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## Learning in the Margins: The Educational Experiences of an African American Male with Disabilities

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Learning in the Margins: The Educational Experiences  
of an African American Male with Disabilities

by

Aisha Holmes

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction  
with an emphasis in Special Education  
Department of Teaching and Learning  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

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Keywords: African American male, disability, DisCrit, self-determination, resilience

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## DEDICATION

Psalm 23 King James Version (KJV)

**23** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

I am blessed. I thank God for my beautiful parents, Robert Nathaniel Yancey Jr. and Joyce Ruth Yancey. They are my foundation. I also thank God for my brother Robert Nathaniel Yancey III. Without them I would have never realized the greatness inside of me. They always know the right time to say and do what is needed to encourage me to be blessed.

To my husband, Harold, I cannot imagine life without you. You bless me with your kindness and wisdom. You fill my days with unimaginable love and joy. We travel this life together as one.

To my son, Sahar, you are my inspiration. You are so talented. Do not ever doubt yourself and know that you belong in any space you desire. Be a reflection of God and you can do anything.

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## **ABSTRACT**

African American males with disabilities meet challenges in K-12 public education and higher education. Educational practices often focus on a deficit interpretation of the abilities of African American males with disabilities. Educational stakeholders who do not reflect their layered identities of race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status often make educational decisions for this student population. The purpose of this study is to include in the educational conversations the voice of an African American male with disabilities who experienced K-12 public education and higher education. Using narrative inquiry and analyzed through the lens of DisCrit, findings from the study revealed two themes that explain the participant's lived experiences. Educational stakeholders and others who see themselves in the participant can learn valuable information from the participant's narrative.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

“Although life is not a narrative, people make sense of their lives and the lives of others through narrative constructions” (Richardson, 1990, p.10).

### **My Narrative**

I grew up in the perils of the inner city during the 1980s and 90s. I was saved from the perils of the inner city when I left for college three years after high school graduation. I attended college in a rural town far removed from the inner city. This was my turning point. This is where I started to make sense of my life. This was the opportunity I got to see, live, and love outside of my current context. Before my escape, I could have easily succumbed to many statistics associated with African American youth living in the inner city. These statistics included teenage pregnancy, exposure to HIV/AIDS, incarceration, drug addiction, low-income earning, and other perils that plagued my childhood community. Although I escaped the dismal statistics associated with the inner city, my new environment at a predominately White institution of higher education presented challenges beyond academic stressors. Some of these challenges included financial constraints due to limited family income and mismatch of culture with predominantly White students and faculty. While an undergraduate student, I found my calling in education after completing a summer camp with high school age African American students from the inner city. As an educator, I have always been more inclined to teach and mentor student populations that mirrored myself as an African American.

Currently, I am married to an African American man and raising an African American son who is now a student in middle school public education. In my work and mentorship with African American males in both PK-12 public education and higher education, I am compelled to understand factors that contribute to their success. My interest in the success of African American males begins with my lived experience as an educator. My role as a special education teacher varied, having taught in fully inclusive classroom environments where students with and without disabilities learned in the same classroom with supports and in fully segregated classrooms where all my students were labeled with a disability. I am troubled most as a special educator teaching in special education settings in which African American males are disproportionately placed. My experiences mirror research that recognizes a disproportionate high identification of African American males in the high-incidence special education categories of intellectual disability, emotional or behavioral disorder, and learning disability (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Blanchett, 2006, 2008; Fergus, 2010). In particular, this student population I taught was most often labeled with a specific learning disability and/or emotional disorder. These categories are considered problematic as they represent judgmental labels lacking clear biological etiologies, meaning the diagnoses rely primarily on professional clinical decisions (Artiles et al., 2010; Fergus, 2010). The clinical decisions made are often by educational stakeholders who do not understand the cultural needs of this student population and limited beliefs in their abilities (Artiles et al., 2010; Fergus, 2010).

As a special education teacher and learner in higher education I began to question and challenge the status quo of the public school system, which I deemed as oppressive for African American males with disabilities. The education system in which I taught often mirrored the school-to-prison pipeline (Balfanz, Spiridakis, Curran Neild, & Legters, 2003) in which African

American males with disabilities suffered the consequences of restrictive learning environments, and disproportionately higher suspension and expulsion. My initial response to combat the disproportionate high placement of African American males in special education was my deep involvement in the inclusion movement. My interpretation of the inclusion movement meant that I advocated and worked toward fully inclusive general education classroom environments with adequate supports for all students labeled with disabilities. In addition, I began to question other forms of segregation aligned with race and ethnicity, such as socioeconomic status. These questions lead me to the purpose of my current research study, to investigate the relationships among race, gender, disability, socioeconomic, and the school experiences of an African American male with disabilities in PK-12 public education and higher education. Although this is a brief description of my life history focused on my education and teaching experiences, it is significant I share this information to give the reader a sense of why I chose to study the school experiences of an African American male with disabilities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The African American male in the United States is under great scrutiny in public education and higher education. African American males are often perceived as the worse behaved, least talented, and most dangerous group of students on school campuses (Howard, 2013). Their academic progress is frequently compared to that of White students aligned with White normative standards that perpetuate inequality (Kaplan, 2011). Academic comparisons are typically described as an achievement gap using a white-black student binary focused on African American student failure (Howard, 2013; Kaplan, 2011; Love, 2004). Whiteness is positioned as normative and all other groups are ranked and categorized in relation.

The African American student population is often presented as troublesome and underachievers (Harper, 2009). Most discourse and rhetoric presented on African American male academic achievement focuses on deficits without offering solutions to narrowing the education achievement gap in K-12 (Harry & Klinger, 2007; Jackson & Moore, 2008). Public schools and society at large often blame the student, families, and communities for these shortcomings while diminishing the role of a fractured education system grounded in a deficit framework (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Haynes-Walker, 2011; Knaus, 2007; Love, 2004; Milner, 2007; Yosso, 2005). This deficit framework is a prevalent form of contemporary racism in the education of students of color (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Love (2004) contends the "...failure analysis or deficit perspective is rooted in a belief of white supremacy, produced by adherence to the concepts of white supremacy, and perpetuates the ideology of white supremacy" (p. 243). Similarly, students with disabilities encounter barriers based on perceived deficits (Connor, 2008; Danforth, 2009).

In the documentary *Including Samuel*, disability advocate Keith Jones described his lived experiences as an African American man with a physical disability. He stated, "The bar is so low for us that there is no bar and anything we do above and beyond nothing is an accomplishment" (Habib, Jorgensen, & Schuh, 2007). Jones's assessment of the expectations of African American males with disabilities can be conceptualized as a double-disadvantage or double minority in which he is twice removed from the norm (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Maeder, 2009). African American men with disabilities' lived experiences are complex and negatively impacted by racism and ableism (Maeder, 2009). Racism and ableism are institutional structures through which people of color and people with disabilities are persistently discriminated against, excluded, and oppressed (Gabel, 2005; Hehir, 2005; Kaplan, 2011; Koppelman & Goodhart,

2011; Smedley, 2011). This complex phenomenon requires in-depth analyses of the lived experiences of African American males with disabilities. This can be done through the documentation of their narratives.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research has documented the life outcomes of African American males. Some African American males encounter and accumulate negative factors related to their educational experiences that place them at risk for failure (Arbuthnot, 2009; Kunjufu, 1983; Lewis & Moore, 2008; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Their experiences are compounded when they are identified with a disability resulting in a double-disadvantage (Maeder, 2009). In public education African American males are overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted education (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Beljan, 2011; Blanchett, 2006; Blanchett, Klinger, & Harry, 2009; Romanoff, Algozzine, & Nielson, 2009). Special education has been used as a form of segregation for African American students removing them from the general education classroom and equitable educational opportunities (Blanchett, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002). In addition, this student population encounters disproportionate discipline resulting in higher suspension and expulsion rates when compared to other student populations (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Monroe, 2005, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Townsend, 2000; Weatherspoon, 2006). Disproportionately higher suspension and expulsion rates are inextricably linked to high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and high juvenile incarceration rates (Alexander, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2003; Camp-Yeakey & Henderson, 2008; Hatt, 2011; Hirschfield, 2008; Lee, Ransom, & Williams, 2011; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; The Children's Defense Fund, 2014; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). It is challenging to combat these negative factors when the educational needs of African American students are often analyzed



using a deficit framework overshadowed by a master narrative that focuses on underachievement, disengagement, and attrition (Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Nationally, African American male graduation rates are disproportionately lower than Whites. The national and state cumulative promotion index graduation rate for African American males was 50.2% in 2001 and declined to 47% in 2008 (Schott Foundation For Public Education, 2010). In 2012-2013, the estimated national graduation rate for African American males was 59%, significantly less than their white male counterparts at 80% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). In 2015-2016, the adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students for African American students was 76% as compared to white counterparts at 88% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In 2015-2016, the adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students with disabilities was 65.5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This data does not disaggregate for African American males with disabilities.

Post-school outcomes for African American males are even more daunting as they experience high incarceration rates, limited employment opportunities, low college matriculation and completion, low-socioeconomic status, dismal health statistics, and lower life expectancies when compared to non-African American peers (Camp-Yeakey, 2012; Epstein, 2003; Feagin, 2010, Hacker, 2013; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Osher et al., 2012; The Children's Defense Fund, 2014). In a report that examined six pathways of male students after high school ages 15-24, Lee, Ransom, and Williams (2011) synthesized data to highlight issues that exist for men of color. The six pathways evaluated include enrollment in a two-year or a four-year college or a vocational school, enlistment in U.S. Armed Forces, employment in U.S. workforce, unemployment, incarceration in state or federal prisons or in local jails, and death. Most problematic are the statistics that show African American men are disproportionately less likely

to enroll in secondary education and disproportionately more likely to be incarcerated when compared to White male peers (Lee et al., 2011). Specifically, African American males enrolled in secondary education at 33.4% compared to White males at 47% and African American males were incarcerated at 9.9% compared to White males at 1.6% (Lee et al., 2011).

The enrollment of African American students in degree-granting institutions of higher education has increased over the past 30 years (U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics, 2011a). From 2000 to 2009, the number of African American high school graduates enrolled in degree-granting institutions of higher education increased three percent, from 11.3% to 14.3% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics, 2011a). Of the overall African American students enrolled, 12.7% of the total number were African Americans with an identified disability (U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics, 2011b). In 2009-2010, the percentage of African American males who earned a bachelor's degree was 34 percent, significantly less than their white male counterparts at 44 percent (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This data does not disaggregate for African American males with disabilities.

Although enrollment in higher education has increased, enrollment statistics mask the inequity of ethnic minority students' overrepresentation in special education in high school and subsequent underrepresentation in college (Reid & Knight, 2006). In addition, the statistics do not reveal how access to postsecondary education is influenced at the intersection of race, class, gender, disability, and inadequate services provided to students with disability labels in high school (Reid & Knight, 2006). High schools and postsecondary institutions must look beyond the statistics to expose processes of continued systemic exclusion at the intersections of race, class, gender, and disability (Reid & Knight, 2006).

## **Purpose of the Study**

Disability intersects other social categories including race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion and socioeconomic status (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). There is a gap in literature related to the lived experiences of people with disabilities and the interaction of race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (Blanchett, Klinger, & Harry, 2009; Klinger, Blanchett, & Harry, 2007; McDonald et al., 2007). Cultural narratives of disability include assumptions that people with disabilities are pathological and incompetent, which perpetuate practices of exclusion in community, employment, and leisure (McDonald et al., 2007). “For many, membership in multiple marginalized groups is an experience of being a minority within a minority or of an existence where one is marginalized even from the margins of society” (McDonald et al., 2007, p. 148). To understand variables that affect learning, special education researchers must examine disability in sociocultural contexts including those related to race, class, culture, and language (Sorrells, Webb-Johnson, & Townsend, 2004).

Although there is empirical literature addressing the educational concerns of public education for African American males, as well as best practices to meet their needs, there is limited narrative research investigating the firsthand educational experiences of African American males with disabilities from their perspective. The research conducted will add to the burgeoning literature in intersectionality of race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status. This study aims to add to the literature on intersectionality by investigating the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities in K-12 public education and higher education. The participant chose the pseudonym of James. I used narrative inquiry to document the James’s oral history analyzed through the theoretical lens of DisCrit. Narrative inquiry provides researchers a viable means to investigate the complexities of human experience through

their stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry moves beyond other methods of inquiry that communicate only one period of time related to studied subjects, but includes the intricacies of the participant's lived experiences within social and cultural contexts (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

### **Research Questions**

The central research questions that guide the study are:

1. What does the educational narrative of an African American male with disabilities analyzed through the lens of DisCrit tell us about how we teach this student population?
2. What can educational stakeholders change about their practice to support this student population?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used to conceptualize my study is DisCrit. It was important that I use a theoretical framework that considers the complexities of what is considered two main identities within the public school system and higher education, race and ability. James is considered someone who may have met many challenges during his educational experiences, which required analysis of his oral history through a critical lens that allowed me to understand and critique how we educate this student population.

#### **Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory**

For this narrative study, I used Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) as a theoretical framework. "DisCrit explores ways in which both race and ability are socially constructed and interdependent" (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, & 2013, p. 5). DisCrit draws on seven core tenets that problematize the ways in which marginalized groups are perceived and

treated (Annamma et al., 2013). The following tenets of DisCrit will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

1. DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.
2. DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on.
3. DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.
4. DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.
5. DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.
6. DisCrit recognizes whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens.
7. DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance. (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11)

## **Method**

I used narrative inquiry to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Data from semi-structured interview responses and physical artifacts such as a lifeline and participant journal were analyzed through the lens of DisCrit to tell the participant's educational oral

history. The participant is an adult African American male with disabilities that include hearing impairment, emotional behavior disorder, and specific learning disability according to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) criteria. Emerging themes from the research were documented and analyzed to inform educational stakeholders and African American males with disabilities about how we teach this student population and changes needed in educational practices. The methods are described in greater detail in chapter four.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Although the participant's educational oral history cannot be generalized, it provides an opportunity to understand the educational experiences the participant encountered and how these may help similar students and educational stakeholders in PK-12 public education and higher education. The scope of this study is limited to the experiences of one African American male with disabilities to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participant's educational experiences with the intention that his lived experiences may impact the personal and professional lives of others that represent and interact with this student population.

Responsive interviewing used in this study is based on mutual respect, trust, and reciprocity (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I have a previous professional relationship with the participant built on these characteristics. He volunteered in my middle school exceptional student education classroom over the course of one school semester during his undergraduate program. At the close of the semester, we maintained a prolonged mentor-mentee relationship that is still current. This relationship includes contact through social media, telephone calls, and email. We discussed both personal and professional life experiences and decisions to include his achievements (e.g., graduating with an undergraduate degree) and disappointments (e.g.,

difficulty securing a job post-graduation with an undergraduate degree and enrolling in graduate school).

Possible bias was addressed using member checks throughout the data collection and analysis. James reviewed each transcribed interview, interview notes, observation notes, and document review notes to ensure I represented his lived experiences accurately. He also reviewed the full dissertation draft including all chapters. All feedback was considered and adjustments made accordingly.

There are two main assumptions underlying this study. The first assumption is in my description of the participant as an African American male with disabilities. This description is based on professional educator norms where person-first language is used following race and gender (Snow, 2001-16). This does not represent how all others who carry similar characteristics as the participant describe themselves. The participant and others with disabilities may choose to identify themselves outside of the person-first language protocol. The second assumption is that being an African American male with disabilities is perceived as a limitation in PK-12 public education and higher education. A review of the relevant literature indicates that racism and ableism are critical factors for some people of color with disabilities in PK-12 public education and higher education that impact this perception.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented an introduction to the research related to the educational experiences and life outcomes of African American males with and without disabilities. The current study points to the need to understand how race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status impact the educational experiences of African American males with disabilities. The participant's voice regarding these experiences is the crux of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Chapter one provided the reader with an understanding of the nature of the study. In this chapter, I describe the theoretical framework that best positions how I conceptualized my study. Specifically, I used DisCrit (Annamma, 2015; Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016) to explore the intersections of Disability Studies (Linton, 1998; Davis, 2017) and Critical Race Theory (Bell, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While researching factors that impact the educational experiences of African American males with disabilities, I developed a theoretical framework that focuses on disability and race.

While I would like to believe the factors of race and disability are minuscule in the overall educational experiences of the African American male, statistical data reports that African American males are more likely than their non-African American peers to repeat a grade, receive special education services, receive parent contact about problem behavior and poor performance, be suspended or expelled, excluded from honors courses, and have greater dropout rates (Toldson, 2014). As a critical theorist, I wanted to know how race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic may have complicated the educational experiences of the participant. Specifically, I wanted to answer the following research questions: What does the educational narrative of an African American male with disabilities analyzed through the lens of DisCrit tell



us about how we teach this student population? What can educational stakeholders change about their practice to support this student population?

### **Critical Theory**

In my advocacy, work as an educator, and student in higher education, I recognize my philosophical analysis of the world is through a critical perspective (Paul, 2005). A critical researcher attempts to uncover the “dynamics of power and ideology” of institutions, texts, or relationships and promotes awareness and emancipation” (Paul, 2005, p. 329). Historically, critical theory was developed in the 1930’s by the Frankfurt School, which represented the collective work of German-American theorists Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse (Bronner, 2011; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Critical theory was influenced by the activism of Western Marxism that challenged the disparities of the poor working class and wealthier bourgeois in a capitalist society (Bronner, 2017).

Critical theorists in education recognize injustice and seek justice utilizing a critical pedagogy that problematizes inequalities and meritocracy (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Ira Shor are authors recognized for their work in critical pedagogy (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Freire (1996) argued that a key component for discussion about oppression and inequality is the inclusion of the oppressor in the discussion. Including the oppressor in a conversation about oppression will enhance the oppressor’s ability to understand the relationship between the oppressor’s role in the system of inequality, the oppressor’s personal benefits from the oppression, and human costs of the privileges that resulted from this oppressive structure (Freire, 1996). Conversely, for a member of the oppressed to be able to fully engage in a discussion about inequality, a strong sense of self is also necessary (Freire, 1996). The attainment of an understanding where one stands within the structure of institutionalized racism

helps the individual to not only to identify the oppressor, but advocate for the necessary changes to the oppressive system. Collectively, these authors encourage oppressed people to recognize and resist their oppression through action (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) offer a contemporary interpretation of critical theory as a critical social theory “concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 81). Critical theory lends itself to theories of race and disability in that it challenges stakeholders to explore social beliefs and practices that undermine these groups. In the context of the current study I seek to understand how race, gender, ability, and class affected the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities in the social system of public schooling. I do this through an analysis of theories of disability and race, specifically Disability Studies, Critical Race Theory, and DisCrit, all complementary fields of study.

### **Theories of Disability and Race**

As an African American woman who teaches African American male students with disabilities, it was important I examine theoretical frameworks that help me conceptualize how race and disability may affect their educational experiences. Specifically, I examined Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory, as well as their limitations as discrete analyses of race and disability. I expanded my theoretical framework as I examined DisCrit to fully understand how both racism and ableism may complicate their educational experiences.

### **Disability Studies**

Disability studies is a field of study that examines social, cultural, and political phenomena as it relates to the lived experiences of people with disabilities (Goodley, 2010).

“Disability studies takes for its subject matter not simply the variations that exist in human behavior, appearance, functioning, sensory acuity, and cognitive processing but, more crucially, the meaning we make of those variations” (Linton, 1998, p. 2). Historically, disability was associated with biological factors and focused on perceived deficits. People with disabilities were described as a subhuman organism, menace to society, object of dread, object of pity, diseased organism and object of ridicule (Wolfensberger, 1970 as cited in Koppelman & Goodhart, 2011, pp. 287-289). Central to the field of disability studies are implications of the social model of disability, the social construction of normal, and ableism.

### **Social Model of Disability**

The social model interpretation of disability rights originated in the United Kingdom in 1975 after the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation argued that the medicalization of disability and the alienation of disabled people formed a system of oppression against them (Gabel, 2005). A key element in the social model of disability is the “distinction between disability (social exclusion) and impairment (physical limitation) and the claim that disabled people are an oppressed group” (Shakespeare, 2017, p.197). A similar movement emerged in the United States in the late 1970s (Gabel, 2005). Drawing from the civil rights movement’s stance regarding the social status of minority groups in general, the minority group model defined social status of minority group members as individuals who experience “marginalization, disenfranchisement, discrimination, stigmatization, and stereotyping” (Gabel, 2005, p. 3). “From a disability rights perspective, social model approaches are progressive, medical model approaches are reactionary” (Shakespeare, 2017, p. 198). “Civil rights, rather than charity or pity, are the way to solve the disability problem” (Shakespeare, 2017, p. 198). The social model

grounded in civil rights has created a social movement in which people with disabilities are politically and psychologically empowered (Shakespeare, 2017).

