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ABSTRACT. Evaluation of gender differences between students and between parents based on the perceived financial, social, psychological, physical, and functional risks associated with college selection. Nineteen criteria associated with these risks were evaluated for significant gender differences as well as for their level of importance by gender in the selection process. Student gender differences were financial aid, security, academics, friendly atmosphere and religious atmosphere. Parent gender differences were financial aid and degrees offered. Within both groups, females possessed a higher mean. The most important criterion for female students and parents was academics; for male students it was tuition. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Students, parents, gender, criteria, college search, college selection

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INTRODUCTION

New marketing challenges, presented by changing demographic and economic conditions, have lead college officials to believe a better understanding of the college selection process is necessary to help meet customer expectation, increase enrollment, and improve retention. To provide services that meet customer requirements and expectations, a college must develop a good understanding of their central customer group then focus on every level of that group. Colleges employing a market orientation can begin this process by assessing their customer base.

In the past decade it has been suggested the prime way for colleges and universities to achieve organizational goals using the market orientation is to consider the concept of the student as a customer (Brown and Koenig, 1993; Divocky and Rothermel, 1989; Helms and Keys, 1994; Shim and Morgan, 1990; Turner, 1995) and to determine the needs and wants of this target market thereby delivering the desired satisfaction. To accomplish this task, college officials need to know which college characteristics are important to the students when they are choosing a college.

Parents' needs and wants should also be evaluated by college officials since parental educational expectations and encouragement are the best predictors of not only if the student attends college but also where they attend (Bouse and Hossler, 1991). Parents are also as likely as students to initiate the college choice decisions and are more likely to be initiators than teachers, counselors, and friends (Smith and Bers, 1989). Therefore, parents of high school seniors should be considered a customer base since their evaluation of various college characteristics is important and does impact college choice (Murphy, 1981; Warwick and Mansfield, 2003).

Recognizing the importance of students and parents as customer bases may not go far enough. Behind a great deal of consumer research and marketing strategy is the assumption that men and women differ in aspects of their consumer behavior ranging from the products they tend to buy to their responses to advertising and product positioning (Buttle, 1992; Fischer and Arnold, 1994). This assumption has led academics to study a wide range of consumer phenomena to document sex-or gender-related differences and has led practitioners to target women and men in very different ways (Fischer and Arnold, 1994). Thus, while understanding the extent to which parents' and students' criteria selection

agree and disagree is important, it is also important to understand when/ if gender plays a determining role. Therefore, this paper will analyze gender differences between college selection criteria for both students' and parents.'

GENDER DIFFERENCES

An individual's behavior is influenced by the socialization he/she received based on their sex. Although people may not identify with gender-typed traits or may reject traditional role definitions, they still learn behaviors expected of them as men or women (Spence and Helmreich, 1978). For example, females are more likely to conform to social norms (Sistruck and McDavid, 1971) and are more susceptible to influence (Aronson, 1972) than males.

Since men and women are subjected to different social pressures, they often take on different social roles. These roles in which men and women find themselves are often attributed to differences in the gender socialization processes (Worchel and Cooper, 1976). For example, females generally receive more purposive consumer training from parents than do males (Moschis, 1985). This could help explain why males and females may place different levels of importance on college selection criteria.

Literature advances the notion that in general, males and females differ in their psychological orientation along the dimensions of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966; Meyers-Levy, 1988). Meyers-Levy (1988) determined males are characterized as being relatively self-focused and are guided by agency goals encompassing self-assertion and achievement-oriented concerns. Females are more sensitive to the needs of both self and others and are guided by communal concerns including interpersonal affiliation, a desire to be at one with others, and harmonizing relations between themselves and disparate parties. This theory offers a partial explanation for why there are gender differences in processing strategies (Laroche, Saad, Cleveland, and Browne, 2000).

Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran (1991) and Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991) assess differences in processing strategies based on a selectivity model which indicates females attempt to engage in effortful, comprehensive, itemized analysis of all available information giving equal weight to information relevant to self and others. Whereas, males often do not engage in the comprehensive processing of information, but rather they are selective information processors processing heuristically

and, therefore, missing subtle cues. Also, males tend to rely on a single cue or cues that are highly available and particularly salient in the focal context.

Given these suggested differences, examining gender issues should be of interest to colleges across the country not only because such knowledge should enable colleges to better understand their targeted customers, but also because it should allow colleges to assess how and to what extent changes that are occurring in the gender roles are likely to impact the kinds of appeals that will be effective with students and parents, both male and female.

Significant gender differences found among high school seniors may be more important than ever before since women now constitute the majority of associate and other two year degree recipients, the majority of bachelor's degree recipients, about half the master's and professional degree recipients, and nearly 40% of doctoral degree recipients (Jacobs, 1999).

Although no parent gender studies could be found, significant gender differences among parents may also be of importance since evidence indicates a mother's role in the selection process may be very different than that of the father's. Cottle (1991, p. 82) found with the first family member attending college:

Each family member experiences the college application process in distinctive fashion. Often I find that it is the father who seemingly rests his entire sense of worth on the acceptance or rejection, or even more acutely, assesses his position on the basis of the schools to which the children apply. His wife, correspondingly, places less stock in the nature and reputation of the school, often attempting to reduce the pressure laid on her child by her husband. Apparently, less rides on the acceptance or rejection; the mere idea that the child is even applying to college is reward enough. . . . Only a few families probably approach the college application process with equanimity; everyone has something riding on the decision.

There is also evidence that indicates a mother's education is a better predictor than the father's as to whether the student will stay and finish their college education. Two main reasons: (1) many students are from single family homes headed by mothers, and, (2) mothers are generally more directly involved in helping children with their homework (St. John, Starkey, and Paulsen, 1995). While not addressing the specific

gender differences between mothers and fathers, other studies do point to the importance of better understanding parents. The Carnegie Foundation (1986) Dixon and Martin (1991) and Flint (1992), all report high school seniors identified parents as primary influencers in college choice decisions and the most influential people in helping them select a college.

Since studies indicate both the important role parents play in the college decision and the difference that gender can make in assessing the criteria for the college decision, it is important for colleges to not only understand the differences between both students and parents when assessing college selection criteria but possible significant gender differences of both the students and parents as well.

