

College Athletic Reputation and College Choice among African American High School Seniors: Evidence from the Educational Longitudinal Study¹

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Abstract

This study extends research on college choice, with recent national survey data, by examining what African American students say about the importance of college athletic reputation in choosing which school to attend. We use the Educational Longitudinal Survey to examine the overall distribution of self-reported factors that shape college choices among African American high school seniors who express plans to attend college immediately after high school. We then conduct factor analysis to examine the structure of relations among the diverse factors shaping student preferences and their contribution to understanding variation in the college choice process among African Americans. Finally, to understand the effect of athletic reputation relative to other relevant college selection and access factors, we undertake logistic regression analyses. Our descriptive results show that roughly one out of every three African American respondents report that a school's athletic reputation is at least a somewhat important consideration in determining their college choice. The factor analysis for the full sample revealed five common dimensions--Academic/Career, Economic/Practical, Demographic, and Social. Academic/Career considerations-- representing the strongest factors, with Social/Academic/Career considerations ranked somewhat lower in importance across analysis groups.

An extensive and growing literature on college choice suggests that students' decision about where to attend college can be just as important as their decision to attend (Astin 1965; Choy & Ottinger 1998; Hossler & Gallagher 1987). Research on the college choice process has demonstrated that a student's selection of a college is influenced by supply and demand considerations involving decision-making processes operating at both individual and institutional levels (Hossler & Gallagher 1987). Individual

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decisions occur early as students identify colleges of interest. Institutional decisions occur later when college admissions officers accept or reject applicants according to their institutional needs. While both the supply and demand sides of this process are important, the present study, like most research in this area, focuses primarily on the supply-side in the college choice process—student decision-making. Dembowski (1980) notes three basic decisions a student must make: (1) which colleges to apply to, (2) which colleges, if any, to visit, and (3) which college to attend. We examine student self-reports of how institutional characteristics, and a number of other relevant factors that have been identified in past research, influence their college and university choices. More specifically, this study replicates and extends research examining the importance of college athletic reputation on African American students' college choice by: (1) employing more current national data; (2) examining gender differences; and, (3) studying college choice prospectively among a longitudinal sample of college bound seniors.

Review of Related Research

Carrington and Sedlacek (1975) cite early research on college choice which identifies four general foci of students' decisions: (1) factors internal to the institution (e.g., academic reputation and prestige); (2) factors external to the institution (e.g., location and proximity to student' home); (3) human influences (relatives, friends, counselors); and (4) individual factors (personal and family finances). Along with the earlier research, more recent studies have examined and affirmed the importance of these and other considerations, including: proximity to home (Corey 1936; Reeves 1932; Holland & Richards 1965; Bowers & Pugh 1973; Erdman 1983), cost (Reinhardt 1938; Bowers & Pugh 1973), campus social life (Bowers & Pugh 1973), as well as college athletic reputation (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman & Lv 2006; Braddock & Lv 2006). Erdman (1983) found that perceived reputation, location, and size are far more important than other factors examined, including cost. Bowers and Pugh (1973) also point out that students and their parents emphasize different factors in the selection process: Parents emphasize financial factors, proximity, and academic reputation, while students emphasize social and cultural factors.

Research further indicates that students also differ among themselves in the relative importance they assign to particular selection factors based on: race-ethnicity (Lisack 1978; McDonough & Antonio 1996); gender (Holland 1958; 1959; Stordahl 1970; Hansen & Litten 1982); academic rank (Stordahl 1970); and socioeconomic status (Munday 1976; Hearn 1984; 1991; Kelpke-Kern 2000). Thus, research over several decades

suggests that college choice decisions are significantly shaped by students' access to information about, and perceptions of, colleges' academic programs, tuition, costs, availability of financial aid, general academic reputation, proximity to home, size, and social life (Comfort 1925; Ripperger 1933; Keller & McKewon 1984; Stewart, et al. 1987; Chapman & Jackson 1987; Braxton 1990; Kinzie, et al. 1998; Hossler, Schmit and Vesper 1999; Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman & Lv 2006; Braddock & Lv 2006).