The social model has its flaws to include minimizing the importance of impairment in individual experience, as well as the crude distinction between impairment (medical) and disability (social), the assumption that all people with disabilities are oppressed, and the possibility of a barrier-free utopia (Shakespeare, 2017, pp. 199-201). Shakespeare (2017) argues that the social model has a narrow understanding of disability and should be expanded beyond fighting social exclusion and separatist practices to include analyses and interventions that encompass the complexities of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the social model's radical overemphasis on shifting the mainstream perception of disability from the medical model to a model focused solely on social oppression has compromised the ability for disability-specific discussion in regards to human rights (Shakespeare, 2013). Shakespeare identified confounding consequences that resulted from this shift. The complete silencing of dialogue including any mention of a disability category has limited the ability to mobilize political advocacy and community support for people with a specific disability (Shakespeare, 2013). Consequently, focusing solely on the social aspect of disability can also bring unwarranted criticism and skepticism regarding the development of new medical or technology based solutions to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2013).

### **Social Construction of Normal**

Davis (2017) argues that to understand the disabled body, one must understand the construction of normal and how this shapes the perceptions of people with disabilities. The idea of normal was not established in the English language until 1840-1860 (Davis, 2017). During this time non-White and people with disabilities became connected in how they were perceived

as “evolutionary laggards or throwbacks” (Baynton, 2017, p. 20). Disability or the perception of low intelligence was used to justify slavery and other mistreatment of black people (Baynton, 2017). With the onset of eugenics and the establishment of statistical norms, subpopulations were formed, populations of normal and abnormal (Davis, 2017). This abnormal population included those deemed as undesirable such as people with intellectual disabilities (feeble-minded) and physical disabilities (cripple), poor (derelicts), criminals, the ill, those with mental illness (insane), children born with illness, and people of color (Baynton, 2017; Davis, 2017).

### **Social Construction of Ableism**

Early work from scholars such as Bogdan and Biklen (1977) modified the term “racism” to create the term handicapism to describe “assumptions and practices that promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed differences” (Gabel, 2005, p. 4). Subsequently, the key components of handicapism were used to develop the term ableism. Ableism in general is used to describe the mistreatment of people with disabilities. Wolbring (2008) argues that every ism has two components, something of value and something not of value. “Ableism values certain abilities, which leads to disableism the discrimination against the ‘less able’” (Wolbring, 2008, p. 251). In education, ableism is defined as “the devaluation of disability that results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for people to walk than roll, speak than sign, and hang out with nondisabled students as opposed to other disabled students” (Heir, 2002 as cited in Gabel, 2005 p. 4). Ableism describes the “social biases against people whose beliefs and practices resulting from and interacting with the biases that serve to discriminate” (Gabel, 2005, p. 4).

## **Disability Studies in Education**

Disability studies constructs a platform to think critically about disability in both “academic discourse and social change” (Linton, 1998, p. 1). Disability studies is not a unified field of thought, but an interdisciplinary approach to exploring the phenomena of disability (Connor, 2008). The foundational tenets of disability studies include the notion that disability is a social construct in which the parameters of normal and abnormal are defined, naming oppression as ableism in which people with disabilities are discriminated, calling for the use of appropriate terminology when describing people with disabilities, denouncing the notion that disability is something to overcome, and the depiction of people with disabilities as victims (Linton, 1998). Disability studies offers a framework that shifts the focus off predominately medical, psychological, charitable, and legal perspectives to perspectives inclusive of historical, social and cultural realms of existence (Connor, 2008).

Discussion regarding the social implications of disability became mainstream topic during the 1960s, which led to the development of labeling theory (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). Labeling theory critiques society’s tendency to create deviant individuals by placing labels on people based on perceived differences (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). Labeling theory defines the term, “deviant” as the resulting action caused by the act of placing a label on an individual. The deviant behavior the individual engages in is due to the act of being labeled by society and the isolation, which follows this act (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). In essence, the individual becomes a deviant because society imposed this role on a specific person or group. Goffman (1961) analyzed the negative effects of stigma on labeled individuals (Goffman, 1961 as referenced in Danforth & Gabel, 2006). Goffman (1961) described stigma as a condition with the sole purpose

of devaluing a person's identity (Goffman, 1961 as referenced in Danforth & Gabel, 2006, p. xv).

The idea of treating individuals with intellectual disabilities as someone to be cared for rather than someone to be housed and isolated from society emerged in the late 1960s (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). As a result the concept of normalization principle emerged (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). The normalization principle was defined as the “means of making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life in which they are close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream life” (Nirje, 1969 as cited in Danforth & Gabel, 2006, p. xvi). The concepts of labeling and stigma were introduced to the field of education in the late 1960s through work such as Dunn's 1968 seminal article, “Special education for the mildly retarded - Is much of it justifiable?” and the 1969 report titled “The Six-Hour Retarded Child,” which questioned the integrity and legitimacy of special education programs (Danforth & Gabel, 2006).

During the early to mid 1970s, critiques on labeling in special education programs shifted from a focus on individuals with higher functioning intellectual disabilities and other disabilities to discussion regarding the social construction of intellectual disabilities and other disability labels (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). Disability studies in education is “the use and application of disability studies assumptions and methods to educational issues and problems” (Gabel, 2005, p. 10). Furthermore, “disability studies in education scholars investigate what disability means; how it is interpreted, enacted, and resisted in the social practices of individuals, groups, organizations, and cultures” (Danforth & Gabel, 2008, p. 5). Disability studies in education fosters an emancipatory method that positions people with disabilities as experts while valuing their active engagement in the research process (Gabel, 2009). Emancipatory research is lead by

the oppressed, in this case people with disabilities, and should foster social change (Gabel, 2005).

Danforth and Gabel (2008) posed ten vital questions for disabilities studies in education researchers. One of their questions helped me shape my theoretical framework, “How can disability studies in education contribute to the ongoing educational conversation about race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class, sexual orientation and other social constructs?” (Danforth & Gabel, 2008, p. 12). This question challenged me to expand my conceptual framework to include Critical Race Theory.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) shaped my understanding of the role of race and racism in public education. Critical race theory is an interdisciplinary theoretical and analytic framework that applies critical theory at the intersection of race, law and power structures. In the mid-1970s, scholars, such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado and Kimberlé Crenshaw, concerned with race inequality contributed to the development of critical race theory (Tate IV, 1997). Although heavily influenced by the works of many scholars (e.g., Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, Antonio Gramsci) (Cole, 2009), critical race theory was developed using insights from critical legal studies (CLS) and radical feminism (Cole, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tate, IV, 1997). Critical legal studies was founded in 1976 by a group of law teachers, students, and practitioners at the Conference on Critical Legal Studies in response to the “law’s role in protecting hierarchy and class” (Cole, 2009, p. 9). Critical legal studies was criticized for neglecting to include race and racism in the analyses of liberalism (Cole, 2009). Although heavily critiqued by those developing critical race theory, the construct of “legal indeterminacy, the idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome” was borrowed from CLS (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5).



Analysis of the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, patriarchy and other types of domination was borrowed from radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Together, insight from critical legal studies and radical feminism influenced critical race theorists to adopt a more color-conscious analysis of racial issues that keep people of color in subordinate positions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). “What every black American knows, and whites should try to imagine, is how it feels to have an unfavorable-and unfair-identity imposed on you every waking day” (Hacker, 2003, p. 28). Critical race theory problematizes this unfavorable and unfair identity. Central to critical race theory are implications of the social construction of race and racism.

### **Social Construction of Race and Racism**

The foundation of understanding critical race theory must begin by acknowledging the prevalence of race and racism in our daily contexts. Race and racism are powerful sociocultural constructs based on white supremacy in the United States (Feagin, 2010; Kaplan, 2011; Smedley & Smedley, 2012). Race as a sociocultural phenomenon has only existed within the last several hundred years, evolving from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries (Smedley & Smedley, 2011). Kaplan (2011) argues that race is a “shallow, hollow concept that evolved to justify and perpetuate the status of privileged light-skinned people” (p. 15). Smedley and Smedley (2011) describe race as

a shorthand term for, as well as a symbol of, a “knowledge system,” a way of knowing, perceiving, interpreting the world, and of rationalizing its contents (in this case, other human beings) in terms that are derived from previous cultural-historical experience and reflect contemporary social values, relationships, and conditions. (p. 13)

Race as a worldview, ideologies that define race, include five parameters (Smedley & Smedley, 2011). The parameters include (1) discrete classification of human groups, (2) hierarchical ranking of the groups, (3) physical characteristics determine inner realities such as intelligence, (4) racial qualities are inherited, and (5) fixed racial status based on God's work (Smedley & Smedley, 2011, pp. 25-26). Racial categories used by the United States Census Bureau between 1790 to 1920 changed to match current beliefs about race during particular periods of time (Lewis, 2006). The continued expansion of racial groups challenges the cultural norm that race is a fixed parameter.

Racism in the United States began as a means to justify domination and exploitation of natives and slaves (Kaplan, 2011). Racism is complex phenomenon of ideas and attitudes that translate into actions of prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry (Hacker, 2003). Racial prejudice and discrimination operate in concert as the primary components of racism (Feagin, 2010). Within this context, discrimination is an act performed with the purpose of exclusion and prohibition that creates negative notions of otherness of individuals based on race, skin color, or cultural connection (Feagin, 2010).

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used critical race theory to critique educational inequity through an analysis of race and property rights. This seminal piece on CRT and education called for educational researchers to analyze the "social-structural and cultural significance of race in education" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50). The rationale for a critical race theory analysis of the inequalities in education rests on the idea that blacks and whites should have equal access to the same educational resources and learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This notion developed as a result of critical legal theory's critique of

desegregation litigation that followed the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Bell, 2004). The reality is that public schools are still largely segregated with most inner city schools occupied by economically oppressed African American and Latino students, and suburban schools occupied by wealthier white students (Lewis, 2006).

Critical race theory has been used to analyze the complexities of race, racism and educational inequalities in P-20 education for African American students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Specifically, critical race theory in education “challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 63). Critical race theorists hold basic assumptions that race, history, voice, interpretation, and praxis matters (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2010). Race matters because it permeates all facets of society, including public schooling (Zamudio et al., 2010). History matters because knowing and understanding history contextualizes contemporary racism (Zamudio et al., 2010). Voice in the form of narratives and counterstories matters because it is needed to challenge the dominant of master narrative (Zamudio et al., 2010). Interpretation of issues related to race and racism requires a multidisciplinary approach (Zamudio et al., 2010). Praxis matters because it is imperative critical race theorists move from theory to action, social justice (Zamudio et al., 2010).

Researchers may draw on one or more of the seven tenets of CRT to analyze issues that impact African American students (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Rector-Aranda, 2016). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) used prominent tenets of CRT (counterstorytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, critique of liberalism) as an analytic tool to understand how race and racism impacted the educational experiences of two African American

students who attended an elite, predominately White, independent school. Accounts of their experiences at this school include descriptions that align with central tenets of CRT, such as a school culture that ignores or downplays incidences of racism (permanence of racism) and black-white student relationships built on strong athletics of black student (interest convergence).

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) suggest educational researchers remain critical of the role of race and racism, fully critique race and racism using multiple tenets of CRT, and consider how their research promotes social justice and social change.

Rector-Aranda (2016) used three tenets of CRT in education- racism is normal, whiteness as property, and interest convergence- to problematize racial inequity in public schooling and reform. They argue that inequity in education is masked through many practices such as, high-stakes testing used for gatekeeping, disproportionately greater discipline for minority students and blaming parents for student failure (Rector-Aranda, 2016). In education, critical race theorists use “CRT’s ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001, p. 3). On this account, Rector-Aranda (2016) provided six realistic actions students and educational stakeholders should utilize to challenge the racial discourse in education: (1) classroom dialogue relevant to students of color, (2) recruitment of faculty that reflects the student body, (3) assessment that values growth over standardized achievement, (4) democratic school practice and policies, (5) participatory research with a social justice agenda, and (6) analyses of racial disparities in policies and laws accompanied with action toward remedy (p. 12). In the two studies described above, CRT was used for methodology (counternarrative) and analyses through critique of school-based issues using tenets of CRT.

Although critical race theory can be used as an interdisciplinary theoretical and analytic framework in the field of education, I felt a void in the research that problematized race at the intersection of disability. I found answers to questions specific to the general African American student population as shown in the two studies above, but in my work as a special educator, often of predominately African American males with disabilities, it is vital I study the issues that impact this particular student population. In my search to understand how disability may have impacted the participant's educational experiences, I found that DisCrit, which I describe in detail in the next section, provided a way of understanding the complex phenomenon of race and disability.

### **DisCrit**

Disability studies as a field has been criticized for its initial focus on White people, excluding other identities and forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ageism (Adams et al., 2013; Bell, 2011; Jarman, 2011). "If Disability Studies as a field had taken a reflexive look at itself at some point, particularly with regard to its failings in examining issues of race and ethnicity, there might not be such a glaring dearth of disability-related scholarship by and about disabled people of color" (Bell, 2010, p. 409). There is a gap in disability literature related to the lived experiences of people with disabilities and the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and socioeconomic status (Blanchett, Klinger, & Harry, 2009; Klinger, Blanchett, & Harry, 2007; McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007).

Similarly, critical race theory scholars have been criticized for insufficiently addressing issues that impact students of color with disabilities, such as overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Connor, 2008). Theoretical and political efforts to problematize one system of oppression without simultaneously problematizing others are incomplete and

potentially oppressive (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). Delgado and Stefancic (2001), described intersectionality as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various setting” (p. 51). They pose the question, “What happens when an individual occupies more than one of these categories...” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51). To further understand these intersections from a theoretical standpoint, I turn to DisCrit, which draws on the interconnected tenets of disability studies and critical race theory.

The tenets of DisCrit align with critical theory in which the principles are “designed to clarify the power relationships and forms of oppression existing in a society or culture, and thus to serve as a guide to efforts to emancipate its members from those forms of oppression” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 637). DisCrit aligns with a transformative emancipatory paradigm in which reality is socially constructed and there is an emphasis on historical, social, and cultural factors (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Researchers in the areas of critical race theory and disability studies have rarely studied the relationships between these two oppressed groups within educational contexts (Erevelles, Kanga, & Middleton, 2006). DisCrit combines tenets of critical race theory and disability studies. The theory is grounded in the “interdependent constructions of race and dis/ability in education and society in the United States” (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013, p. 1). Race and disability are common in that they are “socially constructed categories that are constantly contested and redefined... used to define, segregate, and oppress” (Gillborn, 2015, p. 280).

DisCrit consists of seven core tenets (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). The first tenet focuses on the interdependence of racism and ableism used to reinforce notions of normalcy (Annamma et al., 2013). American history is grounded in an oppressive system of ableism and

racism (Gabel, 2005; Hehir, 2005; Kaplan, 2011; Koppelman & Goodhart, 2011; Smedley, 2011). Ableism and racism are intersecting processes of exclusion and oppression (Jarman, 2011). In education, normalcy is prevalent as all non-White students are compared to their White counterparts. “For many, membership in multiple marginalized groups is an experience of being a minority within a minority or of an existence where one is marginalized even from the margins of society” (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007, p. 148). To understand variables that affect learning, special education researchers must examine disability in sociocultural contexts including those related to race, class, culture, and language (Sorrells, Webb-Johnson, & Townsend, 2004).

Multiple identities should not be compared, contrasted, or ranked in ways that downplay differences and complicated intersections (Jarman, 2011). The second tenet values multidimensional identities and problematizes singular interpretations of identity (Annamma et al., 2013). This is relevant to the educational experiences of African American males who hold multiple identities in race, gender, and ability. For example, an African American child with an emotional behavior disorder would more likely be placed in a self-contained classroom setting than their white peer (Blanchett, Klinger & Harry, 2009).

The third tenet “emphasizes the social construction of race and ability and the material and psychological impact of being labeled as raced or dis/abled” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). In education, African American students with disabilities are continuously marginalized and excluded from the general education curriculum due to perceived notions about race and ability. Furthermore, overrepresentation of minorities in special education could be attributed to deep-rooted stereotypes associated with the belief of inferior intelligence of minority groups (Blanchett et al., 2009). Educational stakeholders must rethink how they perceive and respond to

the needs of African American male students with disabilities. Teachers of African American male students with disabilities in K-12 regardless of student placement must provide quality educational opportunities that support self-determined behaviors including self-advocacy and independence (Banks, 2017). Furthermore, teachers should create environments where students are not burdened with disproving stereotypes related to race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status (Banks, 2017).

The psychological impact of being labeled as raced or disabled is complicated by racial microaggressions and metastereotypes. Racial microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Microaggressions are difficult to identify and manifest in three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation (Sue et al., 2007). Microassaults reflect individual acts of racism that reflect more overt conscious and deliberate acts. Microinsults are subtle unconscious slights unknown to the perpetrator, but convey an insulting message to the person of color. Microinvalidation exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of people of color. In public education, racial microaggressions shape the educational experiences of African American and Hispanic students as socio-cultural messages of inferiority affect students’ well being (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). Discipline and zero-tolerance policies, academic tracking policies, and hegemonic curriculum all serve as district and school level microaggressions (Allen et al., 2013). Deficit based teacher perceptions and dispositions serve to perpetuate racial microaggressions (Allen et al., 2013). “The construct of metastereotype refers to the perceived stereotype that a group of individuals believes or assumes that others hold about a target group” (May & Stone, 2010, p. 485). Metastereotypes



have been found to negatively impact individuals with disabilities causing them to question and doubt their intelligence and abilities, which as a result may lead to poorer performance (May & Stone, 2010).

The material impact of being labeled as raced or disabled is described in an analysis of American public schools. Specifically, ableism and racism have created a structure in American public schools resulting in at least four subsystems (Blanchett, 2006; Connor, 2008). The first subsystem is designed primarily for white students perceived as normal or without disabilities (Blanchett, 2006). These students typically have access to a vigorous college-preparatory curriculum. The second subsystem is designed for disproportionately African American and other minorities perceived to be normal or without disabilities (Blanchett, 2006). These students typically have limited educational opportunities as they often attend high-poverty schools with limited-skilled staff, high staff turnover rates, limited access to technology and other limitations that impact attainment of success. The third subsystem is designed for children who are disproportionately white, having a disability and may be perceived as not normal (Blanchett, 2006). These students are more likely to be included in general education classes at schools described in the first subsystem and will graduate from high school with a regular diploma. The fourth subsystem is designed for in children who are disproportionately African American and other minorities, having a disability and may be perceived as not normal (Blanchett, 2006). These students are more likely to be excluded from general education programs at schools described in the second subsystem and receive a certificate of completion/attendance rather than a regular diploma.

The fourth tenet privileges marginalized voices often ignored in research (Annamma et al., 2013). These voices are gathered through the documentation of counternarratives.

Counternarrative is used to document the autobiographical and biographical stories of people whose experiences are often not told, overlooked, ignored, or dismissed in the dominant literature (Connor, 2008; Sherwood, 2009). The counternarrative is designed to shed light on the lived experiences of individuals in oppressed groups while contributing to co-construction of non-discriminatory educational policy (Conor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016; Banks & Hughes, 2013). The counternarrative challenges deficit-based paradigm regarding the educational and lived experiences of African American males (Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Mutua, 2008). The counternarrative can be used to expose, analyze, and challenge dominant discourse on disability, race, and other indicators of oppression. The counternarrative encourages the reader to understand how students of color with disabilities respond to ableism and racism they encounter in their educational experiences (Conor et al., 2016). The voice of the participant in the current study will add to the quantitative data and statistical comparisons most frequently generated for African American males with disabilities.

Counternarratives in educational research have been used to document and problematize issues that impact the African American male student population, such as racism and ableism (Banks & Hughs, 2013; Harper, 2015; Howard, 2008, 2013), and zero-tolerance policies (Caton, 2012). The counternarrative is a first-person oral history used to challenge systems of oppression including those within public education (Mutua, 2008). Counternarratives identify how cultural groups and individuals are marginalized and the practices used to justify exclusion and subjugation in dominant stories (Mutua, 2008). Furthermore, counternarratives interrogate binary comparisons across groups, identifies practices that maintain hegemony, and challenges narratives that attempt to characterize, define, and or claim to represent all (Mutua, 2008).

It is important to clarify that the purpose of this tenet is not to give voice in terms of the researcher's interpretation of the counternarrative, but give voice to the participant's interpretation of the counternarrative (Connor et al., 2016). The educational research on African American males with disabilities is often overshadowed by a master narrative that focuses on underachievement, disengagement, and attrition (Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000). The counternarrative incites activism that challenges the master narrative (Connor et al., 2016).

The fifth tenet "considers legal and historical aspects of race and dis/ability and how they have been used separately or combined to deny the rights of some citizens" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). Research of the cradle- or school-to-prison pipeline in education analyzes the historical aspects of race and ability and how these are used to maintain an ideology of deficit when discussing the needs and outcomes of African American students. Youth of color are negatively impacted by race-neutral education policies that work to maintain educational inequalities through subjective disciplinary consequences (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014). Students are funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline when they deviate from the norm (Annamma et al., 2014). The school-to-prison pipeline fosters interconnected consequences when a student deviates from the norm; subjective disciplinary actions, referral and placement in special education, and placement in juvenile justice (Annamma et al., 2014; Rumberger & Losen, 2016; Ferri & Connor, 2014; Fenning & Rose, 2007). "Across the nation, 25% of Black students with disabilities were suspended out-of-school at least once in 2009–2010, a rate higher than every other racial/ethnic group and 16% higher than White students with a disability" (Losen & Gillespie, 2012 as cited in Skiba, Arredondo, Gray, & Rausch, 2016, p. 23).

