KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WITH A DISABILITY

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Lorna Nation

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Presented by:
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Key Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of African American Males with a Disability:
A Qualitative Case Study.
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ABSTRACT

There is a diversity of factors that negatively affect the academic success of African American males, from early childhood through adulthood; however, there are those African Americans males with disabilities that defy the odds and are obtaining degrees at the post-baccalaureate level. This qualitative case study, therefore, aims to identify key factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability who have attained master's and earned doctoral degrees. Both purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed to recruit participants for the study. Three African American males with a disability, one of whom has an earned doctoral degree one an earned Master's 'degree and one who is currently pursuing a doctoral degree, participated in the study. Specifically, the interview method was used to gather data as the study investigated an unexplored area in research that contrasts disability diagnosis, and academic success in a specific racial group at the master's degree and terminal degree levels. After data was gathered, the researcher relied heavily on content analysis. Findings from the study show that the factors which contributed to the academic success of African American males with a disability includes family support, resilience, faith/ spirituality, academic engagement, self- advocacy and a belief in ones' ability to succeed no matter the circumstance. African American males with a disability faces a variety of challenges on their path to academic success however they can achieve academic success despite all the challenges they face.

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DEDICATION

To the God who stood by side when I thought this was such an impossible task to complete because so many tragedies surrounded me "though I walked through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalms 23:1), You comforted me and is still my Strong Tower.

Next, to my darling daughter, Shay, who amid our tragedies, the loss of her beloved father, my husband; the death of our three cousins, my brother-in-law and my nephew who all passed away in a single year; consistently encouraged me with her confident cheer, "You Can Do It, Mom, You Will Do It, Mom, there is A God who Strengthens You."

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

There is a diversity of factors that negatively affect the academic success of African American males, from early childhood through adulthood, a prolific amount of literature attests to this information (Cuyjet & Associates, 2016; Davis, & Jordan., 1994). There is, however, a percentage of African American males who seem to surpass these adverse circumstances and who not only have been resilient in their pursuit of academic success (Eunyoung, & Hargrove, 2013) but have achieved master's and doctoral degrees. Of interest to the researcher are those factors that allow this percentage of the African American male population, especially those diagnosed with a disability, to achieve academic success. Therefore, this study seeks to discover what factors contribute to the academic success of African American males diagnosed with a disability. Specifically, this study focuses on the following three categories of disabilities, emotional/behavioral disorder, blind/visual impairment, and specific learning disability, the categories of disability of the participants who volunteered to participate in this study.

The most recent data on special education reporting shows that during the years 2011-2018, the number of students who were diagnosed with a disability and received special education services in public schools across the United States increased from 6.4 million to 7.0 million (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver 2011; Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2019). More males than females receive special education services. Data show that a higher percentage of males (17%) than females (9%) received special education services (Miller, Li, & Kabell, 2015; Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow,2019). Presently, African Americans make up about 18% of the students in American public

schools; however, "If the student is African American, he/or she is 40% more likely to be placed in special education than his/ or her Caucasian counterpart, and if he is an African American male, the statistics are even higher" (Harper, 2017, p.1).

African American male students are the ones most frequently identified as having a high-incidence disability (Gage, Lierheimer, & Goran, 2012). High incidence disabilities are those disabilities identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that are prevalent in children and youth with disabilities in schools in the United States. This group of disabilities typically includes "emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD), specific learning disabilities (SLD), and intellectual disability (ID)" (Gage, Lierheimer, & Goran, 2012, p.168). Sullivan and Bal, in a study on disproportionality in special education, found that African American males are 2.5 times more likely than their Caucasian peers to be labeled as EB/D and 3.29 times more likely to be enrolled in the category ID (Sullivan, & Bal 2013). As early as 2002, a study conducted by Loren and Osefield on disproportionality, found that African American males were 1.13 times more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be diagnosed with a specific learning disability (Loren, & Osefield 2002). Information from the US Department of Education shows that African Americans are overrepresented in the EB/D category. 27.3% receive services in the EBD category. They are 2.8 times more likely to be enrolled in the SLD category than their Caucasian counterpart (US Department of Education, 2006). African American males account for 12% of the total amount of students placed in specific learning disabilities and 21% in the I/D category, resulting in an overrepresentation of African American males in special education (Banks & Hughes 2013).

The quantity of literature that focuses on the overrepresentation of African

American males in special education is disturbing. It is the African American male students who are the children that are most likely to be misidentified and placed in the high incidence categories in special education (Byrnes, 2013). When these students are placed in special education, the experience impedes and influences their entire life's outcome from elementary school, and throughout their post- secondary years. Placement in these special education categories controls the achievement of students and reveals significant disparities in access to a quality secondary education program that is critical to postsecondary education (Parekh & Brown, 2019).

Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of African American male students with disabilities who are planning to be engaged in postsecondary education. Both students with high incidence disabilities and low incident disabilities are planning to attend college and some are currently attending college according to their transition plans (Newman, et al., 2016). However, the percent of African American male students with a disability that are realizing their dreams of college is at the minimal level. Once labeled as having a disability and placed in the special education stream, African American students are less likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be exited from special education, they are less likely to be prepared for college, and they exhibit lower achievement in education (Hiebel et al., 2020). Special education programs often lack rigor, they are not challenging and do not lead students to develop analytical and critical thinking skills needed at the post -secondary education level. When there is a lack of preparation for the college experience for African American males with a disability, especially for those placed in self-contained special education classes, schools deny these students equal opportunities to access postsecondary education (Banks & Hughes 2013).

African American male students, especially those diagnosed with a disability and are placed in self-contained classrooms, have not been given the same opportunities to participate in classes providing "enriched educational offerings." throughout the years since they first gained the rights to access public education in the United States. They are more "frequently removed from the general education classroom due to unfair treatment and teacher subjectivity established in the qualification procedures for special education services" (Banks & Hughes 2013, p.369). African American students receive more severe punishment for violations of the same rules than their Caucasian counterparts. On average, African American male students, especially those attending inner-city public schools, are less than half as likely as Caucasian students to receive extra resources or gifted and talented programs by their schools (Butler et al., 2012). Only a few, 0.6%, African American students are enrolled in Advanced Placement Classes compared to 5.5 % Asians, 10.8% Hispanics, and 61.8% Caucasians despite pleas from colleges and university boards for schools to open these classes to all who may benefit. In school districts where there are selective, college-preparatory high schools, it is almost improbable to find African American male students attending those schools (College Board, 2012). Unfair treatment in schools leads to high dropout rates, mistrust of the educational system and truancy.

On a national scale, the percentage of African American male students enrolled at each level of schooling declines from middle school through to graduate degree level (Lipscomb, et al., 2017). The US Census Bureau reported that during the school year 2017-2018, 13.65% of the students enrolled in elementary schools were African American males, at the high school level only 6.5% of the students were African American males and at the postsecondary only 6.1 % of students were African American males. However, identified

amongst all those students were students diagnosed with a disability. 16 % of the total population of students ages three through twenty-one who had a disability were African American males. African American males with a disability can achieve academic success despite all the challenges they face. During the 2018 academic year, 19.2% of the African American males attending post-secondary institutions had a disability and were enrolled in four year or two-year institutions. 9.9% were enrolled in post baccalaureate studies (US Department of Education 2019). African American males with a disability can succeed academically both at the secondary level and the postsecondary level. Their academic success is attainable when these students are held to high standards of performance, and they are not conditioned to underachieve. "When learning environments embrace and celebrate their cultural background and utilize strength-based perspectives which include self-esteem, confidence, and perseverance which are necessary tools needed to navigate the educational terrain," (Harris et al., 2016, p.56), African American male students with a disability can achieve their highest potentials.

Statement of the Problem

As the American society faces the challenges of era driven by knowledge and technology, post-secondary education has become exceptionally critical for the economic survival of all students. Post-secondary educational attainment must become the new norm for all students whether they are classified as general education or special education students. Students with disabilities are now becoming increasingly aware and focused on postsecondary education as colleges and universities open offices of disabilities services and opens new avenues for educational advancement for students with disabilities on their campuses.

According to the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (2006),

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004,

defines the various categories of disabilities. These disabilities

include: "autism, deaf-blindness, emotional/behavioral disorder,

hearing impairment (including deafness), intellectual disability

formerly mental retardation, orthopedic impairment, other health

impairment, multiple disabilities, specific learning disability,

speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual

impairment including blindness (p. 2).

Given the extent to which African American males are unsuccessful in their formal American educational experience, this paper functions to identify the key factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males diagnosed with a disability beyond the baccalaureate level. The participants in this study have been identified with a disability in the following three categories of disabilities, blind and visual impairment, emotional/behavioral disorder, and specific learning disability.

Purpose of the Study

Numerous research has reported on factors that have negatively impacted the academic success of African American males and have revealed that the "educational plight of the African American male is often associated with underachievement, resulting from deficits placed on their intellect and underrepresentation at the postsecondary level" (Scott et al., 2013, p.288). Whenever a disability label is placed on an African American male, the label further places on him, the pressure of the dominant cultural narrative. This is "that culture which projects African American males as pimps, "criminals, irresponsible

fathers, descendants of dysfunctional families, drug addicts and self-destructive misogynistic ballers" (Banks & Hughes, 2013, p. 369), as he tries to prove that he is not less intelligent than the rest of his peers while struggling with the challenges and stigma associated with his disability.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify factors that influence African American males with disabilities who have achieved academic success at the postgraduate level. It is the hope that the study will support the number of these students who are desirous of transitioning to college. It will "serve as a catalyst" to develop the kind of support system that deters academic drop-out rates of African American male students with disabilities. The study will provide the base that aids in the maintenance of academic success in this population, therefore successfully fulfilling the goal of a former President of the United States, Mr. Barack Obama, to raise the college education graduation rate for all students.

Need for the Study

The researcher hopes that this study will not only guide future practices, policies, and research for the education of all African American male students but that it will also provide insights that will help college administrators, faculty, and advisors, to improve the educational opportunities and retention rates of African American male students diagnosed with disabilities who are enrolled in colleges and universities as well. It is the hope that the study will also help teachers to improve the primary and secondary educational experience of these students, especially where there is a tendency to place these students in special education. The researcher believes that identifying those factors that positively affect the academic achievement of African American males with a disability, especially those specific factors that drive them to achieve master's and doctoral degrees; are critical steps

that will help in the development and implementation of policies that will lead to the advancement of educational equity, and success stories for this population of students (Skiba et al., 2008).

Success stories in education are valuable learning tools, "since it is a belief that a great deal can be learned about promoting school success by studying those students who seemed to succeed academically despite all the odds and despite many barriers" (Powell, 2018, p. 41). It is the hope that others see the value in these success stories that will be related here and use them to assist other African American males to overcome educational barriers or challenges. Harper asks the following questions regarding African American male students: "But what about those among this population who beat the odds, make the most of college, and achieve in multiple ways inside and outside of the classroom? Who are they? What can they teach us?" (Harper, 2005, p. 8). These questions address the purpose of this qualitative case study, to determine the key factors contributing to the academic success of African American males with a disability.

Theoretical Framework

This study, key factors contributing to the academic success of African males with a disability, is grounded in the theory of culturalism, "a theoretical approach that emphasizes the meaning of culture, especially in determining individual behavior and how society functions." (Anthropology 100-Cultural Anthropology (Extra Terms (n.d. Oxford Dictionaries p.1). The culturalist perspective accounts for how a group of people lives. It embodies symbols, artifacts, and intellectual products that define the shared values and habits of a group. Each ethnic group within a society creates a particular basic way of life that is peculiar to the group which is passed on to the next generation as customs and

practices and as the "essence" of the relevance of belonging to a particular group" (Rogalski, 2002, p. 9).

From the culturalist perspective, each group is seen as a "unified or holistic cultural entity, within a society, and therefore represents distinct cultural viewpoints" (Rogalski, 2002. p. 10). Culturalism contends that it sees the value system of a given culture as to some degree defined and determined by the values of dominant groups in society. "These cultural values, themes, heritage, traditions, resources, biases, and blinders of the dominant group are transmitted to succeeding generations and to other new and marginal groups, (for example, immigrants) as received knowledge and values" (Rogalski, 2002, p .9). African American a minority group is impacted by the dominant culture. They have experienced a culture of oppression and marginalization in all areas of life by the dominant Caucasian culture since the first group of their African ancestors arrived as slaves in this country (Irvin & Hudley 2008). A core element of the African American Culture is their belief that racism is a major component of the dominant Caucasian Culture, any institution or establishment created by Caucasians will not treat them fairly. The American educational system is considered to be an institution that is dominated by the European Caucasian culture and is racially stacked against them (Ogbu & Simon 1998).

Racism in the schools and society at large adversely affect the academic success of African American students. The treatment of this minority group in the wider society is a reflection of the what is meted out to them in the educational system Assumptions about the academic achievement of these students results from dominant cultural stereotypes about different races such as "Asian Americans being the model minority and African Americans and Hispanics as under achievers" giving rise to the stereotypical view that the

United States is open for the achievement of all minorities but the lack of academic success for African Americans is due to cultural deficiencies" (Caldwell & Obasi, 2010, p.34). Culturally African Americans value education they believe that education is the means to improve their social and emotional conditions (Caldwell & Obasi, 2010). Education for them is the means of upward mobility in this society, they value and respect those amongst them who are high achievers. However, African Americans are often schooled in underfunded, poorly maintained institutions with underqualified and ill-prepared teachers especially when they attend inner city public schools. Engaging in learning in poorly equipped and underfunded inner-city public-schools results in a lack of trust in the educational system to provide adequate education. When there is a lack of trust in these educational institutions, students become delinquents, drop out of school, or turn to athletics, hair dressing or grooming instead of their academic pursuits. (Irving & Hudley 2008).

The culturalist theory embraces and values all members that exist in a society. Minorities in a society are "autonomous human beings who actively interpret and respond to their situations, they do not act as helpless victims but have the ability to succeed" (Ogbu& Simons, 1998 p.158). The culturalist theory is vital if schooling is to be an agent of social change, social progress, and student empowerment instead of agents who just establish a status quo that is controlled by particular groups, social classes, and teachers, including those that are leading various minority groups (Regleski, 2000). This study will explore the educational experiences of African American males with a disability as it traces how their culture, the American culture at large, and other factors contribute to their academic success as guided by the research questions that drive this study.

Research Questions

The two research questions below guided this study.

RQ1. What factors do African American male students with a disability report drive them to pursue a degree at the master's or doctoral level?

RQ2. What supports and strategies assisted the academic success of African American males diagnosed with a disability at the master's level and beyond?

Definition of Terms

The following terms listed below are used throughout this study:

Academic Engagement: Academic engagement in school has been termed and is equivalent to student involvement and motivation to learn. (Finn & Voepel 1993, p.249).

African American: "An African American is a citizen or resident of the United States who has his origin in any of the black populations of Africa. In the United States, the term refers to Americans with at least partial Sub-Saharan African ancestry" (US Legal.com, 2018, p. 1.).

Academic Success: The achievement of a degree at the master's level and beyond.

Cultural Capital: "Cultural codes and symbols of high status or dominant social groups that become an integral part of the practices, and sensibilities of schools and other social organizations, consequently it shows how these cultural practices yield advantages disproportionately to members of those particular groups" (Rose, 2018).

Disproportionality: Disproportionality exists when students' representation in special education programs or specific special education categories exceeds their proportional enrollment in a school's general population (Blanchett, 2006 p.24).

Education Dropout Rate: "The percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in

school, and who have not earned a high school diploma, (Dropouts-Education Week (n.d.) or an equivalent credential such as a GED certificate" (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).gov (n.d.); Education Ohio.gov.: Eligibility and Application Information. (n.d.).

High Incidence Disability: Students with high-incidence disabilities typically include "students with "behavioral and other disabilities, including emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD), specific learning disabilities (SLD), and mild intellectual disability (MID). However, students with other "high-functioning autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and speech and language impairment are now being identified at higher rates and occupy an aggregate "other" category within high-incidence disabilities" (Gage et al., 2012, p. 168).

Parent Engagement: "A desire, an expression, or an attempt by parents to have an impact on what happens to their children in their schools daily. It is parents interacting with the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued by the schools" (Barton et al., 2004, p. 11). The major types of parental engagement in this study include "(1) nurturing relationships and interactions. (2) Advising and mentoring. (3) Organizing, (4) Monitoring, and motivating students' academic engagement, and (5) instructing" (Borup, Stevens, & Waters, 2015 p.28).

Transition: Transition is the movement from one place, status, or situation to the next.

Overview of the Methodology

The study is a qualitative case study. The interview is the primary method of data collection used in the study. Interview questions were designed to identify themes and ideas related to the study. Each question was also designed to provide a structure for the interview

sessions (Creswell, 2013). The first section of the interview focused on the collection of demographic data. The second section of the interview collected data on the personal experiences of each participant as they were growing up with their disability, their experience while studying in school at the different levels, and the services and supports offered them. Emphasis was placed mainly on the lived experiences of the participants.

Summary of the Introduction

Achieving academic success at the postgraduate level for African American males with a disability is a rare phenomenon. However, there are those students with a disability who are achieving this level of success. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify those factors that contribute to the academic success of those African American Males diagnosed with a disability who have attained master's and doctoral level degrees. A qualitative case study was employed to determine these factors. As more students with disabilities are seeking to acquire education at the postsecondary level, policymakers, school administrators, and teachers need to do everything they can to allow African American students diagnosed with a disability to achieve academic success at this level. In order to assist African American males with a disability to successfully attain academic success, it is expedient that all who are involved in their academic experience beginning from the elementary grades know what allows some African American students with disabilities to achieve high levels of academic success. Once they know this, then they can actively plan and implement best practices in the educational experience of this population of students to ensure their academic success.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 is the introduction. It provides background information to the study,

outlines the significance and purpose of this study, work, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review, here, the writer presents a brief overview of African Americans, information on the factors that contribute to the academic success, and failure of African American males as obtained from the literature review then introduces the methodology. Chapter 3 is the methodology. The methodology is a description of the methods used to gather data, the validity, and reliability of the methods and instruments used for data collection, and a description of the population used for the study. Chapter 4 presents and analyzes the data gathered, as well as discusses the findings. Chapter 5 presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study. The literature review follows.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review aims to gather and discuss data about the perceptions of African Americans males diagnosed with disabilities, and the factors that contribute to their academic success. The study specifically focuses on those African American males diagnosed according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with the following categories of disabilities (a) emotional /behavioral disturbance, (b) blind/visual impairment, and (c) specific learning disabilities who attained postbaccalaureate degrees and volunteered to participate in this study. A few books that provided historical background to the research along with a detailed search of the World Wide Web were used for the literature review in order to capture as much information as possible and lend validity to this study. Amongst the Internet Search Engines used were Google Search Engine, Google Scholar, and Yahoo. EBSCOhost, ERIC, JSTOR, and SAGE were used as four main academic search engines within Slippery Rock University Library. Included in this search were keywords and terms such as academic engagement, academic success, African American Males, Blacks, cultural pluralism, disabilities, postsecondary education, dropout rates, graduation rates, parental engagement, resilience, student engagement, religion, and spirituality to provide information from peer-reviewed journals and books suitable for the study.

A preliminary search of the literature on the factors that contribute to academic success in African American males with a disability identified specific themes such as religion/spirituality, parental engagement, mentoring, resilience, teacher expectations,

academic engagement, and special education services, among others. Three of these themes, namely: academic engagement, special education services, and parental engagement, are explored in this qualitative case study. A historical overview of Special Education, a brief historical overview of African Americans, some characteristics of African American males with disabilities, and the academic success of African American males diagnosed with disabilities precede this.

Historical Overview of Special Education

Special Education services and support have their origin in case laws, legislations, and the efforts of parents and advocacy groups. A 2012 study conducted by McHatton, Gordon, Glenn, & Sue, found that the history of Special Education consists of "segregation, exclusion, and marginalization, often supported by legislation" (McHatton, Gordon, Glenn, & Sue, 2012, p.37). Artiles, in his study on special education, found that "Special Education has a history that is intertwined with the civil rights movement and reflects continued concerns regarding the ''racialization of ability'' (Artiles, 2011, p. 431).

In the early history of education in the United States, children and young people with disabilities were not welcomed in public schools. "Youth with disabilities historically received unequal treatment in public education" (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998, p. 229). As early as 1893, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Courts ruled that a child who was weak in mind and could not benefit from instructions, a child who was troublesome to other children, and a child who was unable to take "ordinary decent, physical care of himself" could be expelled from public schools as shown in the case of Watson V. City of Cambridge 1893 (Yell, 2012). By the 20th century, compulsory education was well established in the USA, but this was not a mandatory provision for students with a

disability. For example, in 1919, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that school officials could ask students who had been attending public-school until the fifth grade who had a condition that caused them to drool, have facial contortions, as well as related speech problems to leave the school (Beattie v. Board of Education 1919). The reason was that the conditions exhibited by these children were nauseating to teachers and some students. Laws had to be designed to determine the educational outcome of students with disabilities.

Many states had laws that gave them the right to exclude students with disabilities from public education as recently as in the years 1958, and 1969. In the Supreme Court Case Department of Public Welfare v. Haas 1958, it was the court's ruling that the state was not required to provide free public education for special needs students under their existing compulsory attendance law. According to Yell, Rodgers, & Rodgers, "the feeble-minded" or children who were "mentally deficient" and who, because of their limited intelligence, are unable to reap the benefits of a good education were not allowed in school" (Yell, Rogers & Rogers, 1998, p. 269). In 1969, it was a crime in the State of North Carolina for parents to continue to enforce the attendance of a child with disabilities after the child was excluded from public school (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). A revolution in the laws governing the education of children with disabilities in the United States had to be made in order to grant them access to an educational system that only seemed to neglect them. The 1960s and early 1970s brought a revolution in the attitude of the United States towards the education of children with disabilities. Most states passed laws that provided the education of students with disabilities in their public-school system. Some states were able to provide adequate educational rights to students with disabilities while others were not able to provide them with any rights other than their being able to attend public schools due to lack

of funds. (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Compulsory education laws passed in the twentieth century in the United States provided for more excellent opportunities for children with disabilities to enter public school but did not provide access to equal education for them (Yell, Rogers & Rogers 1998). It was the efforts of the civil rights movement, the parents, and advocates of these students that set-in motion case laws and legislation to force states to provide equal education opportunities for children with disabilities in the early 1960s and 1970s. "These efforts were very successful, and eventually led to the passage of federal legislation to ensure these rights" (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998, p. 250).

Advocacy movement played a critical role in informing and supporting congress whenever it was considering, developing, or acting on legislation regarding children with disabilities. Prominent amongst these advocacy groups that informed and supported congress in designing legislation that impacted the education of children with disabilities were: (a) The Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) founded in 1922. CEC exists up to the present. The mission of the CEC is to advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. (b) The National Association for Retarded Citizens currently ARC USA. This group was formed in 1960 with a mission to provide information and to monitor the quality of service given to individuals with mental retardation while serving as an advocate for them (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Advocacy by parents and advocacy groups resulted in case laws and legislations regarding the education of youth with a disability. A most critical movement, (c) The Civil Rights Movement, fought for changes in the American society that would allow minorities, especially African Americans, and children with disabilities the right to equal opportunities under the constitution. The landmark case

during this movement, "Brown versus the Board of Education 1954," not only played a role in the education of African Americans but also impacted the education of people with disabilities (LaNear, & Frattura, 2007).

