Toward a critical framework for educational research. *Harvard Educational Review, 86*(1), 27–47.
Dumas, M. J., & Ross, K. M. (2016). “Be real black for me”: Imagining BlackCrit in education. Urban Education, 51(4), 415–442.

Edwards, E. J. (2020). Young, Black, successful, and homeless: Examining the unique academic challenges of Black students who experienced homelessness. Journal of Children and Poverty, 84(3), 1–25.

Egerton, J. (1974). Adams v. Richardson: Can separate be equal? Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 6(10), 29–36.

Elliott, K. C., Warshaw, J. B., & DeGregory, C. A. (2019). Historically Black community colleges: A descriptive profile and call for context-based future research. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 43(10–11), 770–784.

Epstein, R., Blake, J., & Gonzalez, T. (2017). Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of black girls’ childhood. Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality. https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wpcontent/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf.

Espeland, W. N., & Sauder, M. (2007). Rankings and reactivity: How public measures recreate social worlds. American Journal of Sociology, 113(1), 1–40.

Espinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., Taylor, M., & Chessman, H. M. (2019). Race and ethnicity in higher education: A status report. American Council on Education. https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Race-and-Ethnicity-in-Higher-Education.aspx.

Evans, S. Y. (2008). Black women in the ivory tower, 1850–1954: An intellectual history. University Press of Florida.

Evans-Winters, V. E. (2011). Teaching Black girls: Resiliency in urban classrooms. Peter Lang.

Evans-Winters, V. E. (2019). Black Feminism in qualitative inquiry: A mosaic for writing our daughter’s body. Routledge.

Evans-Winters, V. E., & Esposito, J. (2010). Other people’s daughters: Critical race feminism and Black girls’ education. Educational Foundations, 24(1/2), 11–24.

Everett, K. D., & Croom, N. N. (2017). From discourse to practice: Making discourses about Black undergraduate womyn visible in higher education journals and student affairs practice. In L. D. Patton, & N. N. Croom (Eds.). Critical perspectives on Black women and college success (pp. 75–87). New York, NY: Routledge.

Farmer, A. D. (2017). Remaking Black power: How Black women transformed an era. University of North Carolina Press Books.

Fleming, J. (1983). Black women in Black and white college environments: The making of a matriarch. Journal of Social Issues, 39(3), 41–54.

Ford, D. Y., Harris, B. N., Byrd, J. A., & Walters, N. M. (2018). Blacked out and whitened out: The double bind of gifted Black females who are often a footnote in educational discourse. International Journal of Educational Reform, 27(3), 253–268.

Fordham, S. (1993). “Those loud Black girls”: (Black) women, silence, and gender “passing” in the academy. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 24(1), 3–32.

Foucault, M. (1977). Discipline and punish. Vintage Books.

Frazier, E. F. (1939). The Negro family in the United States. University of Chicago Press.

Freeman, K. (1999). HBCUs or PWIs? African American high school students’ consideration of higher education institution types. The Review of Higher Education, 23(1), 91–106.

Freeman, K. (2005). African Americans and college choice. SUNY Press.

Gaddis, S. M. (2013). The influence of habitus in the relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement. Social Science Research, 42(1), 1–13.

Gándara, D., & Hearn, J. C. (2019). College completion, the Texas way: An examination of the development of college completion policy in a distinctive political culture. Teachers College Record, 121(1), n1.

Garcia, N. M., & Mireles-Rios, R. (2019). “You were going to go to college”: The role of Chicano fathers’ involvement in Chicana daughters’ college choice. American Educational Research Journal. https://doi.org/10.3102/002831211982004.

Garcia, N. M., Irizarry, J. G., & Ruiz, Y. (2020). Al esconder, hide and seek: RicanStructing college choice for Puerto Rican students in urban schools. Race Ethnicity and Education, 23(1), 1–20.
George Mwangi, C. A., Thelamour, B., Ezeofor, I., & Carpenter, A. (2018). “Black elephant in the room”: Black students contextualizing campus racial climate within US racial climate. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*(4), 456–474.

Giddings, P. (1984). *When and where I enter: The impact of Black women on race and sex in America.* Bantam Books.

Gildersleeve, R. E. (2010). *Fracturing opportunity: Mexican migrant students & college-going literacy.* Peter Lang.