In-school and out-of-school suspensions can lead to increased student disengagement, resulting in poor achievement and dropout (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). In-school

and out-of-school suspension in high school by the 10th grade correlates to lower graduation rates for all students, but most detrimental for African American students who are disproportionately higher disciplined when compared to their white peers (Rumberger & Losen, 2016). Low-graduation-rate high schools “tend to enroll larger populations of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income students...” (DePaoli, Balfanz, & Bridgeland, 2016, p. 10). A graduation rate gap exists between subgroups - white and Black and Hispanic/Latino students, low-income and non-low-income, and students with and without disabilities (DePaoli et al., 2016). Scholars argue that color-blind and race-neutral discipline policies should be admonished and new policy and practices created that explicitly address race and racism (Annamma, et al., 2014; Caton, 2012).

The existence of racial disparities present in special education identification, disability label assignment as well as disciplinary actions and students in the juvenile justice system have been found to be a major theme in recent literature (Anamma et al., 2014; Jackson, 2016; Skiba et al., 2016). For example, in Anamma, Morrison, and Jackson’s (2014) case study investigating the academic outcomes and contributing factors to outcomes for children of color attending schools in Colorado, the findings identified racial disparities present in school discipline, special education placement, and in the juvenile justice system. In addition, the findings show the presence of school to prison indicators across urban and rural areas (Annamma et al., 2014).

The sixth tenet “recognizes whiteness and ability as property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). Furthermore, individuals who are able to claim whiteness benefit from a larger share of economic resources compared to non-whites (Connor et al., 2016). This diversion of resources based on whiteness increases the likelihood of

academic success (Connor et al., 2016). Ability and whiteness are instituted as property in public schools through practices of exclusion related to segregated classrooms and schools, disproportionate number of students labeled with disabilities, deficit-based remedial curriculum, low academic tracking, unequal distribution of resources, and disproportionate discipline practices (Annamma, Boele, Moore, & Klinger, 2013; Ferri & Connor, 2014). These practices of exclusion are in place to benefit more privileged students, schools, and communities. In education, this occurs across history as decisions made for marginalized groups are considered and enacted only to benefit or have little impact on the needs of white, middle class students and families.

The seventh tenet “urges activism and supports all forms of resistance” (Annamma, et al., 2013, p. 11). This tenant cautions against the sole use of marches, boycotts, sit-ins, or other traditional means to protest social injustices due to the high probability of excluding individual with disabilities from these activities (Connor et al., 2016). Through the inclusion of theory as a tool to address inequality in education, individuals with disability are afforded the opportunity to participate in activism (Connor et al., 2016).

Scholars have analyzed education laws and policy using both disability studies and critical race theory (Beratan, 2006; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Critical in these analyses is the process of identifying how both institutional ableism and racism manifest covertly at the detriment of students. For example, Beratan (2006) argued that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act designed to address inequities in education for students with disabilities has in fact created a hierarchical system where students are often segregated according to ability as well as overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Watts and Erevelles (2004) analyzed the construct of the deviant student, which is typically perceived as minority students

from low-income communities. They argue that minority students are not inherently violent, but are victims of oppressive material conditions (Watts & Erevelles, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

In this study, I used the lived experiences of the participant as a means to disrupt the master narrative that positions African American male students with disabilities as inferior when compared to their White counterparts. An expected outcome of the current study was to allow the context presented from the interviews and other data to inform the selection of relevant tenets of DisCrit.

DisCrit theorizes and examines the intersection of ableism and racism as well as other forms of oppression that impact people of color with disabilities. DisCrit includes several themes that form the perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy. DisCrit challenges the dominant deficit discourse on disability, ableism, race, racism, and disability and racial stereotyping as it relates to education by examining theory and practice used to systematically oppress people of color with disabilities. DisCrit as it relates to education encourages educational stakeholders to identify and work toward the elimination of racism and ableism in education as a catalyst to eliminate oppression in education policy, pedagogy, curriculum, and research agendas.

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) challenge educational stakeholders to ask the following questions analyzed through the critical lens of critical race theory in order to challenge racial stereotyping and deficit discourse:

1. How do educational institutions function to maintain racism, sexism, and classism?
2. How do Students of Color resist racism, sexism, and classism in educational structures, processes, and discourses?

3. How can educational reforms help end racism, sexism, and classism? (p. 3)

I would extend these vital questions to include ableism in the current context of this study: How do educational institutions function to maintain ableism, racism and other interconnected forms of oppression? How do students of color with disabilities resist ableism and racism in educational structures, processes, and discourses? How can educational reform help end ableism, racism, and other interconnected forms of oppression?

## **CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The specific goal of this literature review was to examine and synthesize the literature to gain a better understanding of educational factors that may impact the academic matriculation of African American males students with disabilities in public education and higher education. In order to create a holistic account for the educational experiences of African American males with disabilities, I reviewed literature from a variety of fields including general and special education, and school discipline. I will close the chapter with a summary that further reinforces the need to include narrative studies of African American male students with disabilities in the larger body of educational research.

### **Student Perceptions through Narrative**

Using qualitative methods, Connor (2008) investigated the lived experiences of eight Black and Latino working-class urban youth, between the ages of 18 and 23 who were labeled as learning disabled during their public school education and received special education services. His work sought to reveal what these participants think, feel, and know in relation to the intersections of disability, race, class and the special education system. His work was guided by the theoretical and methodological tenets of disability studies, critical race theory, LatCrit theory, and social class theory. Each has a shared focus of moving beyond a framework of oppression through social justice, ethics, and privileging marginalized voices often ignored in research



(Connor, 2008). Participants experienced limitations imposed upon them further exacerbated by having multiple marginalized identities. Participants often felt the need to prove they are not a burden to society while recognizing they are at a disadvantage in society. They saw this as potentially reducing their chances of success both in school and post-school in relation to employment. Participants identified how race, disability, and class subjected them to identification and placement in restrictive environments in public school when compared to their White, non-disabled, middle-class counterparts. Despite acknowledgement of systemic limitation, participants report their ability to navigate within dominant discourses. Connor (2008) offered many questions to contemplate and implications for research. Those related to the current research project are focused on ways in which race, class and other markers of identity become integral to all research questions, and ways in which researchers can collaborate with people with disabilities to document their lived experiences.

Counterstorytelling can be utilized as a foundation for marginalized individuals to engage in open discussion of oppressive social and political systems. In Howard's (2008) study of the K-12 experiences of 10 African American males, counterstorytelling and Critical Race Theory was used to assess how the participants gain a sense of personal perspectives regarding the role race and racism played in their overall school experience. Their engagement in counterstorytelling allowed them to state how race, sex and class intersect to create an educational system that is rarely ever fair or equitable. Findings from this study suggest the need for K-12 systems to be more cognizant of the systematic role race and racism play in the school academic experiences of African American males. This study displayed the use of counterstorytelling as a tool not only intended to shed light on the lived experiences of one particular set of students; it can be also be

utilized as a means for all non-privileged voices to contribute greatly to the co-construction of non-discriminatory educational policy.

In Harper's (2015) study of 12 African American and Latino male students attending urban high schools, visual counternarratives were used to examine and counter the deficit framework often used to describe their educational experiences and outcomes. The schools in which these students are educated are typically described as places of despair when describe in a deficit framework. The participants' counternarrative described their schools as safe havens where students are respectful, eager to learn, intelligent, goal-oriented, and driven toward post-school success.

#### **Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome**

To help understand the root of disproportionate educational experiences between African American and non-African American students, educators must carefully examine the educational experiences some African American male students encounter at an early age, specifically during their elementary schooling. Kunjufu (2004) describes the phenomenon of the fourth grade failure syndrome in which many African American male students encounter systematic oppression that may negatively impact their educational and life experiences thereafter.

Kunjufu describes how European Americans have conspired to destroy African Americans by damaging their lives through white-male supremacy, and institutional and overt racism (Kunjufu, 2004). African American males endure systematic oppression beginning at childhood to minimize their threat to White-male supremacy (Kunjufu, 2004). To suppress the threat, institutional racism is used in social services and public schools during childhood and adulthood to socially, physically and politically displaces African American males (Kunjufu,

2004). The impact of current racial oppression against African Americans has been compared to the path of other endangered species (Kunjufu, 2004).

Kunjufu (2004) argues that public schools are integral in the destruction of African American males. He describes how African American males exhibit intellectual regression during their fourth grade year of school, which he calls the Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome (Kunjufu, 2004). The Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome is described as the decline in achievement of African American males as they transition from primary to intermediate grades, particularly between the ages of nine and thirteen. These students begin school with enthusiasm and interest, however this is replaced with passivity and apathy by intermediate years (Morgan, 1980 as referenced in Kunjufu, 2004, p. 9). Kunjufu studied this phenomenon by comparing the performance of 20 randomly selected African American male student Iowa Reading Test scores in third and seventh grades. He found that 14 students scores decreased, two students scores remained the same, and only four students scores improved (2004). Kunjufu attributes the decline to a multitude of factors both related to the processes of active and passive conspirators. These factors include decline in teacher expectations, lack of understanding the learning styles of African American males, lack of African American male teachers and role models, decline in nurturance, decline in parental involvement, and increase in peer pressure (Kunjufu, 2004). Active conspirators believe and practice white-male supremacy and engage in overt and or institutional racism. Passive conspirators include African Americans who engage in self-hatred, and the miseducation and apathy of their own children.

Based on the fourth grade failure syndrome, Warren (2007) conducted a descriptive and explanatory study that examined low-income fourth grade students' perceptions of academic achievement in relation to student self-concept, parental support, and teacher attitudes. The

researcher defined the fourth grade failure syndrome as a “withdrawal of interest by children in this age group from school related activities with resultant academic failure” (Warren, 2007, p. 5). The theoretical framework applied to the study included Gibson’s Theory of Direct Perception, The Social Reproduction Theory, and Ogbu’s Cultural Inversion Theory. The sample included 98 fourth grade students between the ages of eight to eleven (forty-six female, fifty-two male, eighty-two African American, one white, five Hispanic, and 10 other). Of the data set, 77% of the students had above average actual student achievement and 19% had below average actual academic achievement. The majority of the students in the study perceived their parent and teacher as having a positive attitude towards them and their academic achievement. In addition, the majority of the students indicated a positive perception of self-concept. The researcher found that these factors are interrelated and low-income status does not always define the attitudes and expectations of African American parents.

Stallings (2011) conducted a phenomenological study to determine if specific factors can be identified that contribute to fourth grade failure among African American male students living in urban areas, specifically in the subject of reading. Data was collected using in-depth interviews. The participants included five students between the ages of 10 and 12, grades five and six. The data analysis revealed the participants understood the importance of reading, but would be more motivated to read materials of choice and material that reflects their lives (urban, lots of action, realistic). The participants were also motivated to read when female classmates took interest. Based on data analysis, the researcher encourages a shift from traditional reading materials to higher interest reading materials to improve academic outcomes (Stallings, 2011).

To counter the Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome, Kunjufu (2004) strongly encourages a moratorium on African American students entering special education classes, promotes African

American male classrooms taught by African American men, encourages teachers to teach to African American male learning styles through cooperative learning, use of an Africentric curriculum in the classroom, increased parental involvement in schools and the community, and less time socializing in the streets for African American males (2004). Furthermore, he implores educational stakeholders to carefully examine the causes of the academic achievement gap.

### **Achievement Gap**

Despite the development of educational policy such as No Child Left Behind (2002) designed to address the achievement gap between African American and white students in public education, the gap persists and continues to widen (Kaplan, 2007). The achievement gap “demonstrates that average group differences in achievement test performance (e.g., reading) are persistent and pervasive between middle- to high-SES Whites and low-SES students of color, with the former consistently outperforming the latter” (Valencia, 2015, p. xiii). Other hypotheses are used to explain the academic achievement gap. Is there a true academic achievement gap or an opportunity gap, funding gap, teacher quality gap, class size gap, housing gap, curriculum gap, time on task gap, conflict between pedagogy and learning styles gap, racial teacher gap, lack of respect gap, income gap, critical thinking gap, lack of appreciation for African American culture gap, tracking gap, resource gap, expectation gap, teacher efficacy gap, relationship gap, or community gap (Kunjufu, 2012; Love, 2004). To remedy the academic achievement gap the curriculum must be culturally relevant and there must be congruence between pedagogy and learning styles (Kunjufu, 2012).

### **Disproportionate Student Placement**

The disproportionate placement of students of a specific group in special education programs occurs when that the group is represented in such programs in a greater percentage

than their percentage in the entire school population (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Since its inception, African American males have been disproportionately represented in special education and underrepresented in advanced placement, honors, and programs for the gifted and talented (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Kunjufu 2012). African American students continue to outnumber other subgroups of students who are labeled with intellectual disability and emotional behavioral disorder (Lawson et al., 2002). Additionally, African American students are more likely than their peers to be placed in more restrictive special education classes and residential placement.

African American students are overidentified for special education services due to several compounding factors including insufficient resources, lack of qualified teachers, culturally insensitive curriculum, misidentification and misuse of norm-referenced and standardized tests, and inequities in special education referral and placement processes (Lawson et al., 2002). Overrepresentation of minorities in special education could be attributed to deep-rooted stereotypes associated with the belief of inferior intelligence of minority groups (Blanchett, Klinger & Harry, 2009). The disproportionate placement of African American males in special education may be the result of unconscious racism (Green, 2008). Ableism and racism have created a structure in American public schools resulting in at least four subsystems (Blanchett, 2006; Connor, 2008). The first subsystem is designed primarily for white students perceived as normal or without disabilities (Blanchett, 2006). These students typically have access to a vigorous college-preparatory curriculum. The second subsystem is designed for disproportionately African American and other minorities perceived to be normal or without disabilities (Blanchett, 2006). These students typically have limited educational opportunities as they often attend high-poverty schools with limited-skilled staff, high staff turnover rates, limited access to technology and other limitations that impact attainment of success. The third subsystem

is designed for children who are disproportionately white, having a disability and may be perceived as not normal (Blanchett, 2006). These students are more likely to be included in general education classes at schools described in the first subsystem and will graduate from high school with a regular diploma. The fourth subsystem is designed for in children who are disproportionately African American and other minorities, having a disability and may be perceived as not normal (Blanchett, 2006). These students are more likely to be excluded from general education programs at schools described in the second subsystem and receive a certificate of completion/attendance rather than a regular diploma.

Kearns, Ford, and Linney (2005) conducted a mixed methods study to gain the perspectives of 151 mostly Caucasian and female school psychologists on the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education for students with mild disabilities. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that participants attributed three main factors most influential on African American underachievement in regular education and disproportionate representation in special education. These factors include lack of parental involvement and broadly defined cultural disadvantage, failures of regular and special education systems, and pressures from parents and teachers to place African American students in special education. The most influential factors identified were low parental involvement in education and cultural disadvantage. The factors identified as least influential included biased referrals from teachers, and parental pressure to place children in special education. The qualitative data revealed that some of the participants made prejudiced assumptions about student potential based on race and family background. In addition, the participants attributed high referral rates and disproportionate placement to poverty, general education teachers' lack of special education

training, student performance on high-stakes tests, negative student behaviors and lack of motivation, and denial of African American culture in schools.

Fergus (2010) examined six years of data across 30 school districts to identify the root causes of disproportionality. He found that disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic minority and low-income students in special education occur because of complex intersections that include gaps in curriculum and instruction implementation, inconsistent pre-referral process, and limited beliefs about ability. Without a well-articulated core curriculum and instructional program differentiated to accommodate a wide range of learners, students who do not meet the standardized requirements of proficiency often face pre-referral for special education. Without a consistent pre-referral process, general education teachers are more likely to misuse pre-referral teaching and learning strategies that has the potential to show evidence of student growth. When educational stakeholders have limited beliefs about students of color, special education is perceived as a means to fix struggling students who are not ready for school aligned with White middle-class normative standards. Fergus (2010) offers three suggestions to eliminating disproportionate representation in school districts, (1) development of a district/school-wide team to collect, examine, interpret, and outline core root causes of disproportionality, (2) conduct an analysis of disproportionality rates, and (3) conduct a survey of culturally responsive practices.

In Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent, and Ball's (2016) study investigating the intersectionality of race and class, DisCrit was used to examine the relationship between racism and ableism (Gillborn et al., 2016). Interview data from 62 Black middle class parents of Caribbean descent, was used to detail their struggle of navigating through Britain's special education identification and labeling process (Gillborn et al., 2016). The results detailed their struggle to advocate for



their children as they encountered unwelcomed disability labeling and their struggle to utilize disability labels for the purpose of securing access to educational resources (Gillborn et al., 2016). Furthermore, the interview data revealed that most of the parent participants had to utilize personal resources that were afforded to them as a result of their middle class status due to the school's' failure to meet the needs of their children (Gillborn et al., 2016). Although this study was performed in the United Kingdom, the key findings from this study correlate with U.S. studies that used DisCrit as a lens to analyze the factors affecting the school experiences of African Americans with disabilities.

Youth of color are negatively impacted by race-neutral education policies that work to maintain educational inequalities through subjective disciplinary consequences (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014). Students are funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline when they deviate from the norm (Annamma et al., 2014). The school-to-prison pipeline fosters interconnected consequences when a student deviates from the norm; subjective disciplinary actions, referral and placement in special education, and placement in juvenile justice (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014). Scholars argue that color-blind and race-neutral discipline policies should be admonished and new policy and practices created that explicitly address race and racism (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). To help decrease overidentification of African American students in special education schools must create a climate where educational stakeholders eliminate harmful biases, increase cultural competence in faculty-student relationships, and increase faculty parent relationships (Lawson et al., 2002).

## **Disproportionate Discipline**

The overuse of suspension in public schools, in particular middle and high schools is a civil rights issue that should encourage educational stakeholders to consider development and implementation of effective discipline practices (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Losen and Martinez (2013) developed a report is to raise awareness about the extent of the problem of high suspension rates, identify civil rights concerns, outline the impact of harsh discipline policies, and to share alternate discipline practices that promote time in school and academic engagement. Suspensions have negative student outcomes such as lower academic performance, higher rates of dropout, failures to graduate on time, decreased academic engagement, and future disciplinary exclusion. Over two million students were suspended during the 2009-2010 academic year. Severe disproportionality was found in the data set. The report found that 19.3% of students with disabilities were suspended, nearly triple the 6.6% suspension rate of students without disabilities. Racial disparities are blatant in the data set. The report found that 31% of African American students with disabilities were suspended, nearly triple the 12% rate of white students suspended. Furthermore, 36% of all African American male students with disabilities were suspended at least once. These students were typically suspended for minor infractions of school rules (tardiness, class disruption) and non-violent behavior.

Data collected for the 2011-2012 academic school year from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, Data Snapshot: School Discipline highlights the inequalities in race, ethnicity, and gender for suspension, expulsion, referrals to law enforcement, and restraint and seclusion (2014). The report found that while African American students account for 16% of student enrollment, they represent 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest. In

addition, students with disabilities represent 12% of the student population, but 58% are placed in seclusion or involuntary confinement, 75% are physically restrained at school to immobilize or to reduce ability to move freely. Furthermore, African American students with disabilities represent 19% of students served by IDEA, but 36% are restrained through use of a mechanical device or equipment designed to restrict the freedom of movement.

African American students and students with disabilities are suspended at a highly disproportionate rate compared to white students. In addition, Latino, girls of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students are disproportionately suspended (Skiba, Arredondo, Karega-Rausch, 2014). The issue of disproportionate discipline prompted The Discipline Disparities Collaborative, diverse group of nationally recognized educational stakeholders to develop a set of comprehensive briefing papers that address the problem of disciplinary disparities and provide support in creating equitable disciplinary procedures (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014).

Skiba, Arredondo, and Rausch (2014) generated a briefing paper that discussed what researchers have learned recently about disparities in discipline, reducing or eliminating these disparities, and further research and actions to address the issue. Unlike previous research grounded in a deficit framework with assigned general characteristics of students in poverty (Payne, 2005), researchers now acknowledge disparity in discipline are not fully explained by higher rates of student misbehavior and higher rates of poverty (Skiba et al., 2014). Researchers have found several factors that contribute to discipline disparity (Skiba et al., 2014). These factors include diversity in student and faculty body, classroom and administrative decision-making processes, and differential experiences and perceptions of school climate. New research findings indicate students of color and students with disabilities are at a greater risk for

suspension and expulsion, compounded by factors of race and gender. In addition, suspension is often the catalyst for events leading to short- and long-term consequences with the ultimate consequence of initiation to the juvenile justice system. Alternative placements exacerbate negative outcomes for students and have negative financial impact on communities. Correctional detention is harmful to youth, places them at a high risk for sexual victimization and suicide. In addition, incarcerated youth are more likely to reoffend resulting in high recidivism rates and return to incarceration within two-three years of release.