Brown v. Board of Education revolutionized the legal, social and political structure of public education in the United States and is said to be one of the most critical cases in the history of American education law. Not only did Brown v. Board of Education aid in impacting the way African Americans were educated in public schools, but it provided a place for students with disabilities in American public schools as well. Because just as how a person's race and color segregated African Americans and prevented them from having access to public schooling, having a disability, segregated children with disabilities from having access to public education. It is believed that this case law had one of the greatest impacts of providing a place for both African Americans and students with disabilities a place in American public schools. It is further believed that the promise of this case law "may even have led to greater injustices for African American students, and students with disabilities through the creation of categories of separation similar to those it intended to eradicate" (LaNear, & Frattura, 2007 p. 89).

Two other case laws, PARC v. Pennsylvania 1972 and Mills Versus Board of Education 1972, played significant roles in the historical development of special education as they paved important roads for later developments in special education laws and court case decisions. The specific choices from the two cases can be found in the core principles of the Education of all Handicapped Children's Act (EAHCA). This legislation would later be renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (LaNear, & Frattura, 2007). It was, however, two significant pieces of federal legislation, Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act and The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), that was passed in the 1970s that showed changes that would improve special education over the years (LaNear & Frattura, 2007). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, "guaranteed that no individual with a disability in the United States is excluded from participation in, is denied the benefits of, or is subjected to discrimination from any program or activity that receives Federal Financial Assistance because of his disability" (LaNear, & Frattura, 2007, p.88).

More improvements in special education were demonstrated by The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (1975) when it addressed some of the inequities, such as the exclusion and segregation of students with disabilities (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006). The implementation of this act and subsequent endorsements of the act also provided students with disabilities the educational opportunities that had once been denied them. The law, for example, allowed students with disabilities to access and receive a "Free Appropriate Public Education" (FAPE) with their nondisabled peers. This access means that disabled children in the United States can attend their neighborhood schools and gain access to the general education curriculum (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006). Further actions by congress in the 80's also impacted access to public education for children with disabilities. In 1984, for example, The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act was passed by Congress. This Act provided federal funding of vocational education programs for students with disabilities. The Perkins Act required that special needs students had equal access to vocational training. This Act signaled greater access to public education, however many school districts set up vocational training for students with disabilities instead of an

integrated service. The Perkins funds eventually led to public school practices that further segregated students with disabilities (McHatton, Gordon, Glen, & Sue, 2012).

In 1990, the Education Handicapped Act (EHA) renamed the EAHCA, then the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) added autism and traumatic brain injury as disability categories (Barton, Harris Leech.Stiff, Choig, 2016). IDEA also removed the term disability and expanded the definition of related services to include rehabilitation counseling and social work under the Act. It also required a statement of transition services for a student with a disability by the age of 16 years in most states, or 14 years in some states on the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). IDEA represented a significant advancement for students with disabilities with each amendment of the Act (Lenore & Frattura, 2007). Not only were laws enacted for access to public education for students with disabilities, but there was a series of federal legislation that allocated funding for the training of students with a disability. "The National Defense Education Act of 1958, The Special Education Act of 1961, The Mental Retardation Facility and Community Center Construction Act of 1963, The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1970 (EHA) and others initiated and reinforced federal funding of special education" (LaNear and Frattura, 2007, p. 99). The laws also played a vital role in ensuring that funding was allocated for the training of special education teachers as they laid the foundation for the development of separate training programs for teachers who would teach students with disabilities.

Today under the protection of these federal laws and enactments, special needs students have access to social and educational opportunities denied them earlier in the history of their education. Not only do students with a disability have access to elementary

and secondary education but to postsecondary educational opportunities in a variety of federally funded colleges and universities (McHatton, Gordon, Glen, & Sue, 2012). However, while some of these students with disabilities are attaining success in their educational experiences, others, predominantly African American male students and other students of color, "still face poor educational outcomes." According to McHatton, Gordon, Glenn, & Sue, these outcomes include disproportional inclusion in special education classrooms, /exclusion from the general education curriculum, disparate disciplinary consequences, and continued lack of educational opportunities" (McHatton, Gordon, Glen, & Sue, 2012 p.41). There is still a lack of equity for African American students, even in special education. "Equal educational opportunity for African American Students with disabilities remains, at best, a promise rather than a reality" (LaNear, & Frattura, 2007, p.98).

Historical Overview of African Americans

About 14% of all-American permanent residents are African Americans. The ancestors of most African Americans came to North America as slaves. These were men, women, and children kidnapped from their homes in Africa by slave traders, sold to Caucasian Americans for labor on their plantations, or in their homes as house slaves. Enslavement of these people lasted for over four hundred years but legally ended in America after the Civil War 1861-1865 (Donovan, 2011). African Americans became free citizens after the Civil War. Nevertheless, they continue to face racial discrimination to this day (Donovan, 2011), by Caucasian Americans and other nations that have migrated to this country who do not consider themselves African Americans, (even when they are considered "Not Caucasian" by Caucasians).

Racial discrimination is the unequal treatment of people or groups based on race or ethnicity (Pager, & Shepherd, 2008. p.2). Discrimination against African American as a whole is entrenched in over 400 years of racial injustices. This type of discrimination in the American society is very overt today and threatens the very existence of African Americans males. Racial prejudice is often manifested in persistent inequities that can be seen in employment, treatment by police officers, housing and educational opportunities. African American males are exposed to a level of victimization and violence meted out to them by Caucasian police officers that frequently imprison them or violently take their lives. The discrimination faced by African Americans in every aspect of their lives, especially that of their educational attainment and academic success, is appalling (Donovan 2011). This type of discrimination is a detriment to their educational progress. An African American male diagnosed with a disability "encounters the challenge of having to internally affirm the integrity of his disability and cultural identities while confronting the norm of an education system that has been traditionally hostile to his identity" (Banks and Hughes 2013, p.368).

African American Males and Academic Success

Educational achievement for African Americans fifty years after Brown versus the Board of Education has shown that the American educational system is still plagued by endemic racism and other educational biases when it comes to African Americans; however, there are far more African American young people graduating from high schools today than in the 1960s. In 1960, only 37.7 % of African Americans between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine had a high school diploma. By the year 2000, 86.8 % had a high school diploma. Enrollment of African Americans in college rose from 13,600 in 1960

to 1,548,000 in 2000, to 2,962,000 in 2013 to a slight drop to 2,675, 400 in 2015. But their enrollment in colleges and universities continues to grow. (US Department of Education, 2017). Overall, African Americans seem to be making some gains in their academic success. Academic success is a crucial to the effective contribution of any person to society. It is that factor that differentiates economically successful African Americans from economically unsuccessful ones. Research has shown that the most critical challenge to the academic success of African Americans is the increasing disproportion in the academic achievement of African American males when compared to that of their peers and even their African American female counterparts. Disproportion in academic success for African American males has severely impacted recent attention in research reports, policy documents, and public commentary (Challenges to Academic Success n.d.).

Disproportionate academic success for African American males is a caustic plague that have continued to leave them behind educationally. "Much of the research on the African American male achievement presents troublesome statistics and often negative stories about their chances of academic success" (Scott, Taylor, &. Palmer, 2013, p. 288). The negative findings regarding the success of African American males that permeate the literature are woefully sad. These conditions need to be changed. There are several factors that negatively impact the educational achievement of African American males. The factors impacting the African American male achievement can be classified as internal factors or external factors. Examples of internal factors are "self-concept and identity" These are demonstrated when African American male students disassociate themselves from school and act out in negative ways as a coping mechanism (Tatum 2006). Examples of external factors that impact the academic achievement of African American males are

as follow (a) dis-proportional placement in special education (Bailey & Moore, 2012, Scott, Taylor, &. Palmer, 2013). (b) A lack of culturally sensitive curriculum. (c) Lack of role models in their educational setting (Gavin, 2009) (d) Challenging environments. (e) Destructive stereotypes. (f) Lack of preparation for postsecondary education. (g) lack of parental involvement (Scott, Taylor, &. Palmer, 2013).

Nationwide, African American children comprise more than half those who are living in single-parent homes. African American male children are more likely than their Caucasian peers to live in homes that have absentee fathers (Caldwell, Sewell, Parkes, & Tolston, 2009). They live with mothers who are often living in poverty. They report having negative interactions with the police, have experienced some form of trauma, and are the ones "most likely to have experienced some ecological risk factor the night before school that compromises their aptitude for learning in the morning" (Caldwell, Sewell, Parks, & Toldson, 2009 p. 204). The American education system quite often fails the African American male student because it fails to educate the whole child. This has become the reality of educational practice ever since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act 2002 in schools. According to Caldwell, Sewell, Parkes & Toldson, "the Act allows educators to sacrifice child outcomes for educational outcomes as they overemphasize high stake testing" (Caldwell, Sewell, Parkes, & Toldson, 2009, p.205). High stake testing leaves many of our African American males behind, resulting in their dropping out of school or their engulfment in the "Special Education Pipeline" (Caldwell, Sewell, Parkes & Toldston, 2009), or the school to prison, pipeline.

For many African American males from low income or working-class families, "the special education process begins on the first day of their school careers" (Harry, &

Anderson, 1994, p. 605). From the initial arrival of the African American males in school, it is the teachers' expectations and judgment that set the standards for their now unfamiliar methods of learning and expected behaviors. Based on teachers' expectations and the teachers' judgment, many of these students are classified as not "ready to learn" as per the requirement of Goal 2000 (Jordan 2001). Research has shown that teachers' expectations and judgment are significant factors in the special education referral process. According to Jordan, these factors account for "over 80% of African American students identified with high incidence disabilities such as learning disability, intellectual disability, and emotional disturbance" (Jordan 2016 p.161). Findings from the study conducted by Jordan's further revealed that most Caucasian female teachers are not using the African American male student's knowledge and skills, to link them to the kinds of knowledge and skills needed for their academic success. According to Jordan, "the predominantly white female teachers influenced by tension arising from historically embedded fear of African American male physicality as well as other prejudices or biases, recommend these students for assessments leading to special education placement" (Jordan, 2016, p.162). This type of treatment meted out to African American male students negatively impacts their educational outcomes. These treatments do not build lasting positive relationships that results in student's confidence and academic success but instead contribute to the factors that negatively impact the educational success of the African American male student.

There are numerous factors, according to the literature, that negatively impact the academic success of African American males. Despite the negative factors that impinge on the academic success of African American males, there are those factors that are still contributing to their success. Some factors that are allowing some of these very students

who are considered most unlikely to succeed or to become a success include the following: mentoring, special education supports and services, student engagement, resilience, parent involvement, teacher engagement, spirituality, and religion (Cuyjet, &Associates, 2016). Although this literature review provides an overview of factors that contribute to the success of African American males, in general, this study will investigate what factors contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability.

Characteristics of African American Students with Disability

Findings from the National Longitudinal Study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012) reveal that students who are diagnosed with a disability when compared to their general education peers are more likely to live in poverty. For example, 58% of youth with a disability live in low-income households, compared to 46% of youth without a disability. Students with disabilities are provided either an individualized education plan (IEP) or a 504-plan explicitly designed for their learning needs. Most African American students with an IEP come from households where their parents live in poverty. Their parents are less likely than other parents to have a college education, be employed, or be married. Those students with a disability that have a 504 plan may have "relatively advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, compared with both youths with an IEP and other youth without an IEP" (NCES, 2017, p.10). The majority of those students diagnosed with a disability are often males and African American. The United States Department of Education informs that those students with an IEP are more likely to be African American males, while the percentage of those with a 504 plan who are males (60%) are mainly Caucasian or Asian (The United States Department of

Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, 2018).

African American students who have a disability are more likely than their Caucasian peers with a disability to be attending lower-performing schools located in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. There is a lack of support for these schools, resulting in these students with disabilities being taught by unqualified teachers mainly long-term uncertified substitute teachers or uncertified content area teachers, young people who are seeking certification via Teach for America, or older career changers with no teaching experience. (Wronowski, 2017). These low performing schools are plagued by overwhelming teacher shortages, and high teacher turnover rates, they have little or no access to technology, and sparsely furnished classrooms that lack basic air conditioning units in the warm months and sparsely heated classrooms in the winter months. More recently, in a survey of 40 urban school districts serving 6.5 million students, "nearly 100% of the districts reported an immediate need to fill teaching positions" (Wronowski, 2017 p. 548). A study conducted by Stanford Research Institute in 2018, found that in California, one out of five teachers were underqualified, with the highest poverty schools having so many unqualified teachers "as to make those schools dysfunctional" (Darling-Hammond, Sutcher, & Carver-Thomas, 2018).

All the dysfunctional conditions mentioned above, in turn, provide African American students with a disability an education that is failing to prepare them for higher education (Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) reported that 80% of African American youth with disabilities aged 18 to 24 years left high school with a certificate other than a regular high school diploma (Chapman,

Laird, Ifill, & Kewal-Ramani, 2018). However, "only 9 % of Caucasian students with a disability and Pacific Islanders students with a disability received an alternate certificate" (NCES, 2018, Chapter 2, p.1). African American students with disabilities exited high school with "the lowest numbers of regular high school diplomas and the highest number of alternatives to a high school diploma" (NCES 2018 chapter 2, p.1). One of the essential requirements for attending a postsecondary institution or for merely obtaining a minimum wage job in the American job market is the possession of a high school diploma.

African American males are under-represented in gifted education, and academic programs at all educational levels. When these students have a disability label, it allows them to be enrolled typically in the lowest learning ability groups/or programs resulting in their lagging behind students placed in higher groups or academic tracts (Hebel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010). They drop out of high school and college at higher rates than their Caucasian peers. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 1999, and 2004, established the right of students with disabilities (SWD) to access the same general curriculum offered to all students. Both these laws mandate access to the academic standards that define the general curriculum through the curricula goals designed on students' IEPs, therefore, fulfilling the core requirement of IDEA, which provides for the granting of students an appropriate education reflective of their abilities and needs (Kurtz, 2011). Research, however, has found that "when African American males have dual exceptionalities and are, especially, diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, the education they receive may not be conducive to their needs, which may lead to the disintegration of students' gifts and talents" (Frazier, & Scott, 2016 p. 98).

African American male students with disabilities are frequently educated outside of the general education classroom and are restricted to self-contained classrooms, although the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,1994 and 2001 and IDEA 1999, and 2004, both require equal access to the grade-level curriculum (Cowin, 2018). IDEA 2004 mandates that children with disabilities are educated to the fullest with an education that measures up to that of their general education peers. IDEA supports the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Cowin, 2018). Special classes, separate schooling or "removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment should take place only in instances when the education of the child cannot be satisfactorily achieved using supplementary aids and services in that environment because of the nature or severity of the disability of the child" (Cowin, 2018, p.587). There is much evidence in the literature to show that students of color, especially African Americans, are overrepresented in the more restrictive educational environments and underrepresented in less restrictive environments (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006; Samuels, & Hardin, 2018).

The literature not only affirms that there is evidence of disproportional placement of African American males but shows the effect of this type of placement as well. A study on the disproportional placement of African American students with disabilities across the educational environment shows that "those with disabilities are represented disproportionately in both the general education setting and overrepresented in the separate class settings" (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006, p.417). Report on the most recent federal statistics on Special Education Reporting showed that of the 423 districts that reported, "33 districts placed minority students in restrictive

settings disproportionally when compared to the placement of their Caucasian peers (Samuels & Hardin. 2018 p.1). When the education of students with disabilities takes place in self-contained classrooms, quite often, these students do not focus on core curriculum content but on social skills, or life skills, and behavior problems. The study, assessing opportunity-to-learn for students with disabilities in general and special education classes conducted by Kurz, Elliott, Lemons, Zigmond, Kloo, & Kettler, across three states, namely Pennsylvania, Arizona, and South Carolina found that students in self-contained classrooms were reported by their teachers to "receive limited opportunities to learn the general curriculum standards" (Kurz, Elliott, Lemons, Zigmond, Kloo, & Kettler, 2014 p.37). There are laws and enactments however, that prohibit this type of educational placement.

In 2001, "The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed by Congress" (Falkner, Cook, Thompson, Howell, Rintamaa, & Miller, 2017, p.8). The NLCB signed by the then president in 2002 was meant to improve the education of all students. This law included all students with disabilities in all public schools (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe 2006) in the United States of America. The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) amended in 2004 worked in conjunction with the NCLB Act to not only authorize the federal government to provide funding for special education but in the provision of a special education that is more aligned with general education school reform efforts while students are in high school (Morningstar, Bassett, Kochhar-Bryant, Cashman, & Wehmeyer, 2012). Up to the age of twenty-one children diagnosed with a disability are educated in a variety of setting some of these include public schools, credit recovery/accelerated programs, alternative schools for disruptive youth, charter schools,

and cyber schools.

Under IDEA, wherever the education of students with a disability takes place, these students have legal "rights to a "Free Appropriate Public Education, (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)" (Rights of Students with Disabilities in Non-traditional Setting (n.d. p.1). Students with disabilities must be provided specially designed instructions, "modifications to the curriculum, related services, detailed transition plans, and all the supports and services" they may need to make meaningful progress" (McInerney 2019 p.2). These students are entitled to be "free from discrimination bullying, especially disability-based discipline, harassment, and cannot be deprived of equal educational opportunities" (McInerney, 2019, p.3) at all levels of their schooling.

For students with or without a disability, high school is the final level of compulsory schooling. The expectation here is to prepare students with a disability for "final postsecondary destinations, whether it is postsecondary education and training or the workforce," (Morningstar, Bassett, Kookhar-Bryant, Cashman, & Wehmeyer, 2012, p.133). However, at this level, academic success for youth with disabilities, especially African American males diagnosed with disabilities, still faces major challenges. Youth with disabilities experiences poor post-school outcomes compared to their peers who do not have a disability. A study conducted by Prince, William, Hodges, & Bridges, found that students diagnosed with disabilities are "more likely to drop out of high school, more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, less likely to pursue secondary education, and less likely to live independently" (Prince, Williams, Hodge & Bridges, 2017, p. 78).

For students to be an academic success at the high school level, transition planning

for students with a disability must take place. Transition planning at the high school level is an overall part of the individualized education plan that guides the student with a disability in his movement from high school to adult life. This plan involves an assessment of the child that results in goal setting by the student's IEP team in the areas of training, employment, education, and independent living skills if necessary. When transition. plans are properly designed and executed special needs students stand to gain many benefits at the postsecondary level. On the other hand, when there is an absence of proper transition planning this negatively impact the postsecondary outcome for these students. Landmark and Zhang (2012), in their research "Compliance and Practices in Transition Planning for Students with Emotional Behavior, and Learning Disabilities in Texas," reported that only 44.8 % of IEPs written had measurable transition goals. Those students diagnosed with EB/D were less likely to have a fully compliant IEP that reflected appropriate measurable transition goals. Where IEPs included postsecondary goals, the goals were not aligned with students' interests or strengths, especially when the child was an African American Male.

African American males are represented disproportionately in special education and under represented in gifted education (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azzir, 2006). "Those with disabilities are disproportionately represented in both the general education setting and in separate class settings (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006, p.417). Overrepresentation of African American male students appear to be most severe especially in the categories of Emotional/Behavioral Disability (EB/D), Mild Mental Retardation (presently Intellectual Disability), and Moderate Mental Disability. This is as a result of unfair practices in the schools (Byrnes,

2013; Prieto & Zucker, 1981). Research has also shown that although states are required to monitor district disparities and inequities in special education since 1997, the practice of overrepresentation is still alive and active in many school districts across the country. The most recent data, on Special Education Reporting, 2015-2016 school year, shows that 423 school districts reported on Special Education diagnosis and placement. One hundred and eighty-six school districts were identified as having significant disproportionality in special education. This was as a result of the districts' high recorded placement of students in the emotional/behavioral disorder category" (Samuels, & Harwin, 2018, p.2).

African American male students face persistent problems. Some of these problems include violence, suspensions, overrepresentation in special education classes, underrepresentation in gifted classes, high incidence of crime, high incidence of incarceration, poor access to higher education, HIV/AIDS and other health crises that negatively affect their educational progress (Euyoung, & Hargrove, 2013). Of the number of African American male students with disabilities, the literature shows that there is some evidence of marginal strides in educational success for African American males, especially those diagnosed with a disability. Today there is evidence they are attending college, pursuing higher-level degrees and emerging with master's and doctoral degrees (NCES 2009-10). Contrary to the discussions that highlight the "failure" of African American male students, there is a recurring theme in the literature that contributes to their success. This is the resiliency of African American college males (Eunyoung & Hargrove, 2013).

Resilience is a broadly defined concept. It is the ability to "bounce back, recover, or successfully adapt in the face of obstacles and adversity" (Zunz, Turner, & Norman, 1993, p. 170). Eunyoung & Hargrove defines educational resiliency as "the ability of

students to succeed academically, despite difficult or challenging circumstances and risk factors that prevent them from succeeding academically" (Eunyoung & Hargrove, 2013, p.300). Resiliency skills include the following (a) academic confidence (b) A sense of wellbeing (c) Motivation to succeed (d) Ability to set goals (e) Strong connections with adults and peers (f) Ability to handle stress. (Eunyoung, & Hargrove, 2013). As cited in the literature, resilience is a positive adaptation despite adverse environmental obstacles. Research on resilience often focuses on factors that empower one to successfully adapt to one's environment despite challenges or dangerous circumstances (Miller, & Macintosh,1999). It results from intricate ongoing interactions between an individual characteristic trait, (intelligence, a sense of worth, coping styles, and strategies), the resources in his or her environment (examples: supportive adult relationships, preventive services, and the presence of youth organizations). Resilience relies heavily on the resources of a person's environment, and is content-specific, educational, relational, social, emotional, and physical (Eunyoung, & Hargrove, 2013).

Studies on educational resilience are limited. Those that are available generally focus on the identification of specific characteristics of those resilient students who achieve academic success in adverse circumstances (William, & Bryan, 2013). Research on resilience has also shown that when several adverse conditions are experienced at once, it can negatively affect the capacity for resilience and, in turn, adversely affect the development and healthy maturation of children and youth alike (Luster, & Mcadoo, 1994). A study which also examined the relationship between child stressors, family risk factors, and the behavioral adjustment of African American youth, found that African Americans tend to live in low-income households in urban neighborhoods that are beset by crime,

drugs, violence, joblessness, poverty, and teen pregnancy (Berliner, 2009). Other studies have also shown that those who grow up in these inner-city neighborhoods are not as likely as their peers from higher-income families to become high academic achievers, to graduate from high school, to attend prestigious colleges, or graduate from college, and to receive a graduate degree (Wyner, Bridgeland, & Dilulio, 2007). There is evidence in the literature that shows that African American families and children suffer a disproportionate share of risk factors. It is the resilience of these African American families that allows them to achieve any measure of success, especially academic success. For many African American male students with a disability, "academic success is contingent on their ability to demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity" (Harris, Mayes, & Mayes 2016, p.9).

Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of African American Males with a Disability

Findings from the literature show, there is a limited amount of literature that focuses on the academic success of African American males in general, and even more limited is the amount of literature focusing on the academic success of African American males with a disability. Amongst the list of factors considered to contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability are academic engagement, parent engagement, teacher expectations, special education supports and services, resilience, inclusion in the general education classroom, religion, and spirituality, peers, and self-efficacy (Euyong, & Hargrove 2013; William & Brian 2013; Harper, 2006). Due to time constraints, this literature review will only focus on three factors that contribute to the success of African Americans with disabilities. These are academic engagement, parent engagement, and special education support and services. A discussion on the three factors follows.

Academic Engagement

Academic engagement is the active and constructive involvement of students in the learning process and the school environment (Furrier & Skinner, 2005). "Academic engagement in school has also been termed and is equivalent to student involvement and motivation to learn." (Finn & Voekel,1993, p.249) There are three major types of engagement: "(1.) behavioral, (2.) emotional, and ((3.) cognitive" (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004 p. 62). Behavioral engagement is participatory and is demonstrated in three ways (a) "positive conduct:" This includes following rules that lack disruptive behaviors, for example, attending school regularly versus frequent absenteeism and not getting in trouble. (b) "Involvement in learning and academic tasks" (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004, p.62). It is engagement in curricular activities and discussions. Here the student demonstrates efforts such as persistence, resilience, paying attention, asking and responding to questions appropriately. (c) "Participation in school-related activities" Examples of this are, participating in sports and student government (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004 p. 63), participating in subject-related clubs, or community activities (Finn & Voekel, 1993).

2. Emotional engagement refers to students' "affective reaction" in the classroom; this describes the feelings of identification. Identification happens when students "internalize the sense that they "belong" in school, understand that they are an essential part of the school," (Finn & Voekel, 1993, p.248) and that the school plays a vital role in their own learning experience. A sense of belonging often happens when the student participates in school activities, especially in those activities where he experiences tangible rewards over a period. 3. "Cognitive engagement can range from pure memorization to the

use of self-regulated learning strategies that promote deep understanding and strategic learning" (Finn & Voelkel, 1993, p.249). It involves academic engagement. Academic engagement involves active participation in both academics and non-academic areas, a commitment to learning, and resiliency to persevere in all aspects of school life. A student can choose to become or not to become academically engaged in his learning.

Students who are not academically engaged are identified as those who are at risk for many long-term problems with their academic success. They do not identify with the school and do not actively participate in their school from the time they enter school. According to Finn and Voelkel, "These students will frequently demonstrate disruptive behavior in class, unpreparedness for classes, absenteeism, truancy, juvenile delinquency, and dropping out of school; these behaviors are often found amongst students with disabilities, and in poor and minority students" (Finn, & Voekel, 1993, p.250). On the other hand, students who demonstrate high levels of academic engagement, whether they are high risk or not high risk, succeed academically, whatever their race, culture, or economic status or disability (Finn, 1992).

A lack of effective instruction and schools with low expectations for students with disabilities can impinge on academic engagement and lead to poor educational outcomes, especially for those students with invisible disabilities. On the other hand, when these students are provided with the right support, suitable supplementary aids and services, there are those students that will be able to graduate with the skills needed for postsecondary success, whether in college or the workplace. Studies further show that not all students with a disability will be able to attain master's and doctoral degrees due to profound physical, mental, and intellectual disabilities. Therefore, this study seeks to explore only

those disability categories of the participants who volunteered to participate in this study.

Special Education Supports and Services

Special education is designed to "identify children with unique needs in schools, in the education departments of other institutions, and to assist in the effective fulfillment of those unique needs" (Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (n.d. p.1). To meet those needs of students with a disability, school programs, whether regular or special, have a vital role to play. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (P.L.101-476) of 1994 define special education as "specially designed instructions at no cost to families to meet the different needs of students with a disability" (p.4.). To be qualified for special education services under IDEA, a child must be evaluated as having a disability, then be determined eligible for disability services. According to IDEA 2004, a child with a disability is a child with any of the following conditions "an intellectual disability, hearing, speech or language impairments, visual disorder, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, a specific learning disability, and emotional/behavioral disorders, who will need special education and related services to meet their unique needs" (p.4). IDEA Regulations (2004) mandate that the disability "must adversely affect educational performance" (p.4). It is the expectation that all children diagnosed with a disability be allowed to take part in all educational, nonacademic, extracurricular programs and services with their non-disabled peers, and peers who have less severe disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (n.d.).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, section 504, "covers qualified students with disabilities who attend schools that receive federal student aid." (Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: Know your Rights and Responsibilities (n.d.). Section 504 of

the Rehabilitation Act protects all students determined to have any of the following

conditions described below

(1).   "A physical or mental disability that significantly limits one or more major life

activities or

(2).   A record of such a disability.

(3).   Is regarded as having such a disability" (Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary

Education, (n.d. p. 1) (Protecting students with disabilities (n.d.).

Section 504 of the American with Disabilities Act further demands that school

districts provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to those students qualified

under IDEA as physically or mentally impaired. (Section 504/Americans with Disabilities

Act West Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) p.1. Students with Disabilities in

Postsecondary Education, (n.d.) p.1; Protecting Students with Disabilities (n.d.) p.1).

All public schools in the USA are mandated to provide students diagnosed with a

disability the following supports and services: (a) access to all services and activities in the

school; (b) schools' admission policies and practices that do not discriminate based on

disabilities (c) access provided with appropriate accommodations; and (d) provision of

auxiliary aids and services (Rehabilitation Act, 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794). The 1990 Americans

with Disabilities Act (ADA), further extends the Rehabilitation Act "to protect these

students based on their disability both in the private sector and the nonfederal public

sector." (Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: Know your Rights and

Responsibilities (n.d.) p.4; Theoretical Orientation and Discipline Practice, (n.d.). The

ADA (1990) defines a person with a disability as a person with "a mental or physical

impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities" (Dietrich, Snyder, &

Villani, 2016, p.39).

A person with a disability is a person who (a) has the disability; (b) has a record of the disability; or (c) is regarded as having the disability" (Introduction to the ADA (n.d.) p.1, ADA, 42 U.S.C., 12101-12132). The ADA stipulates that all schools be required to provide access for students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions are required to provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities to access their institutions. There have been some changes in public education since the 1954 Supreme Court Ruling of Brown v. Board of Education, and under the ADA (1990) to provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities. For example, while higher education institutions or colleges typically agree to pay for "many academic-specific accommodations, such as removing architectural barriers from classrooms and providing computer software designed to assist disabled students on campus" (Hebel, 2001b, p. 44). Students must prove to the college that they have a disability as classified under IDEA for them to access the services.

The case law based on Brown Versus the Board of Public Education designed to improve education for African Americans as well as all those students with disabilities by disallowing segregation in public schools recently ended. "The courts ended the enforcement of Brown v. Board of Public Education, in the 2000 landmark case "Parent Involved v Seattle" (Brown, 2015, p.321). However, between 1960 and 1975, guidelines explicitly explaining the educational rights of students with a disability were established. Students with a disability have free access to appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and have equal rights to the education offered to their non-disabled peers just as Brown versus public education did with regards to race (Harris, Mays, Vega, & Hines, 2016). Students receiving special education must be included as

much as possible in the general education curriculum.

Research has shown that it is only to the extent that students with disabilities are included in the general education curriculum will they be able to attain the level of education that will fit them for post-secondary education (Duchaine, Jolivette, Fredrick, & Alberto, 2019; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2001). Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001), in their study on inclusion, found that "inclusion is a success for students when teachers using appropriate curricula, implemented effective teaching strategies learned from special education teachers. Duchaine, Jolivette, Fredrick, & Alberto (2019) reported from their study that 25% of the 77 % of the high school teachers who reported that students with disabilities should be included in general education classes said both disabled and nondisabled peers benefitted. Students with a disability gained access to core curriculum content areas that fits them for college while students without disabilities learned more when their peers with disabilities were included (Duchaine, Jolivette, Fredrick, & Alberto, 2019). Students receiving special education services must receive transition planning services in order to prepare them for life beyond high school in the following areas: independent living. Postsecondary education or training, and or employment, beginning at age fourteen, according to amendment in IDEA 2004. The purpose of transition services, especially at the secondary level, is to facilitate the movement of students from high school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education or training. (IDEA, 2004).

The literature has shown that special education is a vital source of services and supports for students with a disability. It is particularly valuable in that it provides access to the world of employment, connections to postsecondary education and training, connection to social networks as part of the transition to adult life for students with

disabilities, when properly executed, however, African American students still face several barriers that impinge on their ability to succeed in postsecondary education when placed in special education. According to Harper 2017, in his research, "only 3% of African American students attained proficiency in reading, while practically none attained proficiency in math while in a particular education track (p.1). The National Longitudinal Study-2 found that African Americans males with a disability are less likely to complete a postsecondary degree and experience lower rates of employment compared to their Caucasian peers with disabilities (Newman & Madeus 2011).

Special education labels and categories are used to "confine African American students into particular places which create barriers of access to, and advancements in academic program tracts" (Tabran & Ramlackhan, 2019, p188). There is still, however, a current demand by states, policymakers, and other stakeholders to demonstrate evidence of success in education when it comes to all American children. While special education services can provide an excellent resource for students with disabilities to develop their skills as well as to reach their full potential, it can be challenging for African American males diagnosed with a disability (Miller Dice, 2015). For example, these male students experience placement in more restrictive settings in special education settings when they become qualified for special education supports and services (Trotman, 2015). They experience disproportionately placement in special education and have little or no access to inclusion in the general education curriculum, therefore, having little or no access to rigorous courses that will prepare them for college and career readiness. (Blanchett, 2006; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999).

Parent/ Family Engagement

This section of the paper defines parental engagement, presents a general overview of some of the benefits of parent engagement and discusses the impact of parent engagement on African American male students from grades pre-K through college "Parental engagement is a desire, an expression, an attempt by parents to influence what takes place with their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social and curriculum and other material and resources that are valued within schools" (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis & George, 2004, p. 11). Parent engagement is more than parents volunteering in the classroom; instead, it is a partnership in which teachers and parents collaboratively work together to educate the child in order to facilitate meaningful educational experiences (Staples & Dilibierto, 2010). Parents for this study are those adult family members, including parents, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents, adopted parents, and other caring adults who provide support both economically, socially, and emotionally for children and youth in their homes.

There are mainly two types of family engagement and support (a) home-based, which takes place in the home and (b) school-based, which takes place in the schools (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).Examples of parental engagement in the schools may involve any or all the following:

(a) "Volunteering in classrooms and performing leadership roles as they serve in the decision-making processes for the school" (Anderson-Butler, Lawson, Iachini, Wade-Mdivanian, & Bean, 2008, p.1.).

b). "Attending parent-teacher conferences, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Meetings, and other school events" (Anderson-Butler, Lawson, Iachini, Wade-Mdivanian, & Bean, 2008, p.1.).

c) "Being supporters, co-teachers, advocates, communicators, and learners." (Anderson-Butler, Lawson, Iachini, Wade-Mdivanian, & Bean, 2008, p.1.).

d) "Home-based parent engagement involves parents providing a home environment that supports classroom instructions by ensuring that their children complete homework. They encourage their children to become engaged in classroom learning .as they are involved in regular communication with teachers about their children" (Anderson-Butler, Lawson, Iachini, Wade-Mdivanian, & Bean, 2008, p.1.). The primary types of parental engagement within the context of this study include the following: "(1) Nurturing relationships, and interaction, (2) advising and mentoring, (3) organizing. 4) monitoring and motivating students' academic engagement, (5) instructing" (Borup, Stevens, & Waters, 2015, p.69).

Importance of Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is a partnership between the home and the schools; this type of collaboration is invaluable for two main reasons. First, it is the family that primarily influences children's out of school time. Second, parental engagement supports students' learning in the formal education setting as the parents become actively involved in the schools according to the school district or the individual school's definition of involvement (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Bean, Boone, & Kwiatkowski 2004). Studies have shown that it is the family that is one of the most critical factors that determines children's attitudes, learning behavior, health, and overall well-being. In fact, when families are

engaged in their children's learning and their school experiences healthy educational development results. Family engagement is a better predictor of school success than the family's status (Ho Sui-Chu, 2004). "More specifically, when families are engaged, the benefits persist, regardless of the family's economic, racial, ethnic, and educational background" (Staples & Diliberto, 2010, p.59).

Meaningful family engagement of all parents regardless of race or cultural background determines a student's academic achievement. Studies have shown that students whose parents and families are involved in their schooling "normally receive higher grades, higher test scores, complete more homework, have better attendance, and exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors" (Blazer, 2005, p.16). Students achieve more educational success when schools and families work together to motivate, socialize, and educate them (Caplan, 2000). Children who experience parent engagement in their education have higher graduation rates and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education programs (Riggins-Newby, 2004). Studies have also observed that there are positive outcomes when parents are engaged in their children's' education regardless of the students' ethnic or racial background or socioeconomic status. It is noteworthy that students at risk of failure have the most to gain when schools involve families in their children's education (Blazer, 2005; Caplan, 2000).

According to the literature, parental engagement is an essential factor in the early years of children's overall development. It is necessary for academic performance at the kindergarten level for socialization and self-acceptance throughout their entire lives (Jo & Davis, 2009). An intervention study by VanVorhist and colleagues investigated the impact of family involvement on the education of children, with a focus on literacy and math

achievement and social and emotional skills. One hundred and sixty-six mothers and children who were expected to be at high risk for literacy problems participated in the study. The study found that parent engagement at the preschool level had implications for their children 's academic success from their''' entry in school through to grades 3-5. The educational benefits gained from family involvement with elementary school students continued through the middle and high school years to postsecondary levels (VanVorhist, Mahler, Epstein, Lloyd, Leung, 2013).

The findings from an early childhood longitudinal study that examined parental engagement and neighborhood characteristics at grades K-1 and the students' math achievement through the end of the 5th grade revealed a relationship between higher levels of early education-oriented parental practices and higher mathematics achievement at the end of 5th grade. (Green, Bodovski, & Reed, 2011). Another longitudinal study that investigated how early parental educational expectations and cultural practices during kindergarten through first grade affected children's academic achievement and their self-concept during adolescence showed that there is an association between early parental involvement in schools. The findings further showed that a more positive self-concept in adolescents and higher academic expectations in 8th grade is linked to the parent's' engagement. "Having more children's books at home was also associated with higher math and reading achievement in 8th grade, as well" (Bodovski, 2014, p.3).

Parental Engagement and African American Males Pre-K Through to College

Early studies regarding the participation of African American families in their children's schooling have found a positive association between parent engagements in the home and the schools. For example, research suggests that African American parents are

more involved in educational activities within the home while their Caucasian peers are more likely to be involved in parental engagement in school settings (Eccles & Harold, 1996). "Empirical investigations of the influence of family engagement on children's academic outcomes often emphasize the role of a parent as a mediating factor in children's academic achievement" (Joe, & Davis, 2009 p. 2006). This is particularly true for African American boys. The frequency at which parents engage their African American pre–K sons in specific behaviors has a different impact on their reading, math, and overall general knowledge. Findings from a study, "The Relationship Between Parental Influence and the School Readiness of African American Boys', informed that the frequency at which their parents read books to their pre-K sons, and discussed their racial and ethnic identity with them, significantly related to how well their sons performed in reading assessments in kindergarten or their attainment of higher cognitive scores on reading tests (Joe, & Davis, 2009).

In a related study, findings showed that the parents of African American eight graders, who attended low-income, high-minority schools, had higher expectations for college attendance when their children achieved high grades as well as participated in co-curricular activities (Hamrick and Stage 2004). Parental encouragement secures student achievements and behaviors under certain environmental conditions and challenges. It seems that students perform better and are more likely to succeed when their families affirm their children's choices and encourage them to remain focused or persist in school. Parent engagement is especially important for underserved populations (Gutierrez, 2000).

How adolescents perceive family engagement is a vital factor for their psychological well-being, even though it is very subjective when considering the influence,

it may have on adolescents' academic achievement (Shearin, 2002). However, when African American parents become engaged in the educational experiences of their adolescent sons in the following ways:

Monitoring homework and other academic interests, involving them in positive conversations, and supervising recreational activities so that their sons do not become destructive or idle; this often will result in an essential improvement in academic performance for these students (Shearin, 2002).

A pilot study, "Collective parent engagement and children's academic performance," that sought to identify important improvement strategies for schools serving low-income children of color examined parent involvement using two models of parent involvement. The study used an alternative to conventional parent involvement approaches (PI model) and collective parent engagement (CPE model) as it examined the treatment effects on children's standardized test scores and parents' empowerment scores. The study found that both the PI model and the CPE model yielded higher standardized test scores. However, in contrast to existing theories, the study found that the relationship between parent engagement and children's test scores was not significant. This result is consistent with the literature on parental engagement studies.

A positive identity for the African American male in college is crucial to his academic success. Family engagement structures can provide this. Family engagement provides the supports developed during the pre-college years. For African American males, these carry over to their college years. An analysis of 42 studies that examined the relationship between parental involvement, the academic achievement and school behavior of African American children from pre-kindergarten through to the college freshman years

showed that a significant relationship existed between parental involvement both for younger (pre-elementary and elementary school) and older (secondary school and college freshman) students' achievement and overall outcomes (Jeynes, 2006). Parent support in the familiar phrases "hang in there," "you can do it," often provide the extra spur or push these students need to achieve academic success. It is what drives these students to succeed in the face of deep-seated issues such as campus-based racism and prejudice while simultaneously achieving academic success (Jeynes, 2014).

Many African American college students are products of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Disadvantaged neighborhoods may be associated with lower student achievement because these families live in high poverty, high unemployment, low-education communities and may use fewer education-oriented practices with their children. However, when these parents engage with their children's educational practices throughout their earlier years, the children's educational attainment level becomes higher, although they are children who are products of disadvantaged neighborhoods (Greenman, E., Bodovski, K., & Reed, 2011). The literature shows that parental involvement and support can help offset negative factors that can impinge on students' academic success (Chrispeels and Rivero 2001).

Nationwide, African American children comprise more than half those who are living in single-parent homes. When compared to their peers from other races, African American male students are more likely to live in homes that have absentee fathers. They live with mothers that are often living in poverty (Caldwell, Sewell, Parkes & Toldson, 2009). Parents and peers seem to influence student choices in enrollment in tertiary education (Perna &Titus 2005), and their persistence in decision making about schooling

(Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990). African American students benefit less than others from conversations with their parents about college (Perna &Titus 2005). The family culture and expectations affect how parents engage their children in conversation about educational advancement. Culturalism is one measure that impacts parents. "Cultural capital is an influence that affluent parents use to socialize their children to develop educational and cultural competencies and successes" (Harry & Graves, 2010, p.418). Harry, & Graves in their study, found that when parents spend more time with their sons at museums, libraries, zoos, and other similar places, there was an increase in their sons' aptitude for literacy. However, the lack of resources and sometimes lack of knowledge of the importance of these activities impact how some parents become engaged with their children in these activities (Harris & Graves 2010). African American parents living in poverty may find themselves unable to engage their children in these activities due to lack of time and insufficient funds.

In conclusion, numerous studies showed that parental involvement is crucial to the academic achievement of African American males from pre-K through college level. (Dietel's 2006). Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that parent involvement in schools has a significant impact on student's performance. Parental involvement is one of those sources that give students the push they need to steer off negative factors that can impinge on their success while in college. Although the academic progress of many African American male students' may be hindered by poverty; when parents are engaged with their children's educational practices throughout their earlier years, the children's educational attainment level becomes higher

even if they are products of disadvantaged neighborhoods or may have a disability (Greenman, Bodovsk, & Reed, 2011).

Parent Engagement and African American Males with Disabilities

Parent engagement has been found to have a profound impact (Domina, 2005), on the academic achievement of students with disabilities (Newman, 2005). The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) found that when parents of students with disabilities were engaged in their children's education, these students were more likely to receive higher scores on tests and were closer to their assessed grade level in reading than those students whose families were less involved (Newman 2010). Although families play a vital role in the academic success of their children with disabilities, some studies have shown that parent engagement in the education of their children with disabilities may be lower than for those without disabilities (Lendrum, Barlow, & Humphrey 2015).

Poor parental engagement may be the result of several challenges. The Connor and Cavendish study, "Toward authentic IEPs and transition plans: Student, parent, and teacher perspectives," that focused on IEP meetings and transition planning in high schools, as an area of high parent engagement for special needs students, showed that this area had been neglected when it comes to family involvement (Cavendish, & Connor, 2018). The study identified several challenges to parent engagement in the IEP process. These challenges are as follows: language barriers with not enough translators, scheduling difficulties and conflicts because parents must work many jobs and are responsible for several other children (Cavendish, & Connor, 2018). Another critical barrier to parent engagement in the schooling of their children with a disability identified by Cavendish and Connor is the parents' views about their children's intelligence as well as how the children learn and

develop their abilities. When parents of students with disabilities are engaged in their schooling, these students develop resiliency, a skill they need to overcome barriers at the postsecondary level and throughout their entire lives. Three African American male with disabilities volunteered to participate in this qualitative case study. One participant reports having a visual impairment, one, an emotional /behavioral disorder, and the other reports a diagnosis of specific learning disabilities. A discussion of the types of disabilities follows:

Students Diagnosed with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EB/D)

IDEA defines Emotional and Behavioral Disorder as "a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period and notably affects a child's educational performance adversely in the following ways:

(A) "An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors." (Sullivan, 2017, p. 244).

(B) An inability to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers." (Sullivan, 2017, p. 244).

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. " (Sullivan, 2017, p. 244).

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression;" (Sullivan, 2017, p. 244). and

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems" (Sullivan, 2017, p.244).

Schizophrenia is included in the emotionally disturbed category of disabilities. Schizophrenia, however, "does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted unless

it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section" (Sullivan, 2017, p. 244).

The E/BD category relates to student outcomes both in and out of school. A wealth of research reveals that students identified under this category can have a severely problematic life. For example, relative to their non-identified peers, students identified as EB/D face increased probabilities for juvenile delinquency, incarcerations, and substance abuse. They have the highest number of suspensions per disability groups. According to data from the Department of Education, 25 % of long-term suspensions from school are served by students diagnosed as EB/D. Although all students with disabilities can be suspended from school, about 12 % of students with EB/D are suspended compared to only 3% of their peers with a disability (Samuels, 2018).

Academic Performance of EB/D Students

Academically, EBD students demonstrate limited growth in their achievement, often resulting in academic deficits across multiple areas that do not show improvement over time" (Rice & Yen, 2010). Some studies show that students diagnosed with EB/D may show limited academic progress even when provided with appropriate intervention while in school (Buzick, 2010; Rice & Yen, 2010; Lane, 2008). On the other hand, there are emerging studies that show that the academic growth for students with severe Emotional /Behavioral Disorder (EB/D) is within the range of their regular education grade-level peers (Hass, Stickney, & Yesseldyke, 2016; Ysseldyke, Sierra, Stickney, Beckler, Dituri, & Ellis, 2017). As of 2018, according to Samuels (2018), more than 335, 000 students nationwide were classified as having EB/D. This number constitutes about 6% of the Special Education population nationwide. Although IDEA ensures that students

have access to FAPE, during the 2016-17 school year, less than half of this population of students spent most of the day in the general education classroom. 13% of the EB/D population spent their time in an alternate school, while only 3% of all students in the total disability categories were in alternative placement (Samuels 2108).