PERCEIVED RISK

The concept of risk is one of the most pervasive in the theories of human choice (Dowling, 1986). Since Bauer first introduced perceived risk in 1960, a central theme in this ongoing research has always been the hypothesis that perceived risk is positively related to information search (Gemunden, 1985). The major types of risks that consumers perceive when making product decisions include: (1) functional risk, the product will not perform as expected, (2) physical risk, the risk to self and others that the product may pose, (3) financial risk, the product will not be worth its cost, (4) social risk, a poor product choice may result in social embarrassment, (5) psychological risk, a poor product choice will bruise the consumer's ego, and, (6) time risk, the time spent in product search may be wasted if the product does not perform as expected (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). These perceived risk factors have stimulated a great deal of literature in traditional product marketing where researchers explicitly incorporate the perception of risk into studies of consumer choice (Dowling, 1986); yet, there has been little research devoted to the examination of perceived risk as it relates to services (Murray and Schlacter, 1990) which would be of value to educational institutions.

Since gaining a college education has been placed at the far end of the service continuum in terms of intangibility, non-standardization, and no guarantees, it is necessary for institutions to understand how perceived (1) financial, (2) physical, (3) functional, (4) social, and, (5) psychological risk affects the selection of a college. (The sixth perceived risk, "time," is defined in such a way that it can not be evaluated as a criterion

for school selection, therefore, it is not included in this study). It is also important to understand how these risks may differ between prospective male and female students and male and female parents.

This paper organizes school selection criteria via the five risk categories to evaluate student and parent gender differences. Understanding these differences will allow institutions to tailor recruitment information given to prospective male and female students and mothers and fathers; better meeting the needs of both groups.

Financial Risk

Evaluated in terms of the service (college) being worth the cost, Chapman (1993) found cost (financial risk) to be one of the most important attributes in the college selection process. The importance of cost of the institution has not changed over time, as five years later, Shank and Beasley (1998) found cost to still be considered the most important attribute in the college selection process.

With college costs constantly rising, college saving habits for both parents and students become important. Bouse and Hossler (1991) indicates male students are more likely to save than female students. Also, parents of female students are less likely to save for college. This may be one reason why, once in school, freshman women were more likely than male freshman to report major concern about financing their education and were more likely to indicate low tuition was an important factor for them when selecting a college (Jacobs, 1999). Yet, cost does not stand alone. For many, when appraising the total cost of attending a particular school, financial aid and scholarships are both considered in the school selection process (Warwick and Mansfield, 2003). Freeman (1984) found the amount of financial aid influences college choice except for high-income, no-need students.

With the higher cost of education, information regarding financial aid and the net price of attending private and public institutions should be directed toward students and their parents during the predisposition and search phases (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987) since parents set up a financial screen early in the selection process. Even though the cost of attending an institution can influence the perception of quality (i.e., the higher the cost of the institution the better the quality of the institution), research indicates 30% of parents with high-ability students rule out high-cost institutions even before any applications are filed (Krukowski, 1985). However, there are still parents who may be willing to pay for the prestige of a private school if

they believe that it will translate into career opportunities (Krukowski, 1985) or to have the religious environment needed in order to fulfill their beliefs (Koshal and Koshal, 1994; Warwick and Mansfield, 2003).

Physical Risk

Although products are tangible and services have varying degrees of intangibility, physical risk is still similarly defined for both. Therefore, physical risk would be the risk to self and others that the service may pose. A broad definition of "risk to self and others" is used to determine the criteria involving physical risk on a college campus. For most, this would involve the level of safety/security within the college environment. As a basic concern for all, it would seem that safety and security should be of equal importance for both male and female parents and students. However, studies seem to ask students and not parents about issues concerning physical risk. Only one study (Broekemier and Seshadri, 1999) directly asked students and parents about security/safety issues as a selection criterion. In the study a significant difference was found between students and parents with parents providing higher importance ratings for a safe and secure campus. When students were addressed, studies indicate women were more concerned about physical risk than men (Broekemier and Seshadri, 1999; Hayes, Walker, and Trebbi, 1995; Shank and Beasley, 1998). For physical risk in a college setting, issues would go beyond the safety/security of the campus to other physical elements of the school such as location, size, and weather.

Several research studies have found that an important attribute for students in the college selection process is location (Chapman, 1993; Murphy, 1981; Sekely and Yates, 1991; Shank and Beasley, 1998). Two studies, Shank and Beasley (1998) and Hayes, Walker and Trebbi (1995) have measured differences in this college selection criterion between college men and women, the results, college women believed location was more important as a selection criterion than college men. No studies found addressed parent gender and location selection.

Size is also relevant to the student. On the positive side, small size is associated with students having small classes, individualized attention, and favorable student-faculty ratios. Yet size can negatively affect the depth of academic departments and the quality of facilities. Of concern, the student's perception that a small institution is less known, less important, and less in touch with the real world, and therefore less able to ensure access for its graduates to desirable job interviews and presti-

gious graduate and professional schools (Krukowski, 1985). Although not specifically asked by gender, studies using size as a selection criterion (Broekemier and Seshadri, 1999; Sekely and Yates, 1991) found it to be an important factor in the student's choice.

Weather should also be included when evaluating the physical risk category as first time students assess their new living conditions for the next four to five years. It is a biogenic consideration not only because of the inclement weather that the student may have to deal with on a daily basis when attending classes (sunshine, humidity, rain, snow, frigid temperatures, etc.) but also when assessing hobbies and extra-curricular activities. The weather associated with the school chosen may enhance or decrease a student's ability to do many outdoor activities (i.e., camping, mountain climbing, skate boarding, hiking, snow skiing, ice skating, water skiing, etc.). While weather was identified by our student focus groups as an important search criterion, no previous studies were found that addressed this specific element.

Functional Risk

As with a product this involves whether or not the service (college) will perform as expected. Each college has an array of functional elements including the quality of the professors, degrees offered, and the academics of the school. Thus, it is important for both parents and students to consider these factors when choosing a college.

A meta-analysis conducted by Chapman (1993) was consistent with previous research (Chapman and Jackson, 1987; Manski and Wise, 1983) deeming quality of faculty, quality of majors of interest, and overall academic reputation as being the most important features of the college selection process. Other studies have found only the quality of the faculty to be the most important attribute in the college selection process (Admissions Marketing Group, 1985; Sekely and Yates, 1991; Shank and Beasley, 1998; Widdows and Hilton, 1990). Krukowski (1985) also found this to be true with 62% of high school students believing that the best indicator of institutional quality was the quality of the undergraduate faculty.

Litten and Hall (1989) found course variety as an important criterion for students and teaching faculty for parents. Male students were more than twice as likely as females to choose well-published faculty (22% versus 9%) as an important selection criterion.