Research on African American Students' College Choice

Earlier research on the academic experiences of African Americans suggest that there are several reasons why it is important to understand African American student's college choice: (1) investing in higher education represents the major avenue of upward mobility for most African Americans; (2) African American students' ability to obtain access to graduate and professional education largely depends upon the type and quality of their undergraduate education; and (3) both persistence and graduation rates among African American students have been found to vary with attendance at historically white and historically black colleges (Thomas & Braddock 1981; Braddock & Dawkins 1981; Dawkins & Braddock 1982; Dawkins 1989). More recent studies have confirmed the importance of understanding college choice in the higher education experiences of African Americans. For example, Hurtado, et al. (1997) report that although African Americans were about as likely as whites to apply to several colleges, they were significantly less likely than white students to say they were attending their first choice, with similar findings based on American College Testing (ACT) data being reported by Maxey, Lee, and McLure (1995). Therefore, while previous research has examined college choice decisions, with few exceptions (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman & Lv 2006; Braddock & Lv 2006), the question of whether, and how, a college's athletic reputation may influence high school students' decisions to attend particular colleges or universities has not been examined.

It can be argued that we have limited knowledge about the role of college athletics because educational researchers, in general, fail to incorporate sports into their theoretical and analytic models. However, inattention to this topic is also due, in part, to the fact that most of the national data sets used to examine the college choice process have not included measures of athletic reputation (or related indicators of intercollegiate athletics). For example, the major national college student surveys (e.g., Freshman Norm Surveys collected by HERI, and the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study collected by NCES)

have not included athletic reputation or related information among the items in their college choice inventories. However, even when they have been included, the independent influence of athletics has often not been explored. Rather, athletic reputation data, when available, have more typically been combined with other indicators to assess the relative effect of “social” influences on student’s college choice (Hurtado, et al. 1997).

Athletics and Student College Choice

In some respects, the long-standing neglect of athletic reputation in research on college choice is curious since some have characterized intercollegiate athletics as “the front door or front porch to the university (Toma & Cross 1998). The “front porch” metaphor suggests that college sports are what outsiders see and what eventually gets them inside. One of the populations it attracts is prospective students (Toma & Cross 1998). This phenomenon has sometimes been called the “Flutie factor,” referring to a 25 percent increase in Boston College’s applications the year following quarterback Doug Flutie’s “Hail Mary” pass, which enabled Boston College to upset the University of Miami in the Orange Bowl in 1983. Similarly, North Carolina State University reportedly received a 40 percent increase in applications following its NCAA basketball championship in 1983 (McCormick & Tinsley 1987). More recently, following the University of Florida’s 2006 national football championship, and back-to-back basketball titles in 2006 and 2007, early reports suggest the university will reap similar benefits. For example, recent undergraduate applications reached an all-time high (25,000 students applied for fewer than 7,000 slots), and the average applicant SAT score is now 1400 (Garry 2007).

Similar associations between successful athletic programs and student recruitment have also been attributed to HBCU’s. For example, according to Evans, Evans, and Evans (2002), several HBCU’s -- Florida A & M University, Hampton University, and Grambling University—have experienced enrollment gains associated with winning teams. Specifically, they suggest that, over the past five years, winning athletic programs in football, baseball, track and field, and several minor sports at Florida A & M University and Hampton University have helped their enrollments. Grambling University has had greater success in recruiting students when its intercollegiate athletic teams had winning seasons (Evans, Evans & Evans 2002).

Within the higher education community, discussions about the role and value of highly competitive intercollegiate athletics continue to generate considerable controversy. Much of this debate often focuses on what may be considered “value-added” outcomes of successful athletic

programs, such as increased alumni giving (Turner, Meserve & Bowen 2001; Sperber 2000) or enhanced student applicant pools (Tucker & Amato 1993; Toma & Cross 1998; McCormick & Tinsley 1987; Murphy & Trandel 1994), thought to be associated with having successful high-profile sports teams. While alumni giving is clearly an important matter, we consider here only the arguments and research related to student applicant pools. In this regard, studies examining the association between colleges' athletic reputation and student applicant pools provide limited, and somewhat mixed results. However, the more methodologically rigorous studies tend to show results which are consistent with the value-added "applicant pool" benefits hypothesis. These studies have examined either numerical gains in the applicant pool or the quality of the applicant pool.

Quality of Applicants. Economists McCormick and Tinsley (1987) examined the effect of athletics on academics. Based on an analysis of 150 schools (including 63 from major conferences), these researchers found evidence to support the argument that athletics serve as an advertising tool and, consequently, schools with major college athletics have academically stronger undergraduate student bodies than institutions without major college athletics. Therefore, a symbiotic relationship exists between athletics and academics at many universities (McCormick & Tinsley 1987). Furthermore, according to McCormick and Tinsley, critics of athletic success are misguided if they believe that universities will improve academically by elimination of large-scale athletic participation. Rather, such action could have detrimental effects for any particular school. Tucker and Amato (1993) provide some evidence to support this argument by examining the association between schools' high-profile (football and basketball) teams and student quality (as measured by average SAT scores) and finding that a highly ranked football team boosted SAT scores. However, the same study showed that a highly ranked basketball team did not have the same effect (Tucker & Amato 1993).