Goings, R. B., & Sewell, C. J. (2019). Outside connections matter: Reflections on the college choice process for gifted Black students from New York City. *The High School Journal, 102*(3), 189–209.

Goldrick-Rab, S. (2006). Following their every move: An investigation of social-class differences in college pathways. *Sociology of Education, 79*(1), 67–79.

Goldrick-Rab, S. (2016). *Paying the price: College costs, financial aid, and the betrayal of the American Dream.* University of Chicago Press.

Graves, D. L. (2019). *Cooling out in the verification process: A mixed methods exploration into the relevance of racism in community college students’ financial aid experiences.* Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles. [https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8g27x3pt](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8g27x3pt).

Griffin, K., del Pilar, W., McIntosh, K., & Griffin, A. (2012). “Oh, of course I’m going to go to college”: Understanding how habitus shapes the college choice process of Black immigrant students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 5*(2), 96–111.

Guy-Sheftall, B. (1995). *Words of fire: An anthology of African-American feminist thought.* The New Press.

Hancock, A. M. (2004). *The politics of disgust: The public identity of the welfare queen.* New York University Press.

Hancock, A. M. (2016). *Intersectionality: An intellectual history.* Oxford University Press.

Hardaway, A. T., Ward, L. W., & Howell, D. (2019). Black girls and womyn matter: Using Black feminist thought to examine violence and erasure in education. *Urban Education Research & Policy Annals, 6*(1), 31–46.

Harper, S. R. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *The Review of Higher Education, 36*(1), 9–29.

Harper, S. R., & Newman, C. B. (2016). Surprise, sense making, and success in the first college year: Black undergraduate men’s academic adjustment experiences. *Teachers College Record, 118*(6), 1–30.

Harper, S. R., & Simmons, I. (2019). Black students at public colleges and universities: A 50-state report card. University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center. [https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/black-students-at-public-colleges-and-universities.pdf](https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/black-students-at-public-colleges-and-universities.pdf).

Hartman, S. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review, 106*(8), 1707–1791.

Harris, P. J. (2003). Gatekeeping and remaking: The politics of respectability in African American women’s history and Black Feminism. *Journal of Women’s History, 15*(1), 212–220.

Harris, J. C., & Patton, L. D. (2019). Un/doing intersectionality through higher education research. *The Journal of Higher Education, 90*(3), 347–372.

Hartman, S. (2007). *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hartman, S. (2016). The belly of the world: A note on Black women’s labors. *Souls, 18*(1), 166–173.

Higginbotham, E. B. (1993). *Righteous discontent: The women’s movement in the Black Baptist church, 1880–1920.* Harvard University Press.

Hillman, N. W. (2016). Geography of college opportunity: The case of education deserts. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(4), 987–1021.

Hines-Datiri, D., & Carter Andrews, D. J. (2017). The effects of zero tolerance policies on Black girls: Using critical race feminism and figured worlds to examine school discipline. *Urban Education, 1–22.*
Holland, M. M. (2020). Framing the search: How first-generation students evaluate colleges. *The Journal of Higher Education, 91*(3), 378–401.

Horvat, E. M. (1997). Structure, standpoint and practices: The construction and meaning of the boundaries of blackness for African-American female high school seniors in the college choice process. Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, 1–31. [https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED407884.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED407884.pdf).

Horvat, E., & Davis, J. E. (2011). Schools as sites for transformation: Exploring the contribution of habitus. *Youth & Society, 43*(1), 142–170.

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three-phase model and the implications for policymakers. *College and University, 62*(3), 207–221.

Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2003). Theoretical frameworks for African American women. *New Directions for Student Services, 104*, 19–27.

Huerta, A. H., McDonough, P. M., Venegas, K. M., & Allen, W. R. (2020). College is . . .: focusing on the college knowledge of gang-associated Latino young men. *Urban Education.* [https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920934854](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920934854).

Hughes, R. P., Kimball, E. W., & Koricek, A. (2019). The dual commodification of college-going: Individual and institutional influences on access and choice. In M. B. Paulsen & L. W. Perna (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 415–477). Springer.