Caton (2012) gathered the counterstories of ten African American males who experienced the impact of zero-tolerance policies in high school. Consequently, all of the participants in the study dropped out of high school. The participants equate dropping out of school with punitive discipline policies, suspension, and expulsion. Four themes were identified as having a significant impact on the participants; school security measures created an inhospitable and hostile environment, weakened teacher-student relationships, excessive time spent in disciplinary spaces removed from the curriculum, and exclusion to preserve order (Caton, 2012). These exclusionary practices deny students services, such as academic and social intervention programs (Caton, 2012).

To counter discipline disparities, schools must engage in long-term change (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). This change should focus on preventive measures that include supportive relationships between educational stakeholder and students, high expectations and academic rigor for all students, culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching, and inclusive classrooms of fair treatment for all students (Gregory et al., 2014). In addition, educational stakeholders should engage in equity-driven conflict intervention which includes inquiry into the cause of conflict, recognition of student and family perspectives, problem-solving approaches to

discipline, and reintegration of students after conflict (Gregory et al., 2014). At the federal and state level, school districts should be required to collect, publicly report, and disaggregate discipline data annually according to not only race and disability, but to include data based on gender, English Language Learners, and sexual orientation (Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014). In addition, school districts need to match discipline policies to educational missions (e.g., increased graduation rates) and provide support and funding for alternative discipline programming (Losen et al., 2014).

Future research in the area of disparate discipline should examine under-researched groups, including LGBT students, English Language Learners, gender nonconforming students, Native American students, female students, and address inconsistent findings for Hispanic/Latino students (Skiba et al., 2014). Future research on the effects of increased law enforcement and security technologies should be examined for their role in discipline disparities (Skiba et al., 2014). We still need to know the outcomes of implementation of disciplinary gap-closing interventions (Skiba et al., 2014).

The outcome of disproportionate discipline often results in students who are pushed out of school for extended periods of time, often referred to the cradle- or school-to-prison phenomenon. The cradle- or school-to-prison phenomenon reflects gross inequalities in educational opportunities associated with race, class, disability status and LGBTQ students (Losen, 2013). Harsh school discipline policies and practices are designed to take out the “bad” students to give the “good” students and opportunity to learn. The “bad” students are typically students of color, students with disabilities, students of low socioeconomic status, and students with differing sexual orientation (Losen, 2013). These students often receive in- and out-of-school suspension, or expulsion pushing them out of the classroom for extended periods of time.

The students most often pushed out would most likely be successful with adequate resources (Losen, 2013).

Excessive suspensions and office referrals are primary factors related to occurrences of African American males' premature exit from a high school (Swilley, 2011). There is a higher proportion of African American dropouts compared to White dropouts (Swilley, 2011). Using narrative inquiry, the author found themes centered on being in trouble occurred more frequent than themes of emotional connections to school staff, students and the school environment. Other factors related to African American males higher likelihood for premature exit from school include minimal availability of human and material resources at home and the surrounding community. Solutions Not Suspensions (2013), grassroots initiative of students, educators, parents, and community leaders, joined by more than 50 partners and allies has called for a nationwide moratorium on out-of-school suspensions, implementation of constructive discipline policies, and increased resources that benefit schools, classrooms and communities. These resources include tutoring, mental health counseling, health care, tutoring, and mentoring to help students who have been adversely affected by disproportionate discipline policies and practices (Solutions Not Suspensions, 2013).

### **Higher Education**

In this interpretive case study, Banks (2014) investigated factors that compromised the transition process for three African American male college students with disabilities. One of the students spoke of teacher and student's stereotyping he encountered in high school due to his race and hearing disability. He was perceived as a student with no hope for gainful employment. It was through his strong self-determinism that he was able to successfully transition to college despite a lack of support from his high school teachers and counselor. The second student linked

his compromised college experience due a lack of support from high school teachers and counselors. Due to a lack of knowledge about his university's disability services, comprehending his reading assignments was a long and arduous task. This limited his ability to fully partake in extracurricular or social activities he watched his peers enjoy. He felt that timely access to university disability services would have helped him to complete his reading tasks sooner thereby allowing him to have a more robust college experience. He did not receive any university disability services support until his junior year, which he learned about from his former high school teacher during a visit to his former high school. He felt that timely instruction in his disability early during his high school years would have empowered him with the ability to access these services thereby improving the quality of his college experience. Perceptions of social ostracizing from peer group became a significant barrier for the third participant. He felt his acceptance of special education services for his reading disability would ruin his student athlete social status. His academic and post school trajectory did not change until a concerned coach helped him through the transition process. His anxiety regarding the stereotyping he encountered in high school decreased once learned about other student athletes who took similar paths to higher education. The author stressed the need for strong cultural and social support networks to provide adequate support for the development of self-advocacy skills and educational capital to foster successful transition for African American males with disabilities (Banks, 2014).

Counternarratives and access to university disability services at a historically Black university has the ability to impede the internalization of negative stereotypes associated with disability and Blackness for African American males (Banks & Hughes, 2013). In this phenomenological study, interviews from 12 African American male students with disabilities

were analyzed using a disability and Critical Race Theory framework. Participants endured constant reminders of their disability label through interactions with peers, overt and covert efforts by faculty to refuse accommodations, and deficit thinking of employers (Banks & Hughes, 2013). Furthermore, participants reported the endurance of stereotypes influenced by media images of young African American males that linked the onset of their disability to gun violence. Therefore, African Americans males with disabilities endure race and disability stereotypes concurrently. Participants indicated that counternarratives proved to be a useful tool to resist internalization of oppressive stereotypes. Successful use of the participant's disability label as motivation to succeed despite it was also reported. The final key finding was the positive influence of the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) on the overall academic success of the participants. Participants reported reduced stigmatizing of race and disability at the HBCU compared to the predominantly White university. The author stressed the need for further examination of relationship between university climate and perceptions of disability related to successful outcomes (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

Using a case study research design, Williams, Jr. (2011) examined the educational experiences and perceptions of three African American male students with learning disabilities enrolled in a university. The theoretical framework used to understand the participants' lived experiences included critical race theory and disability theory. Several themes emerged separated into three categories: experiences and perceptions, success, and compensation. Under the category of experiences and perceptions, the participants described experiences of being "in the corner" where they were often separated from their peers without disabilities and felt like outsiders in K-12 learning environments. In addition, the participants spoke to the importance of self-determination as it relates to their academic progress and success. Under the category of



success, the participants described the positive impact of learning environments that supported their learning styles and encouraged high levels of engagement. Under the category of compensation, the participants described the importance of individualized expression and the creation of new identities focused on their individuality, not their learning disabilities. Williams, Jr. (2011) concludes that the most essential need for African American students with learning disabilities in higher education is to actively engage in dialogue with education providers related to the impact of culture and learning styles.

In a qualitative study at two community colleges including 13 minority (African American and Latino) men and women with learning disabilities of low-income, researchers in the field of community psychology analyzed their perceptions to dominant oppressive cultural narratives (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). During individual interviews, participants were asked to examine dominant oppressive cultural narratives of learning disability and the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender, participant responses were resistant to oppression and sought liberation from oppression (McDonald et al., 2007). In particular, the participants described removing themselves from oppressive environments as well as reframing dominant cultural narrative to achieve liberation. The researchers urge social movements towards social change among multiple marginalized groups. In addition, the researchers encourage working with multiple marginalized youth to develop critical awareness with the intent of developing positive self-concepts and personal narratives that triumph over dominant oppressive narratives.

African American males with physical disabilities endure emotional and psychological challenges related to body image, self-esteem, and sexuality (McKenzie, 2014). Using generic qualitative methodology, interview data from 10 African American males with physical disabilities was analyzed identifying the impact of negative perceptions of disability. The author

found that participant perceptions from individuals outside of their trusted social network was fraught with negative stereotypes regarding body image and ableism.

The acquisition of Black Deaf community cultural wealth was instrumental in African Americans with Deafness' successful completion of undergraduate studies (Stapleton, 2014). Six former undergraduate students with Deafness were interviewed to gain a sense of their experiences as African American students with Deafness and how they endured racist and audist microaggressions throughout their college experience. Analysis incorporating critical race theory and critical Deaf theory, it was found that the participants' overall college experience was compromised by a lack of support, accommodations and resources. Some participants endured pressure to choose between Deafness or Blackness as primary social identity. Peer support provided a measure of relief in regards to quality of college life experiences. Faculty support was inconsistent among participants. Some faculty and mentors provided accommodations and while others were unwilling. Racial and audist microaggression events were evident when participants interacted with those who failed to include them in typical college events and support in academic and social settings. Black Deaf community cultural wealth was acquired through the familial and peer support. It was through the acquisition of this wealth that the participants were able to resist oppression from peers and university staff.

## **Conclusion**

Narrative research on academically successful African American males with disabilities is narrow. The majority of research on African American males with disabilities is grounded in a deficit model focused on the achievement gap, disproportionately higher discipline, and other factors focused on incongruent school, familial, financial and community resources to mitigate such challenges. Through the use of narrative research, the unique and highly relevant

perspectives of African American males with disabilities can provide insight into factors not only related to the systematic racist and ableist structures in schools, but also to highlight specific measures schools must take to alleviate these structures. A school's ability to provide the means for its staff to connect, understand and address issues and challenges facing the African American male student will result in practices that will no longer be guided by racist and ableist perspectives.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

“Telling our story enables us to be heard, recognized, and acknowledged by others” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 7). For this study I used narrative research to explore the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities. Narrative inquiry provides a departure from broad and generalized perceptions generated from quantitative research methods (Creswell, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Creswell (2013) classifies five major traditions of qualitative inquiry; these include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013). Narrative research explores the life of one or more individuals by gathering data through the collection of stories, documenting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those stories. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a lived phenomenon of several individuals who have shared the experience. Grounded theory involves studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals used to develop a theory grounded in data from the field based on the views of the participants. Ethnography is used to describe and interpret the shared patterns of a culture-shaping group. Case study is used to provide an in-depth understanding of a case or multiple cases related to an event, program, or activity. Based on the five major traditions of qualitative inquiry, narrative research is the best fit to investigate the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities.

Creswell (2013) describes four types of narratives; these include biographical study, autoethnography, life history, and oral history. In a biographical study the researcher writes and

records the experiences of the participant's life, in autoethnography the researcher is the subject of the study, in life history the research portrays an individual's entire life, and in oral history the researcher gathers the participant's personal reflections of events and their cause and effects (Creswell, 2013). I am drawn to oral history because it affords me the opportunity to investigate the relationships between race, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status in public and higher education and effects on the participant's lived experiences. Oral history research may include newer theoretical frameworks (DisCrit) for interpreting the narrative used to interrogate social justice issues (Janesick, 2010). Oral history research intentionally seeks to include the voices of marginalized and disenfranchised groups (minority, disabled), those who are typically excluded from mainstream documents (Janesick, 2010). As a result, ethical issues that impact those considered marginalized and disenfranchised may be brought to the forefront (Janesick, 2010).

Oral history as a research method helped me achieve my research objectives in two ways. First, documenting the oral history of an African American male with disabilities will add to the scarce number of existing narratives relevant to the relationships between race, gender, and disability in education K-12 public school and higher education. Second, the participant's oral history may influence the lives of similar persons, inform educational stakeholders, and help shape educational policy.

### **Research Questions**

This narrative study was designed to investigate the relationships among race, gender, disability, socioeconomic status and the school experiences of an African American male with disabilities in K-12 public and higher education. Understanding the experiences of African American males with disabilities in public and higher education beyond statistical data is vital to the success of this student population.

The research questions served as the foundation for documenting the participant's oral history. The study will address the following research questions:

1. What does the educational narrative of an African American male with disabilities analyzed through the lens of DisCrit tell us about how we teach this student population?
2. What can educational stakeholders change about their practices to support this student population?

### **Participant**

Participants in narrative research must be prepared and able to articulate their lived experiences over an extended duration of time (Creswell, 2013). Participant selection is purposive in narrative research. I am concerned with specific characteristics, attributes and experiences the participant has encountered as an African American male with disabilities. Participant selection is also opportunistic and convenient in that the participant and I have a previously established mentor-mentee relationship.

Booth and Booth (1996) describe the challenges of interviewing an inarticulate research participant. These challenges include inarticulateness, unresponsiveness, a concrete frame of reference, and difficulties with the concept of time. Inarticulateness is the inability to communicate with verbal fluency attributed to lack of self-esteem, learned habits of compliance, social isolation or loneliness, and the experience of oppression (Booth & Booth, 1996). Unresponsiveness is a limited ability to respond to some types of questions, in particular open-ended questions (Booth & Booth, 1996). Difficulty in generalizing experiences, thinking in abstract terms, and engaging in reflexivity is evidence of a concrete frame of reference (Booth & Booth, 1996). After having engaged in a mentor-mentee relationship with the participant for

approximately seven years and engaging in many conversations, I am certain the challenges described by Booth and Booth (1996) will not present a problem. If there are any challenges during the interview process, I will document these on the interview protocol and my researcher reflexive journal.

The participant (James) is a 31-year-old African American male with disabilities who completed K-12 public education and an undergraduate degree in interdisciplinary studies. He graduated from high school in 2005, community college in 2008, and with his undergraduate degree in 2010. He was raised in southeastern United States in an urban community. His mother was the primary caregiver to him and his younger brother. He attended public school and college in the same state. James currently works as a substitute teacher in a public school system as well as a youth counselor at a neighborhood recreation facility. He resides with his grandmother out of financial necessity. He was diagnosed with a hearing impairment in early childhood around the age of three. In first grade, he was labeled in public school with a primary disability label of emotional behavior disorder and secondary label of specific learning disability according to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) criteria. In higher education, he was registered with the students with disabilities office and received academic accommodations. For this study the participant has selected the pseudonym of James.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are vital in educational research. The safety of the participant and an honest and complete report of the participant's narratives are important (Creswell, 2013). Five issues must be addressed prior to the start of the research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984 as cited in Merriam, 2009). These issues include (1) clarifying the researcher's motives and intentions and the inquiry's purpose; (2) protection of the participant with use of pseudonym, (3) who will take

responsibility for making final decisions regarding the content of the study, (4) compensation (if any), and (5) logistics with regard to time, place, and number of interviews scheduled. I review these in detail below.

The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured prior to the start of research study. The participant received the written IRB consent form and verbal information regarding the process of the study prior to data collection (Appendix B). Specifically, James was informed of the purpose of the research, the type of data that will be collected, his role in data analysis and presentation of findings, a timeline for completion (eight-twelve weeks), right to confidentiality, and his option to withdraw at anytime during the research process. The information gathered in this research study will remain anonymous. The participant chose a pseudonym. All recorded research interviews, transcripts, and other data will only be accessible to the researcher, participant, and outside reviewer who is an expert in the qualitative research process.

This study required an interactive relationship between the researcher and participant. I was cognizant of issues of power and control in the research process and interpretation of results (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Nunkoosing, 2005). The research process legitimately involves the participant and includes his voice and viewpoints (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). The participant and I will take responsibility for making final decisions regarding the content of the study through validation checks in the analysis to ensure his voice was fully represented (Creswell, 2013).

### **Self as Researcher**

In my continued experience working with students with disabilities, I engaged in an ongoing process where I aimed to understand how my current and former students with



disabilities mitigate the academic, social, political, capital implications and challenges they continually face. As an educational researcher, I position myself through the contexts that shape what I know about public and higher education, my views as an individual educator in public and higher education, and my views as a researcher in public and higher education. “Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43). I used narrative inquiry to construct counternarratives/counterstories of those typically marginalized and disenfranchised due to race and or disability. Critical race theory uses legal storytelling and narrative analysis to validate the perspectives of people of color, to “invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Legal or counterstorytelling is akin to slave narratives in that they help Americans understand the effects of race and racism through challenging stereotypes and other preconceived notions about a particular group of people (Baszile, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The use of counterstorytelling and slave narratives can be traced back to the work of Black abolitionists in the 1830s and later civil rights movements. (Baszile, 2015). DisCrit builds on the work of critical race theory in documenting the lived experiences of people of color with disabilities to problematize being labeled as raced and disabled. This research study allowed the participant and I to gain a deeper understanding of his educational experiences as an African American male with disabilities.

As previously stated, James and I have a mentor-mentee relationship. James completed service-learning hours in my middle school special education classroom over the course of one semester several years ago. The participant and I developed a mentorship relationship in which he sporadically contacts me for information related to his educational pursuits and employment. I anticipated our previous relationship would enhance the quality of data collected because we

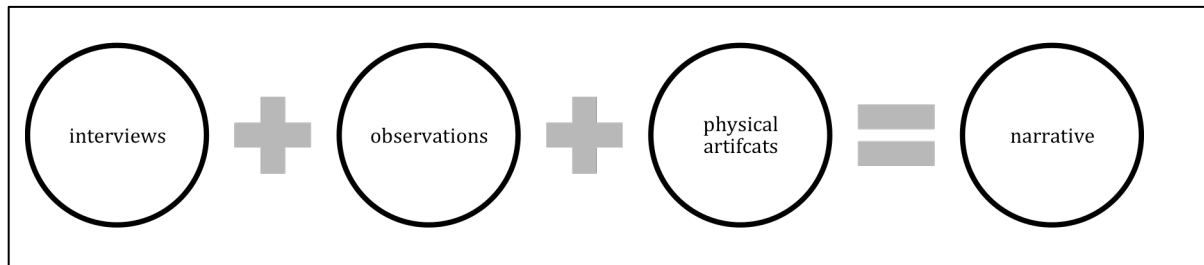
have already developed a level of trust that may lead to more in-depth insight into his educational experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although I anticipated a heightened level of trust, the participant was informed of his right to refuse to answer a question or have any data supplied withdrawn.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

There are multiple approaches to conducting narrative research (Creswell, 2013). The research study will be actively constructed in collaboration with the participant. The participant will be actively engaged in the research process. The most valuable part of the narrative study are the in-depth research conversations where I sought to understand the lived experiences of the participant and the meaning of these experiences to the participant. Three research interviews were conducted, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. I read through all the interview transcripts and collected documents to select codes and themes that were relevant to the research question and constructed a representation of the participant's life in various contexts. My interpretation of the data was shared with the participant during transcription and analyses as a means of member checking. The participant was encouraged to provide explanation or clarification of the analysis. The oral history spanned across the participant's life focused on K-12 education, higher education and post-higher education.

Multiple data sources and artifacts were collected to enhance understanding and analysis of information about the participant (see figure 1). Physical artifacts are primarily information or data about a life (e.g., lifeline), representations of a life (e.g., drawings, photographs), and related to the context within which the participant's life is situated (e.g., school records, employment records) (Cole & Knowles, 2001). I asked questions about the artifacts to gather meaning and understand the significance of the artifact to the participant's life. The participant's educational

experiences are generally defined as those experiences that occurred in elementary, middle, high school, and post-secondary education.



**Figure 1.** Narrative research includes a collection of interviews, observations and physical artifacts.

### **Interviews**

Multiple interviews were conducted (Cole & Knowles, 2001) over a period of seven weeks. The number of interviews changed based on newness of the information provided by the participant and whether the main questions had been thoroughly explored (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Initially, five interviews were planned. The number of interviews changed to three due to the participant's complex work schedules and the extended time allotted to the first interview, 2 hr 11 min. The interviews occurred in a location convenient and comfortable for the participant while also considering conditions such as noise level, traffic, and other potential distractors.

The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. I asked questions, listened, and requested clarification when needed to refine understanding of the participant's lived experiences. Specifically, I used responsive interviewing in this research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A preliminary interview protocol was developed. While the interview protocol is developed in advance, the questions were altered or varied to accommodate the participant's responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) (Appendix A). When interviewing people with disabilities the researcher must be aware of communication and other needs (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004).

The participant in this study does not present any communication or other needs requiring accommodation for the interviews.