Applicant Pool Size. Toma and Cross (1998), found that success in intercollegiate athletics (as indicated by national championships in one of the two marquee sports such as football and men's basketball) appears to translate into a sometimes dramatic increase in the number of admission applications received, both in absolute terms and relative to peer institutions. They note that football championships seem to have more profound impact on applications received than basketball, and point out that their finding of positive attention following a championship year (particularly for football), appears to be "somewhat lasting." Likewise, Murphy and Trandel (1994) examined 46 football schools and found that a .25 increase in winning percentage yielded a 1.370 percent gain in applications.

Student Choice. Studies examining student college selection priorities have produced somewhat mixed results. For example, one recent telephone survey of 500 college-bound seniors reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* suggests that “the quality of a college’s sports teams falls far down the list of factors that high-school students consider when deciding on a college” (Suggs 2003). The study found that 73 percent of the respondents said their decision to attend a given college was not influenced by its position in the divisional hierarchy of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. More than a third (37%) said they did not know whether their college of choice belonged to Division I, II, or III (Suggs 2003). These descriptive survey results are provocative but limited, methodologically. This is especially the case with regard to how this study conceptualized the quality of a college’s sports teams. The size and representativeness of the sample are also of concern.

One recent, more methodologically rigorous, study using reports of college choice among students matriculating at four-year institutions arrived at different conclusions. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman, and Lv (2006) found that, while “academic” and “economic” considerations had the greatest impact on student college choice, college athletic reputation was the most important among the “social” issues students consider in selecting a college to attend. They also note that the importance of college athletic reputation tends to be emphasized by males, students from higher SES backgrounds, students who participate in varsity intercollegiate athletics, students attending public colleges and universities, and, interestingly, by students who place strong emphasis on college academic reputation. In a subsequent analysis using the African American subsample from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), Braddock and Lv (2006) reported generally similar results.

The present study employs the more recent Educational Longitudinal Survey to examine further what African American high school senior students say about the importance of college athletic reputation in choosing which school to attend. Like Toma and Cross (1998), our analyses are guided by the conceptual model proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), which considers college choice as a three stage process, including: (1) predispositions, where a student develops an interest in continuing his or her education; (2) search, where a student gathers information on the attributes and values that characterize alternatives among institutions; and (3) choice, where a student decides which institution to attend. Toma and Cross (1998) posit that the growth of intercollegiate athletics and the positive attention it generates has a stronger impact at the search and choice stages,

while also influencing students at the predispositions stage, especially among those who follow sports, in terms of making them aware of higher education from an early age (Toma & Cross 1998). Specifically, we focus primarily on one aspect of college choice—a college's athletic reputation. We first examine, among African American high school seniors planning to attend four-year colleges or universities, the overall distribution of self-reported factors that shaped the selection of their first choice institutions. We then conduct factor analysis to examine the structure of relations among the diverse factors shaping student preferences and their contribution to understanding variation in the college choice process among African American high school seniors. Finally, to understand the relationship between athletic reputation and college choice, with other relevant college selection and access factors taken into account, we undertake logistic regression analysis.

Methods

Data

The data for this study are taken from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The base year survey was conducted in 2002 when the students were in tenth grade and employed a two-stage, stratified random sample of nearly 17,000 tenth graders in some 1,000 schools who were followed up in 2004 when the respondents were in twelfth grade. Estimated response rates remain consistently over 90 percent.

The overall sample is made up of Whites (53.7 percent), Hispanics (13.7 percent), African Americans (12.5 percent), Asian/Pacific Islanders (9 percent), and Native American/Alaskan Natives (.8 percent). However, our analytic subsample consists of 2,027 African American high school seniors who reported plans to enroll in a four year college or university immediately following graduation. We utilize the standardized NCES panel weight for this sample in order to approximate the original base year sample and to adjust the data for nonresponse bias.