Hull, G. T., Scott, P. B., & Smith, B. (Eds.). (1982). *All the women are white, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black Women’s Studies.* The Feminist Press.

Hurtado, S. (2007). The study of college impact. In P. J. Gumport (Ed.), *Sociology of education* (pp. 94–112). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pedersen, A. R., & Allen, W. R. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practices. *Review of Higher Education, 21*(3), 279–302.

Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C. L., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., & Arellano, L. (2012). A model for diverse learning environments. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 41–122). Springer.

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). The condition of education 2020 (NCES 2020-144). *U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.* [https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144](https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144).

Iloh, C. (2018). Toward a new model of college “choice” for a twenty-first-century context. *Harvard Educational Review, 88*(2), 227–244.

Iloh, C., & Toldson, I. A. (2013). Black students in 21st century higher education: A closer look at the role of for-profit colleges and community colleges. *Journal of Negro Education, 82*(3), 205–212.

Jaquette, O., Curs, B. R., & Posselt, J. R. (2016). Tuition rich, mission poor: Nonresident enrollment growth and the socioeconomic and racial composition of public research universities. *The Journal of Higher Education, 87*(5), 635–673.

Jez, S. J. (2012). Analyzing the female advantage in college access among African Americans. In C. R. Chambers & R. V. Sharpe (Eds.), *Black female undergraduates on campus: successes and challenges* (pp. 43–57). Emerald Group.

Johnson, J. M. (2017). Choosing HBCUs: Why African Americans choose HBCUs in the twenty-first century. In C. M. Brown II & T. E. Dancy II (Eds.), *Black colleges across the Diaspora: Global perspectives on race and stratification in postsecondary education* (pp. 151–169). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Johnson, J. M. (2019). Pride or prejudice? Motivations for choosing Black colleges. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 56*(4), 409–422.

Jones, N. (2010). *Between good and ghetto: African American girls and inner-city violence.* Rutgers University Press.
Kaba, A. J. (2008). Race, gender and progress: Are Black American women the new model minority? *Journal of African American Studies, 12*(4), 309–335.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what’s it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7–24.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F., IV. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47–68.

Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and Society, 32*(5/6), 567–606.

Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). *Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools.* Oxford University Press.

Lewis-McCoy, R. H. (2014). *Inequality in the promised land: Race, resources, and suburban schooling.* Stanford University Press.

Lipsitz, G. (1995). The possessive investment in whiteness: Racialized social democracy and the “white” problem in American studies. *American Quarterly, 47*(3), 369–387.

Litten, L. H. (1982). Different strokes in the applicant pool: Some refinements in a model of student college choice. *The Journal of Higher Education, 53*(4), 383–402.

Love, B. L. (2016). Anti-Black state violence, classroom edition: The spirit murdering of Black children. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 13*(1), 22–25.

Lowry, K. M. (2017). Community college choice and the role of undermatching in the lives of African Americans. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 41*(1), 18–26.

MacMillan, D., & Anderson, N. (2019). Student tracking, secret scores: How college admissions offices rank prospects before they apply. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/10/14/colleges-quietly-rank-prospective-students-based-their-personal-data/.

McDonough, P. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity.* SUNY Press.

McDonough, P. M., Antonio, A. L., & Trent, J. W. (1997). Black students, Black colleges: An African American college choice model. *Journal for a just and Caring Education, 3*(1), 9–36.

McDonough, P. M., Lising, A., Walpole, A. M., & Perez, L. X. (1998). College rankings: Democratized college knowledge for whom? *Research in Higher Education, 39*(5), 513–537.

McFarland, J., Cui, J., Holmes, J., & Wang, X. (2019). Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 2019 (NCES 2020-117). *U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.* https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Means, D. R., Clayton, A. B., Conzelmann, J. G., Baynes, P., & Umbach, P. D. (2016). Bounded aspirations: Rural, African American high school students and college access. *The Review of Higher Education, 39*(4), 543–569.

Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract.* Cornell University Press.

Mims, L. C., & Williams, J. L. (2020). “They told me what I was before I could tell them what I was”: Black girls’ ethnic-racial identity development within multiple worlds. *Journal of Adolescent Research.

Mobley, S. D. (2017). Seeking sanctuary: (Re) Claiming the power of historically Black colleges and universities as places of Black refuge. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(10), 1036–1041.