A diagnosis of EB/D can also be a part of other disabilities, for example, a student with a primary classification of specific learning disability under IDEA may also be diagnosed with anxiety or obsessive, compulsive disorder, or both (Samuels 2018). Behaviorally/Emotionally Disturbed students struggle to learn at a proportionate level with their peers. They are at significantly higher "risks for failing school and leaving school before graduating." About 80 to 90 percent of these students score below grade level on reading and math achievement tests (Merrell & Walker, 2004). The NCES 2017 showed that during the 2015-2016 school year, students with ED exiting high school were the percentage of students who received the highest percent (34 %) of an alternative certificate. Their dropout rate was also the highest when compared to other students with an IEP. They subsequently exhibit more difficulties adjusting to life as adults than students in other disability categories (Frank, Hanchon, & Allen, p.176).

Recent research that reviewed the academic performance of students with EB/D shows that they have a wide array of large academic deficits that are evident in multiple areas of their academic performance. These deficits do not appear to improve over time. (Marcus, Wiglet, Hergrt, Gurt, & Gelleri, 2017). There are studies, however, that provide evidence of variability regarding the academic success within groups of students diagnosed with emotional disorders (Haas, Stickney & Rosseldyke, 2016; Ysseldyke, Sierra, Stickney, Beckler, Dituri, & Ellis, 2017). A study conducted by Ysseldyke, Sierra,

Stickney, Beckler, Dituri, & Ellis, 2017 on the academic growth in reading and math of 321 students with behavioral and emotional disorders in 52 school districts across one state, found that the academic growth for students diagnosed with significant emotional, behavioral disorders (EB/D) was within the range of performance when compared to the status and growth of a national database of over 7, 500,000 students without disabilities. Haas, Strickner, & Yesseldyke, (2016), encourage the use of progress monitoring to monitor the academic growth of EB/D students in order to monitor the level of growth expected from them since they can produce academic growth over time.

There is limited research from the literature on the performance of EB/D students and their academic achievement across gender and ethnicity at the postsecondary level. An article describing the characteristics and outcomes of students diagnosed with EB/D concluded that improved long-term outcomes such as employment, postsecondary education or training, and independent living were associated with parental involvement vocational education, and social integration in the school through participation in sports or other extracurricular activities (Hocutt, 1996).

Students Diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

IDEA defines a specific learning disability as:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding, or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. A specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of a hearing, or motor

disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 2018).

SLD students may demonstrate immature development in all areas of learning. They often lack initiative and do recognize at times that they have no idea or understanding of what is being read or said or taught. Students with a learning disability may have poor memory and may find it difficult, or take a longer time, to recall basic academic facts, for example, a math times table. For these reasons, these students are considered to "be inactive students with metacognitive deficits" (Cullen-Pullen, 2016, p.25). SLD students demonstrate social-emotional problems. Persons with learning disabilities tend to be at risk for depression, social rejection, suicidal thoughts, and loneliness (Cullen-Pullen, 2011).

There is some evidence of racial disparities in the diagnosis of SLD in the literature. The NHIS data show that the prevalence of SLD among African American children is often higher than the prevalence of SLD in Caucasian and Hispanic children. For example, in 2010, the prevalence of SLD among school-aged children was 1.9 percent in African American children, 1.7 % in Caucasian children, 1.2 % in Latino/Hispanic children, and 0.9 percent in Asian children (NHIS, 2010). The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) informed that the prevalence of mild SLD by race was 4.4 % for Caucasian children, 3.9% for African American children 3.4 % for Hispanic children, 3.6% for other non-Hispanic children. In the case of the prevalence of SLD, the survey shows a remarkable difference in the prevalence of the disability between the races. NSCH-estimated the prevalence of severe SLD by race was African Americas, 5.7%, Caucasians 3.9 % Hispanics, 3.8 %, and 3.2 percent for the category other races (NSCH, 2011-2012).

The National Academy of Science Engineering and Medicine in their research concludes. There is evidence of disproportionality in the diagnosis of learning disabilities by race. "Some evidence that test bias and diagnostic bias contribute to disparities are observed between racial or ethnic categories in the identification of children with SLD" (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015, p.183). More males than females are diagnosed with SLD Males are more likely to be diagnosed than females with this disability at a ratio of 3:1 (Corteila 2009). There are several theories, for this reason, examples of these theories are: referral bias, the higher biological vulnerability of males, and sexual bias; however, according to the literature, these theories are only based on speculation since there is no definitive research to support these theories.

Supports and Modifications for the SLD Student

While in school the typical special education supports and services for students with specific learning disabilities range from the very intensive level of support to the less intense level. The very intensive support may include but is not limited to individualized interventions or the special education class (National Academics of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2005). The less intensive support includes additional help in general education classroom or homework, special lesson plans with individuals grouped according to their achievement levels, and intense teacher involvement. Modifications are demonstrated in the following ways: the placement of the child, "modifications in homework, modified test requirements, or extra time on tests. The use of electronic and other resources, such as the use of computers with spell check and text-to-speech- devices can be helpful (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2015).

Resource room support, special classes along with an individualized education plan that helps the school to focus on the SLD students' strengths as well as their weaknesses, are considered the more helpful approach to support and services for these students (Shaywitz,1990).

At the postsecondary level, Section 504 of the Vocation Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires colleges and universities to make reasonable accommodations for all students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations for students diagnosed with SLD may include extended time on exams, provision of a noise-free setting for test-taking, tutoring, and the provision of note-takers during lectures or provision of other technological devices that can help students with note taking (Cullen -Pullen, 2016). These support and services are provided with the aim to boost students' academic performance.

Academic Performance of Students with Specific Learning Disability

While many individuals with learning difficulties experience active and productive lives as adults, others have learning problems that lead to early withdrawal from school and lower levels of employment (Shaywitz, 1990). Those students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities "may have problems in all areas of their academics, but they are more prone to have problems in math and reading" Cullen-Pullen, 2016, p.25). Cullen Pullen's study on the historical and current perspective on learning disability in the United States found that reading problems often termed "Dyslexia" and math disability "Dyscalculia" is often cited as the most common form of learning disability" (Pullen 2016 p.27). Dyslexia affects phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Dyscalculia problems may include the computation of mathematics facts as well as word problems (Pullen, 2016). Those diagnosed with SLD often repeatedly fail their academic

subjects. Failing academic courses repeatedly results in destroying the SLD student's self-esteem, self-concept, and motivation (Denhart, 2008).

Since the '90s, there have been extensive scientific studies on learning disabilities, especially how it impacts the human brain, body genome, and social structure (Denhart, 2008). People diagnosed with SLD continuously struggle to lead successful lives. They are the ones most likely to have low prestige jobs, lower income from employment, and high rates of unemployment. Although SLD students are challenged by all these problems, studies on SLD students show that those who have graduated high school and have moved on to pursue higher education has tripled. (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, Shaver, & Yen, 2010). The percentage of SLD high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions within four years of leaving high school increased from 11.4 % in 1990 to 34.5 % in 2005 (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, Shaver, & Yen, 2010). In 2011, the SLD students' rate of enrollment in postsecondary education within eight years of leaving high school showed that these students were attending postsecondary institutions at the same rate as their general education peers.

While studies report that there has been an increase in the postsecondary enrollment of SLD students over the years, there are studies that report that their dropout rate is very high. "The college drop-out rate of those labeled with a diagnosis of SLD remains very high, locking many of those diagnosed with SLD into high unemployment rates, and more placement in lower rates of poverty" (Denhart, 2008 p.483). Research has also shown that nationally, the dropout rate for SLD students enrolled in college is near 70% when compared to non-disabled college students. If the SLD students remain in college, they obtain a much lower grade point averages, are more likely to take time off from their

studies, and to change to more natural programs than their peers without disabilities while in college (Lightner, Kipps-Vaughn, Schulte, & Trice, 2005). Postsecondary education completion rates for SLD students are "highest at the two years or community college level (41%) and at Vocational/ technical schools (57%) Their completion of four-year colleges is relatively low (34 %)" (Coritiella, & Horowitz, 2014, p.32.) These numbers, however, are much lower than those of their college educated non-disabled peers.

SLD students may drop out of college for many reasons. Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte. & Trice, in their study on, "Reasons university students with a learning disability wait to seek disability services," provided the following reasons: lack of disclosure of their disability due to a fear of issues related to stigma, lack of adequate knowledge of their disability, and the quality of transition services provided at the high school level (Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte, & Trice, 2005). The primary reason, however, for these students dropping out of college according to other researchers, is the lack of disclosure of their disability to faculty (Denheart, 2008). The National Longitudinal Transitional Study-2 found that the majority, 56%, of those students diagnosed with SLD did not believe that they had a disability. While 7.8 % believed they had the disability but preferred not to release that information to their colleges (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, Shaver & Yen, 2011). A study conducted by Denhart in 2008 on the "Perceptions of students labeled with learning disabilities in higher education" found that there is an "overwhelming reluctance" of students diagnosed with a learning disability at the postsecondary level to request or use accommodations, resulting in a workload that overwhelms the students. Some SLD students, rather than seek out the necessary accommodations or supports that would help them succeed, preferred to be viewed as "lacking motivation or lazy while

working to the point of exhaustion and illness because of the fear of the stigma of their disability" (Denhart, 2008, p.49). These posit serious barriers to postsecondary education for the SLD student

There are other barriers to postsecondary attendance and retention for the African American student diagnosed with SLD. Gregg, 2007, in his research, informs that there is a lack of academic skills, lack of documentation to access accommodations and services, and poor transition planning for postsecondary education. When it comes to secondary education, the SLD student is less likely to participate in their general education curriculum. Most often, they are enrolled in remedial so-called research-based intervention programs. When students diagnosed with SLD are enrolled in general education courses, these students do not receive a rigorous secondary education level curriculum due to professionals who have a lower level of academic performance standards for them. The lower expectations for the SLD students, especially by their teachers, coupled with the lack of access to rigorous curriculum standards, results in the failure of SLD students on standardized tests and the lack of success at the postsecondary level (Gregg, 2007). It should be the aim of educators to provide a more rigorous standardized curriculum with accommodations and support needed for the instruction of these students. Minimal performance should never be an acceptable level of academic achievement for them.

The requirements for documentation about the severity level of a student's disability differ across postsecondary institutions (Gregg, 2007). Some students with a learning disability may find it challenging to provide adequate documentation needed by their postsecondary institutions to support their request for accommodations. It is in this instance that appropriate transition planning at the secondary level plays a critical role. With

adequate transition planning, students diagnosed with a disability can with the aid of their parents, seek support services and accommodations at enrollment on college campuses, and experience more successful college years (Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schultz, & Trice, 2005). On the other hand, those that experience poor transition planning face the challenges of dropping out of college or struggling with poor grades throughout their college experience or seek for accommodations only when they begin to experience severe academic challenges (Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schultz, & Trice, 2005).

From the literature on the postsecondary success of SLD students, there is no lack of evidence to support the fact that postsecondary success for students with a learning disability is still daunting and is falling well below the level of acceptable expectations. However, there are those students with learning disabilities who are succeeding academically. Three main ways for raising the level of success of SLD students include inclusion in IEP meetings, providing education courses where they have adequate support and accommodations for success in the standard curriculum. When these opportunities for success are in place, these will not only provide an opportunity for increasing the student's self-advocacy skills in their postsecondary education but build the bridge for success from secondary to postsecondary level.

Students Diagnosed with Blind and Visual Impairments

"Visual impairment includes both partial sight and total blindness" (Guard, 2004. p.1). There is a difference between those classified as blind and those who have a classification of visual impairment. "A person considered to be visually impaired is one who has some sight but needs the care of an eye specialist. A person who is legally blind is one whose peripheral vision is reduced to 20% or less, or a person who can see only the

top 'E' on the optical examination chart" (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 227). There are approximately 455,462 children with "vision difficulty" in the United States. "Vision difficulty" refers to "children who have serious difficulties seeing even when wearing glasses. There are 42, 000 children with a severe vision impairment, these children are unable to see words, letters and regular print, and 61, 739 children in our schools who are legally blind" (American Foundation for the Blind, 2018, p.1.) Under IDEA, vision impairment, including blindness, is "an impairment in vision that even with correction adversely affects a students' educational performance. The term also includes partial sight and blindness" (US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services 2017, p.2).

IDEA mandates each year that the number of students with visual impairments receiving special education and related services must be reported to the US Department of Education. The most recent data for the school year 2015 -16, revealed that during that school year 2, 799 children ages three to five and 24, 944 children six years through twenty-one years old who are visually impaired in the United States and its outlying territories received special education services (American Foundation for the Blind, 2018; Parent Center Hub .org n.d. p.1)

Students who are blind or visually impaired meet several challenges in their lives that may severely impact their educational experience. Included in their IEPs are the skills they are required to learn. These are the required skills that are needed to facilitate the best educational outcomes for these students. According to Heumann, 1996, some skills that could be included on these students' IEPs to ensure that their specific needs are adequately met may include the following:

- Skills necessary to attain literacy in reading and writing, including appropriate instructional methods,

- Skills for acquiring information including appropriate use of technological devices and services,

- Orientation and Mobility Instruction.

- Social Interaction Skills.

- Transition Service's Needs.

- Recreation
- Career Education.

Many of the students who are blind or visually impaired are generally expected to be relatively independent by their senior year in high school. The majority, especially those diagnosed in earlier grades, should be able to independently operate and maintain the variety of assistive devices used in the classroom. Just as with all students with disabilities, transition services for life beyond high school is vital for blind or visually impaired students, since these students will face a variety of social challenges at the college level. (A Guide for College Students with Visual Impairment). Blind and visually impaired students are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Both these Acts require college campuses to provide a learning facility that is "accessible to all students regardless of their disability along with educational devices designed to educate them (A Guide for College Students with Visual Impairments (n.d.).

Academic Performance of Students with Blind or Visual Impairments

Most of those students who are classified as blind or visually impaired are generally expected to be relatively independent by the time they become seniors in high school. Most

blind and visually impaired students, especially those diagnosed in earlier grades, should be able to independently operate and maintain the variety of assistive devices used in the classroom. A 1996 study conducted in Britain by Richardson and Roy found that when the demographic characteristics, programs of study, and academic attainment of visually impaired students were compared to their general education peers, visual impairment appeared to have surprisingly little effect on academic achievement (Richardson and Roy, 2002).

When students with visual impairment are compared to those students diagnosed with a disability category under IDEA, they are the ones more likely to be academically successful. The NCES 2018 report on the "Condition of Education in the US" shows that of the number of students with disability ages ,14–21 who exited school in 2014–15, those who were visually impaired graduated with the highest percentage of high school diplomas (82%) and shared the lowest dropout rate (7%) with those diagnosed with autism (The condition of Education–Pre-primary Elementary and, Secondary, 2018). The percentage of students who dropped out of high school in the 2014-15 school year was highest among those students diagnosed with emotional disturbances (35 %) and lowest among those students diagnosed with autism and visual impairments (both at 7%) (US Department of Education Special education services 2018).

Disability Categories and Students' Postsecondary Experience

There are students with disabilities who recognize that postsecondary education is a vital transition outcome because of the impact of a college degree on future economic and social outcomes and are targeting this aspect of their transition plans more than ever before. The 2005 National Center for Education Statistics Longitudinal Transition Study-

2 reports that 76.7 % of youth with disabilities aspired to attend a postsecondary school or program when surveyed in high school. Research has shown that there has been a steady increase in the number of students with disabilities in the postsecondary educational environment. In 1996, about 6 % of all undergraduates reported that they have a disability (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1999). The different disability categories included learning disabilities (29 %), orthopedic impairments (23%), hearing impairment (16%), vision impairment (16 %), and speech impairment (3%). "A fifth of the undergraduate population that reported having a disability also revealed an additional "health-related" disability or limitation" (NCES, 1999, p. 7). Four years later, there were 66,197 first time college freshmen who entered four-year public and private colleges that reported being disabled.

Amongst those students who reported having a disability were those students diagnosed with hearing impairment, vision impairment, other health impairment, and learning disabilities (Reid &Knight 2006). The National Center for Education Statistic's Longitudinal Study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education reports that two years after high school, 19% of students with a disability were attending a postsecondary school in comparison to 40.5% of youth without disabilities (Newman, 2005). The differences in youth with disabilities and those without disabilities attending a 4-year college were even more striking, with 5.7% of youth with disabilities attending a four-year college compared to 28% of youth without disabilities. During the 2008-2009 academic year 707, 000 students with disabilities as classified under IDEA were attending two and four-year degree-granting colleges (Rue, & Lewis,2011).

There are students with disabilities who are attaining postbaccalaureate degrees. The most recent transition to postsecondary education study (2013-2014) reported that the percentage of post-baccalaureate students who reported having a disability in 2011-2012 was 5%. This was lower than the 11% reported as pursuing an undergraduate degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016; Digest of Education Statistics, 2015). As of 2016, 11% of the college population pursuing postsecondary education reported having a disability (U.S. Department of Education 2018). However, not all students choose to report or disclose their disability to the disability services office (Low, 1996; Reid 2013). Therefore, the percentage of students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education may be higher (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010).

There are differences in the post-high school outcome of students from different disability categories. Youth with visual or hearing impairments are more likely to attend college and are more likely to view themselves as having a disability. They disclose their disability more frequently than any other disability categories. Results from the second National Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS-2) show that 78% of students who had a visual impairment attended college. However, only 57 % of those students who had a speech-language impairment, 47 % of those students who had a specific learning disability, 35 % of those students diagnosed with multiple disabilities, and 27 % of those students who were either diagnosed as emotionally disturbed or intellectually disabled attended postsecondary institutions.

Students with disabilities need to understand the transition process in order to transition from high school to college and careers successfully. They need to become aware of college and job applications and scholarships. Students must be able to distinguish

between the high school environment, the college environments, and faculty expectations, as well as career environments. They need to be able to prepare for an adult living, especially in the areas of self-advocating in college and the community in order to attain academic success (Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, & Test, 2005). It is essential that transition planning is coordinated and executed for all students with disabilities. A 2016 analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study - 2 found that when students with disabilities receive sound transition planning at the high school level the odds of their seeking and using supports and services at the postsecondary institutions significantly increases (Neuman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver & Wei, 2011). Studies also show that when compared, the employment rates and annual salary for college graduates with a disability were similar to those of their non-disabled peers. Those students who had a sound transition plan were better able to navigate the college system and had better advocacy skills. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Postsecondary Education and African American Students with Disabilities

The literature on high achieving African Americans with disabilities is limited. Existing research on academic success by race and ethnicity often overlook African Americans with disabilities. Further, they are rarely discussed or viewed as high achievers when the conversation about race, sex, disability, and academic success occurs. African American males with a disability are rarely discussed or viewed as high achievers (Robinson, 2018). Despite the sparsity of information on academic success in this population, the academic enrollment of students with disabilities is on the increase across postsecondary campuses (Newman & Madeus, 2010).

There are several laws which impact a student with a disability's access to

postsecondary institutions, amongst these are the following:

(1) The postsecondary plan designed by IDEA 2004 contains several significant changes that directly impact students with disabilities who are preparing for the transition to postsecondary education. These modifications include transition planning, reevaluation, criteria for their diagnosis, and the summary of the performance requirement (Cawthon, & Cole, 2010).

(2) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This act is a civil rights law that forbids discrimination based on a disability in all institutions that receive federal funding. Many colleges and universities receive federal funding; this act includes them as well. Section 504 of the Act stipulates the following requirements regarding postsecondary education institutions and students with disabilities:(a) Access to facilities and activities. (b) Provision of supplemental aids and services, (Hawthorne & Cole, 2010; Rehabilitation Act, 1973; 29 U.S.C. 794).

(3). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990. This law extends the law of non-discrimination for the disabled to include the private sector and the nonfederal public sector (Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education, Barriers to Success and Implications for Professionals, (n.d.) p1; Daroff, W., 2015, p. 15). This law also mandates that colleges provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities.

Higher education institutions usually agree to pay for "many academic-specific accommodations for disabled students. Examples of these are, removing any obstacles from classrooms that would hinder access, and providing computer software designed to assist disabled students while they are on campus: (Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education (n.d.); Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students

with a Disability (n.d.); Hebel, 2001b, p. 44). A student diagnosed with a disability is responsible for providing information regarding the nature of his disability to the college he attends as well as to help in identifying suitable aids and services needed by him/ her. Colleges may require students to provide supporting diagnostic test results and professional decisions regarding the services requested and may obtain their professional determination of whether specifically requested aids are necessary. Obtaining accommodations, at the college level, however, depends heavily on the students' decision of whether to disclose his/her disability (Thomas, (n.d.). A study conducted by Newman and Madeus found that the decision to disclose a disability while in college is heavily impacted by attitudes and environmental barriers as well as the type and level of preparation for transition beyond high school during the high school years, and the type of disability (Newman and Madeus, 2014).

Research shows that the rate of self-disclosure of disabilities in college is very low. A study conducted by Newman and Madeus based on the analysis of the National Longitudinal Study-2 (NLTS-2) showed that only 35% of students with disabilities who attended a postsecondary institution disclosed their disability. This level of reporting results in a significantly lower provision of service and accommodation at the postsecondary level than at the secondary level (Newman & Madeus, 2014). According to the NLTS-2, very few African Americans males with disabilities disclosed their disabilities (0.3% at 2-year colleges, and 0.45% at four- year colleges) as a result many African American males with a disability do not receive accommodations at the postsecondary level because of the non-disclosure of their disability. According to Newman and Madeus, this nondisclosure of their disability may be the result of a denial of their disability or the

fear of dual discrimination at this level or poor transition planning throughout high school (Newman & Madeus, 2014).

Newman and Madeus 'conducted a study that analyzed factors that related to the receipt of accommodations and services by postsecondary students with disabilities. The study found that "fear of stigma, discrimination, and professors' attitude," (Newman and Madeus, 2014, p.210), appeared to be deterrents to student decisions regarding receipt of disability-related services, particularly among students with invisible disabilities (examples psychiatric disabilities and specific learning disabilities). Additionally, other factors that may adversely affect disclosure by these students include "the impact of self-determination skills, academic preparation, the student's disability, and transition planning" (Lynn, Newman, & Madeus 2014, p.209). The study also found that students who received sound transition planning at the secondary level that specifies the postsecondary accommodations and supports that will be needed after high school graduation were more likely to access disability services offered at the postsecondary level (Lynn, Newman, & Madeus 2014).

Cited in the literature are several challenges that impact the academic success of college students with a disability. Some that are common from research results are students' lack of appropriate academic skills or suitable academic strategies, social, natural or affective difficulties, and the need for accommodation in order to succeed in academic studies (Heiman, & Pregel, 2003). The long-term success for students with disabilities is influenced by not only enrollment in, but also the completion of a postsecondary education program (Newman & Madeus, 2010). Several decades of research on college persistence show that the success of students with disabilities is affected by a combination of individual

and family characteristics coupled with higher education institution characteristics. African American males are under-represented in gifted groups and high ability academic programs from the elementary level through the postgraduate levels. African American male students diagnosed with disabilities are frequently enrolled in the lowest ability groups or /programs. They drop out of high school and college at higher rates than their Caucasian peers. Research shows that when an African American male has dual exceptionalities, the education received may not be conducive to his needs, which may lead to the annihilation of his gifts and talents (Frazier & Scott 2016).