Measures

College Choice Influences. are measured by a Likert-type inventory consisting of questions which ask the respondents: How much importance does each of the following have in choosing your first choice college or university: (a) active social life; (b) ability to attend same school as parents attended; (c) good record for placing graduates in graduate school; (d) size of school; (e) religious environment; (f) race-ethnic composition; (g) good record for placing graduates in jobs; (h) low crime environment; (i) easy admission standards; (j) strong reputation of school's academic programs; (k) geographic location; (l) chance to live away from home; (m) availability of degree program that will allow me to get a chosen job; (n) availability of specific courses or curriculum; (o) ability to attend school while living at home; (p) low expenses; (q) availability of financial aid; and, (r) strong reputation of school's athletic programs.

The possible responses to these items range from (1=not important, 2=somewhat important, 3=very important). For the logistic regression analyses, these responses were dichotomized to reflect an assessment of either none or some importance attached to school's athletic reputation. The none category (0) includes (1=no importance) to reflect a lack of importance attached to school's athletic reputation. The some (1) category includes (2=somewhat important and 3=very important) to reflect some degree of importance attached to school's athletic reputation.

Control Variables

Student Gender: 1=male, 0=female.

Family SES: This composite measure of socioeconomic status was constructed by NCES, utilizing parent questionnaire data on: father's education level, mother's education level, father's occupation, mother's occupation, and family income. Quartile scores on this measure are dichotomized where 1= top quartile; 0=second, third, and fourth quartiles.

Standardized Achievement Test Score: is a composite scale measure constructed by NCES based on students' individual scores on reading and math standardized achievement tests. Quartile scores on this measure are dichotomized where 1= top quartile; 0=second, third, and fourth quartiles.

H. S. Athlete: is measured by students' reports of whether or not they participated in interscholastic varsity sports during 12th grade where 1=participant and 0=nonparticipant.

School Urbanicity: is a measure that uses U.S. Census categories to classify the students' school as urban (central city); suburban (area surrounding a central city within a metropolitan statistical area); or rural (outside a metropolitan statistical area). Codes: 1=Urban, 0=Non-Urban.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 presents African American high school seniors' responses to each of the 18 original items in the College Choice Inventory (CCI). Among the full sample (left panel), there is considerable variation in the degree of importance attached to particular types of items in the CCI. Not surprisingly, we note that specific items associated with academic and career outcomes (e.g., school's academic reputation, curricular offerings, job placement record, graduate school placements, and specialized degree programs), and financial considerations (e.g., low cost, financial assistance) are rated as much more important than items associated with demographic (e.g., religious environment, low crime) or social considerations (e.g., athletic reputation, social activities).

Table 1: Factors Affecting African American High School Seniors College Choice (N=2027)

	Very Important			Somewhat Important			Not Important		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Academic Reputation	66.6	61.8	70.8	26.8	30.8	23.3	6.6	7.4	5.9
Active Social Life	34.8	39.6	30.5	48.8	47.2	50.2	16.5	13.2	19.3
Financial Aid	75.7	71.5	79.4	18.9	21.8	16.3	5.4	6.7	4.3
Low Cost	52.0	51.6	52.3	35.6	34.8	36.4	12.4	13.6	11.3
Parents Alma Mata	6.6	8.7	4.8	13.2	17.1	9.8	80.1	74.2	85.4
Grad School Placement	60.3	57.7	62.6	30.1	31.5	28.8	9.6	10.7	8.6
Size of School	24.7	23.7	25.6	45.7	46.9	44.6	29.6	29.4	29.8
Religious Environ.	58.4	58.1	58.6	30.2	30.7	29.8	11.4	11.2	11.6
Race-Ethnic Comp.	32.0	32.0	32.0	38.3	38.6	38.1	29.7	29.5	29.5
Job Placement	73.0	72.0	73.9	22.7	23.1	22.4	4.3	4.9	3.7
Low Crime Environ.	52.9	47.9	57.2	33.1	34.4	32	14	17.7	10.7
Easy Admissions	38.8	38.7	38.9	37.9	38.4	37.5	23.3	22.9	23.6
Geographic Location	28.4	28.5	28.3	45.2	44.8	45.5	26.4	26.7	26.2
Live Away From Home	40.3	38.5	41.8	37.8	43	33.3	21.9	18.5	24.9
Live at Home	26.4	26.1	26.6	31.1	33.6	29	42.5	40.2	44.4
Special Degree Program	83.3	79.0	87.0	14.7	18.7	11.3	2.0	2.4	1.7
Specialized Curriculum	73.4	68.1	78.0	22.6	21.5	18.2	4.0	4.4	3.7
Athletic Reputation	26.3	35.6	18.2	29.9	33.7	26.5	43.8	30.7	55.3