Shank and Beasley (1998) and Litten and Hall (1989) found college women rated a broad range and variety of courses (degrees offered) sig-

nificantly higher in importance than men. Paralleling this gender difference in the student's data, Litten and Hall (1989) found mothers were more likely than fathers to select course variety as one of the best indicators of a top quality school.

Social Risk

Choosing the wrong service can lead to social embarrassment and or rejection. Students and parents alike may be concerned with the possibility that the college choice could result in social embarrassment either by the student not fitting in with the campus community or by possibly not being able to complete all the degree requirements. To reduce this risk, students must determine the compatibility between themselves and their school of choice. Compatibility is explained by two key concepts: academic integration and social integration. Academic integration refers to academic success, where as social integration refers to personal and social success (Clark and Crawford, 1992). Both types of integration are important for the student since, the greater the compatibility between the student and the institution, the higher the probability that the student will complete their degree (Clark and Crawford, 1992).

Issues affecting this compatibility include social activities, athletics, whether the student's friends are attending the selected institution, friendly atmosphere, marriage prospects, cultural diversity, and religious activities. Five of the seven selection criteria have been included in various gender-related college selection studies. Yet all of these college selection criteria may be assessed differently by gender. Thus, the results would be of value for colleges. For example, Shank and Beasley (1998) report, although not significantly different, men consistently ranked extracurricular activities and the quality of social life higher than women while Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) found significant differences between male and female students.

In other criteria evaluation Chapman (1993), Shank and Beasley (1998), and Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) found both men and women agreed one of the least important criteria when choosing a college was its prominent intercollegiate athletic programs and athletic participation. However, Hayes, Walker and Trebbi (1995) and Shank and Beasley (1998) found men were more likely to view a prominent athletic program as something that should still be a characteristic considered when choosing a college.

Whether or not the student's friends will be attending the college of choice has been addressed as a college choice criterion. Broekemier

and Seshadri (1999) found that whether or not friends were attending the same college to be of low importance overall (ranked 16th of 17 selection criteria). There was no significant difference between male and female students when assessing this factor yet, in the same study, there was a significant difference found between parents and students on this characteristic, with students placing higher value on friends attending than did parents.

Measuring cultural diversity, Shank and Beasley (1998) found significant differences among the students. Results indicate the cultural diversity of a school to be ranked as an important selection criterion for women. In assessing a religious environment as a selection criterion, Koshal and Koshal (1994) found that students were willing to pay more for enjoying a religious affiliation and environment. Although willing to pay more, Chapman's (1993) study indicated religious activities were deemed by students to be among the least important criteria when choosing a college.

When assessing the value of social life as a selection criterion, our student/parent focus groups discussed the importance of two areas that previous studies have not evaluated that may have merit as a cause for social risk for the student. Friendly college atmosphere and finding a suitable marriage partner are both possible social factors for choosing a school. Finding a suitable marriage partner may be of particular interest since Holland and Eisenhart (1995) found the peer culture within a college environment emphasizes the value of romantic relationships for women while emphasizing values of academics, athletics, and other achievements for men.

Psychological Risk

A poor service choice may bruise the consumer's ego. A poor choice of colleges could result in reducing the self-image or in bruising the ego of the student. The reputation of the school as well as the reputation of the degrees offered at the school can affect psychological risk. Therefore, two important features of the college selection process are "quality of majors of interest" and "overall academic reputation" (Chapman, 1993; Chapman and Jackson, 1987; Manski and Wise, 1983).

Murphy (1981) found, when it came to choice in schools, students listed academic reputation as the most important criterion. Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) reported that parents found academic reputation significantly more important than students. No studies found assessed these two criteria by gender.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Numerous studies have addressed the differences between males and females with regard to their psychological orientation and behavior. From a consumer behavior perspective, there have been several studies directed toward gender differences. Studies have addressed gender differences in information processing strategies (Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran, 1991), roles and attitudes (Fischer and Arnold, 1994), cueing and judgment-related activities (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991), and right-brain/left-brain activity (Meyers-Levy, 1994) to name a few. Previous studies have also found judgment-related differences between males and females when evaluating promotional materials and their attentiveness to different forms of advertising appeals (Holbrook, 1986; Meyers-Levy, 1994). Given that research has also found gender differences in shopping behavior (Roberts and Wortzel, 1984; Zeithaml, 1985) and in the characteristics males and females consider when evaluating products (Fischer and Arnold, 1994; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991), it is likely that gender differences are extended to the evaluative criteria in the selection of a college.

This study was designed to address two main questions in which we will address each group of selection criteria separately:

- Do male and female students differ in the selection criteria they consider important when choosing a college?
- Do male and female parents differ in the selection criteria they consider important when assisting their children in choosing a college?

Important to note, no studies were found that addressed differences by parent gender with regard to the college selection process. However, it was recognized that among various studies on gender roles, differences in shopping behavior by gender, and gender information processing the respondents with similar attitudes were of various ages. This would lead to the expectation of similar attitudes for the female students and female parents as well as for the male students and male parents. Therefore, our hypotheses for parents in this study will parallel those of the students unless there is supporting theory for them to be addressed otherwise.

Financial Risk Issues

When appraising the total cost of a college, its tuition, availability of scholarships, and financial aid are individual selection criteria that are

equally considered by both genders. Traditionally, however, parents of female students have saved less for college tuition than have parents of male students (Jacob, 1999). This may in part be due to the fewer numbers of females attending college in the past than males. If this trend has continued, then female students might be expected to be more cost-conscious than their male counterparts. However, given that females now consist of half the campus population, parents saving less for the female student may be a trend of the past. Thus, when assessing financial risk factors, there would be no significant gender differences between students or parents.

The hypotheses for financial risk are:

- H1a: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in their level of importance placed on tuition costs.
- H1b: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in their level of importance placed on availability of scholarships.
- H1c: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in their level of importance placed on financial aid.

Physical Risk Issues

Physical risk involves issues of safety, security, size, location, and weather. Physiological and safety needs may not be equal to males and females since studies on gender roles indicate males are more self-focused while females are guided more by communal concerns and are more sensitive to the needs of both self and others. Based on this information as well as previous research on college selection criteria, which indicates higher levels of importance placed on these physical factors by females, leads to the supposition that female students and mothers of perspective students would be more interested in the physical factors of safety, security, size, and location than would their male counterparts.

In this study, the hypotheses for physical risk for gender of both students and parents are:

- H2a: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on the safety and security of a school than will male students and male parents.