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review discussed factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability. More specifically, it addressed those African American males diagnosed with disabilities in the following three categories: Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (EB/D), and Vision Impairment, as presented in the participant in this study. The following factors, special education support and services, academic engagement, and parent engagement, were discussed to provide an overview of how these impacts the academic performance of these students. Identified in the literature review were several important factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males diagnosed with a disability. Critical amongst these factors were the student's decision about whether to disclose his disability and when to seek services at the college level. The decision to disclose their disabilities is impacted by issues related to stigma, a knowledge of their disability, and the quality of transition services provided to them during the high school years.

The scholarly literature on African American males at the postgraduate level, especially those on African American males with a disability, is very sparse. However, there are African American males with and without disabilities that are graduating with master's and doctoral degrees as supported by a few studies. However, their story is missing from the literature. Instead, there is a copious amount of research on factors that impinge on the academic success of African American males. According to the literature review, there are supports and services, as well as laws that are designed to provide access to equal education for all students. However, there are instances where the very services that are set up to support the educational success of African American male students with a disability fail to do so (Frazier & Scott 2016). For example, African American males diagnosed with a disability are frequently enrolled in the lowest ability groups and programs in their school, resulting in their dropping out of high school and college at higher rates than their Caucasian counterparts. When an African American male has a disability, the education he receives may not be suitable to the level of his needs. This may result in the annihilation of his gifts and talents (Frazier & Scott 2016). Not all African American males diagnosed with a disability will be able to attend college or obtain master's and doctoral degrees due to the severity of the impact of their disability on their cognitive ability. However, there are those African American male students diagnosed with a disability who can survive all odds and attain academic success at the highest level. This study aims to discover what are some of the salient factors that contributes to the academic success of those African American males with a disability. The Methodology follows.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This study serves to identify key factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability. The previous chapter was the literature review which reviewed and presented major topics related to this study. The literature review demonstrated a need for further research on this topic. This chapter is the methodology. This chapter explains the researcher positionality, gives an overview of the research design, participants in the study, explains the instrument used as well as the validation and reliability of the interview questions. The data collection method and analysis are also reviewed and described in this section.

Researcher Positionality

The term positionality is defined as an individual's personal world view and the position he or she has chosen to adopt a specific task. Research positionality is described by Milner 2007 as the researchers 'awareness of their racial and cultural awareness as it influences the qualitative research process, especially in instances where race and cultural diversity are concerned.

The researcher is an African American Female and works currently as a special education teacher whose experience spans teaching African American males with disabilities in a large urban school district for over ten years. As an African American female, the writer believes her racial identity and teaching experience may have provided her with worthwhile experience in the interview process. For example, as an African American female, the researcher was an insider for much of the interview process. As a result, the participants openly shared pertinent information regarding racial issues experienced on

campus. However, the researcher was also an outsider since she does not have a disability, but the fact that the researcher is currently employed working with students with disabilities in an urban setting as a transition coordinator and the emphasis placed on the purpose and need for the study minimized the outsider status.

Research Design

This study is a qualitative study. Qualitative studies may involve the use of the collection of both qualitative like documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Merriam,1988). Specifically, this study employed the use of the qualitative case study. The qualitative case study is, "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. They are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning" (Merriam, 1988, p.16, The Learning-Disabled College Student Surviving College Education (n.d. p. 3).

The case study is" particularistic because it "focuses on one specific phenomenon like a person, process, institution, or group. A case study is "descriptive" because it provides a "rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study" (The Learning-Disabled College Student: Surviving Higher Education n.d. p. 11). It is also said to be "heuristic" because of the study's power to "illuminate the understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam 1988, p. 13). Inductive reasoning is a hallmark of case studies because new relationships and understandings emerge from studying the data (Barga, 1996; Merriam, 1988). The primary goal of the case study research is to conduct an in-depth analysis of an issue within its context to understand the issue from the perspective of participants.

Participants

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the recruitment of the participants for the study was conducted by the researcher. Participants for the study must meet the following criteria:

1. African American male

2. Has a disability as classified by IDEA.

3. Has an earned post baccalaureate degree

A total of three African American males diagnosed with a disability as classified by IDEA, who possessed an earned post-baccalaureate degree, volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were informed that their participation in the research was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw from participating in the research at any time they desired to do so. Once the participant agreed to participate in the research, they were asked to provide a pseudonym which would be used to sign their consent form. This pseudonym would also be used to ensure the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the data.

Each of the three participants who volunteered for the study belonged to one of the significant disability categories, Visual Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, and Emotional /Behavioral Disorder, to fulfill the demands of the study. The disability categories were used in order to facilitate the triangulation, contrasting, and validation of the data, this helped to determine if the data yielded similar findings across the disability categories. The participants were selected using two methods, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study" (Patton, 1990, p.182). Snowball sampling, according to Marcus et al. (2017),

is "any type of sample recruitment strategy, whereby the researcher does not directly recruit all or a portion of participants who are asked to provide data but through other persons who connect them to other persons as participants" (p. 635). Snowball sampling is useful in instances where participants are less likely to identify themselves due to social stigma.

First, based on the purpose of the study, purposive sampling was used to recruit African American Males with a disability from public schools and local college campuses in an urban area in the United States of America. School principals and the Office of Disability Services on college campuses were contacted (see Appendix B) and permission requested to post flyers on their list serve or notice boards to recruit participants for the study. The researcher aimed to recruit at least three participants with three different disability categories for the purpose of the study. There was some difficulty experienced in recruiting participants with hidden disabilities. Therefore, the researcher resorted to the use of snowball sampling to recruit participants with hidden disabilities. This chain-referral-sampling expanded the sample by consenting prospective participants who responded to the flyer after the purpose of the study was explained to them to identify and recruit participants for this study (see Appendix B). Participation in the snowball sampling was voluntary. In the application of the snowball sampling method, once the individuals with whom initial contacts were made to participate in the study was done, they voluntarily contacted and recruited the participants with a hidden disability. Two participants diagnosed with a hidden disability were recruited, one with an Emotional/Behavioral Disorder, and the other a participant diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability. This method of sampling was essential to the study due to the limited amount of time that was available for data collection (Mack et al., 2011).

Data Collection Procedure

Before conducting the study, the researcher requested and obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University to conduct a study on factors contributing to the academic success of African American males with a disability. The IRB approval is included in Appendix A. Three requirements for participation in this study are that the participants (a) are African American males (b) have an earned postgraduate degree and (c) Have a disability as classified by IDEA. After receiving the IRB approval, the researcher contacted the prospective participants via telephone, after they were identified as possible participants for the study. Telephone scripts and emails used to recruit and contact participants are included in Appendix B. The potential participants provided an initial over the phone consent which was followed up by an informed consent letter (Appendix D) that explained the purpose of the study, the method by which the data would be collected, their right to participate or not to participate in the study and the consent to participate. Participants would sign the consent to participate request section of the letter using a pseudonym coined by them. This consent to participate would be returned to the researcher prior to the time of the scheduled interview. If participants forgot to mail their signed consent prior to the scheduled interview, a copy of the letter with the consent would be available to be emailed immediately to them that time. A day before the interview, the researcher made a telephone call that reminded prospective participants of the date and time of their interview appointment.

Data collection employed the one-to-one-interview method. The researcher used both written notes and audio-recording of the interview to capture information presented during the interview sessions. The recording of the interview was conducted via Zoom or

Google Meet or any other platform convenient to the participants. Any data recorded on these platforms could only be accessed using a password to which only the researcher had access. Before the interview, prospective participants were informed that the interview would be recorded in the recruitment letter sent earlier. Participants were again reminded that they were being recorded at the time and date of their scheduled interview. Each participant was interviewed on a separate date and time to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The interview utilized both open and closed-ended questions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to ensure that participants were asked the same standardized questions, therefore, assisting with the credibility of the study.

Questions for the interview (Appendix C) were designed to identify themes and ideas related to the study. Each question was intended to provide a structure for the interview sessions (Creswell, 2013), as it carefully solicited information relevant to the study. The first section of the interview focused on the collection of demographic data; the second section collected data on the personal experiences of each participant as they pursue their academic goals at the different levels of schooling, and the services and supports received. Emphasis was placed mainly on the lived experiences of the participants and their reflections on their experience.

In order to provide comparisons across the disability groups, the interview covered the following areas, participants' perceptions of schooling; this included school environment relationships with faculty and peers, and the receipt of academic support throughout their schooling. The interview covered parental and community support, participation in IEP meetings and transition planning, indicators of resilience expectations for postsecondary education, and employment. These areas also formed the common

themes under which the data were grouped for data analysis. The data were repeatedly examined for recurrent themes or new themes that would aid in the coding of the data collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a reliable way to analyze qualitative data. This procedure can be used in a variety of formats; "nowadays content analysis is most often applied to verbal data such as interview scripts" (Elo et al., 2014, p. 4). To analyze the data, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews on multiple occasions before coding of the data from the interviews. This process aided in identifying statements or responses that needed to be clarified and the recognition of emerging themes as well as the recurring themes that should be coded during the data analysis procedure.

In instances where information gathered from the data was unclear, the participant was contacted for clarification to ensure the validity of the data collected. The major aim here was to highlight the factors that contributed to the academic success of the African American male students with a disability who had achieved academic success at the master's and doctoral degree level. Therefore, the interviews served as the chief source of providing data that was to be analyzed in this study (Elo et al., 2014).

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure employed content analysis. The primary goal of the qualitative content analysis is "to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and brief but comprehensive summary of the key results" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017 p.93.) This means that raw data from the word for word written

interviews must be analyzed to form categories or themes. "This process involves detailed abstraction of data at each step of the analysis, from the manifest and literal content to latent meanings" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017 p.93). Content analysis is flexible. Employing this method involves "working and reworking the data to identify relationships and connections" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 97).

The first step when conducting content analysis involves reading and re-reading the data in order to have a sense of what participants are saying (Erlingsson, & Brysiewicz, 2017). Therefore, after collecting the data, the researcher listened to the recorded data and immediately transcribed the data recorded on the Zoom or Google Meet platforms for each participant, read and reread the recorded data repeatedly while listening to the recorded data on the various platforms to ensure accurate transcription of the data. The transcribed recorded data were next compared to the handwritten word for word notes obtained at the interview. Next, both sets of data were examined in order to identify "meaning units" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Once a meaning unit was identified, it was marked on the margin of the handwritten note page. Examples of meaning units used follows: participants bio, school, college, faculty, teachers, peers, support and services, transition planning, IEP meeting, expectations, self-advocacy, culture, culturalism, disability disclosure, desire to succeed, nurturing relationships, advising, mentoring, monitoring, motivating, academic engagement, instruction, and goal. The data were also examined for emerging recurring meaning units. Useful emerging meaning units that add further clarity and meaning to the data gathered would be used. Next, the meaning units were condensed into codes that were merged into categories. The researcher made a tally of the number of times specific themes

appeared. The data were also examined for emerging recurring issues in order to code the data.

Codes are descriptive tables for condensed meaning units. "Coding is an analysis" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 6). "Codes help the researcher to examine, reflect, and review the data in a variety of ways" (Erlingsson, & Bryslewicz, 2017 p.94). The coding process used here involves the following steps, reading through the data, dividing the data into steps, labeling the data with codes, collapsing the codes into themes, reducing the codes to twenty codes then reducing the codes to five or seven categories. (Huberman & Suldana 2010). The data were coded under the following priori themes: high school experience, college experience, perception of schooling, perception of schooling for African American males with disabilities, school environment, relationship with faculty, perception of faculty, relationship with peers, academic support, parental support, community support, participation in IEP meeting, participation in transition planning, participation in extracurricular activities, college readiness, self-advocacy, indicators of resilience, personal expectations, parent expectations, teacher expectations, disclosure of disability, indicators of culturalism, cultural expectations, engagement in schooling, strategies for own success, to provide trustworthiness. The data were also examined for emerging themes and useful emerging themes incorporated into the data analysis (Erlingsson, & Brysiewicz, 2017).

These sub-themes were further merged into six major categories, namely: social integration in the school environment, demonstration of resilience, academic engagement, participation in the transition process, strategies for success, and supports and services, to provide answers to the two research questions (RQ1). What factors do African American

male students with a disability report drive them to enter college and persist in college to complete a degree at the master's or doctoral degree level? (RQ2.) What supports and strategies assisted the academic success of African American males diagnosed with disabilities at the "master's degree' level" and beyond?

Prior to merging the subthemes into major themes, the researcher cross-checked the facts and discrepancies the data provided, at all levels of the content analysis, process, classified the information so that it could be checked quickly, then tabulated the frequency of events, and noted it. The quantitative data gathered were used to corroborate and support the qualitative data obtained and vice-versa. Finally, the researcher examined the transcripts for existing patterns to ensure confidence in the data and to provide the findings and recommendations for the study (Erlingsson, & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Summary of the Research Method

This study is a qualitative case study. It enlisted three African American males with disabilities who have achieved post-baccalaureate degrees. One of the participants holds a doctoral degree; one is in the process of obtaining a doctoral degree; the other holds a master's degree. The study employed the use of the interview method in order to investigate the lived experiences of the participants themselves. Once the data was gathered, it was coded and analyzed with a focus on the two research questions that drive the study.

Ethical Issues

To ensure the protection and the rights of all the participants included in this study, the researcher participated in the training on Human Subject Research offered by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After completing the training, the researcher obtained permission for the use of human subjects in this study from the (IRB). The study is minimal

risk research. Therefore, participants in this study will not be exposed to any type of psychological, physical, or legal risks. No participants in this study will be manipulated or coerced.

The study utilized an informed consent form that gives participants the opportunity to agree or decline their participation by signing the form. The form outlined the purpose of the study and emphasized the fact that participation in the study is voluntary. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Any information provided by the participant would be held with the strictest confidence. Pseudonyms would be used throughout the entire research process to guard their identities. Any data collected would be kept in a locked personal file cabinet in the researcher's office. The audiotaped data would be kept for six months, then erased, and all notes would be shredded after one year. The next chapters present the data analysis, the findings from the study, discussion and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings of the data collected from the sample in this qualitative case study focusing on factors contributing to the academic success of African American males with a disability. The main source of the data gathered was interviews with three participants. The findings are presented in relation to the research objectives and the two salient research questions that drove the study:

RQ1. What factors do African American males with a disability report drive them to pursue a degree at the master's and doctoral degree level?

RQ2. What supports and strategies assisted African American males diagnosed with a disability to gain academic success at the master's degree level and beyond?

Details of the methodology used to analyze the data were discussed previously in chapter 3. Included in the findings presented in this chapter are the demographic profile of each participant; an analysis of the data gathered on their experiences, perceptions, and strategies; and recommendations for academic success as gleaned from responses to the questions used for the interview. For confidentiality purposes, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant during the interviews, allowing them to disclose their personal experiences and perceptions for academic success, since they were each guaranteed that their identity would be held in the strictest confidence. The information they provided was used solely for the research purpose as outlined in the signed consent.

Demographic Profiles of the Participants

Participant 1: Ken

Ken is a 41-year-old single African American male diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders. He has earned a master's degree from a local college. He spent 10 years in college, six years to attain his undergraduate degree and four years to earn his master's degree and is employed as a social worker. Ken did not disclose his disability while in college. He stated that once you tell people you have a disability, they begin to look at you differently. According to Ken, he left his disability in high school, although he has had a mental disorder throughout his life. Ken claims he owes his academic success to family members who have supported him throughout his life, fellow social workers, resilience, spirituality, and his mental health case manager. He also recalls a teacher who believed in him; this teacher was his football coach who kept him out of trouble and helped in his transition from high school to college.

Ken is the product of a single-parent home; however, his mother and grandparents took a keen interest in his schooling. They dreamed that he would keep off the city streets and go to college. According to Ken, "My mother was always there for me. She showed up at all my school meetings and agency appointments; she was always trying to find a way to help me. She was prouder than I was at my college graduations." Ken is an only child but has many cousins and other family members who are college graduates. They, according to Ken, were his role models, his support, and his cheerleaders. According to Ken, his reason for getting a college education is "I wanted to please my mother, just to fulfill her dreams of me, more than anything else. I wanted to be like my cousins; they all

had a college education and a good job. Deep down, I wanted to give my mother a good life and succeed academically."

After completing his first degree and working for a few years, he realized the importance of obtaining another degree. To be considered a professional in his field meant having a license, which translated into having a master's degree and better pay. Therefore, to advance in his career and have a license to practice in his social work career, he obtained his master's degree.

Participant 2: Simon

Simon is a 38-year-old single African American male diagnosed with Blind/Visual Impairment; He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in education. Simon has spent 9 ½ years in college and is poised to graduate in the fall of 2021. He disclosed his disability while in college since according to Simon his disability is "very obvious." Simon contends that his academic success is attributed to his belief in success and that his disability does not define him. He also explained that several other factors contributed to his success: his high school itinerant teacher's belief in him, his family support, his resilience, his spirituality, his peers, and his family's knowledge of available community supports and services that are available to him.

Simon stated that he is the product of a "stable family" and grew up with both parents. His entire family contributed to his academic success; they were always there for him, whether as cheerleaders, providing moral support, or being advisors. Simon always had a desire to go to college; he knew that this was the only way to be successful. After completing his first degree, he found out that he had to have a master's degree to get a "decent" career. With the mindset to get a "decent" career, Simon successfully obtained

his master's degree. Currently, he is employed at a government agency where he is helping students with disabilities but is hoping to find a job in the school system teaching young people with disabilities how to achieve academic success beyond high school. His drive to obtain a doctoral degree stemmed from the desire to show the world that he could obtain another degree despite his disability. Once accepted into a doctoral degree program, his strong faith and self-motivation is driving him to complete it.

Participant 3: Matt

Matt is a single 44-year-old African American male diagnosed with a specific learning disability. He currently holds a doctoral degree in Education Administration and is a high school special education teacher. He spent six years completing his first degree, four completing his master's degree, and five years completing his doctoral degree. Matt stated that completing his first degree was the most problematic in his educational experience. In his first year, he discovered that he was unprepared for postsecondary education. According to Matt, "High school never prepared me for the rigors of college." Matt would have failed out of college had it not been for three influences: his siblings who taught him his courses, his family support overall and their high expectations, and his ambition or drive to succeed educationally. While in college, he did not tell anyone about his disability because, according to Matt, "I forced myself to be as normal as everyone else. My family did not own my disability, so why should I claim it?"

Matt is the product of a two-parent working-class family. His mother and father worked a 40-hour per week job throughout his younger life. His two sisters and brother all have postgraduate degrees. He is an active member of his church community and an avid advocate for young people who have disabilities, and he desires to help all young people

succeed academically. Matt knew that not going to college was not an option in his family; his parents expected him to go to college no matter how long it took him to complete it.

When there was a lack of male teachers and a shortage of special education teachers in his current school district, Matt answered the call to become a special education teacher. Matt was immediately hired in a position as a special education teacher and granted emergency certification so he could teach, but very soon he discovered that the emergency certificate was temporary, and he had to return to school to become certified as a special education teacher if he wanted to continue in the classroom. After successfully completing the certification courses, he realized he only needed a few more credits to complete a master's degree. Thus, he persisted to complete the courses and was awarded the master's degree. According to Matt, he developed a love of learning as an adult that never existed earlier in his schooling. This love of learning, coupled with the aspiration for salary advancement and proving that he could achieve a doctoral degree as a black man with a disability label, drove him to complete his doctoral degree. He completed his doctoral degree in educational administration.

As presented in Table 1, all participants are single African American males with a disability who have earned postgraduate degrees and are gainfully employed. Ken has an earned a master's degree, Simon is a doctoral degree candidate, and Matt has an earned doctoral level degree. Just as how their number of years differ in college, their career paths differ. Of all the participants Matt has spent the greatest number of years in college but he has an earned doctoral level degree. If Simon graduates as planned in the fall, both he and Ken would have spent the same number of years in college but would have attained a

higher-level postgraduate degree in the same number of years than Ken and would have

used a lesser number of years than Matt to complete his doctoral level degree.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant's Pseudonym	Race & Gender	Education Level	Years in college	Current Employment	Disability Type	Age	Marital Status
Ken	African American Male	Master's Degree	10	Social Worker	EB/D	41	Single
Simon	African American Male	Doctoral Degree Candidate	9 1/2	Civil Servant	BVI	38	Single
Matt	African American Male	Ed. D	15	Teacher	SLD	44	Single

Presentation of Research Findings

Introduction

This section of the chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data from

individual interviews on the study factors contributing to the academic success of African

American males diagnosed with a disability. Codes were generated from the data gathered

from interviews using a six-step content analysis method as explained in detail in Chapter

3, and those codes were identified as the emergent themes to answer the research questions.

Six themes emerged from the coding process: (a) social integration in the school

environment, (b) demonstration of resilience, (c) academic success, (d) participation in the

transition process, (e) strategies for success, and (f) supports and services. An explanation

of each theme, the major findings for each theme, and interview quotes from participants

relevant to each theme follows.

Theme 1: Social Integration in the School Environment

Social integration into the school environment refers to how a student's sense of membership and connectedness to their school is supported through school practices and students' personal interactions (Niemi, 2017, p. 68). This theme was consistent with the literature in that it spoke to the issue of students with disabilities inclusion into the school environment as it relates to their sense of general well-being and level of academic achievement (Nichols, 2008; Niemi, 2017; Raffi, 2013).

Interview data gathered in this study showed that only the student who disclosed his disability during his postsecondary education, Simon, had a sense of connectedness to his school at the various levels and was socially integrated into his school environment. Simon reported, "My professors were just great." Simon had knowledgeable peers, and he became fully integrated into the school and its social activities because of his connections with the office of disabilities services. According to Simon, "The colleges provided me with much of the supports I needed, especially at my first-degree level. At the postgraduate level, supports and services were a bit different, but overall, I had a sense that I belong."

The other two participants, who did not report their disability to their professors or campus officials, had a more difficult time than Simon. Matt reported, "My professors were difficult to deal with; they thought I was lazy." According to Matt, the work was difficult, and no one cared whether he showed up in classes at the college level. He never felt he belonged on any of his college campuses. He surmised, "I guess I was always the outsider." He lived on his college campus for one year for his first degree then had to return home. He never lived on a college campus again but commuted to campuses throughout the

remainder of his college years. "That way, I never really had to be involved with the student body or college life," he explained.

Ken's experiences paralleled Matt's. Ken reported, "School was difficult, especially in the first couple of years after high school. High school never prepared me for college." According to Ken, "My professors thought I was lazy. I even believe they thought I was stupid, so I got to the point where I stopped answering questions in some classes." He informed the interviewer that campus was challenging to navigate; he never felt a sense of belonging in college. He found support from outside sources: "Thank heavens I had my family to help me and the perseverance to succeed against all odds."

Theme 2: Demonstration of Resilience

Resilience is referred to as the competencies or capacities of people to function positively in the face of adversity (Fletcher, & Sakar, 2013). This specific theme alludes to the belief of some African American students with disabilities that they will need resilience to succeed academically and across all environments in society. The resilience of African American youth is best understood within the context of acknowledging their experience in the United States and recognizing the continued legacy of oppression and discrimination that affects their daily lives (APA, 2008).

Results from the interviews showed that all participants demonstrated resilience to achieve their academic success. Matt expressed his resilience to achieve academic success when he stated, "I cannot be a failure. I had to succeed, although the cards were stacked against me. I resigned myself to doing everything I had to do to learn. Quitting college was just not an option for me." Likewise, Ken explained that one of the strongest factors that led to his success was "Refusing to quit; never giving up on my dreams."