Table 1: Factors Affecting African American High School Seniors College Choice (N=2027)

With few exceptions (e.g., athletic reputation, campus safety), the results for males and females in the middle and right panels, respectively, are quite similar. Not surprisingly, only one quarter of African American seniors ranked a college's athletic reputation as "very important" in their decision-making (26.3 percent among the full sample and 35.6 percent and 18.2 percent among males and females, respectively). In contrast, a larger proportion of African American seniors generally ranked college athletic reputation as "not important" in their decision-making (43.8 percent among the full sample and 30.7 percent and 55.3 percent among males and females, respectively).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that roughly one half of our sample of college-bound African American high school seniors (69 percent of the African American males, and 45 percent of African American females) considered a strong athletic reputation to be at least somewhat or very important in their choice of college. In many respects, these patterns are quite similar to those reported for the NELS: 88 African American sample of high school seniors (Braddock & Lv 2006) and those reported for the full multi-ethnic national sample of high school seniors (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman, & Lv 2006). However, we should note that among African American students, the current data suggest a substantially stronger emphasis placed on athletic reputation among ELS college bound seniors compared to that reported for the NELS college matriculant cohort. Both the current patterns and over-time trends suggest that college athletic reputation should be an important consideration not only for college choice researchers, but also for college administrators and others involved with student recruitment.

Factor Analysis

Principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed on the set of 18 items to examine whether the CCI included more than one dimension. Because previous reports based on the earlier NELS Survey (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman, & Lv 2006) have identified gender differences in the factor structure of the CCI, we carried out our analyses on the full sample as well as parallel analyses for the male and female subsamples. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained. Each factor consisted of the items loading at .50 or above on that factor. All items that received a factor loading of less than .50 were dropped from further analysis. For the full sample, one item was deleted following the initial analysis and additional factor analyses were conducted with the 17 remaining items. For the full sample, varimax rotation resulted in five factors –Academic-Career, Demographic, Economic, Social, and Practical. The specific items are listed in Table 2 according to their factor

loadings and the factors are presented in order of their Eigenvalue ranking, and proportion of variance explained.

Table 2: Rotated Factor Loadings for Four Dimensions of Self-Reported Influences on African American High School Seniors' College Choice (N=2027)

	1	2	3	4	5
ACADEMIC/CAREER (1)					
Job Placement	.786				
Grad Placement	.769				
Academic Program	.742				
Job Degree Program	.617				
DEMOGRAPHIC (2)					
Size of School		.807			
Geog. Location		.782			
Race-Ethnic Composition		.669			
ECONOMIC (3)					
Financial Aid			.786		
Low Expense			.737		
Specific Curriculum			.552		
SOCIAL LIFE (4)					
Athletic Program				.732	
Social Life				.647	
Live Away Home				.627	
PRACTICAL (5)					
Live at Home					.821
Easy Admission					.561
Parents Alma Mater					.536
Eigenvalue	4.394	2.008	1.493	1.168	1.011
Principal Components Extraction/Varimax Rotation					

The factor analysis of ratings on these 17 items produced five factors that were rotated to terminal solution (Table 2). The resulting five factors explained 59.3 percent of the variance in the CCI importance ratings. Factor 1, which was labeled Academic-Career, accounted for 16.3 percent of the variance. This factor consists of four items that describe college choice factors associated with academic, and status attainment concerns. Factor 2, Demographic, accounted for 12.2 percent of the variance. This factor consists of three items--school size, geographic location, and race-ethnic composition. Factor 3, Economic, consists of three items—low costs, availability of financial aid, and specific curriculum--accounted for 10.4 percent of the variance. Factor 4, Social, which is represented by three items—athletic reputation, ability to live away from home, and active social life--accounted for 10.3 percent of the variance. Factor 5, Practical, consisting of three items—live at home, attend parents alma mater, and easy admissions standards--accounted for 10 percent of the variance.

For males, however, varimax rotation resulted in just four factors that were rotated to terminal solution –Academic-Career, Demographic-Social, Practical, and Economic. The specific items are listed in Table 3 according to their factor loadings and the factors are presented in order of their Eigenvalue ranking and proportion of variance explained.