Responsive interviewing is an approach to in-depth interviewing where researchers respond to and ask further questions during the interview based on the participant's responses rather than relying exclusively on predetermined questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). James and I developed and maintained an ongoing relationship as conversational partners (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Prior to the first interview, a tentative list of topics to explore were generated and shared with James in advance. During the interviews I included three primary kinds of questions: main questions, probes, and follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Main questions address the overall research problem and structure the interview; probes help manage the conversation and elicit detail; and follow-up questions explore and test ideas that emerge during the interview. Follow-up questions are critical to the model because they create the interaction with the interviewee responding to what the interviewee has shared (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviewing includes a set of procedures. In responsive interviewing the sequence is not fixed allowing the researcher to adjust questions during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These procedures include designing research questions, identifying the interviewee, determining the type of interview, use of recording procedures, design and use of interview protocol or interview guide, determining the place for conducting the interview, obtaining consent from the interviewee, and using effective interview procedures during the interview (Creswell, 2013). Broad, open-ended questions allow wide latitude in participant responses and yield rich insights (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Research questions were developed based on the set of guiding principles of reflexivity, relationality, mutuality, care, sensitivity, and respect. These principles should guide all aspects of

narrative research (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Relationality focuses on challenging hierarchical principles and practices that traditionally define the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The relationship is one that is based on mutual interest, complex, and fluid (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Mutuality focuses on researcher-participant collaboration as they jointly engage in the research process (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Empathy is developed through reflexivity. Reflexivity requires the researcher acknowledge (inter)subjectivity, operate from an ethic of care for research participant, and a heightened awareness of self, other, and self-other dialectic (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Care, sensitivity, and respect are qualities that must be infused into the researcher-participant relationship. These traits are concerned with the practical, the relational, and the personal elements of the researcher and participant (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Emotions expressed during the interviews may emerge. It is usually not necessary to avoid these moments in interviewing (Atkinson, 1998). People generally tell you when they feel uncomfortable and or want to skip over a certain part of the story. These moments can be noted in the interview protocol guide and later in the researcher reflexive journal. It is better to ask emotionally laden questions later in the interview process after the participant has become more comfortable talking about his life (Atkinson, 1998). I was certain to respect the boundaries of my participant.

Interviewing requires responsive listening (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In conversational style interviews a certain amount of researcher disclosure is essential to build a positive researcher-participant relationship (Cole & Knowles, 2010). Similar to teachable moments in education, the researcher is keen to “researchable” moments. These are serendipitous moments that often become turning points or moments of transformation that lead to significant

understanding during the research process (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Janesick, 2010). In addition, what the participant does not tell can be just as important as what they do tell provided the researcher is able to uncover omissions (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

An interview protocol guided each interview (Creswell, 2013). The interview protocol for subsequent interviews beyond the first changed based on preliminary data analysis and feedback from the participant, and in response to “researchable” moments. In addition, the interview protocol guide served as an organization tool focused on organization of headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the respondent (Creswell, 2013). Two of the three interviews were recorded digitally. The digital files and transcriptions of the files were saved on a computer that only I had access to and that is password protected. The participant’s anonymity is protected in the digital files. I took notes during the third interview in which I encountered technology issues. My digital recorder was not properly charged. The notes were as detailed as possible, often asking the participant to give me an additional moment to document his responses. The hand written notes were scanned and saved digitally.

A familiar setting for the participant is the ideal location to conduct the interviews and review artifacts (Atkinson, 1998). In addition, the best location to conduct the interview would resemble an informal room that is quiet and encourages genuineness (Atkinson, 1998). The participant and I determined the best time to meet based on personal and professional schedules.

### **Observations**

Observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The observations were based on the research purpose and questions. I initially planned to be a passive participant during the two observations, meaning I would not interact with the participant during

observations and make very little interruption in the environment (Creswell, 2013, Merriam, 2009; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). This was not possible as the observations were conducted at two of the participant's places of employment in very social settings. The participant was given the option to select where the observations were conducted.

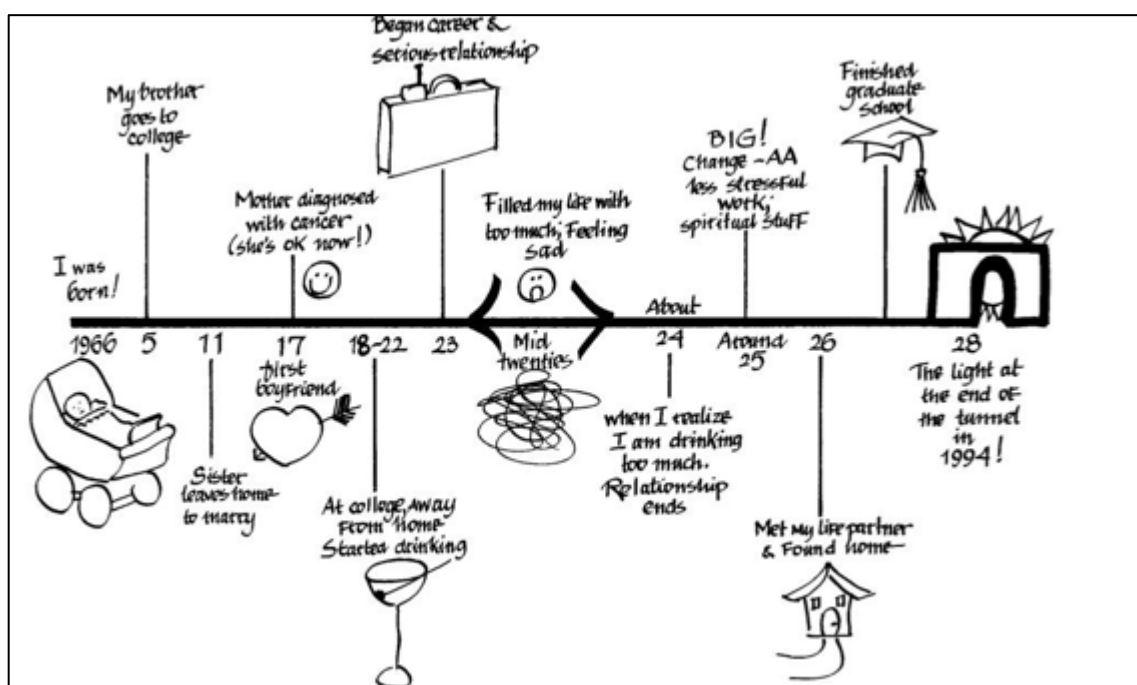
I took field notes using a narrative format in which I documented descriptive and reflective notes (Cresswell, 2013). The descriptive notes summarized the occurrences during the observation while the reflective notes documented the process, my reflections, and conclusions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I recorded the date, time, and location in the header of the observation. The final observation notes were typed in a narrative format including my reflections for participant and outside reviewer legibility.

## **Physical Artifacts**

### **Lifeline**

The participant was invited to construct a lifeline of key events in his life with an emphasis on educational experiences. Lifelines are visual depictions of an individual's life events in chronological order and may include interpretations of the events depicted as well as drawings (Atkinson, 1998; Gramling & Carr, 2004; Yang, 2012). The lifeline is a horizontal line complete with events from the participant's life from birth to present, in which the participant considered significant. The lifeline was used to structure interviews, prompt memories and concentrate attention during interviews (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The lifeline includes, but is not limited to the following: demographic information, biographical information, community context, school context, work context and other pertinent components of the participant's life that impacted his educational experiences. The participant can use the lifeline to express feelings in relation to events and milestones in his life, starting from childhood

to present using labels and/or symbols to identify each milestone. The participant was asked to record self-talk and verbal processing as he completed the visual lifeline. His self-talk and verbal processes may add details specific to those life experiences beyond what is written or drawn on the lifeline. The participant was provided a digital recorder to record his self-talk. The lifeline served as data triangulation (Gramling & Carr, 2004). Figure 2 is an example of a lifeline (Gramling & Carr, 2004). An image of his lifeline was not included because it included information that may have compromised confidentiality.



**Figure 2.** Sample lifeline.

### **Photographs**

I invited the participant to share photographs from pivotal moments in his life.

Photographs and other objects of memory can help the participant recall stories and events in his life and provide further insight into events and experiences (Atkinson, 1998). During the interviews I had planned to ask the participant to interpret the photos and use this in the data analysis (Merriam, 2009), but he was unable to share photos. Although he did not share photos,



he shared newspaper articles from his undergraduate college experience that included pictures of himself.

### **Art**

The participant is an artist. I invited the participant to share art pieces that represent vital moments in his life. During the interviews I asked the participant to interpret the artwork and use this in the data analysis (Merriam, 2009). Documents including personal artwork give the researcher a snapshot into what the participant thinks is important while sharing their personal perspective (Merriam, 2009).

### **Personal Documents**

I invited the participant to share personal documents. These documents included, but were not limited to school and employment records. James shared school, medical and employment records after our first observation at the community recreation center. At the end of the observation he handed me a large folder and shared that his grandmother had *kept these files all these years*. I thought about how fortunate he was his grandmother maintained these important documents. If not, James would probably have had to contact the school district to obtain records. The information from the documents helped to trigger memories for James as well as support his shared stories. The documents were presented in a large folder and plastic bag, well preserved with the exception of being a little dusty. On my initial review of the documents, I sorted them into two categories, school and medical records. The school records ranged from elementary school grades kindergarten through fifth. He shared three medical documents; one from middle school and two from college.

After ordering the documents chronologically, the first school record from kindergarten detailed when he was first referred to the multidisciplinary team for destructive and aggressive

behaviors and poor task related behaviors. At that time, James was not found to have a specific learning disability. Confirmed through school records, James received labels of emotionally handicapped and conductive hearing loss in the first grade. In the third grade James received a label of specific learning disability in addition to his previous labels. James shared an audiological evaluation in which he was found to have moderate to mixed hearing loss bilaterally at the age of eleven. The doctor stated that James had not worn his binaural amplification for over two years, which most likely resulted in decreased school grades. Medical documentation from college described James with a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and recommendation for medication. Using his participant journal James also shared personal documents, which are described below.

### **Participant Journal**

The participant was asked to maintain a journal. The participant can use the journal to refine ideas, beliefs, shared stories and other data during the research process (Janesick, 2010). In addition, the journal can be used to note information recalled post-interviews (Janesick, 2010). The journal may also be used as an interactive tool between the researcher and participant where an open dialogue is maintained to include the participant's reflections on his life stories. The journal was reviewed between interviews. The participant used his personal computer to write notes or journal entries, which were emailed to my professional university account. One particular journal entry included school newspaper articles in which James was featured. In one article for one of the universities development offices, James offered his perspective as a transfer and transition student. James also shared his resume to provide insight on his skillset related to school and employment experiences.

## **Order of Interviews and Observations**

The initial meeting with James served to establish rapport, review study requirements and gain consent. During this time, James and I decided we would move forward with the first formal interview focused on broad K-12 and higher education experiences. The decision was made simply for time and convenience. James's schedule allowed him to dedicate additional time to the day's meeting. The meeting lasted 2 hr 11 min. This time does not include breaks. This is the time assigned to the digital recording. Both the initial meeting and first interview were digitally recorded. We were both nervous at the beginning of the interview, but quickly became comfortable often forgetting the interview was being recorded. We both took a sigh of relief at the conclusion of the first interview sharing that the experience was something we were looking forward to doing again. The following interviews were much more comfortable from the start. It was interesting balancing physical needs during the interviews. We would stop the recording for quick water, snack and bathroom breaks. These are things I initially planned for so I had snacks and beverages available each interview. Breaks during interviews did not appear to present any problems. It ensured we both were not fatigued and could maintain a high level of engagement.

The first observation was conducted at one of three of James's summer jobs, the recreation center. James secured permission from his supervisor to conduct the observation for the purpose of this study. This is a year-round part-time position. The observation lasted approximately 1 hr 45 min. James's title is Recreation Attendant. The recreation center is situated off of a major road and adds color to the community as it is painted with bright colors of yellow, orange, and green. The facility is large. Entering the parking lot you are able to see a large sports field complete with scoreboard, bleachers, and concession stand. There is also a

swimming pool with splash area off the parking lot. Inside, there are many areas including a cardio room, weight room, basketball courts, game rooms, and program spaces.

James gave me a full tour of the facility, detailing all of his job-related tasks. In his work as a recreation center staff member, he is seen as a leader, the go-to person. After introducing myself to one of his coworkers he stated, “He’s the authority. When I need something I go to him.” He is skilled in many jobs at the recreation center and recently received a raise. His responsibilities at the recreation center include greeting and checking in guests, handling and processing payments, organizing the weight room, organizing the game room, safety monitoring of both indoor and outdoor spaces, setup and breakdown of outdoor spaces, and other assigned tasks per management. James expressed how “controlling” he is in his job, how he is “always doing something.” What he described and what I observed is someone who really takes pride in their work and genuinely cares for coworkers and guests.

The second interview focused on review of the first interview transcription, lifeline, observation notes, and shared documents. The interview lasted 1 hr 30 min. This time does not include breaks. This is the time assigned to the digital recording. We reviewed the first interview transcript to ensure I documented his words verbatim. We discussed his lifeline in detail as he described pivotal moments in his life. We discussed the observation notes in which James felt I gathered details he does not always see about himself, such as being a leader. We reviewed his shared documents, school and medical records. I documented notes from the records sequentially beginning from kindergarten through twelfth grade and college. The paperwork included school documents such as multidisciplinary team reports, consent for placement, individualized education plans, exceptional student education least restrictive environment review, school reassignment letter, school discipline records, and medical reports. James shared how he had

forgotten many of the details from his school and medical records. Reviewing these documents triggered both positive and negative memories. Specifically those related to being labeled with an emotional behavior disorder. James felt he was mislabeled and placed in classroom settings that did not support his academic and social emotional needs.

The second observation was conducted at the second of three of James's summer jobs, a public middle school. It was challenging to gain access to this location. I had to get approval from district-level personnel to conduct the observation. James was a great support in this process providing me with the contact person's information and permission to contact the person for the purpose of collecting data for this study. The observation lasted 1 hr 30 min. James's title is Substitute Custodian. His responsibilities include working in a team of eleven to deep clean classrooms and other spaces during the school's summer break.

The school was situated on a quiet secondary road. The school was large enough that I missed my entrance to the rear parking lot and entered a third entrance to the campus. James met me in the rear parking lot. We first stopped by the break room where he and several coworkers were taking their fifteen-minute breaks. James was happy to introduce me as his mentor and shared that I would be observing him while they worked. Everyone welcomed me and described how much they enjoyed working with James. One person described James a hard worker who keeps them motivated. After meeting his coworkers in the break room we proceeded to the girls locker room where James and others cleaned individual lockers. The air smelled of WD-40 and other cleaning supplies. After cleaning the girls locker room we transitioned to the boys locker room where I stayed briefly before ending the observation. One thing that stands out besides James's work was the smell of the boys locker room. The memories that stay with us are interesting.

After the second observation we had a phone conversation lasting approximately 30 min. We discussed chapter five, results and worked to identify themes. James and I felt two major themes identified in James's stories were resilience and self-determination. After the phone call and moving forward I began to research resilience and self-determination as it relates to African American males with disabilities educational and employment experiences. The literature on resilience and self-determination as it relates to African American males with disabilities is sparse.

The third interview focused on review of the final chapters, findings and discussion. James offered clarification on some memories described in chapter five and appropriate changes were made. The interview lasted 3 hr 30 min, including lunch and two short breaks. We took a break for approximately 30 min to eat lunch and simply rest. We knew prior to the interview that it would be long, as we had to accommodate James's busy work schedule. James wanted closure to the interviews, but made himself available thereafter via phone calls and email for questions and or clarification.

### **Data Analysis**

The construction of narrative is a joint process where the researcher and participant engage in analytical cooperation (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The theoretical framework guided the analysis of the data. The rendering of life stories to narrative required a layer of analysis and interpretation. I recognize life stories are not told sequentially or done neat and tidy, logical, consequential and consistent, but for the organization of the current study the results will be organized and grouped in time periods aligned with public and higher education, and post-higher education (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although the data analysis process presented below seems concise, there were moments of messiness where I felt

overwhelmed with the data. For example, I had to transcribe lengthy interviews within a short timeframe and make sense of disorganized shared documents. Without a clear and focused plan for gathering and organizing data I would have not been able to fully analyze the data.

The data gathered during the research study was organized in a way that allowed frequent access (Coles, & Knowles, 2001). Initially, the data was organized sequentially based on the date of data collection. During data collection and analysis, the organization of data changed based on connectedness of the data points. The data was analyzed holistically with attention to the connectedness and interrelatedness of human experience within complex social systems of education (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The data collection and analysis process provided opportunity for long term immersion into the data, which required a process of repeated examination of the recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, and artifacts (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

In this research study, reflective qualitative analysis was used (O'Leary, 2010). The process required a spiral of interconnected activities. These activities included organizing the raw data, reading and memoing the data, coding the data, conducting a thematic analysis, interpreting meaning, drawing conclusions, and representing the data (Creswell, 2013; O'Leary, 2010). All raw data was organized in date received in a storage container. Research interviews were digitally downloaded and time stamped. Artifacts were organized using labeled folders and storage containers. I listened to and transcribed the research interviews as immediate as possible, within four days each. I completed the research interview transcription in order to become familiar with the data. Through repetitive listening to and reading the transcribed research interviews, ideas and themes should emerge and allow for intimate engagement with the data (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Research interview memos gathered using the interview protocol

guide were matched to the transcribed research interviews to annotate tone of voice, body language and gestures. Memos gathered during review of additional research artifacts also guided the initial exploration and organization of data.

Data analyses began with data coding. Data coding requires the researcher read and reread the transcript to identify frequently repeated words and statements. In addition, the researcher will read and memo the transcript and additional research artifacts to capture phrases, key concepts, or ideas that emerge (Creswell, 2013). The process of coding requires the researcher aggregate the research data into small categories of information to assign and label a code (Creswell, 2013). Thematic analysis requires the researcher conduct a line-by-line examination of research conversation transcripts and other data sources. During this process patterns and interconnectedness from the coded data were identified. Themes were developed from the patterns identified in the coded data (Creswell, 2013). I identified stories, and individual experiences and the context of the experiences to include in the final narrative (Creswell, 2013). I analyzed for three elements: interaction (personal, social), continuity (past, present, future) and situation (physical spaces, participant places) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I drew conclusions from the identified themes linked back to the research study main questions and theoretical framework (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004; O'Leary, 2010). A critical component of my analysis of the three elements was the need to provide robust descriptions (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The depth of descriptions provided opportunity for intuitive crystallization of the data, which led to the identified themes (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

The continuous process of reflective analysis provided opportunity for crystallization of the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Crabtree and Miller (1999) describe crystallization as a constant process of extracting pertinent information throughout the data collection and data



analysis process. During the data collection process, I frequently noted trends and patterns during the interviews, which guided my analysis of the transcribed interview data. Crystallization during the data analysis process was achieved through a systematic process in which the interview and artifact data are done with a specific objective for each time the data is examined (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Tracy, 2010). During the first reading, I focused on identifying key themes and my reactions to the themes. Subsequent readings were conducted with the objective to find support of the themes I identified during the first readings while noting findings that support alternative themes (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Further readings of the data were conducted with the purpose of identifying discrepancies between themes uncovered during the readings and finding relatable points between the interpretations of the interview data after each reading (Crabtree & Miller 1999).

Collectively, the participant's life stories, electronic journal, and other artifacts served as data that highlighted the processes in the individual's life, the different theories that relate to his life experiences, and the unique and general features of his life (Creswell, 2013). The goal of data analysis is to authentically portray the participant's life and bring meaning to their lived experiences. The participant received the analyzed data to ensure his lived experiences were represented appropriately. If the participant and I did not agree with the interpretation of specific data it was to be noted in the analysis that the participant and I took a different view. This did not occur.

Alternate techniques to represent the meaning of the data were considered. Found data poems may be used to represent the participant's story (Janesick, 2010). Found data poems are constructed from the data, including interview transcripts, lifeline, participant journal entries, and additional artifacts (Janesick, 2010). The found data poems may adopt any form of poetry. Poetic

transcription is a third voice that emerges in analysis of the data in which words are carefully selected, ordered, and structured to communicate a particular meaning (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Janesick, 2010). Art exists within the context of lived experience and represents a process within this experience (Janesick, 2010). Because the participant is an artist I elicited he share his own art pieces that represent critical moments in his life. I also solicited meaning of the shared art pieces during the interview.

Stories alter depending on the context, what is judged to be appropriate, politic and useful and differ based on unique lived experiences and the knowledge of the participant (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). McLaren and Kincheloe (2005, as cited in Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) describe seven basic assumptions in cultural studies. These assumptions guide my analysis of the data.

1. Every society systematically gives privilege to certain cultural groups and oppresses other cultural groups.
2. The oppression experienced by an individual is an interactive combination of the various oppressions generated in response to all that individual's nonprivileged identities.
3. Cultural texts (including but not limited to language) are probably the most powerful means of expressing and maintaining differences in privilege.
4. Every human act, creation, or communication can be interpreted in relation to the cultural context of capitalist production and consumption.
5. All thought is mediated by socially and historically constructed power relationships.
6. Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values and prevailing assumptions about what is valued.

7. Mainstream research practices help reproduce systems of oppression that are based on class, race, gender, and other cultural categories. (pp. 509-512).

### **Researcher Positionality**

My motivation for collaborating with the participant is deeply rooted in my professional experiences as a public school teacher. As a teacher of students with disabilities, I often encountered a disproportionate higher number of African American males in my classrooms. It has always left me with questions about the educational experiences these students encounter. As a result, I have an interest and commitment to the success of African American male students with disabilities. I am particularly interested in the factors that contribute to the success of these students having taught primarily African American males in self-contained special education classrooms. The self-contained classroom was one of the most restrictive classrooms in the public schools in which I taught. African American male students with disabilities who achieve academic and life success intrigue me. I desire to understand the success of one African American male with disabilities who earned an undergraduate degree despite the challenges many of these males encounter as discussed in the literature review.