Monks, J., & Ehrenberg, R. G. (1999). US News & World Report’s college rankings: Why they do matter. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 31*(6), 42–51.

Morris, E. W. (2007). “Ladies” or “louodies”? Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society, 38*(4), 490–515.

Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools.* The New Press.

Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. *Sociology of Education, 90*(2), 127–148.

Moynihan, D. P. (1965). *The Negro family: The case for national action.* US Government Printing Office.

Muhammad, C. G. (2008). African American students and college choice: A consideration of the role of school counselors. *NASSP Bulletin, 92*(2), 81–94.
Muhammad, C. G., & Dixon, A. D. (2008). Black females in high school: A statistical educational profile. *Negro Educational Review, 59*(3/4), 163–180.

Muhammad, C. G., Smith, M. J., & Duncan, G. A. (2008). College choice and college experiences: Intersections of race and gender along the secondary to post-secondary education continuum. *Negro Educational Review, 59*(3/4), 141–146.

Museus, S. D., & Griffin, K. A. (2011). Mapping the margins in higher education: On the promise of intersectionality frameworks in research and discourse. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 151*, 5–13.

Museus, S. D., & Kiang, P. N. (2009). Deconstructing the model minority myth and how it contributes to the invisible minority reality in higher education research. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 142*, 5–15.

Museus, S. D., Agbayani, A., & Ching, D. M. (2016). *Focusing on the Underserved: Immigrant, refugee, and indigenous Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education*. Information Age Publishing.

Mustaffa, J. B. (2017). Mapping violence, naming life: A history of anti-Black oppression in the higher education system. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(8), 711–727.

Nash, J. C. (2019). *Black Feminism reimagined: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press.

National Academies of Science, Engineering, & Medicine (NASEM). (2018). *Minority Serving Institutions: America’s underutilized resource for strengthening the STEM workforce*. The National Academies Press. Retrieved from https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25257/minority-serving-institutions-americas-underutilized-resource-for-strengthening-the.stem.

Neal-Jackson, A. (2018). A meta-ethnographic review of the experiences of African American girls and young women in K–12 education. *Review of Educational Research, 88*(4), 508–546.

Nichols, A. H., & Schack, J. O. (2019). Broken mirrors: Black student representation at public state college and universities. *The Education Trust*. https://edtrust.org/resource/broken-mirrors-black-representation/.

Njoku, N., Butler, M., & Beatty, C. C. (2017). Reimagining the historically Black college and university (HBCU) environment: Exposing race secrets and the binding chains of respectability and other mothering. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(8), 783–799.

Nora, A. (2004). The role of habitus and cultural capital in choosing a college, transitioning from high school to higher education, and persisting in college among minority and nonminority students. *The Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 3*(2), 180–208.

Núñez, A. M. (2014). Advancing an intersectionality framework in higher education: Power and Latino postsecondary opportunity. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 33–92). Springer.

Núñez, A. M., & Bowers, A. J. (2011). Exploring what leads high school students to enroll in Hispanic-serving institutions: A multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 48*(6), 1286–1313.

O’Meara, K. (2007). Striving for what? Exploring the pursuit of prestige. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 121–179). Springer.

Office of the Press Secretary, White House. (2014, February 27). *Presidential memorandum- Creating and expanding ladders of opportunity for boys and young men of color* [Press release]. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/27/presidential-memorandum-creating-and-expanding-ladders-opportunity-boys-.

Okechukwu, A. (2019). *To fulfill these rights: Political struggle over affirmative action and open admissions*. Columbia University Press.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial formation in the United States*. Routledge.

Orphan, C. M. (2018). Public purpose under pressure: Examining the effects of neoliberal public policy on the missions of regional comprehensive universities. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 22*(2), 59–101.

Palmer, R. T., & Maramba, D. C. (2015). Racial microaggressions among Asian American and Latino/a students at a historically Black university. *Journal of College Student Development, 56* (7), 705–722.
Park, J. J., & Becks, A. H. (2015). Who benefits from SAT prep?: An examination of high school context and race/ethnicity. *The Review of Higher Education, 39*(1), 1–23.

Patton, L. D. (2016). Disrupting postsecondary prose: Toward a critical race theory of higher education. *Urban Education, 51*(3), 315–342.