H2b: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on the size of a school than will male students and male parents.

H2c: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on the location of a school than will male students and male parents.

H2d: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in the importance placed on the weather or climate in which the school is located.

Functional Risk Issues

Functional risk involves whether or not the college will perform as expected including the academics of the school, the quality of the professors, and the degrees offered. With women now equaling or surpassing men in the number of degrees received (Jacobs, 1999) these functional risks should be basic concerns to both males and females; thus, functional risk should be similar for both gender groups. However, Litten and Hall (1989) found one difference, male students were more likely to choose quality of faculty as a more important college selection criterion than females. Thus, hypotheses for functional risk for both students and parents are:

H3a: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in the importance placed on the academics of the school.

H3b: Male students and male parents will place significantly more importance on the quality of the professors than will female students and female parents.

H3c: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in the importance placed on the degrees offered at the school.

Social Risk Issues

Social issues of self-esteem such as the possibility the student's choice of colleges could result in social embarrassment either by not fitting in with peers or failing to graduate is of importance to both male and female students. Therefore, the social criteria measured include whether

there is a friendly atmosphere on campus, whether friends will be attending the chosen college, and the degree of cultural diversity on campus. Also included are the prospects for finding a marriage partner, social activities, athletic programs, and the religious atmosphere of the campus.

Previous studies that have found mixed results between genders for the importance of global social college issues such as cultural diversity, friendly atmosphere, and religious atmosphere. When differences were indicated it was the female who found these issues more important. This, coupled with gender research that indicates social issues, may be assessed differently for males, who are more assertive, and females, who are more sensitive to interpersonal affiliation and social relationships (Meyers-Levy, 1988), would indicate females may be significantly different than males given these global social variables.

No studies were found which addressed the more personal social issue of the possibility of finding a marriage partner. Yet studies on gender roles and general behavior, found females typically were more interested in how they interacted with others around them (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991) and were more susceptible to social influence (Fischer and Arnold, 1994). Therefore, it would be expected females would find this significantly more important.

With the school selection criteria of social activities and athletics, males assessed athletics and social activities as more important than females. Given gender research indicates males are more interested in extra-curricular activities and quality of social life, this study would expect males to indicate both social activities and athletic programs as more important college selection criteria than females.

In this study the hypotheses for social risk for both students and parents are:

- H4a: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on the degree of cultural diversity at a school than will male students and male parents.
- H4b: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on the social atmosphere at the school than will male students and male parents.
- H4c: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in their level of importance placed on social activities at a school.

- H4d: Male students and male parents will place significantly more importance on the athletics programs offered a school than will female students and female parents.
- H4e: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on whether or not their student friends will attend the school than will male students and male parents.
- H4f: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on whether or not there are appropriate marriage prospects at the school than will male students and male parents.
- H4g: Female students and female parents will place significantly more importance on the religious atmosphere than will male students and male parents.

Psychological Risk Issues

When evaluating the potential college, a poor choice could result in reducing the self-image of the student, particularly after graduation when the student enters the job market. Previous studies have found students and parents both understand the importance of academic reputation and the reputation of the degrees of the school. Therefore, the reputation of the school and the reputation of the degrees offered can affect psychological risk for either gender. The hypotheses for psychological risk for both students and parents are:

- H5a: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in their level of importance placed on the reputation of the school.
- H5b: Male and female students and male and female parents will not differ in their level of importance placed on the reputation of the degree.

METHODOLOGY

While previous studies have used various search criteria to evaluate college selection, no standard measurement scale appears to exist. In order to assure evaluating the most current set of criteria used for selecting a college, one high school was chosen in which both a focus group of

high school seniors and telephone interviews of their parents were conducted. The focus group consisted of ten students: four males and six females. Using both round table discussion and open-ended written responses, moderators determined a list of the most important criterion used by the students for college selection.

To determine those characteristics important to the parents of the seniors, personal interviews via the telephone were conducted with twelve parents, eight women and four men. The same open-ended questions concerning college selection asked of the seniors were asked of their parents.

A comprehensive list of college selection criteria used by either group was compiled. From this list, nineteen of the most cited criteria were assimilated into a questionnaire to be sent to both parents and students. The respondents were asked to report their opinion of the level of importance for each attribute on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, "not at all important" to 5, "very important."

Eight private, religiously affiliated schools from five states were selected to participate. After determining the exact number of seniors in each school, surveys were sent to teachers who had the students complete and return them during a given class period. A total of 327 surveys were sent for distribution; 192 or 59% were collected and returned by the teachers. Although not matched to the students, the parents of the same 327 seniors were also mailed a survey. A reminder card was mailed to the parents after the first week and a second survey was sent the following week. A total of 66 surveys or 20% were returned.

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic profile of each of the respondent groups was as follows: of the students, 54% were female and 46% were male. Their racial/ethnic background was represented with 61% Caucasian, 16% Black/Non-Hispanic, 7% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 10% reported as "other." The students came from 11 states, representing the Midwest, the Southeast, the Northwest, and Southwest. While no average age for the students was collected, they were all high-school seniors. Of the parent respondent group, 60% were female and 40% were male. Their racial/ethnic background reported as 73% Caucasian, 14% Black/Non-Hispanic, 7% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and the remainder reporting "other." The parents reported annual household income in the following ranges: 8% had a household income less than \$25,000; 25% had an income of

\$25-50,000; 31% had an income of \$51-75,000; 19% had an income of \$76-100,000; 6% had an income of \$101-125,000; and 11%, an income over \$125,000. The parents represented the same 11 state classifications.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The stated hypotheses involved comparisons of the importance level of evaluative criteria used by males and females when selecting a college or university. Our purpose for this study was to examine any differences in the way in which male and female students consider and evaluate the college. We were also interested in any differences between the male and female parents who assisted them. In order to compare the levels of importance for the male and female respondent groups, t-tests were used on each criterion. These search criteria were organized into five groups: financial, physical, functional, social, and psychological. The results will be reported for the student group first, and then the parents.

Financial

The first comparisons involved differences in search criteria that were financial in nature. These included the specific attributes of tuition costs, financial aid, and scholarships. The t-tests were conducted using the mean differences of the respondents' reported importance levels for each of these criteria. Table 1 shows the results of the comparisons between male and female students.