### **Researcher Reflexive Journal**

Qualitative research is not a seamless, linear process. The researcher can use the reflexive journal to make the messiness of research process visible to the researcher and to those who read it (Ortlipp, 2008). I maintained a reflexive journal used to document my reflections on the research process including feedback from my qualitative reviewer and the participant's reflections on the shared story (Janesick, 2010). The journal was used to identify stories, epiphanies, and concrete contextual biographical information. Furthermore, I used the journal to construct follow-up questions. Journal writing as a heuristic tool and research technique can help

the researcher refine their role, understand the participant responses, share an interactive tool of communication between the researcher and participant, bring awareness to thinking and reflection patterns, and elaborate on social justice issues (Janesick, 2010).

I maintained a reflexive researcher journal where I recorded what I read, trains of thought, hunches, discoveries about myself as a researcher, and self-disclosure of biases. I used the reflexive journal to document exactly how I conducted my study, techniques used during the process, and ethical issues that arise (Janesick, 2010). The reflexive journal also served as a resource to document responses to conversations (thoughts, ideas, questions) and help process preliminary analyses. In addition, I used the reflexive journal to document researcher subjectivity, my presence in the research (Cole & Knowles, 2001). I also used the journal after my dissertation defense to make sense of and respond to committee member questions and feedback.

### **Credibility**

Critical theorists and cultural studies researchers are criticized as being hypercritical (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Extreme deconstructionism positions research participants as victims and may perpetuate a sense of hopelessness rather than emancipation. In narrative research, the participant is considered an expert and authority on his or her life based on the belief that the participant's stories and other data are authentic and thorough in their representation of events (Atkinson, 1998; Nunkoosing, 2005). This study will challenge the negative statistical data presented on African American males with disabilities. In addition, critical theorists and cultural studies researchers are criticized for espousing dense and complex writing and speaking styles often excluding the lay reader (Gall et al., 2007). Scholars need to develop work that is accessible to educational stakeholders and others unfamiliar with this tradition (Gall et al., 2007).

Every attempt was made to ensure the final document is readable by educational stakeholders and other interested in the educational experiences of African American males with disabilities (e.g., African American males with disabilities, parents of African American males with disabilities).

There is no absolute truth in qualitative research (Atkinson, 1998). Verisimilitude in qualitative research is the process of judging whether the research writing is representational of real life- how far it seems to be true, how far people who have personal experience in the focus of the research regard it to be likely, or the extent to which experts in the field consider the results plausible (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Credibility asks the questions, “How confident can you be in the researcher’s observations, interpretations, and conclusions? Are they believable (credible)?” (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 504). Merriam’s (1998) guidelines for sound qualitative research (as cited in Cole & Knowles, 2012) include triangulation of data, member checks, peer examination, involving participant in all aspects of the study, and declaring researcher biases. The research process should be transparent including the assumptions of the researcher and an audit trail of research procedures to ensure reliability and dependability (Merriam, 1998 as cited in Cole & Knowles, 2012). The researcher reflexive journal was used to maintain an audit trail.

For this research study, rich thick description was collected through substantial engagement. I knew that I reached the threshold of engagement when I was confident themes and examples were repeating instead of expanding (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). The interview transcripts and other data points were triangulated to ensure there are no contradictions. I checked all data for consistency (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Member checks were done throughout the data collection phase. I verified with the participant the themes that developed as

a result of data collection and analysis (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Member checks included a brief summary at the end of interviews to know if I accurately reflected the participant's position, shared transcripts of interviews to solicit comments, and other tasks that invite the participant to offer clarification. An outside reviewer who is an expert in qualitative research with no connection to the study and participant completed a peer examination. The outside reviewer assessed both the process and product of the data collected. The outside reviewer had access to all data. I engaged in discussions with the outside reviewer focused on findings, conclusions, and analysis (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). I relied on the outside reviewer to ask me questions that challenged my position in the study. The participant was informed that an outside reviewer would have access to the research study, but his identity would remain anonymous. I documented and clarified all researcher biases throughout the research study using my reflexive journal. The research study included all of the above stated guidelines for sound qualitative research.

### **Reciprocation**

As a critical researcher, I was grateful for the opportunity to engage in this vital research study. The participant was willing to share intimate moments of his life and help construct meaning in larger contexts specific to the relationships between race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status during his public and higher education matriculation. I feel the need to reciprocate extended opportunities of engagement to express my appreciation for his time, effort, and cooperation. After completion of the study, I would like to co-present with the participant at regional and national conferences. In addition, I would like to co-author with the participant in academic journals and other relevant texts. Should the participant accept the proposed extended opportunities of engagement, I will make every effort to support expenses related to time

commitment, travel and other logistics. I can support these expenses through grant writing and other tasks to generate financial support.

## **Conclusion**

Narrative research focuses on a single individual, documents stories about a significant issue related to the participant's life, develops chronologically, tells a story that reports themes and idiosyncrasies, and reflexively brings the researcher into the study (Creswell, 2013). This narrative research study investigated the relationships among race, gender, disability, and the school experiences of an African American male with disabilities in K-12 public and higher education. The participant completed a series of in-depth interviews, which served as the primary data source, electronic journal and shared other personal artifacts. A number of steps were taken to ensure the research process was transparent, confidentiality was maintained, and concerns of credibility addressed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **RESULTS**

“Each day we tell stories. We do so when we talk with others at home, work, school, and in our neighborhoods. The stories we tell are not complete life chronicles. They are snippets of our experiences, events, thoughts, and feelings at a particular time and place. they are capsules of the experiences that are most important or meaningful to us-the things the we value. Stories about meaningful experiences are told in a more formal way in newspapers, on radio and television, and in books” (King, Brown, & Smith, 2003, p. 1).

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities who completed K-12 public education and higher education. I am concerned with the intersectionality presented in his narratives as it relates to race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status. A series of interviews and observation were conducted as well as document review.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. What does the educational narrative of an African American male with disabilities analyzed through the lens of DisCrit tell us about how we teach this student population?



2. What can educational stakeholders change about their practice to support this student population?

The structure of the results is a written narrative describing five timeframes in James's life. These include (1) elementary school, (2) middle school, (3) high school, (4) college, and (5) post-college. James's stories are written in italics with removal of extraneous words and statements such as *like* and *um*. All recognizable details have been changed to ensure the participant's anonymity.

### **Participant Profile**

With his tall broad frame, hair in twists and full beard, James navigates each day working two or more jobs in and out of his field of interest. James's career interests center around teaching middle school special education. His current employment includes working as part-time custodian, recreation center staff member, and driver for transportation network company. During the school year, August to May, he works as a substitute teacher, recreation center staff member, and driver for transportation network company. He graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies. Initially, his undergraduate goal was to complete a degree in special education, but was halted after multiple attempts to pass the math portion of the teacher certification exam, which is he subsequently passed and financial roadblocks. He ran out of money needed to complete the program. Failing the teacher certification exam multiple times during his undergraduate program did not decrease his desire to teach. He is currently studying to take the teacher certification exam to teach middle school special education, slightly hesitant because he is not sure what subject area exam he should complete and has difficulty affording the initial exam and potential retake(s).

James was raised in a community he described as the *projects*. His childhood and current community reflects predominately African American residents as well as residents of low socioeconomic status. He lived with his mother until he left for college at the university level. He was what some would describe as a latchkey kid beginning in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as his mother worked full-time to provide for him and his brother. He currently lives with his grandmother in a historically African American community out of financial necessity. Despite working multiple jobs, it is not enough to live independently in his current town. He hopes to gain employment that allows him to move toward greater independence, residing on his own. He does currently own his own vehicle. He does not currently have a significant other.

James provided narratives about his schooling and employment experiences. He attended approximately four elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, one community college, and one university. Document review combined with James's stories trace his entrance into exceptional student education to the first grade. He was initially referred for exceptional student education in kindergarten for destructive and aggressive behaviors and poor task related behaviors. He was evaluated through a specific learning disability multidisciplinary team. He was not found to have a specific learning disability at that time. He was found to have an emotional handicap and placed in exceptional student education programming in first grade. During his elementary schooling his disability labels were primary emotionally handicapped, secondary specific learning disability and hearing impairment. He was later diagnosed in college by a medical professional with attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder noting difficulty focusing and concentrating on schoolwork as well as difficulty remaining stationary long enough to complete tasks, including schoolwork.

## Elementary School

**Classroom Setting.** James described his classroom setting as an *ESE classroom*. ESE is an acronym for exceptional student education. Exceptional student education provides specialized instruction and related services for students with disabilities who have an individualized education plan aligned with the federal provisions of The Individuals with Education Act, Part B. Exceptional student education services are provided in a continuum of classroom settings including the general education classroom, resource classroom, and self-contained classroom. The resource classroom typically focuses on pullout services for exceptional education students from the general education classroom for reading and or math taught by a certified teacher in exceptional student education. In the self-contained classroom all students receive exceptional student education services for all core content areas by a certified teacher in exceptional student education. *I guess I was always in the ESE program except for when I was at Sunnyside for some reason I was in both... an ESE class in the morning and then come back to the regular ed class in the afternoon. So much bouncing around. At some point I had to go to both ESE with the older kids and at some point SLD reading.* According to his school records he moved between general education, resource, and self-contained classrooms, usually related to disciplinary issues.

*Usually the classes were predominately Black, African American male.* He described some of his classmates as angry and engaging in behaviors *to take attention away from their lacking... not necessarily bad things, just other things like sometimes they're better at sports or they'll be funnier, but they would focus on those things and then try to diminish what they couldn't do.* James felt like he engaged in similar tactics to hide that he *couldn't read for a long time.*

**Favorite and Least Favorite Subjects.** James liked learning. He *never wanted to put off or not do anything... he just like school in general.* James's favorite subject was art. He most liked abstract art, expressionism. *With abstract expressionism it can look like how you want it to.* He also enjoyed music. James did not like math. *It just kept getting harder and harder. As they added more steps it just got tougher.* He had difficulty grasping new content while still learning old content. *I didn't really know how to study because they would do it for you in the classroom and just repeat it over and over again.*

James also struggled with reading. *I could not read.* He remembered learning to read in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. *I didn't know that you're supposed to decode the letters and then blend them to words. I thought you just know the word, whole language.* He felt he was not taught appropriately because he always looked older than he was and people assumed he already knew how to read. *So when it came down to actually doing work I don't even know how it got that far. I don't know how I did work before (chuckle), but I couldn't read (chuckle). But once I learned, I just got it.* He shared one strategy he remembered using in small- and whole-group reading. *I would read last and have the kids read before me because some words were repetition, some words would repeat, so then I would start reading because the kids already said the word and I would memorize the word.* I can only imagine how exhausting that would have been. James confirmed this by simply stating, *Exhausting!* He did not begin to fully comprehend what he read and make meaning of it until 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Discipline.** James remembered getting suspended. He said he got suspended *a lot for fighting.* He felt like he was being bullied. His teachers expected him to be the bigger person, but he didn't want to always *turn the other cheek.* His mother spanked him in response to his suspensions, but James felt *it was their (peers and school staff) behaviors and I would respond*

*like necessary. I did not go there with the intent to get in trouble. I wanted to learn, but somehow I would get suspended. I can't even explain it. It happened all through elementary school.*

He also remembered being restrained at least three times in early elementary. *They would decrease pressure as you calmed down.* Referral and suspension records indicated he was most often disciplined for fighting peers and disrespect toward authority. He believed some of his referrals were questionable. He believed teachers lied to get him suspended. He remembered a practice where teachers would turn in referrals at the end of the day without first discussing with the student.

**Memories.** James reminisced about some good times. He fondly remembered getting awards for achievements. *I would get an award every year. And then they would give us little food things, like Burger King. I get Burger King for free because I did well?* He also remembered added pressure to be more mature than his age because he was taller than his peers. *I would have this added pressure of being more responsible because I was taller.* He believed his differences in size attributed to being targeted negatively by his peers. *They would hit me or tease me. I was like you have to be the bigger person, but I'm like no they can see me, they know that I'm taller. They should be the ones to have that instead of me all the time.*

James remembered one teacher fondly. He remembered her as the teacher that discovered he could not read. *She did the assessment and she did one-on-one with me and helped me with decoding.* Specifically, she let him read books one tape. He also remembered one teacher uncaringly. He remembered that she did not help him learn to study his weekly spelling lists despite him failing the spelling test each week. He felt *horrible!* *She would give them back in the morning and then I would just shut down for the rest of the day. That wasn't helpful. I knew I wasn't learning. I kept going at the lady and I would get suspended.*

James described an issue related to teacher expectation. *I didn't have homework. Never had homework. Not until middle school. I guess the teachers figured like it wouldn't come back, it wouldn't get done or whatever, never had homework.* He also remembered being taught material that was a grade level below his current grade. *They were teaching down. The curriculum was watered down.*

**Self-Reflection.** James learned he was resilient. When asked what he learned about himself in elementary school he recalled having to use what he had to be resilient. *I guess to use what I have and be more resilient.* He also described his responses to others despite facing challenges. *I don't take, I snap early. I'm cool. I'm calm. I go with the flow, but when it's not right, it's not right and I say something about it. I learned that I can only take so much for so long; from adults, from kids, from whoever. This is what's going on, this is the situation. I learned that early.* He also knew he was different from the majority of his school peers. He was in exceptional student education. *That was one of those things that they'll make fun of you about. So they want to know whose class you're in. If they didn't recognize the teacher, they'd say that must be special ed or whatever.*

## **Middle School**

**Classroom Setting.** James was once again in both self-contained and resource classrooms. *Middle school I was self-contained. There was a teacher and an aide and it was guided.* The student demographic was predominately African American. *So, again predominately Black class. There's like three white kids. Middle school became more diverse. Black, Asian, Hispanic, white, but for that core group, Black male majority.* He remembered the environment as restrictive. James described how the students were unable to go in the halls even

though they needed to move around. *The program was setup so you couldn't socialize. At lunch we had to sit at our own table with same group of kids we had been with all day.*

He was mainstreamed in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, meaning he was taught reading and math in a resource classroom. He was also taught science in the general education classroom in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. *I'd leave one class during science and go to another class. This was the regular ed science class, but then I started failing because I couldn't keep up and there were more kids. There was like 35 kids and maybe 15 in the other class (chuckle). I was in a group and they were just going way too fast. That would happen a lot during specials. When I would go out during specials and I'd have to work with a group I would fall behind because I couldn't keep up with the group and they were usually white or Hispanic. He remembered some classmates as disruptive. For some reason I would leave one ESE science class to go to another ESE science class, something to do with numbers, I don't know (chuckle). I would go there, but they were so unruly, nothing would get done or started... kids would just do whatever, whenever to avoid it. Then some days I just wouldn't go because nothing gets accomplished.*

James felt his peer's behaviors negatively impacted his learning. *Whatever little support I could have gotten, would have needed, I didn't get because some kid was having a fit in the corner.* He described some of his peers as probably angry and as having issues.

**Favorite and Least Favorite Subjects.** James's favorite subjects were art and music. James recalled that although he enjoyed music he had to make adjustments to how he played the trumpet and violin. *I'd play. I could play it. He was telling us to blow into it. I couldn't. It hurt my teeth. The sensation of the trumpet vibrating would bother me so I wouldn't do that. I would sing into it from like back here (blowing). I would do that and that was great. It was tiring. It was really hard to do. We had to do the violin and I couldn't play it sitting down. I had to stand*

*up and play it and he thought I was faking it the whole time and I was like no, I couldn't play it sitting down. I couldn't. Maybe I was too tall and the seat was too small and I just couldn't, I just couldn't do it sitting down.*

*I guess my toughest subject would have been math and somewhat writing because if I couldn't spell a word I could always look back and find it. Math was still an issue. James remembered how difficult math was overall and shared that in 8<sup>th</sup> grade he started to avoid math because again we would rotate and I would have to leave the self-contained and go to another class. It was just another ESE class, but for math. She taught it like it was gen ed. For some reason, some of the problems, I just couldn't do, so I would just do as many as I could.*

*James described his struggles with reading. It got a little hard around middle school because the books would get longer... the other kids would be like I'm done and I'm like, what? And I was like, ok, so I really struggled with that. He also described the challenges he had with studying. In middle in high school you have to do your homework and I'm like how do you study? Do I just read it over and over again? So I didn't know.*

**Discipline.** James remembered having less behavior incidents in middle school because he self-advocated. *I wasn't opposed to punishment, but I wasn't going to take the fall for something I didn't do.* He remembered being moved around a lot. *Did I get suspended in middle school? No. I don't think so. But I got moved around a lot.* James recalled his classroom setting as very restrictive. The students were not allowed to walk through the halls. *Walking through the halls was connected to assumed behaviors, we were up to no good.*

**Memories.** James described memories related to teacher perceptions of him. Teachers *just assumed because of the previous students that I would be like those other African American male students. I showed up, I was ready to go, but then I just didn't get what I needed, I guess.*



James expressed that he felt like he was not in the correct classroom setting as he was predominately in classrooms with students with emotional behavioral disorders. *Because mine wasn't emotional. All their stuff was emotional behavioral. It became emotional behavioral over time, but I just needed accommodations I just never really got except for sit up front, write things out, repeat things. All that dealing with them I just didn't get what I needed.*

**Self-Reflection.** James described a time when he may have been depressed. When in 8<sup>th</sup> grade he was placed in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade language arts class. *That was fine for a while. But then I guess I got a little depressed or something because I'd show up late. I would just wake up late and I would get there after that class. I would be fine again. But I'd be ahead. Like my work would be done.*

James described being perceived as different than his peers in regular education. *I guess they knew because we all sat at the same table, but everybody sat at the table. You sat at your table and we had the small class and the small class was the ESE class. So they would know at lunch. They knew because they would always see me at my grade level, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>, they would only see me at specials, PE and lunch. Every other class they would rotate with the same group of people for the most part. So he's the same grade, the same age as us, but he's not going to any of our classes. So they knew. He isolated himself at times.*

James was not interested in being apart of the crowd during breaks between classes or before and after school. *Other kids would do that and I'm like I'm not doing that, I'm not going into a crowd. Are you crazy? (chuckle) It's bad enough in the morning. That didn't intrigue me, walking into the crowd. I use to walk around the school because my classes were in the portable, so instead going through the building, through the crowd, I would walk around the building. They're like no, go through the building, go through the building. I'm like, I don't want to go*

*through the building. I didn't want to be in the crowd. I didn't want to be touched. I didn't want to be bumped. I would see all this going on in the beginning and was like I'm just going to go around this. I wanted to avoid that.*

*James became more active in middle school. I joined the clubs. I joined the yearbook. I joined the art club. I was on Cougar Watch, like a safety patrol. We would walk around the school and make sure there's no funny business going on here, skipping class. I just tried to find something to do like I don't want to be bored or alone or whatever. I guess I'll try to find more ways to be more sociable because again same kids. I was nominated for the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Student of the Year.*

*James also learned more about himself as a learner. I learned more about my accommodations so I became more vocal. I learned to self-advocate. He was also gained greater independence. I had to walk to school. So I didn't catch the bus. I had to walk everyday in the rain, in the heat, in the cold. I kind of liked that except for when it rained and it was cold. So I would get myself up, ready for school and then go and then come home. No one was there so I'd make me something to eat and then chill out.*

*He also remembered how he helped others self-advocate. Then I learned about there's different pods, different ESE classes. I learned that there was one group that did not leave their room; they just stayed there (chuckle). Then I learned about the TMH. Then I learned about, what else, there was one group that, I can't describe it. They would use a wheelchair or braces, arm braces. One kid, he's Asian, he was in there. He has cerebral palsy so he couldn't you know, he can't walk, but up here (pointing to forehead) he's all there, but he was just in there like I'm dying here (chuckle). I tried, helped him advocate, I think, and then he finally got an aide and he was finally able to go to the general ed population, but for the most part he was in the TMH*

room. The acronym TMH stands for trainable mentally handicapped. This is an antiquated term used for students with intellectual disability.

## **High School**

**Classroom Setting.** James entered high school with no transition group. He was in all general education classes. *At this point, I just kind of showed up to school, got my schedule and then given classes. There's like no transition group or whatever. I just started.* He did enroll in a learning strategies course. *It was supposed to be like a study hall and she would help you with it. She didn't give us the assignments because it didn't make sense in her head to give us assignments to learn how to study when we had assignments we had to learn and study. She would just let us do our work in there. But then again we never really had homework. You always could be studying something. So we would study and that was great. I would get an A in that class because I would do my work. I guess that helped.*

James also socialized through clubs and academic programs. *In high school I was in the art club and then I was in National Art Honor Society. I was also in the college outreach program. I got a scholarship the Joplin Club gave me some money. I got an endowment for college books and tuition.* He was able to use the endowment at the community college.