Patton, L. D., & Croom, N. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Critical perspectives on Black women and college success*. Routledge.

Patton, L. D., & Njoku, N. R. (2019). Theorizing Black women’s experiences with institution-sanctioned violence: A #BlackLivesMatter imperative toward Black liberation on campus. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 32*(9), 1162–1182.

Patton, L. D., Crenshaw, K., Haynes, C., & Watson, T. N. (2016). Why we can’t wait: (Re) examining the opportunities and challenges for Black women and girls in education (Guest Editorial). *The Journal of Negro Education, 85*(3), 194–198.

Patton, L. D., McEwen, M., Rendón, L., & Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2007). Critical race perspectives on theory in student affairs. *New Directions for Student Services, 120*, 39–53.

Paulsen, M. B., & St. John, E. P. (2002). Social class and college costs: Examining the financial nexus between college choice and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education, 73*(2), 189–236.

Perkins, L. M. (1993). The role of education in the development of Black feminist thought, 1860-1920. *History of Education, 22*(3), 365–275.

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 99–157). Springer.

Perna, L. W., & Thomas, S. L. (2008). Theoretical perspectives on student success: Understanding the contributions of the disciplines. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 34*(1), 1–87.

Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students*. Beacon Press.

Phelan, P., Davidson, A. L., & Cao, H. T. (1991). Students’ multiple worlds: Negotiating the boundaries of family, peer, and school cultures. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 22*(3), 224–250.

Poon, O., Squire, D., Kodama, C., Byrd, A., Chan, J., Manzano, L., Furr, L., & Bishundat, D. (2016). A critical review of the model minority myth in selected literature on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(2), 469–502.

Porter, C. J. (2017). Articulation of identity in Black undergraduate women. In L. D. Patton & N. N. Croom (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on Black women and college success* (pp. 88–100). Routledge.

Porter, C. J., Green, Q., Daniels, M., & Smola, M. (2020). Black women’s socialization and identity development in college: Advancing Black feminist thought. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 57*(3), 253–265.

Powell, T., & Coles, J. A. (2020). ‘We still here’: Black mothers’ personal narratives of sense making and resisting Anti-Blackness and the suspensions of their Black children. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 1*–20.

Pusser, B. (2015). A critical approach to power in higher education. In A. M. Martinez-Aleman, P. Pusser, & E. M. Bensimon (Eds.), *Critical approaches to the study of higher education: A practical introduction* (pp. 49–69). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ransby, B. (2003). *Ella Baker and the Black freedom movement: A radical democratic vision*. University of North Carolina Press.

Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review, 84*(1), 26–53.

Reyes, N. A. S. (2019). “What am I doing to be a good ancestor?” An Indigenized phenomenology of giving back among Native college graduates. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(3), 603–637.

Rios-Aguilar, C., Kiyama, J. M., Gravitt, M., & Moll, L. C. (2011). Funds of knowledge for the poor and forms of capital for the rich? A capital approach to examining funds of knowledge. *Theory and Research in Education, 9*(2), 163–184.

Roberts, D. E. (1999). Killing the black body: Race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty. Vintage.

Robinson, C. J. (2000). *Black Marxism: The making of the Black radical tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.
Rodriguez, P., & Nuñez, A. M. (2015). Constructing college “choice” for Latino students: The organizational culture of an urban catholic high school. In P. Perez & M. Ceja (Eds.), Higher education access and choice for Latino students (pp. 38–49). Routledge.

Roegman, R., Knight, M. G., Taylor, A. M., & Watson, V. W. (2016). From microscope to mirror: Doctoral students’ evolving positionalities through engagement with culturally sensitive research. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 29(1), 44–65.

Rogers, I. H. (2012). The Black campus movement: Black students and the racial reconstitution of higher education, 1965–1972. Palgrave MacMillan.

Sablan, J. R., & Tierney, W. G. (2014). The changing nature of cultural capital. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.), Higher education: Handbook of theory and research (pp. 153–188). Springer.

Salazar, K. (2019). The wealth and color of off-campus recruiting. Dissertation, University of Arizona. Public Research Universities. https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/634340.

Selingo, J. (2017). How colleges use big data to target the students they want. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/how-colleges-find-their-students/522516/.