The resulting four factors explained 54.9 percent of the variance in the CCI importance ratings. Factor 1, which was labeled Academic-Career, accounted for 17.6 percent of the variance. This factor consists of five items that describe college choice factors primarily associated with academic, and status attainment, concerns. Factor 2, Demographic-Social, accounted for 17.1 percent of the variance. This factor which combined consists of six items--school size, geographic location, race-ethnic composition, athletic reputation, ability to live away from home, and active social life. Factor 3, Practical, consists of three items—live at home, attend parents alma mater, and easy admissions standards--accounted for 10.3% of the variance. Factor 4, Economic, consists of three items—low costs, availability of financial aid, and specific curriculum--accounted for 9.9 percent of the variance.

Table 3: Rotated Factor Loadings for Four Dimensions of Self-Reported Influences on Male African American High School Seniors' College Choice (N=675)

	1	2	3	4
ACADEMIC/CAREER (1)				
Job Placement	.782			
Academic Program	.754			
Grad Placement	.741			
Job Degree Program	.670			
Low Crime	.545			
DEMOGRAPHIC / SOCIAL (2)				
Size of School		.774		
Race-Ethnic Composition		.666.		
Geog. Location		.655		
Live away from Home		.653		
Social Life		.552		
Athletic Reputation		.470		
PRACTICAL (3)				
Live at Home			.822	
Easy Admission			.584	
Parent's Alma Mater			.538	
ECONOMIC (4)				
Financial Aid				.786
Low Expense				.734
Specific Curriculum				.486
Eigenvalue	4.900	1.990	1.369	1.076
Principal Components Extraction/Varimax Rotation				

For females, varimax rotation resulted in five factors that were rotated to terminal solution –Academic-Career, Demographic, Economic, Social, and Practical. The specific items are listed in Table 4 according to their factor loadings and the factors are presented in order of their Eigenvalue ranking, and proportion of variance explained.

The resulting five factors explained 57.9 percent of the variance in the CCI importance ratings. Factor 1, which was labeled Academic-Career, accounted for 15.3 percent of the variance. This factor consists of five items that describe college choice factors primarily associated with academic, and status attainment concerns. Factor 2, Demographic, accounted for 11.9 percent of the variance. This factor consists of three items--school size, geographic location, and race-ethnic composition. Factor 3, Economic, consisting of three items—low costs, availability of financial aid, and specific curriculum--accounted for 10.7 percent of the variance. Factor 4, Social, which is represented by three items—athletic reputation, ability to live away from home, and active social life--accounted for 10.2 percent of the variance. Factor 5, Practical, consisting of three items—live at home, attend parents alma mater, and easy admissions standards--accounted for 9.8 percent of the variance.

Table 4: Rotated Factor Loadings for Four Dimensions of Self-Reported Influences on Female African American High School Seniors’ College Choice (N=773)

	1	2	3	4	5
ACADEMIC/CAREER (1)					
Job Placement	.788				
Academic Program	.781				
Grad Placement	.721				
Job Degree Program	.573				
Low Crime	.509				
DEMOGRAPHIC (2)					
Size of School		.801			
Race-Ethnic Composition		.740			
Geog. Location		.734			
ECONOMIC (3)					
Financial Aid			.777		
Low Expense			.737		
Specific Curriculum			.573		
SOCIAL LIFE (4)					
Live Away Home				.701	
Athletic Program				.674	
Low Expense				.639	
PRACTICAL (5)					
Live at Home					.804
Parent’s Alma Mater					.552
Easy Admission					.525
Eigenvalue	3.991	1.954	1.604	1.288	1.013
Principal Components Extraction/ Varimax Rotation					

Logistic Regression Analysis

Our analysis employs logistic regression given the categorical outcome measure in our model. We examine three different models where parallel analyses are presented for the full sample, and separately for males and females. Table 5 reports the logistic regression of importance attached to college athletic reputation on gender, SES, standardized achievement tests scores, participation in interscholastic varsity sports, public-private high school attendance, and the importance African American high school seniors attach to academic reputation when selecting a college. The unstandardized regression coefficients represent the net or direct effect of each of our predictor variables on the importance African American high school seniors attach to colleges' athletic reputations. Standard errors are also reported in the tables. The reported Odds Ratios allow us to compare the degree of importance attached to college athletic reputation across categories of the predictor variables.