There was no significant difference between the importance level placed on tuition by male students and that placed by female students. Therefore, H1(a) is supported. However, the means for both groups (4.35 for males; 4.48 for females) show this is an important criterion. There is no significant difference between male and female students with regard to the importance of scholarships. Thus, H1(b) is also supported. Once again, this does appear to be an important criterion for both groups, with means of 4.24 for males, and 4.49 for females. However, with regard to financial aid, there was a significant difference ($t = 2.83$; $p < .05$) between the importance level placed by males and that placed by females. Females placed a higher level of importance on that criterion than did males (means of 4.55 and 4.14 respectively). Therefore, H1(c) is rejected. One additional interesting finding was that for each of these criteria, females consistently ranked their level of importance higher than did the males.

TABLE 1. Students' Perceived Level of Importance of Search Criteria for Colleges—by Gender

Search Criteria	Importance for Males N = 84	Importance for Females N = 101	t-Value
Financial	Mean (std. dev.)	Mean (std. dev.)	
Tuition Cost	4.35 (.99)	4.48 (.84)	.94
Scholarships	4.24 (1.06)	4.49 (.90)	1.71
Financial Aid	4.14 (1.04)	4.55 (.89)	2.83*
Overall Mean	4.24 (.88)	4.51 (.76)	2.17*
Physical			
Security/Safety	3.84 (1.13)	4.45 (.77)	4.18*
Size	3.28 (1.12)	3.45 (.99)	1.11
Location	3.96 (1.15)	4.10 (.99)	.86
Weather	3.41 (1.08)	3.54 (1.11)	.80
Overall Mean	3.62 (.89)	3.89 (.59)	2.36*
Functional			
Academics	4.32 (1.09)	4.69 (.69)	2.67*
Professors	3.89 (1.09)	4.14 (1.09)	1.53
Degrees	4.20 (1.17)	4.48 (.76)	1.87
Overall Mean	4.13 (.95)	4.45 (.59)	2.70*
Social			
Cultural Diversity	3.21 (1.03)	3.38 (.97)	1.16
Friendly Atmosphere	4.20 (.99)	4.60 (.80)	3.06*
Social Activities	3.61 (1.08)	3.83 (.89)	1.46
Athletics	3.11 (1.16)	2.82 (1.01)	1.75
Friends	4.16 (1.01)	4.29 (.96)	.92
Prospects for Marriage	3.34 (1.21)	3.21 (1.23)	.69
Religious Atmosphere	3.76 (1.18)	4.31 (.93)	3.46*
Overall Mean	3.61 (.78)	3.78 (.59)	1.59
Psychological			
Reputation of School	3.88 (.94)	4.07 (.86)	1.43
Reputation of Degree	4.05 (1.14)	4.23 (.84)	1.20
Overall Mean	3.96 (.96)	4.15 (.74)	1.44

*Significant at $p < .05$

With regard to differences by gender for parents in the financial risk group, results can be found in Table 2. There was a significant difference between the level of importance placed on tuition by male parents and that placed by female parents ($t = 2.14$; $p < .05$), with females reporting it as a higher level criterion. Thus, H1(a) was rejected. This does appear to be an important criterion for both groups, with males reporting a mean of 4.46 and females, 4.76.

Also, although important criteria for both groups, there was no significant difference between male and female parents with regard to either scholarships or financial aid, therefore, H1(b) and H1(c) were both supported. Males reported a mean level of importance for scholarships of 4.50 and females 4.46; they reported means for financial aid of 4.52 and 4.73 respectively.

Physical

These college selection characteristics included safety-security, the size of the school, location, and weather. For these criteria, it was hypothesized that female students would place significantly different levels of importance than would males for security/safety, size, and location. Results show that females did place a significantly different level of importance ($t = 4.18$; $p < .05$) on security/safety than did males, with females ranking it of greater importance (mean for females 4.45; for males 3.84). Therefore, H2(a) was supported. With regard to the level of importance placed by males and females on the size of the school, there was no significant difference found, thus H2(b) was rejected. Also, this criterion was slightly less important than those previously mentioned, with means of 3.45 for females and 3.28 for males. Of the two remaining criteria in this group, there were no significant differences found for either location or weather. The mean level of importance for location was 4.10 for females and 3.96 for males. Therefore, H2(c) was rejected. The importance of weather was not significantly different, with means of 3.54 for females and 3.41 for males. Therefore, H2(d) was supported. For this group, females once again consistently rated each criterion's importance level higher than did the males.

With regard to the parental group we found that no significant differences were found between male and female parents for any of the physical risk criteria. Therefore, H2(a), H2(b), and H2(c) were rejected; H2(d) was supported. The level of importance for these criteria varied, with males reporting 3.92 for location, 4.54 for security/safety, 3.08 for size of the institution, and 2.96 for weather. Females reported means of

TABLE 2. Parents' Perceived Level of Importance of Search Criteria for Colleges—by Gender

Search Criteria	Importance for Males N = 25	Importance for Females N = 37	t-Value
Financial	Mean (std. dev.)	Mean (std. dev.)	
Tuition Cost	4.46 (.65)	4.76 (.43)	2.14*
Scholarships	4.50 (.71)	4.46 (.79)	.21
Financial Aid	4.52 (.65)	4.73 (.55)	1.41
Overall Mean	4.48 (.48)	4.67 (.44)	1.57
Physical			
Security/Safety	4.54 (.66)	4.71 (.52)	1.07
Size	3.08 (1.02)	3.27 (.99)	.71
Location	3.92 (.88)	4.03 (.80)	.50
Weather	2.96 (.91)	3.11 (.95)	.60
Overall Mean	3.64 (.54)	3.76 (.50)	.84
Functional			
Academics	4.64 (.64)	4.80 (.41)	1.12
Professors	4.08 (1.06)	4.54 (.65)	1.90
Degrees	4.27 (.72)	4.64 (.54)	2.39*
Overall Mean	4.31 (.56)	4.68 (.40)	2.87*
Social			
Cultural Diversity	3.24 (1.01)	3.41 (.99)	.68
Friendly Atmosphere	4.48 (.71)	4.70 (.46)	1.37
Social Activities	3.78 (.90)	3.78 (.92)	.01
Athletics	2.54 (1.14)	2.31 (1.39)	.66
Friends	3.92 (.86)	4.28 (.64)	1.90
Prospects for Marriage	3.65 (1.54)	3.86 (1.19)	.63
Religious Atmosphere	4.88 (.33)	4.95 (.22)	.90
Overall Mean	3.76 (.53)	3.88 (.40)	1.02
Psychological			
Reputation of School	4.60 (.58)	4.61 (.55)	.04
Reputation of Degree	4.13 (.80)	4.32 (.75)	.99
Overall Mean	4.38 (.59)	4.46 (.60)	.53

*Significant at $p < .05$

4.03 for location, 4.71 for security/safety, 3.27 for size of the institution, and 3.11 for weather. While the differences weren't significant, it was noted that similar to the student findings, female parents consistently ranked the physical risk criteria higher than did male parents.