Slater, R. B. (1994). The growing gender gap in Black higher education. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 3, 52–59.

Slaughter, S., & Rhoades, G. (2004). Academic capitalism and the new economy: Markets, state, and higher education. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Smith, M. J. (2008). College choice process of first generation black female students: Encouraged to what end? Negro Educational Review, 59(3/4), 147–161.

Smith, M. J., & Fleming, M. K. (2006). African American parents in the search stage of college choice: Unintentional contributions to the female to male college enrollment gap. Urban Education, 41(1), 71–100.

Smith, A., & Stewart, A. (1983). Approaches to studying racism and sexism in Black women’s lives. Journal of Social Issues, 39(3), 1–15.

Sojoyner, D. M. (2016). First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles. University of Minnesota Press.

Spencer, R. C. (2016). The revolution has come: Black power, gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland. Duke University Press.

Squire, D. D., & Mobley, S. D. (2015). Negotiating race and sexual orientation in the college choice process of Black gay males. The Urban Review, 47(3), 466–491.

St. John, E. P., Asker, E. H., & Hu, S. (2001). The role of finances in student choice: A review of theory and research. In M. B. Paulsen & J. C. Smart (Eds.), The finance of higher education: Theory, research, policy, & practice (pp. 419–438). Agathon Press.

Strayhorn, T. L., Blakewood, A. M., & DeVita, J. M. (2008). Factors affecting the college choice of African American gay male undergraduates: Implications for retention. National Association of Student Affairs Professionals Journal, 11(1), 88–108.

Swartz, D. (1997). Culture and power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. The University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, K. Y. (Ed.). (2017). How we get free: Black feminism and the Combahee river collective. Haymarket Books.

Teranishi, R., & Briscoe, K. (2006). Social capital and the racial stratification of college opportunity. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), Higher education: Handbook of theory and research (pp. 591–614). Springer.

Teranishi, R. T., & Briscoe, K. (2008). Contextualizing race: African American college choice in an evolving affirmative action era. The Journal of Negro Education, 77(1), 15–26.

The Crown Act. (2020). About the crown act. Retrieved from https://www.thecrownact.com/about.

Thompson, G., Ponterotto, J., & Dyar, C. (2019). Social identity pathways to college choice and attitudes toward help-seeking among Black students at a minority serving institution. College Student Journal, 53(1), 113–129.

Tichavakunda, A. A. (2019). An overdue theoretical discourse: Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice and critical race theory in education. Educational Studies, 55(6), 651–666.

Tichavakunda, A. A., & Galan, C. (2020). The summer before college: A case study of first-generation, urban high school graduates. Urban Education. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920914362.

Tobolowsky, B. F., Outcalt, C. L., & McDonough, P. M. (2005). The role of HBCUs the college choice process of African Americans in California. Journal of Negro Education, 74(1), 63–75.
Turley, R. N. L. (2009). College proximity: Mapping access to opportunity. *Sociology of Education, 82*(2), 126–146.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019a). Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, sex of student, and control of institution: Selected years, 1947 through 2029 Biennial Survey of Education in the United States; Opening Fall Enrollment in Higher Education, 1963 through 1965; Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), “Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities” surveys, 1966 through 1985; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), “Fall Enrollment Survey” (IPEDS-EF:86-99); IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component; and Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, 2000 through 2029. (This table was prepared December 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_303.10.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_303.10.asp?current=yes).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019b). Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level of enrollment, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity or nonresident alien status of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2018 Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), “Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities” surveys, 1976 and 1980; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), “Fall Enrollment Survey” (IPEDS-EF:90); and IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component. (This table was prepared September 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_306.10.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_306.10.asp?current=yes).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019c). Fall enrollment, degrees conferred, and expenditures in degree-granting historically Black colleges and universities, by institution: 2017, 2018, and 2017–18 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2018, Completions component; Spring 2018 and Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component; and Spring 2019, Finance component. (This table was prepared November 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.10.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.10.asp?current=yes).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019d). Fall enrollment in degree-granting historically Black colleges and universities, by sex of student and level and control of institution: Selected years, 1976 through 2018 Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), “Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities,” 1976 through 1985 surveys; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), “Fall Enrollment Survey” (IPEDS-EF:86-99); and IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component. (This table was prepared November 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.20.asp).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019e). Selected statistics on degree-granting historically Black colleges and universities, by control and level of institution: Selected years, 1990 through 2018 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), “Fall Enrollment Survey” (IPEDS-EF:90); IPEDS Spring 2001, Spring 2011, and Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component; IPEDS Spring 2019, Finance component; and IPEDS Fall 2018, Completions component. (This table was prepared November 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.30.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.30.asp?current=yes).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019f). Bachelor’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976–77 through 2017–18 Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), “Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred” surveys, 1976–77 and 1980–81; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), “Completions Survey” (IPEDS-C:90-99); and IPEDS Fall 2000 through Fall 2018, Completions component. (This table was prepared October 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_322.20.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_322.20.asp?current=yes).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019g). Percentage distribution of first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions 6 years after entry, by completion and enrollment status at first institution attended, sex, race/ethnicity, control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted: Cohort entry years 2007 and 2012 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2013–14 and Winter 2018–19 Graduation Rates component; and IPEDS Fall 2007 and Fall 2012, Institutional Characteristics component. (This table was prepared October 2019.) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_326.15.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_326.15.asp?current=yes).
Van Camp, D., Barden, J., Sloan, L., & Clarke, R. (2009). Choosing an HBCU: An opportunity to pursue racial self-development. *Journal of Diversity in Negro Education, 78*(4), 457–468.