Simon, the participant with the most evident disability (BVI), demonstrated his resilience through his desire to show others that he is more than his disability. He explained that he spent a great deal of his college years "Working long hours at my study, never giving up. How could I prove to the world that my disability does not define me if I did not follow through on my goals to be academically successful?"

Theme 3: Academic Engagement

Academic engagement in school has been termed and is equivalent to student involvement and motivation to learn (Finn & Voekel, 1993, p. 249). Consistent with the literature, there are several reasons why college students diagnosed with a disability may be vulnerable to lower levels of academic engagement. Some reasons include academic stigma, lower grade point averages, longer time to graduate, and weak academic integration.

The interview results show that the participants were highly engaged academically in their learning; they were motivated to learn. The responses to the interview question "What does academic success mean to you?" indicated that the participants linked academic success to a college degree, economic success, job advancement, taking care of oneself, one's social mobility, and taking care of one's family financially after high school and beyond. Participants also linked their academic success to academic engagement.

Matt defined his perception of academic success: "Academic success means getting a college education, having a better job, and taking care of my family. It means being engaged in learning at all levels of schooling. It is job advancement."

Ken viewed academic success as life success. He stated, "Academic success is everything. It's my job, my college degree, my ability to have a job, move into a better

neighborhood, and being able to take care of my mom and myself financially, just enjoying the finer things in life."

Simon's definition of academic success combined engagement in learning with overcoming obstacles in order to achieve life goals: "Academic success is navigating through life challenges, being resilient, having a college education, getting as many diplomas as one can, and being a self-advocate. It means getting involved in one's learning and having more opportunities, the ability to have enough money so that I can comfortably take care of my parents in their old age."

Academic engagement and academic success are closely related. To achieve academic success, the participants demonstrated their engagement in various ways. Simon reported that "Being motivated to learn and get connected to all the support and services I need to succeed" were keys to his engagement and ultimately his postsecondary success. Simon explained that he completed assignments on time, participated in-class activities, advocated with professors, and managed his time to demonstrate academic engagement.

Ken's academic engagement came from his intrinsic motivation to do what was required to succeed as well as outside support when he needed it. He explained that academic engagement meant "Long hours of study, getting to classes on time, completing class assignments, and seeking out the help of my cousins and professionals on my job in coursework where I was having difficulties."

Matt's explanation of academic engagement closely paralleled Ken's. Matt reported: "Long hours of late nights studying and seeking out the needed help I could not get from my professors or peers from my sisters. Being motivated and completing all projects and assignments on time."

To further examine the participants' academic engagement, the researcher probed into their college experience. Responses to the interview question "What challenges did you face while in college?" showed that college was challenging for all participants. Some challenges included complex, challenging, or overwhelming coursework; low grades; and difficult and uncaring professors who thought participants were stupid in instances where participants were experiencing difficulties in understanding or interpreting coursework. There were also occasions on which participants reported that they had problems navigating the college campuses. One participant had difficulties identifying what accommodations were available at the different levels of college and advocating for the services that should be provided to him on his college campuses, even in instances where he was awarded those services.

Matt reported that college courses were challenging, in part due to his lack of high school preparation, but support from home helped him overcome some of those challenges. He explained,

> I was never prepared for college. Without the help of my sisters and the encouragement of my parents, who constantly let me know that I could succeed, I would have been a total failure during my first two years of college.

On campus, without those supports in place was where Matt felt the strain the most. He continued,

> I believed the professors thought I was stupid. I had so much difficulty interpreting and understanding the coursework that I stopped answering questions or asking questions in class and took notes profusely' Finding my way to classes was another big problem, I was late many times due to my poor sense of directions.

Ken's experiences were similar to those that Matt had faced. Ken reported:

> Work was hard, I mean challenging, especially at my first-degree level, no one cared if I failed or succeeded; no one cared whether I showed up in class. I did all my work without any help from professors; sometimes, I felt the professors did not want me in their class. By the time I got to the master's degree level, I knew what to expect; however, work was much less demanding, I had the support of my co-workers especially from those who were in my classes.

Simon's challenges came from the burden of self-advocacy and a lack of accommodations on college campuses. Simon reported:

> Advocating with professors to let them understand my needs and providing the services I needed was very difficult. Navigating college campuses and navigating higher education systems, understanding what the colleges did and what they did not do regarding accommodation at the different college levels were severe challenges. It was a challenge working with some advisors.

Participants employed a variety of strategies to overcome these challenges, including spending extra time on coursework, not participating in extra-curricular activities on campuses, sacrificing friendships, employing the aid of siblings as tutors, studying with peers, taking responsibility for their own learning, and appealing to people in "high places" to get the support and services received.

For example, Ken explained, "I studied for long hours each day, … I watched videos on lessons, wrote extra notes so that I could learn on the go. I had no time to participate in any other college activities other than my courses. I had to give up friends to stay on track with my coursework."

Simon reported similar efforts to how Ken overcame obstacles to his postsecondary success: "Advocating, advocating, getting help from peers, getting help from professors, and appealing to people in "high places" to get the supports and services I needed and was awarded."

Matt and Ken relied on family members to provide tutoring support. Matt reported that "My sisters taught me much of my coursework during my first-degree years at college." Likewise, Ken "sought out my cousins to help as tutors."

Theme 4: Participation in the Transition Process

In Pennsylvania, laws mandate that the school-based special education team provide transition planning services to all special needs students beginning at age 14. This mandate means that these students must be guided in identifying their goals, interests, and needs as they relate to postsecondary education, independent living, vocational, and community involvement. Transition services must be results-oriented (IDEA, 2004). There is an abundance of best practices in the literature that offer special educators a host of information regarding transition planning, but quite frequently, special education students are not the recipient of these services.

The participants in this study reported that various people supported them in their transition from high school to postsecondary education. All three participants reported that their family participated in their transition process. Some participants reported that peers were very significant, while the others found some peers were distractions. Two participants reported that their high school teachers supported them when transitioning from high school. Two participants declared that even though they participated in their individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, they had no idea of what their transition plan

meant. Transition goals were only mentioned at the IEP meetings and left there according to those two participants.

During the interviews, in response to the question "What supports, and services did you receive while transitioning from high school to postsecondary education?" participants elaborated on the mixed levels support they received from school personnel, family, and outside agency representatives as they went through the school's transition planning process.

Matt responded that his family came to all his IEP meetings in high school, but his transition planning was more about his behaviors than his aspirations. The goals, according to Matt, were there because his teacher set them, and his parents agreed to them. Looking back, Matt said transition planning was just a formality. He further clarified that he attended transition planning, but he was not an active participant. As a high school student, he found the meetings to be all talk and took too long to be over.

Ken knew he wanted to go to college after high school. His gym teacher and mental health case manager were his sources of support for moving beyond high school; they were very influential in helping his parents get him where he needed to go. The formal transition meetings, however, were not beneficial to Ken. He explained, "I really did not understand what was going on during my transition planning; it was just a meeting between my parent and my teacher. They set my goals, but I cannot remember working on any set goals. I just attended classes, paid attention, and did my best."

Simon responded: "I participated in transition planning with my parents and teachers in high school; however, it was not until the final year of high school that I really understood what it meant. My vision teacher ensured I met with the vocational teacher. They knew I

wanted to go to college. They both connected my family and me to Vocational Rehabilitation (V.R.) services. The school counselor assisted me with college applications, federal student aid applications, and grants. Peers and their parents were also instrumental in passing on information to me regarding transitioning as well."

Ultimately, the three participants in this study made successful transitions from high school to postsecondary education, but they did not find the IDEA-mandated transition process to be beneficial to support their transition, rather, this study's participants cited the support of influential people in their lives, namely parents, family members, teachers, and other school support personnel, as aiding in their successful transition.

Theme 5: Supports and Services

Traditionally, African Americans have been known to have developed and designed their forms of support systems (Bagley & Carroll, 1998). The family forms the base of their support system. Family for African Americans may include their extended family and even individuals unrelated to the family they adopted as a family because of their role in raising their children. African Americans create significant lasting bonds with the church, their spirituality, and other community members outside of the family that play an important supportive role. In addition, according to the literature, schoolteachers, counselors, and professors who demonstrate an understanding of these students' plights are frequently acknowledged as sources of support and services for these students. School counselors and teachers can provide significant sources of supports and services that aid in the successful transitioning of African American students with disabilities beyond high school (Bagley & Caroll, 1998).

All participants in this study reportedly were beneficiaries of some supports and services they utilized throughout their postsecondary years. Results from the interviews show that all participants reported that their family members were their major sources of support beyond high school. In contrast, only one participant, diagnosed with blind and visual impairment, disclosed his disability to college officials and expressed that his professors and school environment were sources of support while transitioning to different colleges. All participants reported that they received some type of support services from their community, whether from social service agencies, vocational rehabilitation services, their jobs, or the church. Two participants obtained no supports from their college because of non-disclosure of their disability.

When asked about the support and services participants received while transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, responses focused on the individuals, community groups, and educational support (both at the high school and college levels) that they had access to while preparing for postsecondary life.

Matt reported that his family, church, peers, and high school teachers were great sources of support. Similarly, Simon cited sources of support as family, church, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR), professors, and the office of disability service on campus. Finally, Ken found the strongest support from his family, gym teacher, mental health agency, and church family.

When asked to elaborate on the nature of the services received, participants reiterated the people and agencies that were critical in their transition but also shared how each individual or group aided them. Matt responded:

"My parents and family members helped me throughout my school life, whether financially or otherwise, they were there for me. My family always helped with my homework. My sister helped me with my college assignments and taught me most of my courses. A teacher at my school gave me all the support I needed in high school; he was so instrumental in my life when it came to transitioning to life beyond high school.

Simon reported:

My vocational teacher, vision teacher, and school counselor helped with college applications and financial aid applications. My parents, grandparents, and church helped with all other financial obligations; they were my cheerleaders as I moved on to college. V.R. services provided me with much of the funding I needed for college. They assisted me with finding the necessary accommodations such as braille translators, braille lists, Orientation and mobility services, tutors for my first-degree courses, and connection to the on-campus disabilities services office.

Finally, Ken described the transition support he received:

My parents and my social service agency were significant in assisting me with college applications. My parents followed through on the recommendations of my mental health case manager. I don't even think that my IEP case managers and most of my teachers believed that I would make it to college, especially to where I now have a master's degree. My co-workers supported me and pushed me to go back to college when I needed a license to practice as a social worker. They encouraged me to follow through at times when schooling became too difficult. My job assisted with some of the funds that I needed to return to college.

From family support to community services, and from moral support to financial aid to academic these participants' experiences illustrated that with proper services and supports, it is possible for African American men with disabilities to overcome obstacles and succeed in undergraduate and postgraduate education.

Theme 6: Strategies for Success

Identifying factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males, especially those with a disability, is a rare phenomenon in the literature. Most of the literature on African American males focuses on reasons they are academic failures, not on reasons they are academically successful.

All participants willingly informed the researcher of strategies they used to become academically successful and recommended strategies for others like themselves and all African American students with a disability.

Matt explained that the strategies he used for success are "Having a solid faith/spirituality, believing in myself, being willing to persevere against all odds, and having family members who support and cheer me on."

Simon attributed his success in part to his ability to "Accept my disability, advocate for what I need to be successful, being resilient, my faith."

Similar to those that Matt and Simon employed, Ken's strategies included "Believing in myself, knowing that my disability does not define me, having the support of my family, my spirituality."

In response to being asked what strategies they recommend for others like themselves who want to go to college, the strategies paralleled the strategies they attributed to their own success. Matt recommended that others "Believe in yourself, surround yourself

with people who believe in you and your dreams, have a system of support whether family, community, positive friends, or the church."

Simon's recommendations were for others to

Accept your disability, know that you can succeed even when others might not believe it, have a sound transition plan, and utilize the office of disabilities services on the college campus and any support system that will benefit you throughout your schooling. Consistently advocate for the things you need to succeed.

Finally, Ken recommended that college-bound African American men "Be persistent with your studies, make the sacrifice to get where you want to go even if you must give up friends, manage your time, seek the help of people who have experienced college life, and believe in your dreams."

In summary, the strategies participants recommended for the academic success of students with disabilities include (a) a belief in yourself that you can succeed even when no one else does; (b) being resilient and never giving up; (c) having realistic goals and keep working towards achieving them no matter how long it takes; (d) establishing and maintaining a strong support system which must include parents, family members, teachers, administrators, and social service agencies; (e) attending schools that have teams of experienced special education teachers who care enough to believe that African American students with disabilities can succeed academically; (f) vigilant parents who recognize when their child with disabilities is not getting the quality education they deserve; (g) utilizing vocation rehabilitation services; and (h) becoming an active participant in designing your realistic student-centered transition plan. Work towards achieving the goals you set yourself.

Summary of Findings Aligned with Research Questions

The two research questions that drove the study are as follow:

1. What factors do African American males with a disability report drives them to

pursue a degree at the master's and doctoral degree level?

2. What supports, and strategies assisted African American males diagnosed with a

disability to gain academic success at the master's degree level and beyond?

The themes that emerged from participant interviews that most closely aligned with

RQ1 were theme 2, demonstration of resilience; theme 4, participation in the transition

process; and theme 5, supports and services. Five of the six emergent themes aligned with

RQ2: theme 1, social integration in the school environment; theme 2, demonstration of

resilience; theme 3, academic engagement; theme 5, supports and services; and theme 6,

strategies for success. Findings for these questions are summarized in Figure 1 and Figure

2 below.

Figure 1

Research Question 1: Factors Influencing Decision to Pursue Graduate Studies

Factors Influencing Decision   **Category**

| Parents / family expectations |
| My job demands |
| My sisters' influence |
| To prove to myself that I am as good as anyone else |
| Job mobility, |
| Job change |
| I wanted another degree |
| I applied for a doctoral degree and was accepted |
| The mindset to get a decent career, |
| My resilience |
| Proving to myself that my disability does not define me |
| To fulfill my mothers' belief in me that I can succeed |

Decisions

When participants were asked what factors contributed to their academic success, they all acknowledged that no one single factor was responsible, but a multiplicity of factors were responsible. Factors contributing to their academic success identified amongst the participants are listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Research Question 2: Supports and Services Contributing to Academic Success

Factors Contributing to Success

| My faith /Spirituality |
| Owning my disability and getting the needed services |
| Knowing that my parents had my back |
| Resilience |
| My belief that I can succeed |
| A belief that my disability does not define me |
| My family's belief in my ability to succeed |
| Family support |
| Love of learning |
| I was driven to succeed in life |
| Role models |
| Knowing about services that are out there for me and accessing them |
| Family members who encourage you |
| Community support |
| Knowing that my disability makes me differently able |

Category

Academic Success

To summarize each participant's key supports and services that contributed to their academic success, Matt shared "My siblings did it, so could I (role models).

The family supported and encouraged me. My faith. Belief in myself, that I can succeed."

Simon claimed,

I wanted to succeed in life, never giving up, owning my disability, and getting the services I need. Knowing the services that are available and using them for my benefit. Self-advocacy. My faith, family support. Knowing that my disability makes me differently able. I have the mindset to get a decent career.

Ken concluded, "My spirituality, my love of learning, my mother believed in me, she was my cheerleader. Family support, my cousins, helped me; they were my role models. My co-workers and peers helped me."

Research question 2 warranted deeper examination of specific supports, services, and strategies that contributed to the participants' academic success. When the participants were asked what supports assisted them in gaining academic success at the master's degree level and beyond, all three participants provided a variety of supports that are listed in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Supports at the Master's Level and Beyond

Perceived Supports   **Category**

My parents
Siblings
My grandparents
My Church family
Itinerant teachers, school counselors VR services
Peers / Co-workers
Social service case manager/ Agency
Office of disability services
Professors
My job

Supports

Services are integral part of what the supports provide. Figure 4 presents the list of services they received from their supporters.

Figure 4

Services at the Master's Level and Beyond

Perceived Services		**Category**
Emotional support Braille services (Braille transcriber) Counseling services from social service agency Advice and emotional support from peers Orientation and mobility services On campus tutoring Extra time on tests Encouragement Sister tutored me Cousins helped me with my coursework Co-workers assisted me with my coursework Financial support from parents, church, and grandparents. Social & educational support from office of disability service Braille list Financial support from my job	→	**Services**

In continuation of the final part of RQ 2, what strategies did you use to attain academic success? The strategies participants associated with their success follow in Figure 5:

Figure 5

Strategies at the Master's Level and Beyond

Perceived Strategies   **Category**

| Faith/spirituality |
| Academic engagement |
| Resilience |
| Self-advocacy |
| Support system |
| Personal belief in one's ability to succeed |
| Accept my disability |
| Time management |
| Being persistent with one's studies |
| Surrounding myself with people who believes in me and my dreams |
| Setting personal goals and working with the end in mind |
| Have a sound plan for your life |

Strategies

Theory of Culturalism

The study is grounded in the theory of culturalism, which is a theoretical approach that emphasizes the meaning of culture, especially in determining individual behaviors and how society functions. It embodies how different groups of people live in a society, their artifacts, symbols, all the intellectual and shared values of each diverse ethnic group within an organization. Cultural capital is an aspect of culturalism. Cultural capital refers to how "cultural codes and symbols of high status or dominant social groups become an integral part of the practices, and/or sensibilities of schools and other social organizations, consequently how these cultural practices yield advantages disproportionately to members

of those particular groups" (Rose, 2018). Identifying how these values and social practices consequently impact the members of this group is of importance to the culturalist theory.

Summary

The unique population in this case study, African American men with disabilities who have experienced academic success at the postgraduate level, shared the services, supports, and strategies to which they attribute their success and ability to overcome obstacles in their quest for academic success. The common sources of support across the three participants, and the services that those supports provided, included support from family and other social groups, faith/spiritual support, motivation to succeed, and resilience. From the interviews with three participants who have received a master's degree or higher, six themes that emerged: (a) social interaction in the school environment, (b) demonstration of resilience, (c) academic engagement, (d) participation in the transition process, (e) supports and services, and (f) strategies for success. This chapter aligned the findings to the research questions, and chapter V will present a discussion of the findings, conclusions from the study, and recommendations.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Findings from this qualitative study that was grounded in the theory of culturalism sought to identify the factors contributing to the academic success of African American males with a disability. It specifically examined the factors contributing to their academic success at the master's degree level and beyond. Two questions drove the research study: RQ1, what factors do African American males with a disability report drive them to pursue master's or doctoral degrees? and RQ2, what supports, and strategies assisted the academic success of African American males with a disability at the master's or doctoral degree level? The research questions were supported by data obtained from interviews with three participants. The data obtained from the interviews were considered in combination with relevant literature in the field. The major findings are reviewed and discussed below.

Summary of Findings

From the research findings, the factors that were reported that drive the participants to pursue degrees at the postgraduate level are as follows: job demands, sibling's or cousin's influence, parents expectations, desire for another degree, desire to prove to myself that I am as good as anyone else, job mobility, job change, a love of learning, application and acceptance to graduate school for a doctoral degree, the mindset to get a decent career, proving to myself that my disability does not define me, to fulfill parents' or other family member's belief that I can succeed, family believed in my abilities, spirituality, faith, and resilience.

Those supports that assisted the participants in achieving academic success at the master's and doctoral degree level are as follow: parents, siblings, grandparents, church

family, itinerant teachers, school counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselor, peers, social service case manager/agency, on-campus office of disability services, professors, friends, co-workers, and the job. The services obtained from these identified sources of support included emotional and financial support from the family; braille services; counseling services from a social service agency; orientation and mobility services; on-campus support group; extra time on tests; encouragement; family members as tutors or help with coursework; financial support from parents, church, and grandparents; social & educational support from the office of disability service; braille list; braille transcriber; advice and emotional support from peers, friends, and co-workers as advisors and study partners; and financial support from the job.

While pursuing their academic success, these participants experienced several challenges. Amongst these were complex, challenging, or overwhelming coursework; low grades; and difficult and uncaring professors who participants thought believed they were stupid in instances where they were experiencing difficulties in understanding or interpreting coursework. There were also instances where participants reported that they had problems navigating the college campuses. One participant had difficulties identifying what accommodations were available at the different college levels (undergraduate and graduate). At times, once the services were identified and provided, this participant had problems advocating with professors for the services that should be provided to him. In instances, he had to appeal to "people in high places" to receive them. The strategies that the participants used to overcome challenges at the postgraduate level include the following: faith/spirituality, academic engagement, resilience, self-advocacy, working with a support system, a personal belief in one's ability to succeed, acceptance of one's

disability, time management, being persistent with one's studies, surrounding oneself with people who believes in one's dreams, setting personal goals and working to achieve them, and having a sound plan for one's life.

Discussion of Findings through a Culturalist Lens

The study is grounded in the theory of culturalism. The researcher discusses the perceived factors of three African American males with a disability that have driven them to achieve academic success and their strategies to attain their postgraduate degrees from the perspective of the culturalist theory. As culturalism emphasizes individual behaviors through the lens of the different cultural and societal groups to which one belongs or is assigned, it is important to examine the traditional obstacles at the collegiate and graduate level that are faced by African Americans, African American males, and students with disabilities in order to understand the magnitude of what the three participants in this study have been able to accomplish.

There are very few African American males in college as compared to other cultural groups, the general American male population, and the African American female population in college in today's American society. When it comes to African American males with a disability in college, the statistics are even lower (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006). College students with disabilities, when compared to their non-disabled peers, have far more obstacles to overcome. Those who are Black males with a disability and are attending college must struggle with the fact that they have a disability, coupled with various racial disparities (Banks & Hughes, 2013). Consistent with the literature is the fact that while African American men with disabilities now have greater access to postsecondary

education, they remain underserved at the postsecondary level and underprepared for the rigors of education at this level (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

All three African American male participants with a disability in the study had access to postsecondary education; however, they all faced challenges transitioning to postsecondary education and throughout their college experiences. All participants reported challenges navigating college campuses. Interviews showed that two participants claimed they were unprepared for education at the college level. According to Matt, high school did not prepare him for the academic rigor of a college education. Ken recalled that his first two years college were so difficult that he stopped asking and answering questions in his classes because he believed that his professors thought he was stupid.

Consistent with the literature, African American males with a disability may be unprepared for college for several reasons. Chief among these is academic unpreparedness, lack of academic skills, low academic expectations, unqualified/underqualified special education staff, and lack of or poor transitional plan to postsecondary education (Newman, 2006; Rojewski & Kim, 2003, Wronowski, 2017). The major problem with academic preparedness may arise from low academic expectations for these students in K-12. Poor academic performance and lack of high expectations for these students results in a lack of rigorous secondary curriculum and poor academic preparedness to meet the rigor of a college education (Newman, 2006). The requirement to earn a high school diploma varies from state to state. Thirty states allow schools to adjust the graduation requirement for students with IEPs so that they can earn a regular diploma. This means that these students are allowed to earn a regular diploma based on a lower passing grade when compared to students who do not have identified disabilities in these states. Schools should set high

standards for all students' performance and be held accountable for providing the supports and services needed for the performance of students with disabilities at the same or equivalent level as students without disabilities.