Functional

The third group of criteria addressed the performance of the school. These criteria included the school's academics, the quality of the professors, and the degrees offered by the school. Findings were mixed in this group. With regard to the academics of the school, there was a significant difference ($t = 2.67$; $p < .05$) between the level of importance reported by male and female students. Females ranked the academics as higher in importance than did males (means of 4.69 and 4.32 respectively). Therefore, H3(a) was rejected. There was no significant difference found between the males and females reported importance level of the quality of professors, thus H3(b) was rejected, however, the females reported this as of higher importance than did males (means of 4.14 and 3.89 respectively). With regard to the degrees offered at the school, no significant difference was found between the importance placed by males and that placed by females. Therefore, H3(c) was supported. The means for both groups indicate that this is an important criterion, however, with females reporting a mean of 4.48 and males, 4.20. Male and female parents did not differ significantly with regard to the importance level of academics and professors. Males rated the importance of academics as 4.64 and professors, 4.08; females ranked them 4.80 and 4.54 respectively. There was a significant difference ($t = 2.39$; $p < .05$) between male and female parents with regard to the importance of the degrees of a college, with females ranking it a higher level criterion than did males (means of 4.64 and 4.27 respectively). Therefore, H3(a) was supported; H3(b) and H3(c) were both rejected.

Social

These search criteria included the degree of cultural diversity on campus, a friendly atmosphere, social activities, athletic programs, whether or not friends will attend, prospects for marriage, and religious atmosphere. Of this group, significant differences were found for only two of the criteria, a friendly atmosphere and religious atmosphere.

With regard to cultural diversity on campus, there was no significant difference found between the importance level placed by male students

and that placed by females. The means for this criteria were 3.21 and 3.38 respectively. Therefore, H4(a) was rejected. This study did find a significant difference ($t = 3.06$; $p > .05$) between male and female students with regard to the importance level of a friendly atmosphere on campus. Female students ranked this criterion of higher importance than did males (means of 4.60 and 4.20 respectively). Therefore, H4(b) was supported. Although females rated this characteristic higher than did males, with means of 3.83 and 3.61 respectively, the next criterion, the importance of social activities, showed no significant differences between males and females. Therefore, H4(c) was supported. It was expected that male students would place a significantly higher level of importance on the athletic programs than would females, however, this study found no significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, H4(d) was rejected. The mean for males was higher than that for females, however, reporting 3.11 and 2.82 respectively.

Another social criterion was whether or not the student's friends would also attend the same college. No significant difference was found between the level of importance placed by male students and that placed by females. The mean was slightly higher for females, however (4.29), than for males (4.16). Therefore, H4(e) was rejected. In common vernacular, it is usually purported that females are more interested in marriage than are males, however, in this study no significant difference was found between the gender groups with regard to prospects for marriage. Therefore, H4(f) was rejected. The surprising finding here; however, is that the males rated this criterion higher in level of importance than did females (means of 3.34 and 3.21 respectively). The last social group criterion was the religious atmosphere on campus, where it was expected that a significant difference between males and females would occur. This study found a significant difference ($t = 3.46$; $p > .05$) between males and females with regard to the level of importance placed on religious atmosphere, with the females rating it higher than did males (means of 4.31 and 3.76 respectively). Therefore, H4(g) was supported.

No significant differences were found between male and female parents for any of the social risk criteria. Therefore, hypotheses that were rejected include H4(a), H4(b), H4(d), H4(e), H4(f), and H4(g). Only H4(c) was supported. The importance levels placed on these criteria varied. Male and female parents reported means for each of the criteria as follows: for cultural diversity (males = 3.24, females = 3.41), for friendly atmosphere (males = 4.48, females = 4.70), for whether or not the student's friends would be attending the college (males = 3.92, females = 4.28), for prospects for marriage (males = 3.65, females =

4.28), for social activities (males = 3.77, females = 3.78), for athletics (males = 2.54, females = 2.31), and for religious atmosphere (males = 4.88, females = 4.95). In this group, female parents once again reported higher levels of importance than did males for all criteria with the exception of athletics.

Psychological

The psychological risk criteria included the reputation of the school and the reputation of the degree obtained. No significant difference was found between the level of importance placed by male students and that placed by females on the reputation of the school. Therefore, H5a was supported. However, the females did rate this criterion higher than did males (means of 4.07 and 3.88 respectively). Likewise, no significant difference was found between the level of importance placed by males on the reputation of the degree and that placed by females. Thus, H5b was supported. Once again, the females rated this criterion higher than did males with means of 4.23 and 4.05 respectively. No significant differences by parent gender were found for either of the psychological criteria supporting both hypotheses H5a and b. However, both male and female parents reported these as having a high level of importance. Males reported a mean for the reputation of the school at 4.60 and for the reputation of the degree at 4.13. Females reported 4.61 and 4.32 for the reputation of the school and degrees respectively. Again, the female parents reported higher levels of importance than did males for both criteria.

DISCUSSION

The data indicate not only differences in the importance level placed on search criteria by males and females, but also provides information as to where these criteria rank by level of importance for each group. Both male students and female students rate the characteristic groups in the same order, beginning with financial, then functional, psychological, physical, and social while overall means for each characteristic group are higher for the females than for the males (Table 3).