Table 5: Effects of Demographic and College Characteristics on African American High School Seniors' Rating of the Importance of Athletic Reputation in College Choice (N=2027)

	TOTAL			MALES			FEMALES		
	Odds Ratio	b	SE	Odds Ratio	b	SE	Odds Ratio	b	SE
Male	2.550	0.936 ^a	.117						
Tests	.344	-1.066 ^a	.208	.292	-1.231 ^a	.278	.434	-.836 ^b	.305
Public	1.212	.115	.172	.965	-.036	.285	1.244	.218	.219
Urban	1.083	.080	.114	1.019	.018	.182	1.152	.142	.149
Acad Rep Imp	4.590	1.524 ^a	.245	4.308	1.460 ^a	.314	5.516	1.708 ^a	.422
Varsity Athlete	2.956	1.086 ^a	.125	3.467	1.243 ^a	.185	2.579	.947 ^a	.120
Constant	-2.066	.127	.313	.355	-1.035	.451	.102	2.279	.479
Chi Square	244.930 ^a			94.288 ^a			61.724 ^a		
Cox and Snell R ²	.149			.125			.073		

a. $p < .001$

b. $p < .01$

c. $p < .05$

d. $p < .10$

In Table 5, the left panel reports results for the full sample, the middle panel results for males, and the right panel results for females. First, considering the full sample, we see that gender and standardized achievement test scores both exert significant (though different) effects on importance attached to colleges' athletic reputation. Male seniors are significantly more likely than females to attach greater importance to a college's athletic reputation ($b = .936$, $S.E. = .117$, $p < .001$). Specifically, African American male seniors are roughly one and one-half times more

likely than African American females to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college to attend (Odds Ratio: 2.55). On the other hand, African American seniors with high standardized test scores are less likely than African American seniors with lower test scores to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college, and this difference is statistically significant ($b = -1.066$, $S.E. = .208$, $p < .001$).

Not surprisingly, African American seniors who participate in interscholastic varsity sports are significantly more likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college, compared to those who did not participate ($b = 1.09$, $S.E. = .125$, $p < .001$). Indeed, African American high school student-athletes are nearly three times as likely as non-athletes, to attach greater importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college (Odds Ratio: 2.96). African American high school seniors who attended public schools are also significantly more likely to attach greater importance to colleges' athletic reputation, compared to African American seniors who attended private institutions ($b = 1.052$, $S.E. = .307$, $p < .01$). More specifically, African American high school seniors who attended public schools are more than 10 times as likely as those enrolled at private schools to attach importance to colleges' athletic reputation (Odds Ratio: 11.71). In the full sample, the Cox and Snell R-Square is .149, indicating that gender, SES, standardized achievement tests, varsity sports, school sector, and the importance attached to academic reputation, account for fifteen percent of the total variation in the likelihood of African American high school seniors attaching importance to colleges' athletic reputation.

The middle panel of Table 5 reports, for African American males, the logistic regression of the importance of college's athletic reputation on SES, standardized achievement tests scores, participation in interscholastic varsity sports, public-private school attendance and the importance seniors attach to academic reputation when selecting a college. Here, we see that African American male seniors who participate in high school varsity sports are significantly more likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college, compared to those who did not participate ($b = 1.679$, $S.E. = .538$, $p < .001$). Indeed, African American male varsity student-athletes are more than 8 times as likely as African American male non-athletes, to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college (Odds Ratio: 9.76). African American male high school seniors who attended public schools are also significantly more likely to attach greater importance to college's athletic reputation, compared to African American male seniors enrolled in private high schools ($b = 2.294$, $S.E. = .544$, $p < .001$). More specifically, African American male high school seniors

who attended public schools are more than 16 times as likely as those at private schools to attach importance to college's athletic reputation (Odds Ratio: 17.81). Among males, the Cox and Snell R-Square is .224, indicating that SES, standardized achievement tests, varsity sports, school sector, and the importance attached to academic reputation, account for twenty-two percent of the total variation in the likelihood of African American male high school seniors attaching importance to college's athletic reputation.

For African American females, the right panel of Table 5 reports the logistic regression of the importance attached to colleges' athletic reputation on SES, standardized achievement tests, participation in varsity sports, school sector and the importance seniors attach to academic reputation when selecting a college. Here, we see that African American female seniors who participate in high school varsity sports programs are significantly more likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college, compared to those who did not participate ($b = 1.631$, $S.E. = .565$, $p < .01$). Indeed, African American female student-athletes are more than 7 times as likely as African American female non-athletes to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college (Odds Ratio: 8.32). Interestingly, African American female high school seniors, who consider a college's strong academic standards to be important, are also significantly less likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college, compared to those who place less importance on the academic reputation of colleges ($b = -1.968$, $S.E. = .839$, $p < .05$). African American female seniors who give strong consideration to a college's strong academic standards are roughly four and one half times less likely to attach importance to athletic reputation when selecting a college (Odds Ratio: 5.50). Among females, the Cox and Snell R-Square is .087, indicating that SES, standardized achievement tests, varsity sports, school sector, and importance attached to academic reputation, account for roughly nine percent of the total variation in the likelihood of African American female high school seniors attaching importance to a college's athletic reputation.