**Favorite and Least Favorite Subjects.** Art remained James's favorite class in high school. *I had an art class, drawing one. That was fun. I got an A.* Initially, James felt he was doing good in language arts in the beginning, but something changed. *I was doing really well in language arts in the beginning. Then somehow my grades started dropping. I think it had something to do with the test, the studying component. But in the class I would do fine. The first year of high school was tough, but I think I was passing art, language arts and PE (chuckle) and*

*everything else I was failing. James also enjoyed taking advanced placement Literature online. I did better online as typing became easier. He realized then he did better in online courses.*

Math and science were James's greatest challenge. *I was retained every year because of algebra and science. I took freshman algebra pretty much every single year, or quarter, which ever, because it was block. I was taking at one point two or three math classes a day. I was finally getting all the support I needed so I was doing better I wasn't failing so much. Despite failing math several times James graduated on time. He attributes his academic progress to his learning strategies class, but still faced challenges with studying. When it came down to studying I just didn't know what to do, like working on my own. I guess that's how the ADHD. I know I would read something and then I would just trail off, it would remind me of something else. I try to explain this to people, but they say you're just not focusing. I'm like, oh. So the class helped, learning strategies class helped. My grades improved. I think I may have made renaissance one year. For algebra, I just kept failing. It was the same teacher, that was the strange part, it was the same teacher.*

**Discipline.** James did not have many behavior incidents in high school. He described the one time he got suspended in high school. *I don't know, I think I was having a manic moment. We had a sub and I wanted was to listen to my headphones. He took my headphones and I had to leave the room or something and then I took them back and then I was late. Then I got suspended. And I had detention. I didn't even know what I did.* He also recalled having detention very few times. *I got detention twice because I was late. I had to take the city bus and I was barely late, I was almost on time.*

James remembered a time when he was *criminalized for poor grades in algebra freshman year.* He received a letter in the mail stating he was on probation. He was required to check-in

with the school resource officer every morning and for an extended session every Monday morning. He always found this to be strange and never really understood the use of academic probation and its connection to the school resource officer.

**Memories.** James shared stories about times he felt supported. After failing a math class, he was able to gather the support of the college prep program teacher who was also a math teacher. During a meeting after school hours she assured him she was going to help resolve his issue. *James, we're going to fix this, just go home.*

This issue along with others forced James to self-advocate. *That's when I had to start really advocate. It was like they had no record. It was like they didn't even know I was there. I mean, I would go to my counselor and try to explain what was going on.* He recalled two teachers in particular that did not provide him with accommodations. *The science teacher, it was like she did everything that was the opposite of what I was suppose to get accommodations for. When I would self-advocate, go to people, talk to people, she would get made and then she'd be like, ok, and she would literally do the opposite of the accommodations. I can't even describe it. It was just so methodical and evil. I was like, why me? Are they just going after me? I'm just like trying to graduate. I'm just like, look lady I don't know if you like me, I'm just trying to graduate.*

James recalled a teacher who tried to force him to set low standards for himself. When James shared one of his goals was to earn an A or B in all classes the teacher replied, "You can't perform at that level." James believes his judgment may have been influenced by paperwork that followed him from elementary and middle school.

James remembered one teacher uncaringly that motivated him to self-advocate for appropriate accommodations. In addition to research and writing papers, he described how he

learned better by doing. He negotiated with his personal fitness teacher; *instead of reading these articles can I just document everything I do or keep a journal? He was like no, that's not how the class is set up. And I'm like, is it? So I started talking to teachers and looking at the standards. And what I wanted to do met the standards and more. So, what he meant was it's not the way he is teaching it. So I was actually doing more work by doing the articles. I wouldn't read an article every week, but I was doing something related to physical activity, like write it down. It worked best for me. So I did that and documented, took pictures, wrote it down. I got an A.*

**Employment.** James started working at the age of sixteen. He took the city bus to school and home and would walk to work from home. James described how working made life including school easier. *I got a job. I started working when I was in high school. He worked as a holiday helper in the mall and at a movie theatre. He described the advantages and disadvantages of having a job. I was making money and then it made me tired too. So it kind of made me like, I had to focus a little more. I only had so much time. He was able to buy resources such as food and school supplies he would not have otherwise been able to purchase. Then I gained weight, but then because I had all this money and I could eat whatever I want (chuckle). I would lose weight and I would get on a better diet and then I noticed I started to focus better.*

He was able to purchase school resources for learning and toward extra credit. *The English teacher she had all these torn copies of the Moby Dick and so she was like if you, what is it, buy a book and donate it, you'll get extra credit. So I went to the bookstore and they were getting rid of their copies because they were going to change the cover art. So I got like 15 books. They were like two dollars each and so I'm like I'll take them all, all you have. The teacher provided him with extra credit for each book. This was a moment of self-advocacy as he had to negotiate his extra credit points. So what can you do for me? She's like what do you want?*

*I'm like what do you have (chuckle)? But I don't want no 10 points, not for no 15 books. So if she wasn't going to give me the credit then I was going to sale them to the other kids in the class and have them turn it in for extra credit, which was going to give her more work to do. So I'm like (tapped table), change it. He was also able to purchase a laptop senior year on payments.*

James recalled an incident at work at the movie theatre that was frustrating. *First they had me in concessions and somehow I messed up some of the money and the guy just yells at me and I'm like it's the first time I've done it. So pulled me out of concession and then made me an usher and I'm like okay. Can I go back to working concessions? I'm like, I think I got this and they didn't want me to work concessions. I don't know why. I messed up the money once. I'm like whatever. But then I felt like this level of disrespect from the general manager. I'm like why did you hire me if you're going to disrespect me? He was an asshole to everybody, but I just took it the hardest.*

James was a problem-solver at the movie theater. He described how he developed and implemented a practical strategy encouraging employees to take only their allotted break time. *We had the worst problem with breaks. I had people not coming back on time so I just let them leave earlier because you don't ride them until the wheels fall off because they're not going to come back on time. They're going to need an extra five minutes and they're going to walk a little bit slower. I would tell them get your food, get set up, then clock out and eat your food, and then come back. They'd want to come back early because they've eaten, they've rested. I didn't like kill them out there.*

**Dropping Out and In.** James described a time where he attempted to dropout of high school when he was 16. *Formally, I was going to go back and get my GED or go back later. Well I tried to drop out. What happened was somehow the papers, I got all my paperwork done*

*just disappeared. I just didn't go back for like 2 weeks or 3 weeks. I just went to work now. Then I got bored and I went back. His motivation to return to school was boredom.*

He described how his employer embarrassed him in front of his coworkers after soliciting his signature for the paperwork to dropout. *He called everyone and was like James has something to tell us. And I'm like no I don't (chuckle) and he's like yeah you do. He's like what's with this paperwork? I was like I'm applying, and everyone thought I was going to say to college. No, I'm applying to either finish high school later or to take the GED. And they were like so why are you, so you're dropping out? Yes. And they're like why? Because I'm failing. Is it because of the job? No, I'm failing.*

**Self-Reflection.** James talked about being resilient and a self-advocate. *I know that it's easier to fall into self-doubt and blame, but when someone literally doubts me, I'm like I'll show you.* He also spoke about teacher perceptions of him. *It's not that I wasn't trying it just looked like other people thought I wasn't. They assumed that I was trying to create a situation out of doing my work when I wasn't. Again, it was probably another student who did that, who gave them some story and it turned out it wasn't true. I'm like this is true, like I'm literally struggling. So, I guess, I don't know why I'm so resilient cause like I didn't want the story to be true. Like I was just one of those kids that talked out and was rude and disturbed the class. I was literally there to learn.* He also described how despite failing math multiple times, he was still passing other courses and working. *I was failing, but also passing and working. I was also making social gains in the art club and college outreach program.*

I asked James about why he believed teachers held their perceptions of him. *I guess they would put everything in the cum and so the teachers who read it assumed that that's who I was. And then when I started to self-advocate then I got a little push back because I don't know, I just*



*made them accountable, I don't know.* The *cum* is a student's cumulative file that follows them from start to finish. The file includes academic, exceptional student education, disciplinary, and attendance records. James is unsure how their perceptions was formed, but has a greater understanding in his work as a substitute teacher.

James talked about the challenges of failing math multiple times during high school. *I took algebra like four times. Did I ever just quit and stop working? Yes. It was algebra. I was writing notes and I just sat there and I just stopped. I'm like I'm failing.* He described his frustration as a fight. *I was like I don't know what I can do, but I'm just going to do what I can do. A lot of it was me fighting, I mean, I literally had to fight. I didn't get it, why I had to fight so hard just to learn.*

After reviewing school and medical documents from public schooling James was concerned that his behaviors were misrepresented. *I was reading it (documents) and it said aggressive. I looked it up. What is aggression? I look like I'm about to attack or am I speaking in a tone that you think is going to lead to more aggression or something physical?* He was referring to the initial referral for exceptional student education services in kindergarten. He was referred to the specific learning disabilities multidisciplinary team for destructive and aggressive behaviors and poor task related behaviors. At that time he was not found to have a specific learning disability, but qualified for services under emotionally handicapped. Throughout his public schooling he continued to receive services for emotionally handicapped as well as specific learning disabilities and hearing impairment. James described how reviewing the documents made him feel. *It was depressing. I feel like the initial assessment in kindergarten followed me forever.*

**Transition.** James described his post-school plans while in high school. *I didn't plan on going to college. I didn't even think I would graduate. I was like I want to try, so I did. I wanted to go to GMI (technical school) and just learn a trade or something or go to the military. I wanted to go to GMI because I wasn't thinking about college. Well I wanted to learn how to be a barber or something because of math; there isn't a lot of math involved if you want to do barbering. They didn't teach barbering they taught cosmetology. So I couldn't do that. If I would have done on-the-job training, I probably would not have gone to college.* He also recalled during this time being steered toward graduating with a special diploma. The special diploma was an option for students with individualized education plans. The special diploma allows students to graduate without completing all the standard requirements, such as course completion and passing the state standardized assessment, the PCT. *I refused because I wanted to do barbering.*

After attending a college outreach program ceremony of a friend, he was motivated to join. James joined the college outreach program in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The program included field trips, college visits, SAT prep, tax preparation, and FASFA application support. The program was for African American students. When asked if he would have pursued a degree at the community college without the college outreach program, he replied, *No.*

James recalled having difficulty passing the state standardized exam needed to graduate from high school and apply for general entrance to college as well as eligibility for financial aid. *I couldn't pass math PCT.* He also took the military assessment at the age of seventeen. He tested into engineering, but did not want to go into the military. *There was a war at the time. No! If I pass the PCT, I'm not going. If I don't pass, I can't go.* He knew if he passed the PCT he had the option to attend college and qualify for financial aid. Despite failing math multiple times and

multiple retakes of the standardized state exam math portion, he graduated from high school on time with a standard diploma.

He also completed a PCT preparation course. He remembered the course being predominately Black, Hispanic, Haitian, and second language students. When describing the need to complete the PCT and SAT exams he described the PCT as most troublesome. *PCT was my biggest hurdle, the greater beast.* He was caught in a conundrum. He could not take the SAT exam because he had not passed the PCT exam and while the PCT preparation course was free, the SAT preparation course was not free. He eventually passed the PCT reading after failing once and the math portion after failing at least seven times. He was then able to take the SAT exam for free on a waiver without the support of the preparation course. Due to scoring issues, his SAT score was increased to allow for acceptance into college.

## **College**

**Transition.** James graduated high school in the spring and started a summer bridge program at the community college he attended. The college outreach program supported the summer bridge program. He completed student life skills and psychology courses during this time. *I took the placement test and I tested out of reading, but low in math. I tested out of college prep reading, so I was able to take psychology. I did that and that was kind of tough because it was summer. The best part about it was it wasn't really test heavy; it was more assignment driven and the assignments counted at tests. So I would write a paper and then turn it in and get an A, nothing to memorize. I mean we still had to take the test, but you couldn't really bullshit your way through the paper because you had to use the terminology and implement it and whatever. Um, so that was good.* He earned a 3.0 his first semester.

In addition to financial support from the college outreach program, James also received financial support from vocational rehabilitation and student loans. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is a federal-state program that helps people with physical or mental impairments achieve employment. Both the college outreach program and vocational rehabilitation programs required James complete an associates of art degree. James described his frustration in qualifying for VR after having to get a psychological exam that evaluated his IQ and career goals. *It was the most frustrating thing. You had to get another evaluation. I had to get a psychological evaluation... to evaluate my IQ. I think he could tell I was intelligent, but I was lacking in some areas... but am I cognitively aware, can I process, can I think critically? Yes. If I did really well it would give me more money and I could get like a bachelor's degree, they'll pay for that.* As a result, James secured financial support to cover his associate's of art degree and his bachelor's degree. *It paid for everything. I had so much money. I had money from the college outreach program. I had money from voc rehab. I had money from financial aid money. I had a lot of money.*

James described difficulties with securing funding for college outside of financial support from the college outreach program, vocational rehabilitation, an endowment through the Joplin Club, and student loans. He attempted to apply for scholarships, but was frequently met with challenges. *There was no scholarships for male special education teachers. It was male engineers, male scientists, male doctors. I'm like, what's the point of me looking for money? I just took out a loan. They would pay for everything. I would get a refund, but I still needed more money.*

James described completion of his associate and bachelor's degree as taking a *long time*. It took him six full academic years to complete his degrees. In the last semester of his associate's program his academic counselor advised him to attend a specific university because they had a

teaching academy with smaller class sizes. James completed an associate's of art in education and a bachelor's of art in interdisciplinary studies. His initial goal for the bachelor's degree was education, but had difficulty passing gateway requirements, such as the teacher certification exam, specifically the math portion of the exam. *It was the math and then the general knowledge math section. I couldn't move up in the program because I had to finish the general knowledge section.* He described how he's taken the math portion of the teacher certification exam multiple times. *Um, probably taken the math about four times.* He completed a preparation course and eventually passed the math section, but this was too late in his undergraduate program, forcing him to finish his degree in interdisciplinary studies instead of special education. *I eventually passed it. But now I gotta retake it.* He is referring to taking the teacher certification exam to teach middle school special education.

**Services.** Although James received accommodations through the students with disabilities office and by instructors who saw he had specific needs, he did not receive full accommodations at both the community college and university. He did not receive full accommodations because he only submitted a partial psychological evaluation for both his associate and bachelor's programs. *They sent me to a psychologist who did an evaluation. They paid for that, but they paid for half of the whole evaluation. They do up to this amount.* The full evaluation was too expensive for James to pay. Vocational rehabilitation only paid for one-half of the evaluation. The evaluation completed by vocational rehabilitation ensured he received financial support, but did not ensure he received access to full accommodations offered by the students with disabilities offices.

James met challenges when trying to qualify for services in his bachelor's program. His psychological evaluation used for the community college did not transfer to the university. He

had to go back to vocational rehabilitation for approval for an updated evaluation. He was denied several times, but persisted and was eventually granted an evaluation. He believes this happened during an incident when he visited the vocational rehabilitation office. *First they were like no. Then they were like come in and see us. Then she was like no again. I was ready to leave and I was like congratulations and she was like for what. I'm like your pregnant right? She was like how did you know that? I'm like I could hear it like I could hear something in there (chuckle). Then she said sit down and then she started typing and was like ok we're getting services.* There was something in that moment that showed this vocational rehabilitation representative the James had something special, something different.

Overall, James did not receive access to full services at the community college or university. *All I got really was early registration. I got more time because they (instructors) assumed I would get more time, but it wasn't documented so I would you know not officially get additional time. I was allowed to take my tests there in the disability center or more time. I would self-seat, I would sit myself in the front.* James shared that he received an implant in one ear his first semester of college that allowed him to sit in the back of the class. James was also able to use his psychological report to receive extended time to complete the teacher certification exams required at one point in his bachelor's program.

**Learning.** James described his frustration with course completion. He described how he had to take classes multiple times, in particular, math. *Math held me up a long time. I would avoid it.* He shared how he sought help from a math specialist, math tutor and peers. *I went to the math specialist. I went to tutoring, everything.*

James shared that he was able to show what he learned best if he had options. *I don't really know how I best learn, but I know I excel when I have options. If I could do a project, if I*

*could do a paper, if I could do a PowerPoint, do a presentation, that was great, but if I had to memorize facts for a test I didn't even like, I usually didn't do well. He also benefited from reading summaries and watching videos. I find that I started reading the summary first. I would do the vocabulary. Then luckily we had YouTube and YouTube was really big and everybody was putting everything on there. I would go to YouTube and watch videos. If I could just make meaning of it, make use of it, that's how I guess, I would work best. It's kind of hard to explain. I just needed a schedule, I needed support, I needed extra time.*

Similar to when he completed advanced placement Literature in high school, James performed better when completing online courses. Many of his courses for the Interdisciplinary Studies program were online. *Everything online was easier. I didn't have to go to class.*

**Memories.** James clearly remembered being on his own during his transition to his bachelor's program from his associate program. *Once I got to UMD I was like I'm on my own. He described how he had family members who attended college, but did not offer him advice. Everybody went, but I didn't get any advice as to what to expect, what to look for.*

James shared a special memory that occurred during his bachelor's program. He was invited to attend an event at the President of the university's home. At the time he was working in the registrar's office and food services. The student workers of the registrar's office were invited to attend the special milk and cookies event while his supervisor from food services wanted him to work the event. *I was like I can't work the event because I'm attending the event.* He attended the event as a guest.

James also described that he didn't have a lot of free time because he always worked. He could not be as social as he would have liked. *I had to work. I'd see all these white kids out there playing Frisbee and just walking lackadaisically and I'm like don't you have to be somewhere?*

*I'm like I have to go get a 30-minute nap and go to work. As for like parties and stuff I didn't get to go to a party. I went to like one birthday party because I had to leave early because I had to go to work (laugh). Despite receiving financial support from the college outreach program, vocational rehabilitation and student loans, James still had to work, often two jobs. I still had to eat. I still needed gas. I needed car insurance. I didn't have any health insurance. I had to get glasses.*

Most of his most troubling memories were related to failing. *Failing, that was tough. Having to withdraw from classes or having to work so much. That wasn't great, but sometimes it worked out. I would make it work.*

**Self-Care.** James learned more about his disabilities after he received medical evaluations and had completed coursework in child development, psychology and student learning skills. The coursework, in particular, cleared things up for James. *It just helped me better understand what I should have gotten and what I hopefully I can give you know once I do start teaching full-time or what I'm doing now to sub.* He focused more on self-care in relation to his adult diagnosis of attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD). *When I'm fat (chuckle) I struggle, but when I'm in shape, exercising regularly, eating regularly, then I'm firing on all cylinders. Then with the ADHD meds it was like good and bad. I did better somewhat on multiple choice tests because all I had to do was just like recall what I read, literally.* Although he is able to focus more on the medication, he said the *Adderall makes me pace and the Vyvanse takes away my art.*

**Employment.** While a student at the community college James continued to work at the movie theatre. James shared his successes at the movie theatre during this time. He moved into a management position and organized on the job training for high school students. *I eventually*



*moved up and I to management. I worked at two theaters. I even did OJT (on-the-job training). I taught OJT. James developed a plan to keep current high school employees working during the day instead of cutting their hours and having to hire new employees for the day shift after the school year began. I'm like all our teenagers will be in school during the day and we only had teens working. So why can't we just do OJT on-the-job training that way they can work during the day?*

As a student at the university James worked several jobs as a student worker in the student transfer services office, registrar's office, food services, and housing office. He recalled how he lost his first campus job in the student transfer services office before securing a job in the registrar's office. *I lost that (job in student services office) because my GPA dropped because of math (chuckle). So then they moved me to the registrar's office where I became an assistant. I did that then I worked dining services and the registrar's at the same time. Then I did the registrar, dining services, and student housing at the same time because there was a break in between.* While working in different campus jobs he learned his university had a high retention rate of African American students. He described how African American students have limited options. *We can't just pickup and transfer. Some parents advocate for students, but my family didn't do that.* He had no choice but to stay and finish. Transferring if unhappy or dropping out was not an option for him.

### **Graduate School**

James applied to graduate school during the last semester of his undergraduate program. *I hadn't worked that last semester, so I applied to graduate school. I didn't get in.* James did not initially get in, but reapplied that same semester and gained admittance. *I applied anyway because I knew that they will accept some people because they need the numbers. I knew I wasn't*

*going to get in, but it was like, but the letter said like at this time. I'm like well what's going to change next year? So I reapplied and I got a letter recommendation from a couple professors and then I got in.*

He earned a 3.0 grade point average his first semester. He described how tension with instructors and students with disabilities services office his second semester lead to withdrawal from graduate school. He also described his physical and financial state also contributed to his withdrawal. *I couldn't really eat properly. I wasn't working. I didn't have any money and I was popping pills (for ADHD) and you have to eat even though it curbs your appetite. But you still have to eat. I turned my car back in. I attempted graduate school, got burned out then haven't been back.* He recently reapplied to continue graduate school, but knows he needs updated documentation. *I need documentation that I've been actively working in the field. I need a letter of recommendation. I probably got to take the GRE even though it's not required, but I got to show that.*

## **Post-College**

### **Employment**

After completion of college and returning home to live with his grandmother, James secured employment at a fast food restaurant. After a year and a half he secured employment as a substitute teacher in his community and later several other part time jobs. James secured employment as a recreation center staff member in 2015. He continues to work there. He also secured employment as a driver for transportation network company in 2017 when he purchased his own vehicle. He started working as a substitute custodian summer 2018.