For the parent group, male and female parents did rank these groups differently, with the males ranking the groups in order of financial, psychological, functional, social, and physical. Female parents felt the functional group was the most important, with financial following sec-

TABLE 3. Students' Means of Search Criteria Level of Importance in Descending Order

By Group:

	Mean for Students-Males:		Mean for Students-Females:
Financial	4.24	Financial	4.51
Functional	4.13	Functional	4.45
Psychological	3.96	Psychological	4.15
Physical	3.62	Physical	3.89
Social	3.61	Social	3.78

By Individual Search Criteria:

For Students-Males: n = 82		For Students-Females: n = 100	
	Mean (std. dev.)		Mean (std. dev.)
Tuition	4.35 (.99)	Academics	4.69 (.69)
Academics	4.32 (1.09)	Friendly Atmosphere	4.60 (.80)
Scholarships	4.24 (1.06)	Financial Aid	4.55 (.89)
Friendly Atmosphere	4.20 (.99)	Scholarships	4.49 (.90)
Degrees	4.20 (1.17)	Tuition	4.48 (.84)
Friends	4.16 (1.01)	Degrees	4.48 (.76)
Financial Aid	4.14 (1.04)	Security/Safety	4.45 (.77)
Reputation of Degrees	4.05 (1.14)	Religious Atmosphere	4.31 (.93)
Location	3.96 (1.15)	Friends	4.29 (.96)
Professors	3.89 (1.09)	Reputation of Degree	4.23 (.84)
Reputation of School	3.88 (.94)	Professors	4.14 (1.09)
Security/Safety	3.84 (1.13)	Location	4.10 (.99)
Religious Atmosphere	3.76 (1.18)	Reputation of School	4.07 (.86)
Social Activity	3.61 (1.08)	Social Activity	3.83 (.89)
Weather	3.41 (1.08)	Weather	3.54 (1.11)
Prospects for Marriage	3.34 (1.21)	Size	3.45 (.99)
Size	3.28 (1.12)	Cultural Diversity	3.38 (.97)
Cultural Diversity	3.21 (1.03)	Prospects for Marriage	3.21 (1.23)
Athletics	3.11 (1.16)	Athletics	2.82 (1.01)

ond, then physical, psychological, and social (Table 4). As with the student group, the overall means for each group were higher for females than for males.

With regard to specific search criteria, the top ten for male students and the top ten for female students include the same criteria, with the exception of security/safety and religious atmosphere, which are in the females' top ten, but not the males' (Table 3). Instead of these two, males included location and quality of professors in their group. It is interesting to note that when eliminating security/safety and religious atmosphere from the females top ten, the next two characteristics included are like the males,' those of location and quality of professors. It would appear then, that the attributes that are salient for both males and females are very similar, even though they are not ranked in the exact same order of importance.

For the parent group in this study, both male and female parents ranked religious atmosphere as their number one criterion and academics second (Table 4). The number one criterion is likely due to the study's sample of high schools with a single religious affiliation. However, if the religious atmosphere criterion is eliminated, then both male and female parents still have a single number one criterion, that of academics.

The discussion above addressed the general results of the top ten criteria. The following will discuss the results of criteria by each type of perceived risk.

Financial Risk (Tuition, Scholarships, Financial Aid)

All three criteria were included in the top ten lists for both male and female students although females rated each of them more important than males with a significant difference for financial aid (Table 1). Of interest, females ranked financial aid 3rd, scholarships 4th, and tuition 5th, while males ranked tuition 1st, scholarships 3rd, and financial aid 7th (Table 3). This may reaffirm past research indicating females understand there may not be as much money available from their family to attend college and, therefore, while financial risks are important to both groups, female students may be more price-sensitive than are males.

For the parent groups, all three financial risk criteria were found in the top ten by level of importance. However, mothers placed more significance on tuition costs than did fathers (Table 2) and ranked them higher, 3rd and 8th respectively (Table 4). While this follows with past research, the importance level of the difference financial criteria could

TABLE 4. Parents' Means of Search Criteria Level of Importance in Descending Order

By Group:

	Mean for Parents-Males:		Mean for Parents-Females:
Financial	4.48	Functional	4.68
Psychological	4.38	Financial	4.67
Functional	4.32	Physical	4.46
Social	3.76	Psychological	3.89
Physical	3.64	Social	3.88

By Individual Search Criteria:**For Parents-Males: n = 26****For Parents-Females: n = 39**

	Mean (std. dev.)		Mean (std. dev.)
Religious Atmosphere	4.88 (.33)	Religious Atmosphere	4.95 (.22)
Academics	4.64 (.64)	Academics	4.80 (.41)
Reputation of School	4.60 (.58)	Tuition	4.76 (.43)
Security/Safety	4.54 (.66)	Financial Aid	4.73 (.55)
Financial Aid	4.52 (.65)	Security/Safety	4.71 (.52)
Scholarships	4.50 (.71)	Friendly Atmosphere	4.70 (.46)
Friendly Atmosphere	4.48 (.71)	Degrees	4.64 (.54)
Tuition	4.46 (.64)	Reputation of School	4.61 (.55)
Degrees	4.27 (.72)	Professors	4.54 (.65)
Reputation of Degree	4.13 (.80)	Scholarships	4.46 (.79)
Professors	4.08 (1.06)	Reputation of Degree	4.32 (.75)
Friends	3.92 (.86)	Friends	4.28 (.64)
Location	3.92 (.88)	Location	4.03 (.80)
Social Activity	3.78 (.90)	Prospects for Marriage	3.86 (1.19)
Prospects for Marriage	3.65 (1.54)	Social Activity	3.78 (.92)
Cultural Diversity	3.24 (1.01)	Cultural Diversity	3.41 (.99)
Size	3.08 (1.02)	Size	3.27 (.99)
Weather	2.96 (.91)	Weather	3.11 (.95)
Athletics	2.54 (1.14)	Athletics	2.31 (1.39)

be impacted by the demographics of the family, depending on the income level in the household, the number of children, etc., and may be of interest in a future study.

Physical Risk (Security/Safety, Size, Location, Weather)

Results indicate that the majority of physical criteria are of interest to both genders (students and parents); however, they are not of major importance in the scheme of overall evaluation. Only one attribute, safety/security, was found to have a significant difference between female and male students (Table 1), with female students also rating it of higher importance than did males, 7th versus 12th (Table 3). It is clear, however, that safety/security is of more importance to parents than to their children with both mothers and fathers placing it in the top five criteria (Table 4). This result supports previous studies' findings.

Functional Risk (Academics, Degrees, Professors)

Male students included all three of these criteria in their top ten list, while females included only academics and degrees. Our results, with regard to the academics criterion, support the findings in earlier studies, where females were found to have placed significantly greater importance on academics than did males (Table 1). These same studies found the criteria of degrees and professors to be rated significantly higher by females as well, however, our results did not support this. Both male and female parents rated academics as the second most important criterion when evaluating a school, preceded only by the religious atmosphere of the institution (Table 4). This was not unexpected given the sample was drawn from parents whose students were currently attending a religious institution. Given the mean order of the selection criteria, all three of the functional risk criteria are attributes that are of importance to incoming students and parents, both male and female. However, academics are clearly of greater importance.