Consistent with the literature, students with disabilities are highly capable of meeting high standards when educators set them. With the right supports, accommodations, interventions and services, and compensatory strategies, it can be done. We should give every student the opportunity for success (Thurlow, 2015; Kravet, 2006). The frequent placement of students with disabilities in classrooms headed by under-qualified or unqualified teaching staff not only affects the quality education they will receive but their transition planning as well. States, policy makers, and school administrators should ensure that all special education teachers, especially those in inner city public schools, be certified in and demonstrate knowledge in the content areas that they teach and competency in the skills needed to support students with IEPs. Too often, urban secondary special education classrooms are filled with long term substitutes, teachers on emergency certification, or first year teachers who have little or no knowledge of the rigors of providing suitable education for these students at these levels (Wronowski, 2017). When the education of special needs students, especially those students with hidden disabilities, are neglected at the secondary level, it is detrimental to their academic success (Rosenzweig, 2009).

Two of the three participants in this study, Matt and Ken, have hidden disabilities and did not disclose their disabilities to their college professors or other college officials. Hidden disabilities include specific learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders and emotional and behavioral disorders. Disclosing one's disability on a college campus is strictly voluntary. However, when college students disclose their disability, they

have the right to receive the needed support from their colleges and universities. Services and necessary accommodations or modifications become more accessible to them, therefore increasing their chances for academic success at this level. Consistent with the literature, these students with hidden disabilities denied their disabilities while in college and missed out on services (Newman & Madeus, 2014).

Non-disclosure of one's disability on college campuses may be for several reasons; amongst these are the fear of being stigmatized, fear of rejection, lack of knowledge about their disability, and knowledge of available resources that can help them (Kranke et al., 2013). The participants with hidden disabilities identified their reasons for not disclosing them during their postsecondary education. Ken stated, "I forced myself to be as normal as everyone else. My family did not own my disability, so why should I claim it?" Matt asserted, "I left my disability in high school." College students with hidden disabilities may deny their disability for several reasons, including (a) they may feel the need to be independent and do not want to be treated differently; (b) these students may feel that they can function on a college campus without the services they needed in high school, (c) they may not be aware of what is available to assist them on college campuses, and/or (d) students with hidden disabilities often feel the social pressure to merge into the dominant college culture; which too often leads to the denial of their disability (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). Self-disclosure of disability is very low in college (Lowe 1996; Reid, 2013; Newman & Madeus, 2014).

When African American students with disabilities struggle with cultural adjustments as demanded by college campuses, support from professors or on-campus services designed for them may not be an option (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). Adequate

transition planning for students at the secondary level may aid students with the confidence to own and disclose their disability, to access and advocate for the supports and service they may need to function efficiently on college campuses.

Disclosing one's disability in college does not prevent one from having challenges. One participant, Simon, who had a visible disability and disclosed his disability, explained that he had challenges navigating his physical college campus and the different levels of the education system. He consistently and repeatedly had to advocate with professors for services that he was awarded. He further claimed he had to appeal to "people in high places" to receive those services as he transitioned to the various levels of his college experience.

Studies have shown that transitioning to any level of college education and fully participating in on-campus activities can be a stressful time (Goodman, 2017). For any student, especially those with disabilities, transitioning to college changes their educational experience. The new demands of college may supersede their ability to cope and bring on to these students an overwhelming amount of anxiety and depression (Nichols, 2008). Stress, anxiety, and depression can impact students' integration into the school environment. High schools and postsecondary institutions must provide more equitable access to postsecondary education for African American males with a disability. Studies have shown that a student's social integration into the school environment relates to their sense of general well-being and academic achievement (Nichols, 2008; Niemi, 2017; Raffi, 2013). African American males with a disability are susceptible to stereotypical discrimination on college campuses. Finding a place on college campuses with a sense of belonging and acceptance can boost college retention and matriculation.

Not all participants with disabilities had difficulty finding a sense of belonging on campus. The participant who disclosed his disability felt a sense of belonging because he had made connections in the office of disabilities services on campus. Destigmatizing use of the campus office of disabilities services, promoting on-campus programs designed to be culturally sensitive that allow for social integration and positive interactions with minorities as well as other students, and fostering full inclusion of students with disabilities in campus activities with their non-disabled peers may assist students with disabilities in disclosing their disabilities, thus improving retention and achievement on college campuses.

Discussion and Implications of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What Factors do African American Males with a Disability Report Drive Them to Pursue Master's or Doctoral Degrees?

A major question that drives the research study was what factors African American males with a disability perceive drive them to pursue degrees at the postgraduate level? Each participant had some unique responses regarding these factors, while there were also some commonalities across participants.

Ken reported that his drive to earn his master's degree stemmed mainly from intrinsic factors, including his belief in himself that he can achieve, his faith, his resilience, his desire for career advancement, and "Proving to myself that my disability does not define me." Two extrinsic factors propelled him to success in the master's program: job demands and "To fulfill my mother's belief in me that I can succeed."

According to Simon, the same two extrinsic factors as Ken drove him to apply for and get accepted into a doctoral program: his parents' expectations and job mobility.

Intrinsically, Simon was driven by the mindset to get a decent career, resilience, desire for another degree, wanting to prove to himself that he is as good as anyone else, job mobility, faith, and a love of learning.

For Matt, the fact that his family believed in his abilities allowed him to believe in himself. Additionally, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators of resilience, spirituality, a job change, and his sisters' influence let him to successfully complete his doctoral degree in educational administration.

Chief amongst the factors that participants perceived drive them to pursue postgraduate degrees are their family's expectations, belief in their ability to succeed, resilience, and faith or spirituality. All three participants recounted that their families took an active role when it came to their academic success throughout their entire educational experience. While still in the K-12 school system, parents were always present at IEP meetings whether or not they understood what was going on in the meetings. Parents were also active in their college education process, and they were the ones encouraging them, being their cheerleaders, and supporting them emotionally, mentally, and financially. One participant, Ken, recalled that his mother was always present at his graduations and seemed to be prouder of his achievements than he was. She was his cheerleader. He existed just to fulfill her dreams.

According to Matt, his parents' expectations were similar to his because he knew from an early age that college was not an option in his family. He said, "I could always go to my siblings for the help I needed with my coursework. I just could not fail my family."

Simon stated that his parents wanted him to go as far as he could with his education, his family supported him, and it was through their efforts that he could advocate for himself

at all levels of college. His grandparents were a major source of support, especially financially. His entire family, immediate or extended, were cheerleaders. It gave them so much pleasure to see him succeed academically.

The extended families of the participants were also very active in their educational aspirations; cousins and siblings who had college experience were not only role models but tutors in instances where the participants had difficulties with their college courses. Grandparents assisted emotionally and financially. Ken explained that his cousins were his tutors and role models, as they all had a college education and successful jobs. As a result of their influence, Ken just wanted to be like them.

The literature consistently demonstrates that parental expectations for their children's academic attainment strongly predict their academic success. It is the parents' expectations that positively impact test scores (Benner & Mistry, 2007: Zhan 2006), along with students' grade point average (Seyfried & Chung, 2002), and students' expectations for themselves (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Jodyl et al., 2001). Parental expectations are critical to preparing their children for college and helping them to achieve success while they are there. According to a study by Fan and Chen (2001), parental expectations and aspirations for their children have a much stronger impact on student academic success when compared to parent involvement and academic achievement. Students are more likely to demonstrate higher academic achievement and improved behaviors when families are involved in their learning (Bryan 2005). If a parent does not expect their child to go to college, it is less likely that parents will be involved in the transition process from high school to postsecondary education.

Culturally, African Americans value education. The perception of schools that African Americans do not value education is closely linked to low expectations for Black students' performance that characterizes U.S. schools. Contrary to the dominant culture, schools do not provide knowledge and opportunities equitable to all; it is a system where members of higher social classes get what they want in order to perpetuate their position of power as they keep lower classes in their place (Puchner & Markowitz 2015). African American college students, whether disabled or non-disabled, must believe in their ability to succeed academically.

All participants reported that a belief in their own ability to succeed was what drove them to achieve at the postgraduate level. Their self-determination or desire to succeed was only equaled to that of their parents and/or family members. Their belief in their abilities, coupled with those of their parents or family members, developed the level of self-efficacy or belief that they can achieve and the resiliency they need to succeed on college campuses. Self-efficacy is quite frequently associated with the African American male's ability to advance on college campuses. Self-efficacy is predictive of the African American males' academic achievement throughout the college experience (Okech, & Harrington, 2002). According to Bandura (1997), "Self-efficacy provides the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster what it takes to succeed" (p. 80).

Another critical factor that participants reported pushed them to achieve academic success is their resilience. Resilience is that protective factor that African Americans use to withstand most everyday challenges that affect them. Some of these problems are institutional racism, oppression, violence, crime, and drugs (Smith & Landor, 2018), and the myriad of other threatening conditions faced in this society. Resilience may appear in

times of challenges. It is that seemingly positive adaptation and coping skills that children of African American families use to push through obstacles and achieve academic success. African Americans are expected to rely on their resilience to succeed academically, for example. When Simon was denied disabilities services that were entitled to him on campus, rather than giving up or accepting the denial of these services his resiliency allowed him to appeal to "people in high places." He advocated for services so that he would not jeopardize his academic success. Resilience from all three participants stemmed from their intrinsic motivation as well as outside support. Ken and Matt both relied on their families to tutor them when coursework seemed difficult. All participants appealed to their faith, spirituality, or church to draw on cultural strengths to support their academic success.

Faith, church, spirituality, and strong religious affiliations are often central to family and community life in the African American culture. African Americans also tend to believe in God with absolute certainty and belief in miracles. Most African Americans grow up attending church or mosque weekly. African Americans are more religious than the American public overall (Pew Research Center, 2021). Schools, colleges, and universities can include faith-based communities during educational outreach and events. The clergies can be used to deliver critical messages to families during an event or sermons since their faith plays an essential role in their resilience. By developing the necessary skills to become resilient, African American males with a disability will become better able to meet challenges on college campuses. "By taking both a universal and culture-specific approach to explain resilience, the field can provide research and services that will meet the needs of African American youth and increase their capacity to be resilient" (Bryan et al., 2020, p. 14).

Job requirements and financial stability were among the factors that pushed participants to pursue graduate degrees. All participants equated financial stability, having a good lifestyle, and having a good job with advanced degrees. They believed academic success would lead to job mobility, "opening of more doors," and social mobility, not only for themselves but for their parents and families as well. Matt associated his job change with academic success. Changing his job to a better paying one forged the way for him to obtain a master's degree and certification to become a teacher. Once he gained his master's degree, he attained social mobility. His love of learning forced him to obtain a doctoral degree. Now, according to Matt, he can take care of himself and give back to his family as well.

Ken believed his job requirement was tied to his academic success. In order to advance in his career, he had to obtain a license, which forced him to obtain a master's degree. Not only was he able to move from his old neighborhood to a better one, but he then could also purchase his own home and own a better car. Now he can provide not only a better lifestyle for himself and his mother, but Ken was proud to report that he can also help other family members.

Simon believed job mobility and social mobility meant academic success. According to Simon, the more diplomas one has, the more doors will be opened, and the more money one can make. Simon believes that completing his doctoral degree will provide more opportunities for him. Not only will it provide the opportunity for him to move to a better job and have a better lifestyle, but it will prove to him that he is just as able as anyone to succeed academically.

Postsecondary education, whatever the path, is important for African American males with disabilities. Postsecondary education and training can help those with disabilities who are often marginalized and have poor access to the job market to gain skills and certifications that will help them become more marketable in the workforce. Not only will completion of a college education open doors to better employment opportunities and having adequate food, housing, insurance, and other basic necessities essential to life, but it will also provide them with a sense of self-worth and the confidence they need to succeed.

Research Question 2: What Supports and Strategies Assisted the Academic Success of African American Males with a Disability at the Master's or Doctoral Degree Level?

The supports reported by the participants that assisted them in achieving academic success at the master's and doctoral degree level include support from parents, siblings, grandparents, church family, vocational rehabilitation counselor, peers, social service case manager/agency, on-campus office of disability services, professors, friends, co-workers, and job. These factors are categorized into three groups, (a) family support, (b) community support, and (c) college support and are discussed below, along with implications of each level of support group for colleges and universities as well as other African American male students with a disability who wish to pursue graduate degrees. Also included in this section are the services that each support group provided for the participants and strategies they used to overcome obstacles they faced on campus.

Family Support

African Americans generally come from a culture in which extended family and even close friends who are not blood relatives are thought of as part of the family. In

addition to parents and siblings, African American families include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, and close friends. They often include in their family circle a variety of people such as relatives' friends and even people in their wider social circles. Extended family members are an essential part of the family unit, as African American families often enlist the support of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents to support them in the rearing of their children, reinforcing their children's behaviors, and setting academic expectations (Diamond et al., 2006). All members of the family contribute a great deal to the educational success of African Americans. Consistent with the literature, African American families want their children to succeed educationally. According to Anderson (2016), "87% of parents and 90% of Black leaders want Black children to attend and graduate from college."

From this study's findings, the participants are all beneficiaries of family members' contributions to their educational success. They played an important role as support systems, whether financially or emotionally, as well as providing tutorial service at the postgraduate level. "Maintaining close connections with extended families is very important in African American families" (Komen, 2020 p. 19), and Ken, Simon, and Matt attributed their academic success to their strong connections with their extended families. Family influence or support for African American male students on a college campus is a major contribution to their academic success. Numerous studies have documented the influence of family on the psychological, social, and academic development of African American male college students (Bean et al., 2003; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006). Cuyjet and Associates (2006) assert that the family support from one or both parents is significant to

the matriculation of African American students. "It is their encouragement that translates into students' academic persistence and commitment" (p. 29).

When possible, colleges should include family members in outreach educational events. Finding a way to integrate the families into various aspects of the postsecondary experience of students with disabilities will not only promote academic success for these students but promote goodwill between families and colleges (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006). Many African Americans rely on the support and guidance of others to help make decisions for them, and family and friends often play pivotal roles in their decision-making process. College and university officials must continue to promote family members' initiatives in the admission and retention process. Schools, families, and communities are primary agents for aiding with life outcomes for all (Booth et al., 2016; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006).

Community Support

Community supports play an integral part in the academic success of African American males with a disability. The gains and the outcomes associated with community supports for students with a disability have been widely studied and documented by numerous researchers in higher education. Community supports help students with disabilities set and achieve meaningful goals through the provision of the support needed to achieve their goals, whether they are mental and spiritual health, social, educational, vocational, or economic. From the interviews with participants in this study, the major community supports that they cited included mental health agency, V.R. services, the church, and their job. Simon used his church and the V.R. services, both of which linked him to the type of services he needed throughout his college years. Matt relied on services

provided by his church. Ken depended on his mental health case managers, his church, and his job.

Only one participant used V.R. services, and one used his job and mental health agency; however, all participants relied on the support of their church. Simon was the only participant who used a community support specifically provided for those with disabilities, V.R. services, which is designed for helping persons with disabilities prepare for, obtain and keep employment. V.R. services allowed Simon to access services on his college campus that were important throughout his postsecondary retention in college and his matriculation from college. When participants who were non-users of V.R. services were asked if they were aware of V.R. services or the office of disabilities on their college campuses, they both responded yes, they were aware of the availability of these services and that the V.R. counselors were present at high school around graduation time. However, they believed they were just there for students who were intellectually or physically disabled. They never were quite sure what their roles were or what services they could provide. They believed the office of disabilities services on their college campus was for those who had visible disabilities.

Having little or no knowledge of community service providers that can assist students with disabilities transition to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living can be a serious barrier to living quality lives in society. Li (2004) contends that there are salient barriers to school-family-community service for African American males with disabilities: (a) misapprehensions when using outside agencies by school staff, students, and their parents, or poor perceptions of schools and students by

agency staff; (b) the lack of or inefficient collaborative methods and postsecondary transition planning; and (c) financial problems.

There are federal laws that exist to afford students with disabilities access to postsecondary education and employment goals. Notable among these policies is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. IDEA focuses on quality preparation at the secondary level, transition to postsecondary education, and transition to the workforce. ADA focuses on the provision of reasonable access to learning and work environments. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides financial assistance and training support that leads to gainful employment. Students with disabilities need efficient and effective transition plans that will link them to all the services they will need for postsecondary success (Booth et al., 2016).

Parents, family, and community collaboration, especially at the secondary level, increase the academic and postsecondary success for youths with disabilities. When schools fail to help foster collaborative processes with family and community, students with disabilities will be unprepared for life beyond high school (Lamb, 2007; Booth et al., 2016). Given the many unique transition barriers encountered by African American males with a disability, every attempt should be made by schools to partner with key stakeholders to combat dismal postsecondary outcomes for this population, therefore boosting the academic success of these students (Bean et al., 2003; Booth et al., 2016).

College Support

From the interview, two participants had no access to on campus college level services because of their own non-disclosure of their disabilities. Participants disclosed that

they were unaware of services available to them since they both experienced poor transition planning and denied their disabilities while on campus. In contrast, the student who disclosed his disability while on campus had access to a wide array of services that he needed. Simon found the services offered by his campus's office of disabilities service to be invaluable. He claimed his access to these services was due to proper transition planning, especially in his final year of high school.

While family support is crucial to the academic success of African American males with a disability, the lack of access to adequate services on the college campus for African American males with a disability may result in lower matriculation and retention rates (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006). Not all students with disabilities have college-educated siblings or extended family members who can help them. They may be the first in their entire family to be attending college; therefore, African American males with a disability and their families must be exposed to the myriad of services available to them from an early grade. Currently, the trend of many urban high schools is to host transition fairs for students and their parents, guardians, or families. However, transition fairs should be accessible to students with disabilities from the middle grades, if not lower, so that parents can become familiar with services and accommodations available to them and begin to develop positive attitudes towards supports and accommodations as they plan early for their child with a disability to have access to services that can enhance their academic success.

Parents' and peers' perceptions of accommodations have a great influence on how students will perceive the use of accommodations. When disabilities are stigmatized, and when children are taught to disown their disability or leave their disability at the high

school when they move on to postsecondary education and training, the likelihood of students using available services and accommodations will decrease (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011). In high school, IDEA places the burden on the school to find and serve students with IEPs; in postsecondary education, the burden is on the students to find services and navigate through higher education (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Disability service providers need to market and promote their service well. Not only do they need to influence those on college campuses who have hidden and visible disabilities to use the service they offer, but they also need to influence faculty and peers' perception of the legitimacy and the necessity for these students to be provided with the accommodations and modifications vital to their *academic survival (Hartley, 2013).*

Services that Contributed to Academic Success

An essential aspect to the second question that drove this study is what services contributed to the academic success of African Americans males with disabilities. The services obtained from the sources of support identified include: emotional and financial support from family; braille services; counseling services from a social service agency; orientation and mobility services; on-campus support group; extra time on tests; tutoring and help with coursework from family members; financial support from parents, church, and grandparents; social and educational support from the office of disability services; braille list; braille transcriber; advice and emotional support from peers; friends and co-workers offering to be study partners; and financial support from the job.

All participants reportedly had received a wide array of services while pursuing their postgraduate education. The services provided were crucial to the matriculation of these students. For Simon, it was the V.R. services that provided much of the funding he

needed for his education from the first day he entered college to the present time, when he is now pursuing his doctoral degree. V.R. services linked him to the on-campus disabilities service offices, where he was provided with social, educational, and emotional services. V.R. not only advocated for him but helped him develop powerful self-advocacy skills needed to get the quality accommodations necessary as he pursued his academic goals. It was through this service that he was able to obtain many of the accommodations he needed. Some of these accommodations include orientation and mobility training on different college campuses, provision of a tutor for his first-degree classes, extra time on tests, a note-taker, a braille list, and a braille transcriber. Some of the services he received did not carry over to his postgraduate education, but he is still benefiting from services provided at that level. In addition to V.R. services, Simon also received emotional and financial support from his family. He reported they were his cheerleaders and celebrated his success every step that he took. In his church family, he found the moral and emotional support he needed. It was his faith that gave him the resilience and strength he needed to survive college. He reported he had teachers at the secondary level who pushed him to succeed, who linked him to services that helped transition from secondary to postsecondary education. He still uses some of those services today. He also had professors on the college campus who guided and advised him to transition from one level of courses or schooling to another.

Most of the services Ken received came from his family; his mother instilled in him the belief that he could achieve. Her belief in his abilities and her encouragement throughout his educational journey were his constant sources of motivation. His extended family supported him by helping him with his coursework and tutoring him when he was

failing college courses. He stated, "They were my encouragers and advisors." According to Ken, his grandmother, mother, and cousins kept him grounded, and his cousins were his role models. Once he started his educational journey, his family and his church were there for him, whether financially, emotionally, or otherwise. In addition to his family, according to Ken, the case managers at his social service agency have been his anchor. They kept him grounded on days when he felt his whole world was falling apart. They counseled him, mentally, emotionally, and educationally. He still receives services from his agency.

Like Ken, Matt revealed that the services he received mainly came from his family. His sisters were his actual tutors from elementary school up through to college. His parents, brother, and sister were his encouragers. According to Matt, "They believed in me much more than I believed in myself." His sisters were his role models. Matt's family supported him financially, as did his job. Where student loan left a gap in his college finances, his family covered the additional expense. His colleagues assisted him with coursework, especially at the master's level; some were his study partners, as well as his advisors. Matt concluded that all members of his team worked together for his success.

Both theoretical and empirical research studies have noted the importance of supports and services in the life of African American males with disabilities. According to NCES reports, graduate students make up just 11% of the student body on college campuses, although the percentage may be higher due to the number of students with disabilities who are non-disclosers of their disability. Students with a disability may have special needs that limit them mentally, educationally, and physically. Disabled students must self-identify on college campuses to access accommodations and/or modifications necessary for their academic success. Some common accommodations/modifications at the

graduate level include note-takers, sign language interpreters, extended time on tests, testing in separate rooms or quiet areas, use of assistive technology, readers, scribes, and changing classrooms to accessible locations. College may also provide different levels of learning support services, such as tutoring, academic improvement seminars, and writing centers. In order to access this service, students must be willing to disclose their disability on campus (GoGrad, 2019).

Strategies that Contributed to Academic Success

The academic survival of African American male students with disabilities on college campus is crucial to their retention and matriculation. A variety of factors impact African Americans with disabilities on college campuses. All participants in the study experienced a variety of problems on their college campuses. To overcome these problems, they used a variety of strategies in order to progress from one level of college to another. In an exploration of the second research question, participants identified several strategies that they used. Chief among them were self-advocacy, a belief in oneself and in one's ability to succeed even when no one else believes that they can, resilience, academic engagement, spirituality/faith, self-sacrifice, never losing focus on their goals, and having a strong support system.

Having a strong support system was seen by the participants as those people that helped them to achieve meaningful outcomes academically. According to Matt, "Those people, whether family, church members or friends who have the ability to deliver help or services to you with a willingness, sincerity, and knowledge, that makes you want to succeed." The participants' academic engagement and resilience has been discussed throughout this paper. It is noteworthy that all participants used the strategies listed above

to their advantage in pursuit of their academic success. Consistent with the literature is the fact that African American value education and those that want to succeed educationally whether disabled or non-disabled will employ several strategies to succeed.

Limitations

The primary limitations of this study are the method of collecting data, the small sample size, and the untested interview questions. As present in many research projects using qualitative interviewing, the sample size of this study is small due to limited time and resources. The sample in this study consisted of three participants who were recruited using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Because of the nonrandom nature of the sampling method used, the study will not be generalizable to larger audiences and may be difficult to replicate. Additionally, the interview questions that were used in this study had not been previously tested.