Discussion and Implications

This study examined college characteristics and other factors considered by African American high school seniors when choosing a college. Consistent with prior studies (Braddock & Lv 2006) we find that African American seniors planning to attend college consider a very wide range of issues and college characteristics in their decision-making process. Our analysis focused specifically on whether a college's athletic reputation plays a role in their decision-making. The findings suggest that while college athletic reputation is clearly not among the top factors considered, it does matter to a significant number of college bound African American

high school seniors. Specifically, our descriptive results show that, for the full sample, roughly one-half (56%) of African American high school seniors report that a school's athletic reputation is at least a somewhat important consideration in determining their college choice. Among male seniors, about two-thirds (69%) report that a school's athletic reputation is at least a somewhat important consideration in determining their college choice. In contrast, among female seniors, less than half (45%) report that a school's athletic reputation is at least a somewhat important consideration in determining their college choice. As previously noted, the current data suggest a substantially stronger emphasis placed on athletic reputation among ELS college bound seniors compared to that reported for the NELS college matriculant cohort (Braddock & Lv 2006). While few would expect college athletic reputation to be among the most important considerations shaping African American high school seniors' college choice decisions, the evidence presented here demonstrates that it is by no means a trivial matter. This finding is also consistent with results reported for the full multi-ethnic sample (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman & Lv 2006).

The results of our factor analysis revealed different factor structures across gender groups. For males, however, varimax rotation resulted in just four factors that were rotated to terminal solution –Academic-Career, Demographic-Social, Practical, and Economic. Among the full sample and for females we found five common factors--Academic/Career, Demographic, Economic, Social, and Practical. This study, like many prior studies (Comfort 1925; Rippinger 1933; Keller & McKewon 1984; Stewart, et al. 1987; Chapman 1981; Chapman & Jackson 1987; Braxton 1990; Kinzie et al. 1998; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper 1999; Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman & Lv 2006), found that Academic/Career issues represent the strongest factor with Social considerations ranked somewhat lower in importance. Nevertheless, not unlike results reported elsewhere for the full multi-ethnic sample (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Basinger-Fleischman, & Lv 2006), the present study found that college's athletic reputation loads on the Social factor across analysis groups. This suggests that among African American high school seniors who value the potential for an active college social life, a college's athletic reputation is also an important consideration. Perhaps, a number of these students see their college social life centering, at least in part, on their school's sports events.

Our logistic regression analysis revealed several interesting patterns among variables that were related to the degree of importance African American high school seniors attach to a college's athletic reputation when deciding which school to attend. First, we found that students who score

higher on standardized achievement tests give little consideration to college athletic reputation. Not surprisingly, among African American students, males, and varsity athletes (male and female) were found to give stronger consideration to college athletic reputation than females or non-athletes.

While these are important findings, the study has several limitations. Specifically, the present study was unable to account for variations in several potentially important characteristics of four year colleges—e.g., size, quality, location, race-ethnic composition, and the like. Because we do not have access to the restricted data file containing college ID (fice codes), we are unable to merge other data files which contain such relevant information on key college characteristics. For example, we were unable to ascertain whether an African American student's college choices might vary across HBCU's and HWCU's. It will be important for future research to take into account such key institutional characteristics, which conceivably, might influence the impact of athletic reputation in the college choice process among African American students.

Notwithstanding future research needs and study limitations, the results of this study provide insights into the debate regarding the role of strong athletic programs as an important factor shaping college choice among African American high school seniors. This is significant information for consideration by college recruiting and admissions staff, as well as for reflection among faculty and staff interested in the connection between athletics and academics. We believe it is important to caution, however, that these findings should not be narrowly interpreted to suggest that prospective African American students are solely, or even primarily, attracted to institutions with successful programs in high-profile athletics such as football or basketball, or even NCAA Division I athletic programs. The issue of college athletic reputation is much more complex. For example, prospective students interested in highly competitive football may choose Grambling University or Tennessee State University because of their long tradition of excellence in that sport, without either knowing, or caring, that those schools compete in Division I-AA, rather than the more prestigious Division I-A, of the NCAA. Moreover, as Bowen and Levin (2003) suggest, the appeal of strong athletic programs operates as strongly among Ivy League and elite private universities as it does among big-time Division I universities.

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