Social Risk (Cultural Diversity, Friendly Atmosphere, Friends, Prospects for Marriage, Social Activities, Athletics, and Religious Atmosphere)

Studies of gender roles and behavior have suggested that females are more interested in social criteria than are males. Although only statistical difference for religious atmosphere and friendly atmosphere were

found (Table 1), the results of the means in this study do follow with previous research suggesting that female students are more interested in the social risk criteria than are males (Table 3). However, two exceptions were noted; athletics and prospects for marriage. Possibly counter-intuitive, male students rated the prospects for marriage as more important than females. It would be interesting to further investigate this finding.

Of perceived social risk, there were no significant differences (Table 2) and both male and female parents ranked religious atmosphere as the number one criterion of importance when choosing a college for their children (Table 4). This finding is most likely due to the sample used in this study and cannot necessarily be generalized to other situations. Within the parent group, all social risk criteria but religion were ranked below the top ten. Similar to the male/female student overall finding, the female parent's means were higher for all social risk criteria with the exception of athletics.

Psychological Risk (Reputation of the School and Reputation of the Degree)

Although no significant differences for any of the psychological risk criteria (Table 1), once again, female students overall means were higher for each criterion (Table 3). Given the increased number of females in today's workforce over previous decades, female students appear to be slightly more interested than male students in the overall reputation of the school and its degrees and what both can do for them after graduation.

Male and female parents did not differ significantly with regard to the psychological risk criteria (Table 2), however, the reputation of the school was found to be ranked third in level of importance for the male parents, and eighth for females (Table 4). This finding would contribute to Cottle's (1991) research which reports fathers seemingly resting their entire sense of worth on the acceptance or rejection on the basis of the schools to which his child applies whereas mothers are just pleased their child is applying for college.

LIMITATIONS

While the findings of this study are interesting, it does include several limitations. One is the modest size of the sample. Despite its modest size, however, this study could be used as a springboard for future ef-

forts where larger sample sizes either confirm or refute the findings. Also, while the sample represented several geographic regions across the country, it was collected from a somewhat homogenous group; the students were attending high schools that are affiliated with a single religious domination and their parents preferred these schools based on the religious affiliation. This could have had an impact on the importance of several search criteria, including the importance placed on marriage prospects and religious atmosphere. While this homogeneity of religious philosophy could act on one level as a control variable, it may also have skewed some of the results. Future studies could investigate the search criteria of other types of high school groups.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The data obtained in this study suggest that there are several areas in which male and female high school seniors differ, as well as male and female parents, when evaluating potential colleges. Given that males and females tend to process information somewhat differently, and that parents are also involved in the selection process, this data should be of interest to college administrators, recruitment, and enrollment departments, as well as to those responsible for developing marketing materials for the school in which they can focus on specific criteria where significant differences were found among the four groups. It should be of interest since, from a practical perspective, the results suggest that marketers for these schools might use a differentiated target segmentation strategy when developing materials and in their personal selling efforts.

From a practitioner's perspective, results suggest those who are involved in marketing the college and attempting to influence the decision process may find several areas where search criteria are of equal importance to both males and females, be they students or parents. This would indicate that some advertising and promotional material could be developed using the same information for all segment groups. Given this study's findings that females tended to rate the majority of the criteria as having a higher level of importance than did males, practitioners should be aware that males and females look for differing levels of detail. This information is useful in developing a communication program and should be utilized and integrated into all aspects of the schools' promotional program including the school website, videos, and printed materials. It is also useful to those who are developing and conducting any campus visitation programs for students and their parents.

CONCLUSION

This study asked two questions, “Do male and female students differ in the selection criteria they consider important when choosing a college?” and “Do male and female parents differ in the selection criteria they consider important when assisting their children in choosing a college?” The results of this paper found that there were some gender differences between both groups, male and female students and mothers and fathers.

Of the nineteen hypotheses for the student group, ten were supported and nine were rejected; for the parent group, eight were supported and eleven were rejected. There were five significant differences reported between female and male students with females reporting higher level means regarding academics, friendly atmosphere, financial aid, security/safety, religious atmosphere. These five areas could be stressed when targeting material to students especially toward the female student.

While the findings were somewhat different than expected, there was one interesting pattern that emerged. The mean level of importance for female students was higher than males on 17 of 19 criteria. The mean level of importance for male students ranked only athletics and the prospects for a marriage partner higher. While intuitively, it may seem that this finding for the athletic criterion is sensible, it is somewhat anti-typical for the marriage prospects criterion.

Also noted, four of the top five selection criteria for male and female students are the same: academics, tuition, scholarships and friendly atmosphere. The two which are different; for males the last of the top five is degrees offered, for females it is financial aid. These similarities and differences are important for university officials to note when preparing promotional material. Noting differences in the top ten selection criteria might also prove useful.

For the parent group there were only two significant differences reported with females reporting higher levels for tuition and degrees offered. Given these results these two areas should be stressed when addressing the female parent. Yet, given these two were in the top ten for both parents, both these areas could be stressed when material is targeting parents, especially the female parent. Similar to the student group, the mean level of importance for 17 of the 19 criteria for female parents was consistently higher than males. The exceptions: athletics and scholarships.

When evaluating the top five selection criteria, the four similarities between genders: academics, religious atmosphere, security/safety, and

financial aid. The two that were different; for males the reputation of the school was important, for females it was tuition (which was also different for female parents). Those academic officials preparing promotional material or visiting with students and parents on a campus visit might find this observation useful as well.

Overall, in every significant relationship, for both students and parents, the females ranked the attribute as having a higher level of importance. This may possibly be due to the fact that females tend to encode more information than do males and tend to elaborate on this information more extensively.

When comparing all four groups, male students, female students, male parents, female parents, the only criterion that was consistently in the top five was academics. This would indicate the primary focus for a university's recruitment effort should be on its academics.

In conclusions, there does appear to be similarities as well as differences between gender groups with regard to evaluative selection criteria. However, in any segmented approach, marketers must be careful about stereotyping any group. In this research, none of the members in any one group choose 100 percent of a given selection criterion. While school recruitment publications, from brochures to letters, have to be designed for a mass audience some specifically targeted media or messages may increase the probability of directly addressing the needs and concerns of certain types of individuals. Thus, the data presented in this report should be useful for educating all involved in the recruitment process as well as alumni and others by showing differences among groups which should be explored during interactions with individuals.

Given the importance gender could play when marketing to students and parents as well as its ease of identification and use as a targeting mechanism, colleges should take another look at this commonly used demographic segmenting variable.

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