Specifically, the case study approach was engaged in this study; therefore, the data collected are based on the individual participants' self-reported perceptions and experiences. Only three participants diagnosed within three different disability categories volunteered to participate in this study; their experiences may not be reflective of all persons across the different disability categories. Because of the low number of participants used in the study, the findings will not be able to be generalized across all settings. Content analysis was used for data analysis. Causality, therefore, cannot be established since content analysis merely describes data and does not extract deep meanings or explanations for data patterns (Krippendorff, 2006).

Although the research team followed the guidelines for self-identifying bias, conducting this research using a different methodology could produce additional or different results. Finally,

despite these limitations, this study can be a steppingstone for future research in this understudied area or can be beneficial in being the catalyst for undertaking more extensive studies in this population of students. K-12 teachers and school officials, college and university officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the education of African American male students with disabilities can use some information presented here to unlock resources that can support the potential of these students who are disproportionally impacted by a variety of factors that negatively impact their access to postsecondary education.

Recommendations

Students with disabilities have hopes and dreams like their non-disabled peers. They should be challenged to learn. To that end, they must be provided a similar curriculum and the necessary accommodations and modifications as they are paired with highly qualified content area teachers who are equipped with tools and the skills necessary to provide a quality education that will foster better postsecondary outcomes for African American students with disabilities. Their transition plans should reflect students' personal goals, dreams, and plans for accommodations beyond the high school level.

Colleges and postsecondary transitional planners have a unique responsibility to connect students to the disability service providers on college campuses so that the students as well as professors can become more appreciative of the importance of accommodations, modifications, and other support services beyond high schools. This will help to better

faculty interactions with students with disabilities, relationships, and an overall improvement of classroom and campus climate for students with disabilities. As this study's participants illustrated the importance of family support to their academic success, colleges and universities should capitalize on this untapped resource when planning on-campus support for students with disabilities. When possible, colleges should include family members in educational outreach events. Finding a way to integrate the families into various aspects of the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities will not only promote academic success for these students but promote goodwill between families and colleges/universities (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006).

Overall, these findings indicate that despite the various misconceptions about African American students with disabilities and their parents, the families of this study's participants value education and want a quality education for their children that will help them fulfill their highest aspirations and dreams. Education has always been of utmost importance in African American communities from desegregation of K-12 schools and colleges to establishing and managing of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). African Americans value education because it is their only hope for attaining social mobility and economic independence. Despite the numerous challenges African American students with disabilities face, they want to succeed. Their education is seen as an important tool for their success.

As the United States has struggled for decades with systemic inequality, institutional racism, the fight for equality in education, and disproportional representation of African American students in special education, tangible changes must be made to drive a more expansive education that will channel policy makers and administrators to begin

conversations that strengthen policies and fundamentally change the current state of education for African American males with a disability. Finally, the list of recommendations that the participants perceived can be assets to the academic achievement of African American males with disabilities can be used to build the self-efficacy and social supports of other students within this demographic: (a) a belief in yourself that you can succeed even when no one else does; (b) being resilient, never giving up. (c) having realistic goals and working towards achieving them no matter how long it takes; (d) maintaining a strong support system which must include parents, family members, teachers, administrators, and social service agencies; (e) attend schools that have a team of experienced special education teachers who care enough to believe that African American students with disabilities can succeed academically; (f) vigilant parents who recognize when their child with disabilities is not getting the quality education deserved; (g) utilizing vocation rehabilitation services; (h) actively participating in designing your realistic student-centered transition plan; and (i) working towards achieving the goals you set yourself. The recommendations presented here by the participants are directed at students with disabilities and their parents. It is their belief that they can be easily adapted by African American students with disabilities to assist them to achieve the academic success they desire at all levels of the education system.

Recommendations for Further Study

Because of the lack of research on the factors that contribute to the success of African American students with disabilities in postsecondary education, and because of the intentionally narrow nature of this case study, this area of study warrants further

investigation. The list below shows examples of follow up study that the researcher would like to see completed.

1. This study could be examined in a broader context in which a wider cross section of African American students with disabilities from both sexes are included to gain further insights into their academic success.

2. It would be of interest also to study faculty perceptions of teaching African American students with disabilities at the postgraduate level with an intent to identify how faculty could adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate these students without having to jeopardize college accreditations.

3. Policymakers could also examine the correlation of individual transitional goals to postsecondary outcomes indicated on indicator 14 for all these students. Then, the results could be used to design and provide training for administrators, parents, and teachers who may be responsible for students whose goals are to pursue degrees at the postgraduate level.

4. Research on topics such as racial inequity in special education at the postgraduate level could be conducted in an effort to close the achievement gap at that academic level and to encourage policymakers and community activists to consider broader contextual issues and hopefully influence more colleges and universities to embrace this population of students.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provides insight into this population of students' academic success and some of the factors that contributed to their success from their perspectives and lived experiences. Participants noted supports and services, barriers, and the factors that drove them to pursue postgraduate education. Promising factors that contributed to the

academic success of these participants are parent and family support, whether emotional, financial, or informational; resilience; enhanced self-advocacy skills; a belief in one's ability to succeed even when no one else believe in them; the motivation to learn; faith/spirituality and community support; teacher and faculty support; and sound transition planning at the high school level.

Perceived factors that drive them to achieve academic success, were social mobility, job advancement, a love of learning/motivation to learn, financial success, and desire to prove that having a disability does not prevent one from being as successful as anyone else. The barriers noted are poor knowledge of or access to services, disinterested and uncaring college professors and advisors, difficult college courses, and poor transition plan or lack of transition planning.

Despite the negativity concerning African American males with disabilities and the challenges they face while pursing postsecondary education, there are those students who are beating the odds and making strides on college campuses as they achieve postgraduate degrees. The academic success of African American males with a disability is not an impossibility but has received little attention in the research literature. It is the intent of this study not only to help to make some inroads into this area of need but also to remind educators and policymakers that students with special needs can succeed academically, and policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and all stakeholders share the responsibility to make this happen.

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Appendix A:

IRB Approval

SlipperyRock University of Pennsylvania

Ashlea Rineer-Hershey Ph.D.
Slippery Rock University
Phone: 724-738-2460. Email: arineer-hershey@sru.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

STUDY TITLE

Title of Research: Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of African American Males with a Disability

Researchers' Name and Contact Information
Ashlea Rineer-Hershey Ph.D.
Slippery Rock University
Phone 724-738-2460; email: arineer-hershey@sru.edu
Assistant: Lorna Nation: Phone 267-303-4969. Email: lxn1016@sru.edu

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lorna Nation, a doctoral student from the Special Education Department at Slippery Rock University. Ms. Nation is conducting this study as a requirement for her doctoral dissertation; Dr. Ashlea Rineer- Hershey is her faculty advisor for this project.

To participate, you must be an African American male with a disability as defined by the Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA), the holder of a masters' degree or a doctoral degree, and be 25 years of age or older. Taking part in this research project is entirely voluntary; please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. You will be asked to sign this consent form after all your questions are answered to your satisfaction.

Important Information you should know about the Research study

- The purpose of the study is to identify those factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability who has an earned master's or doctoral degree or is currently enrolled in a doctoral degree program.

- If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to provide information about your level of education, your type of disability, and the factors that influenced your academic success

- You will be required to participate in an interview over the phone or/ on an online meeting platform suitable for you. The talk will last between 45- 60 minutes.

- This study is a minimal risk study

- The study will provide no potential or direct benefit to you as a participant.

- Taking part in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop participating in the study at any time. _____ Page 1 of 5

- If you feel uncomfortable when asked a question, you can verbally refuse to answer the question.

*Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take Part in this research project.

What is the Study About and Why are We Doing it?

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males diagnosed with a disability at the postgraduate level by answering the following two questions: 1. What factors do African American males with a disability report drive them to pursue a degree at the masters and doctoral level? 2. What supports and strategies assisted African American males diagnosed with a disability to gain academic success at the masters' degree level and beyond?

This study hopes to identify those factors that contributed to your success so that they can hopefully provide supports and strategies to assist other African American males with a disability achieve academic success. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45- 60 minutes interview over the phone / or in a virtual meeting hosted on Google meet or Zoom or on any platform available to you on a date and time convenient to you. Risks or discomforts from this research are minimal. No personal face to face interview will be conducted at this time.

What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to take Part in this Study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Coin a pseudonym and use it to sign the consent form provided.

2. Return a copy of the signed consent form to the researcher.

3. Provide the researchers with a time, date, and platform convenient for you to participate in an interview.

4. Complete a 45-60 minutes interview session

5. We will ask your permission to record your interview session. Please sign below if you give your consent for us to record the interview. If your interview is recorded on any platforms (Zoom, Google meet, etc.) or on an iPhone only the researchers will have access to your recorded information

6. Your interview script will be signed using your pseudonym. The information collected from your interview will only be used for the research purpose.

How Could You Benefit from This Study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because your participating in the research might help us learn how to improve educational services for other African American male students with disabilities to achieve at all levels. _____ Page 2 of 5

What Risks Might Result from Being in This Study?

This study is a minimal risk study. The only risk that may be associated with it is a breach of confidentiality. Participation in the study may also cause embarrassment or shame. Every effort will be made by the researchers to ensure that you, the participants are comfortable in disclosing your information.

Be assured that any information disclosed by you will be held in the strictest confidence. You will not be interviewed as a group but in a one-to-one setting with the researcher. The interview will not involve the use of any potentially sensitive questions. Any other risk, discomfort, or inconvenience will be minimal, and the researchers believe that they will not happen. However, if you feel uncomfortable participating in this research at any time, you may discontinue your participation.

How Will We Protect Your Information?

The results of this study may be published or be presented at a conference. To protect your privacy, we will not include information that could directly identify you. As soon as you, the participant, are enrolled in the study, you will coin a pseudonym which will be used to sign your consent form and to link the collected data to the pseudonym. Personal information such as your disability category will be collected for sampling purposes only. To protect the information you provide, the pseudonym you coined will be used throughout the study. No information shared with the researchers will be directly linked to you personally to ensure confidentiality. Consent forms and data scripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet available only to the researchers. Data collected will be transcribed to a password protected computer. Recorded information will be kept either on an iPhone that is password protected and can only be accessed by the researchers. The information recorded on any meeting platform will only be accessible by the researchers. Host privileges on the meeting platforms will not be shared. Once the data transcription is completed, the meet link will be closed. Recorded data will be destroyed no later than six months after the date of completion of the study.

What Will Happen to the Information We Collect About You After the Study is Over?

We will not keep your research data to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data.

What are the Costs to You to be Part of the Study?

There is no cost to you if you choose to participate in this study

What Other Choices Do I Have if I Don't Take Part in this Study?

If you choose not to participate, there are no alternatives.

Your Participation in this Research is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you choose to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide

to withdraw before this study is completed, the information you provided will not be used in the study and will be shredded or deleted from the platform from which it was recorded. As soon as the study is completed, all information gathered for data collection purposes will be deleted or shredded no later than six months.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this research, you may contact:

Ashlea Rineer-Hershey Ph.D. (email: arineer-hershey@sru.edu and (phone: 724-738-2460)

Lorna Nation: (email) lxn1016@sru.edu and (phone) 267-303- 4969)

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this Study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
Slippery Rock University
104 Maltby, Suite 008
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this Study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Consent Form has been given to me.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Participant Name   Signature of Participant   Date

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details in this document and has been given a copy.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name of Investigator   Investigator's Signature   Date

_____

Photo/Audiotape/Videotape Release Form:

We request the use of audiotaped/ recorded material of you as part of the Study. I specifically ask your consent to use this material, as is deemed proper, specifically for professional publications, websites, and or exhibits related to the study. We also emphasize that these materials' appearance on specific media (websites, professional publications, news releases) will not use any photographs of you or any voice recording of you.

Please check one of the following boxes below:

☐   I do...

☐   I do not...

Give permission for the investigators to record the interview (using any of the following iPhone Google Meet, Zoom, or on any platform available for the conduction of the interview) of me. I understand that I can turn my camera off during the interview on any platform used.

_____   _____   _____
Print Name   **Participant Signature**   **Date**

Appendix B:

Participant Recruitment Messages

Initial Phone Contact with the Office of Disabilities Services on College Campuses

Hello, Good Morning:

My name is Lorna Nation. I am currently a doctoral degree level student at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. As part of the requirement for completing my degree I am conducting a study on Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of African American Males with a Disability. The focus of this study is to obtain information on those who have achieved academic success at the master's or doctoral degree level.

I am therefore requesting permission to post a flyer to your Notice Board in an effort to recruit African American Males with a Disability who may be willing to participate in this study.

Thank you sincerely for your help.

Follow up Email to the Director of Disability Services on College Campuses

The Director of Disabilities Services

Office of Disabilities Services

[Name of University]

Dear Director:

As per a recent phone call to you, I am a currently a doctoral degree level student at The Slippery Rock University who is conducting a study on Factors Contributing to the Success of African American Males with a Disability as part of the requirement to complete my degree program. I am writing to ask your permission to allow me to post a flyer on your Notice Board. A copy of the flyer is attached. This flyer is being used to recruit participants who may be interested in participating in this research who meet all the following criteria: be at least 25 years old, the holder of a master's or doctoral level degree or is currently enrolled in a postgraduate degree at an accredited college or university and is an African American Male who has a diagnosed disability according to the Intellectual Disability Education Act (IDEA).

Please note you are under no obligation to consent to allow me to post this flyer on your Notice Board. Your consent is voluntary. If you are willing or not willing to allow me to post to your notice board, please respond via telephone or email regarding your decision.

Thank you.

Respectfully

Lorna Nation
Phone: 267-303-4919
email lxn1016@sru.edu

Email to Consented Directors of Disability Service on College Campuses

Dear Director (LAST NAME)

Thank you for allowing me to post a copy of the recruitment flyer to your notice board the flyer has been duly posted/ or is attached for posting. Please be assured that the privacy and confidentiality of your staff and students are my highest priority.

Respectfully

Lorna Nation

Initial Email to School Principals

The Principal,

[Name of School]

[Address of School]

Dear [Principal: LAST NAME]

As per our phone conversation, I am a currently a doctoral degree level student at The Slippery Rock University who is conducting a study on Factors Contributing to the Success of African American Males with a Disability as part of the requirement to complete my degree program. I am writing to ask your permission to allow me to post a flyer on your staff list serve. A copy of the flyer is attached. This flyer is being used to recruit participants who may be interested in participating in this research who meet all the following criteria: be at least 25 years old, the holder of a master's or doctoral level degree or is currently enrolled in a postgraduate degree at an accredited college or university and is an African American Male who has a diagnosed disability according to the Intellectual Disability Education Act (IDEA).

Please note you are under no obligation to consent to allow me to post this flyer on your staff list serve. Your consent is voluntary. If you are willing or not willing to allow me to post to your staff list serve. Please respond via the telephone number or email listed below.

Thank you.

Respectfully

Lorna Nation
Phone: 267-303-4919
lxn1016@sru.edu

Email to Consented Principals

Dear Principal (Last Name)

Thank you for allowing me to post a copy of the recruitment flyer to your staff list serve. The flyer has been posted/ or is attached for posting. Please be assured that the privacy and confidentiality of your staff is my highest priority.

Respectfully

Lorna Nation

Flyer to Recruit Participants

Slippery**Rock**
University
of Pennsylvania

Department of Special Education

Dr. Ashlea Rineer-Hershey, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
phone: 724-738-2460
email: a.rineer-hershey@sru.edu

The Slippery Rock University Department of Special Education is Conducting a Research Study on

> **Factors Contributing to the Academic Success**
> **of**
> **African American Males with a Disability**

Via telephone, Zoom, Google Meet,
or any online platform convenient to you.

If you are:

25 years and older
Have been diagnosed with a disability according to IDEA
An African American Male
The recipient of an earned master's or doctoral degree or currently enrolled in a doctoral degree program at an accredited degree granting university.

You are invited to participate in a research study that investigates the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males with a disability.

Eligible subjects receive no compensation, any information they provide will be held in the strictest confidence. Participation in this research study is voluntary, participants will be expected to participate in a 45–60-minute interview.

Your privacy is respected.

Principal investigator: Ashlea Rineer-Hershey PhD.
For more information: call or email Lorna Nation, phone: 267-303-4969, email lxn1016@sru.edu

Email used to Consent Participant to Participate in the Snowball Sampling

(After the study has been explained to them)

Dear [Mr. LAST NAME],

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study Factors Contributing to the Success of African American Males with a Disability. I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to pass along the enclosed flyer to friends or colleagues with a disability who has a master's or doctoral degree or is currently enrolled in a doctoral degree program who may also be interested in participating in this research study.

You are under no obligation to share this information, and whether you share this information it will not affect your relationship with me or the staff at Slippery Rock University.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lorna Nation Phone 267-303-4969 email lxn1016@sru.edu
Please check one of the following statements below then respond via email or phone to the researcher with your decision.

☐ I voluntarily consent to pass on the flyer to friends or colleague who meet the criteria for the study.

☐ I will not pass on this flyer to any of my friends or colleagues at this time

Initial Telephone Scripts to Participants for the Study

1. Hello:

My name is Lorna Nation. I am a doctoral student in the Ed. D. program in Special Education at the Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. Thank you for responding to the flyer. I am delighted that you have expressed the desire to be a participant in this study.

Please provide me your email address so that I can send you a letter that will inform you of the requirements to participate in this study. I look forward to setting up an appointment with you no later than two weeks after you receive this letter if it is your desire to consent to participate in this study.

I may be reached at 267-303-4069 regarding any questions or concerns you may have about your participation in this study

Thank you

OR

2. Hello:

My name is Lorna Nation. I am a doctoral student in the Ed. D. program in Special Education at the Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. I am delighted that you have expressed the desire to be a participant in this study.

Please provide me your telephone number so that I can speak with you and inform you of the requirements to participate in this study. I look forward to setting up an appointment with you no later than two weeks after you receive this email if it is your desire to consent to participate in this study. I may be reached at 267-303-4069 regarding any questions or concerns you may have about your participation in this study. Thank you.

Appointment Script/Email

Good day:

My name is Lorna Nation. I am a doctoral student in the Ed. D. program in Special Education at the Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. You recently agreed to become a participant in a study that I am conducting as part of the requirement of my Doctoral Degree in Special Education Program at the Slippery Rock University. Please note the following dates and time (List of Dates and Times) are available for an appointment for the interview. Please let me know which is most convenient for you. If none of these dates are convenient, please provide me a date and time convenient to you. I may be contacted via telephone at 267-303-4969 or via email **lxn1016@sru.edu** regarding any questions or concerns that you may have.

I am delighted that you have expressed the desire to be a participant in my study.

Thank you.

Telephone Script for Reminder Call to Prospective Participant to Attend Interview

Hello,

My name is Lorna Nation, and I am a doctoral student in the Ed D. program in Special Education Administration at the Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. This call is to remind you that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow at TIME and PLATFORM for an interview.

Is (TIME) still convenient for you?

If tomorrow is still convenient, please bring the completed and signed consent to participate letter with you to the interview tomorrow. I look forward to conducting an interview with you tomorrow

Thank you.

If tomorrow is not convenient, what date is convenient for you to reschedule?

(When the new date is provided). Thanks, I have marked my calendar and will see you on (Rescheduled Date)

Thank you

Appendix C:

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

This interview is conducted by Lorna Nation, a student in the E.D. program at the Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. It will last between 45 minutes to one hour. Please note, the interview will be recorded. However, the information disclosed will be used solely for the study while holding your identity in the strictest confidence.

Please note that your pseudonym will be used in the section where the questionnaire requires your name. If, at any time, you no longer wish to continue as a participant in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study without any consequences to you. If you are asked a question and you do not feel comfortable answering that question, you have the right not to answer that question as well.

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study.

Questionnaire

Section 1

Demographic Information

Name of Participant:

_____
_____

2. College / colleges attended

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Sex_____ 4. Age_____
5. Marital Status_____
6. Number of years in college?

_____

7. Highest degree level attained?

_____

8. Major?

_____

9. Primary disability as identified on your IEP?

_____

Section 2

Preparation for Life After High School

1. What supports, and services did you receive while transitioning from high school to postsecondary education?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. How did your parents / family members / teachers help to shape your college aspiration?

_____
_____
_____
_____

College Experience

3. What type of challenges did you face as a student with a disability while in college?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. How did you overcome these challenges?

_____
_____
_____
_____**Support and Services**

5. Did you ever disclose your disability while you are or were in college?
(a) Yes_____ No _____
(b) If yes, who/what influenced you to disclose your disability?

_____

_____
_____
_____

(c) If no, why did you not disclose your disability?

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. If you disclosed your disability what types of accommodation supports and services did you receive /or is receiving while in college

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. How did your parents or family members support you while you were in college?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Post BA Success

8. What influenced your decision to pursue graduate school?

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Were there major differences between your undergraduate experience and your graduate experience while in college?

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. What factors contributed most to your college success from undergraduate through to graduate school?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Academic Success

11. What does academic success mean to you?

_____

_____
_____
_____

12. Tell me, what are some factors that contributed to your academic success?

_____
_____
_____

13. What role have significant people in your life, or social services agencies played in your academic success?

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. What do you think African American males with disabilities need to do to achieve academic success?

_____
_____ _____
_____
_____

15. What recommendations would you like to make about how to promote the academic success of African American students with disabilities at risk of failure at the different level of schooling?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

16. Is there anything that the researcher has not thought of that you would like to add?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you

Interview Notes

Name of Participant: _____

Date of Interview: _____ Time of Interview _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D:

Informed Consent Letter

Date _____

Dear_____

_

As per an earlier phone contact regarding your participation in this study, thank you for your voluntary participation in this study. The study, Key Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of African Males with a Disability, is being conducted by me as part of the requirement necessary to complete my dissertation as a Doctoral Student in the Department of Education, Slippery Rock University. The purpose of this study is to identify those factors that contribute to the success of African American males with a disability who have aa education beyond the post- baccalaureate level.

As an African American male diagnosed with a disability classified by IDEA, who has completed or is completing a postgraduate degree, you can provide valuable information that can be used to assist policymakers, school, and college administrators and other stakeholders with information from your experience to assist other students. This will be especially useful in the development and implementation of policies that will assist in a more effective transitioning of African American males with a disability throughout out elementary and high school years to the college years and beyond.

A face-to-face interview will be conducted on -Date and TIME on a platform convenient to you. The interview will last between 45 minutes and one hour. Please note

the interview will be recorded in order to assure the validity of the data. Your identity and response to the questions will be held in the strictest confidence. Any written information or recorded data collected will be kept securely in a locked filed cabinet in my office throughout this study and will be destroyed upon its completion no later than one year after. You will coin a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study in order to further protect your identity. Any information you provide will be used only for the purpose of the study. You are welcomed to review the study upon its completion for the accuracy of the data you provided.

Please be reminded that your participation in this study is voluntary; you are free to withdraw from the study any time you wish to do so without any consequences to you. If you choose to participate, before the date of the study, you will be contacted via telephone to remind you of your appointment. You may contact me at 267-303-4969 regarding any questions you may have about your participation in this study.

I consent to participate in this Study

Signature _____

I do not wish to participate in this study

Signature _____

Respectfully,

Lorna Nation