Van Camp, D., Barden, J., & Sloan, L. R. (2010). Predictors of black students’ race-related reasons for choosing an HBCU and intentions to engage in racial identity-relevant behaviors. *Journal of Black Psychology, 36*(2), 226–250.

Waite, C. L. (2002). *Permission to remain among us: Education for blacks in Oberlin, Ohio, 1880–1914*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2003*(99), 9–15.

Walker, A. (2004). *In search of our mothers’ gardens: Womanist prose*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Wallace, M. (2015). *Black macho and the myth of the superwoman*. Verso Books.

Wallace-Sanders, K. (2008). *Mammy: A century of race, gender, and southern memory*. University of Michigan Press.

Watson, T. N. (2016). “Talking back”: The perceptions and experiences of black girls who attend City High School. *The Journal of Negro Education, 85*(3), 239–249.

Wells, R. S., & Lynch, C. M. (2012). Delayed college entry and the socioeconomic gap: Examining the roles of student plans, family income, parental education, and parental occupation. *The Journal of Higher Education, 83*(3), 671–697.

Wilder, C. S. (2013). *Ebony and ivy: Race, slavery, and the troubled history of Americas*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Williams, J. L., & Palmer, R. T. (2019). *A response to racism: How HBCU enrollment grew in the face of hatred*. https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/98987.

Williams, K. L., Burt, B. A., Clay, K. L., & Bridges, B. K. (2019). Stories untold: Counternarratives to anti-Blackness and deficit-oriented discourse concerning HBCUs. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(2), 556–599.

Wing, A. K. (Ed.). (1997). *Critical race feminism: A reader*. New York University Press.

Winkle-Wagner, R. (2015). Having their lives narrowed down? The state of Black women’s college success. *Review of Educational Research, 85*(2), 171–204.

Wun, C. (2016). Unaccounted foundations: Black girls, anti-Black racism, and punishment in schools. *Critical Sociology, 42*(4/5), 737–750.

Wun, C. (2018). Angered: Black and non-Black girls of color at the intersections of violence and school discipline in the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 21*(4), 423–437.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69–91.

Yosso, T. J., Parker, L., Solórzano, D. G., & Lynn, M. (2004). From Jim Crow to affirmative action and back again: A critical race discussion of racialized rationales and access to higher education. *Review of Research in Education, 28*(1), 1–25.

Zinshteyn, M. (2016). The colleges are watching. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/the-colleges-are-watching/506129/.

---

**Channel McLewis** is an Assistant Project Scientist in Higher Education and Organizational Change at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research investigates Black participation in higher education, with an emphasis on the sociology of race, gender, and inequities in accessing postsecondary options. Specifically, McLewis examines how Black women, as they navigate the higher education terrain, experience intersecting systems of power and how they negotiate their multifaceted identities.