**Fast food restaurant.** James returned home to live with his grandmother. *I just came home.* His first job after graduating college was at the local fast food restaurant. *Then I got a job*

*at Wendy's. I guess I have a bachelor's degree, but at the time nobody was hiring. They weren't hiring teachers or subs so I got a job at Wendy's for a year and a half until I quit. I asked James how working at a fast food restaurant with a college degree made him feel. It was okay. I tried to find the best of it. I didn't feel degraded or anything. I really didn't want to tell anybody I went to college. I don't know it just kind of came up in conversation so they all knew. During this time James also tried to work in his field as a tutor, but it conflicted with his schedule at Wendy's. I was tutoring. I was helping with Pamela's tutoring program in the afternoon, but then I had to work, so then I couldn't do it.*

**Public school.** James secured employment as a substitute teacher in 2014 and continues to work at this capacity. He has worked in several schools as a day-to-day substitute teacher and also worked as a long-term substitute lasting two-weeks to several months at a time. His long-term substitute positions have been at schools in his community, a historically African American community. Initially, he primarily worked at community schools because he did not own a vehicle. *I was using my grandma's car.* In the community schools he has worked at the middle school as a long-term substitute for general education language arts and science, and special education language arts and science. He taught all middle school grades, 6th through 8th.

He described some of the challenges he encountered as a long-term substitute teacher. At the middle school he was assigned to a newly formed class because of high student numbers the school was not fully prepared for. he described how the room was not clean before he and the students began using it. *The room wasn't clean so I kept asking is this building clean? What's going on? It was all this dust (laugh).* He was told they were not initially using the building at the start of the school year. *I think they weren't going to use that building so they didn't do it (clean) or they didn't have enough crew since they were going to do it last. That was a Friday. I*

*came in Monday and that room was clean. He also described difficulty gathering materials to teach, such as a microscope for labs. I had to run around the school looking for resources. But I couldn't get a microscope, so I improvised. He used the whiteboard and magnify function to replicate a microscope. I'm like okay the whiteboard is a microscope, it's adjusted, it's clear, you can see it, now draw your specimen.*

James also described student challenges. He described a student who came late to class everyday. *One girl will come to class late. Everyday she would come late. I was going to write a SIR (student incident report) then I called her name and she was there. I was like, you're here? Like yeah, why did you say it like that? Well, I had the SIR. She's like don't worry about it I'll be late tomorrow. I'm like ok, I'll keep this right here and just change the date.*

James encounter a break in employment during the 2017-2018 school year after withdrawing from his state retirement fund. *They said I couldn't work. Yeah but turns out I could work. I just have to pay a tax. They tax the money twice.* After his break in employment he worked as a long-term substitute at the community elementary school. There he worked on the response team. *It wasn't bad.* Response team members support students who require behavior supports and other assigned tasks by the administrators.

**Recreation center.** James works at the recreation center in his community. The recreation center serves guests all ages, newborn to elder. His responsibilities have changed over time as he has been cross trained in many facets of running the recreation center. James described his overall disposition working at the recreation center. *I try to make the most of it. I keep trying to control the place, but what I want to control needs to be controlled.* Many of James's stories lead me to believe his is a problem-solver able to quickly propose and follow through with practical solutions. He described the task of working in the game room and

challenges encountered. *I try to create stability. Like I said before nobody wanted to work in the game room. once I cleaned it and learn what was in there it got better. It's a different fight because the biggest problem is they were eating in there, food all over the place. I'm like your supposed to eat over here and I'm just like why not put another trash can over there? Wouldn't it just alleviate that? But they're (management) not going to buy a trashcan.*

### **Satisfaction**

James described his level of satisfaction with current employment. *I'm satisfied I'm employed. Is it the level? Is it the way I thought it was going to be? No, but I just I don't know. I feel like I'm getting something out of it.* James described two specific incidents where he has met people he probably would not have otherwise in his employment as a substitute teacher and recreation center staff. *I've met two mayors.* He worked with one mayor as a substitute teacher and helped resolve an issue at the recreation center for the other mayor. *I just made a new contact.*

### **Challenges**

James described how he is working multiple jobs to pay off debt. His debt includes student loans, car note, car insurance, health insurance and other expenses. James described how he would like to settle into one full time job and one part time job. *I don't want to continue all this running around, but if I could stay at the community center I'll have to move probably here just so I could have some distance (between work) and those kids. Or at least work there in the summer maybe. I'm so used to having so much going on. you know?*

### **Relationships**

James is not currently in a relationship with a significant other. He attributed this to his busy schedule and debt. *People say like, don't you have any fun? I have fun. I'm entertaining*

*myself. I don't need people; I don't need you to make me happy. I just do what I do. I don't even watch TV that much. I sleep. But is that a goal? Yes. Everyone wants the family, the white picket fence., but like right now I'm just surviving. I don't want to bring anybody into that. I don't want to bring anybody into my struggle. That's not really fair (laugh).*

*I'm not connecting with people. Not regularly. They force themselves on me. He recalled an incident he had with a coworker during his undergraduate program. This lady kept trying to build rapport with me. I'm like you're a stranger. I don't know you. You just replaced the person who was working here before and I have to teach you his job and my job at the same time and you want to know my childhood. I'm like it's not, I can't let you in my bubble. We got to do all these other things first. James said his lack of connection worsened as he became older. He described a relationship at work he developed with a coach recently where he felt like the person forced himself on him. I met him when he came in because he replaced the old coach. I don't know anything about football and I didn't know anything to talk to him about.*

### **Goals**

*James described how he did not have a goal as a child. I grew up in the projects so I really didn't have a goal. I just kind of drifted. At one point I was like I want to be a teacher, but that wasn't until I was in fifth grade. I said that out of spite. I don't know why and I just kind of stuck with it. I believe in goal setting and being determined, but what was my long-term goal? I don't really have one, know the big picture in my head yet. Even Though he watched family members attend college it did not influence his goals. I didn't know what they were doing. Jenn and Christy they went off to college. I didn't even know what that meant. I didn't know.*

Currently, James's professional goal is to be a middle school exceptional student education teacher or work at the university full time. He described his interest in the university

while reminiscing about his experiences at the university as a student assistant. *I like the advising part especially when I work with people who needed services* (referring to student with disabilities). He described challenges with securing employment at the university after applying for an academic advisor position. *Yeah, that's why they didn't hire me, they want a master's degree to be an academic advisor now.*

James would also like to complete his master's degree. He described a program of interest out of state. *Sometimes I think about this program. They help you turn your degree green, how you could do your job more eco-friendly. They'll show you different ways you can make your job more cost-effective.*

In five years James sees himself in a different place. *My goal is to be in better shape, be healthier, working in my field. My car should be paid off by then, maybe an apartment. Finish with school, graduate, maybe doctorate. I don't know.* James possibly sees himself as an administrator in ten years. *If I do become a principal at least I'll know this part. I know what it's like to be a sub. I know what it's like to be a long-term sub and what it's like to be custodian. I know if one person is out the whole thing not necessarily falls apart, but it crumbles a little bit. You don't have that cafeteria aide, it's over.*

## **Life Experiences**

### **Problem Solver**

James is a problem-solver. James described being a problem-solver as a strategy developed for survival. *I guess I had to. I mean it was probably a strategy I developed just to, I don't know. Is it because the reading thing? Yeah. I had to memorize words and you know. I don't know. I just try to see all sides of it. I don't know, I guess I think something could go wrong. It was the defense thing. Maybe it was a survival thing. Like something could just go*

*wrong so I just got to know what are the possibilities. Like I don't see it as I'm controlling people, I'm controlling the situation. He shared how people described how he managed the movie theater he worked when in high school and community college. You should have saw me at the movie theater. People will come in and say this place runs better than the postal service.*

### **Race and Disability**

*I didn't know it was racism. I just knew something wasn't right. James shared a few stories of how race may impact his life. Does anyone assume I couldn't do something because I was black? I don't think so, but I think they just assumed I would do something violent. James described what he believes may have been a racially motivated encounter as an undergraduate student. I was looking for the bathroom. I was at work as well. I was a peer advisor and they told me the bathroom's around the corner, but in the back. I was walking around and around. I could not see this bathroom. There was no sign. I just knew it was behind, it was there, so I walked outside in the back and down... then saw a bathroom and it had the sign on it. I went in to use the bathroom... and someone called the police. He described a casual conversation he had with a man while walking back to work. I'm like I know what this is (laugh) and then I just kept talking and talking and then I stopped. He was like where are you going? The building doors is this way. I was like I know, but I have to go back to work. He's like work, you work here? Yeah I was working on a different floor, but I couldn't find the bathroom. Somebody actually called campus security. He just like engaged me in conversation just to follow me out of the building, but I didn't leave the building because I had to go back to work.*

James recalled another incident he experienced in his undergraduate program that may have been racially motivated. *Once I was studying in the common area in the middle of the dorms and I was just sitting there reading. I sat there reading my book my study guide and then*



*security was called because I was just sitting in there. She's like hey what are you doing? I'm studying. But nobody's allowed in here. I'm like they are they just don't. Like every floor had one, a study lounge, but nobody would use it. It was like I worked for housing at the time and I lived there in that dorm, so I didn't really know what to make of it. I'm like I really gotta read this book (laugh). So it could have been racism. I don't know.*

James recalled having only five Black and two Hispanic educators as well as two Black paraprofessionals in his entire public schooling and college experiences. *White, everybody was white.* James believes having predominantly white educators may have negatively impacted his educational experiences.

*I wouldn't have to say so if this paperwork wasn't so messed up and had a preconceived notion and they just assumed I wasn't there to learn, I guess.* James is referring to school documents he reviewed that described him as physically and verbally aggressive. He believes new teachers reading the paperwork may have been negatively influenced changing how they may have taught and interacted with him. *Plus more people like to categorize, which who doesn't but they kind of really do it. Like I don't know. I didn't think of it as racism at the time. I don't know what I thought it was, but I know wasn't going to let it go down. I told you what I did.* He is referring to specific incidents where he advocated for himself. *I don't take, I snap early. I'm cool. I'm calm. I go with the flow, but when it's not right, it's not right and I say something about it. I learned that I can only take so much for so long; from adults, from kids, from whoever. This is what's going on, this is the situation. I learned that early.*

### **Advice**

James shared specific advice for African American male students with disabilities, educational stakeholders, and employers.

### **African American males with disabilities**

*Do your best. Your goal should be to learn your content and socialize later. Once people know that you're about your business, you're not going to fool around too much, gossip or whatever, they're going to come to you because they're know you're not the type of person that's going to sit there and create drama. You're ready, you're going to work. If you're going to talk and you're going to talk and clean at the same time. Just focus on the main reason you are there and then once you learn your job, your task it's going to be easier to socialize because you're not going to try to do two things at the same time or you are but you'll be better equipped. You'll know your content. You'll know what strategies you'll need to apply. You'll know that I need you to stop talking because I have to read this and then your friends are going to understand. they're going to know that you need to focus. Don't shrink yourself. Don't think you're intimidating because you're big, but that's their issue not yours. You're just you. That's it.*

### **Educational stakeholders**

*You can only group so much because if they're Black then they might be Dominican or Haitian or Jamaican or African American. Just try not to group so much. Just ask a question? Do you speak Spanish? Do you understand Spanish? Do you speak Creole? Don't assume so much. Just ask a deliberate question. It's not racist, it's informative. I don't know if I've been pulled into it too because when they (African American males) start pushing and shoving they say that's part of the culture I guess to toughen us up or whatever. I (referring to educational stakeholder) will keep that in mind, the pushing and shoving and in their community they need to be tough for what God only knows, but they need a mental and physical toughness. Yes it could turn into real fighting, but just remind him you break it you bought it. Like there's going to be a consequence if this escalates. You don't have to assume it's a fight.*

James also reinforced the need for movement and actively engaging learning experiences. *Movement needs to be built in. Educators gravitate back to the “Stop, listen to me. I’ll tell you what to do.”*

James wanted educational stakeholders in higher education to know that African American males with disabilities are not going to always have the resources to obtain full medical documentation needed to qualify for accommodation services. *People of color aren’t going to have these documents because it’s free when it’s in school (referring to K-12 public education), but they don’t have the resources to go to the psychologist psychiatrist to get the additional evaluations post-secondary.* He also warned that *in the black community there’s this stigma against mental illness or mental issues that you need to be aware of that not everybody is going to have all this their ducks in a row.*

### **Employers**

James reinforced the importance of consistency and clarity in what employers want their employees to do. *You got to know what you hired them to do. Then consistency. I don’t mind cleaning the equipment. I don’t mind going to the desk or working the desk, but just know what you hired them to do and then every once in awhile, cross-train, let them grow. You’d be surprised like how much they can balance. They might not get it right away, but don’t just take it from them and not another chance to go about it to see if they can learn it a different way differently than the way you have traditionally shown people to do it.* He shared a professional experience while working at the movie theater in during high school. *I’ve had those experiences. Somehow I messed up some money. I gave back too much change, they took me out of concessions and then they made me tear tickets and then they gave me all these tasks to perform. They said this, why aren’t you sweeping the floor? Why aren’t the other ushers? I thought I was*

*supposed to take the tickets. Just explain what the new task is that you want them to do without giving too much information. Sometimes you just have to learn as you go, but right now do is A, B, and C. There's more to come, but for right now A, B, and C.*

### **Post-secondary education**

James is passionate about access to post-secondary education. In a graduate level course he completed he remembered a discussion addressing the topic of all students being college ready. His stance is that everyone does not have to go to college. Everyone should have access to post-secondary education to prepare them for jobs that do not require a college degree. *Everyone should have post-secondary. What does that look like if it's not a university? Where are you learning your skills?*

### **Conclusion**

The participant's story shares his raw experiences including emotions and outcomes. He has fought, both literally and figuratively, to earn his education in both K-12 public and higher education and to secure employment. His successes are connected to his resilience and self-determination.

## **CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS**

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities who completed K-12 public education and higher education. The study offered the participant an opportunity to share his lived experiences examined at the intersections of race, gender, ability and socioeconomic status.

### **Thematic Analysis**

I transcribed three face-to-face interviews, completed descriptive and reflective observation notes for two observations, and reviewed shared documents. After immersion in the data and engaging in reflective qualitative analysis, two themes emerged. The themes identified were verified with the participant. The two themes include: (1) resilience and (2) self-determination. Like race, ability, gender and socioeconomic status, the identified themes are interwoven in James's lived experiences. Both identified themes account for his academic success and work experiences. James's stories are also recounted in this chapter. His stories are in italics.

The themes are relevant because they help us understand factors that attribute to James's academic and employment experiences as well as expound what we already know about the academic and life experiences of African American males with disabilities. Furthermore, the construct of resilience and processes of self-determination can be operationalized for educational

stakeholders as they plan to teach and support this student population. Educational stakeholders should be able to define what resilience is and how they can foster environments that support resilient learners. In addition, educational stakeholders can structure systems of support that build on the processes of self-determined behaviors.

**Theme 1. Resilience.** Resilience has varying definitions across education literature. In general, resilience is “the ability not only to withstand or adapt to hardship but also to transform into something stronger” (Krasny, Lundholm, & Plummer, 2011, p. 14). Wang, Haertel, and Walberg define educational resilience as “the heightened likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities, brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (p. 46). Furthermore, resilience is defined as “academic achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar sociocultural context” (Gayles, 2005, p. 250). Education researchers have studied resilience in terms of race, ability, gender, and socioeconomic status (Gayles, 2005; Hargrett, 2015).

The correlates of individual resilience include four factors most seen in James’s childhood and adolescent narrative (Masten, 1994). These include good intellectual skills; areas of talent or accomplishment valued by self and others; and self-efficacy, self-worth, and hopefulness (Masten, 1994, pp. 13-14). James shared stories that showcase his good intellectual skills. As stated before, James is a problem-solver and sees the big picture in how he plans for and solves problems. In addition, psychological assessments in both elementary school and post-secondary education showed James had average intellectual skills. James shared one psychiatrist’s assessment of his intelligence. *I had to get a psychological evaluation... to evaluate my IQ. I think he could tell I was intelligent, but I was lacking in some areas... but am I*

*cognitively aware, can I process, can I think critically? Yes. James is also a talented artist. His art was recognized early. He was a member of the art club in middle school and The National Art Society in high school. James understands his self-worth despite how others perceive him. I know that it's easier to fall into self-doubt and blame, but when someone literally doubts me, I'm like I'll show you.*

Willoughby, Brown, King, Specht, and Smith (2003) explored resilience in fifteen people with disabilities between the ages of twenty-eight to fifty-three. The researchers found that resilient people have strong sense of self including a clear self-concept (how we see ourselves), high self-esteem (value we place on ourselves), and self-efficacy (how we deal with life). Self-concept is shaped by many factors, but most important to the participants was their response to and understanding of their disability, perseverance, spirituality, and a sense of humor. Self-esteem in the participants was shaped in their belief in oneself and one's abilities, opportunities for self-expression, and not feeling intimidated to ask for help when needed. When one engages in self-efficacy, they are analyzing if they are competent and able to deal with life's challenges or master a new skill (Willoughby et al., 2003). Persistence helps to develop self-efficacy while other's negative perceptions and responses may hinder self-efficacy (Willoughby et al., 2003). Social supports from friends, family, and organizations were also noted as factors that support resilience in people with disabilities (Willoughby et al., 2003). James has a clear self-concept and self-efficacy. He continues to work on his self-esteem as he focuses on weight-loss through physical activity and eating healthier. *My goal is to be in better shape, be healthier...*

Hargrett (2015) found that African American males from urban communities use transferable (across settings) and transformative (responses to varying stressors) resilience to achieve academic success. The eight study participants had all earned undergraduate degrees

despite facing a multitude of challenges. The researcher found that participants countered stressors using application of wisdom, an orientation toward achievement, engagement in self-actualization, and personal accountability (Hargrett, 2015). James also countered stressors in both K-12 public and higher education. Despite failing math multiple times across his academic career, he continued to persevere until he passed. In high school James retook math more times than he could remember. *I took freshman algebra pretty much every single year, or quarter, which ever, because it was block. I was taking at one point two or three math classes a day.* Despite facing similar math challenges in college he completed a degree in interdisciplinary studies. At times James was frustrated, but he continued to fight toward success. *A lot of it was me fighting, I mean, I literally had to fight. I didn't get it, why I had to fight so hard just to learn.*

Gayles (2005) found that the success of three African American males educated in a poor minority urban school offered counternarratives to the metanarrative of non-affluent African American males. Through resilience the participants graduated with honors, were college-bound, and earned academic scholarships. They “believed in the power of their school achievement to transform their future lives” (Gayles, 2005, p. 299). James knew by fifth grade he wanted to be a teacher. *At one point I was like I want to be a teacher, but that wasn't until I was in fifth grade. I said that out of spite. I don't know why and I just kind of stuck with it.* Although his desire to be a teacher was out of spite, he did everything possible to earn a degree in education and become a teacher in the field of special education. During his journey he has encountered roadblocks, but despite these roadblocks he continues to work in the field of education as a substitute teacher and is studying to take the certification exam to teach middle school special education.



**Theme 2. Self-Determination.** Historically, the construct of self-determination was developed in the fields of psychology, motivational psychology, and disability (Wehmeyer, Abery, Mithaug, & Stancliffe, 2003). The basic intent of self-determination is that individuals are able to make and act on decisions through their own free will. “Self-determination is a complex process the ultimate goal of which is to achieve the level of personal control over life that an individual desires within those areas the individual perceives as important” (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003, p. 27). There are three innate psychological needs that underlie behaviors of self-determination including competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Environmental factors of motivation, self-regulation, and personal well-being are also fundamental in understanding self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both intrinsic (inherent satisfaction) and extrinsic (attain external outcome) motivation are relevant in goal planning and attainment while behavioral (action) and emotional self-regulation is needed to not only attain goals, but to ensure a healthy well-being (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Characteristics of self-determined individuals include, but are not limited to, the ability to initiate and take action when needed, problem-solving skills, self-advocacy skills, persistence and creativity (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998). These are all characteristics held by James. Across his educational and professional careers he has taken action when needed whether it was mitigating failure in coursework or enhancing job functionality. In middle school James became a self-advocate. *I learned more about my accommodations so I became more vocal. I learned to self-advocate.* “Individuals cannot self-advocate if they have not developed self-determination skills” (Wehman, 2006, p. 34). Through his self-advocacy, he felt empowered to control his own interests and outcomes. He learned early in life he enjoyed art and the

possibilities of creativity. He described his enthusiasm in art class as early as elementary school. *Especially when we did abstract art, expressionism. It didn't have to exactly look like what you wanted it to look like. In those days I was obsessed. With abstract expressionism it can look like how you want it to. Like how it needs to be to express whatever it is you need to express.* James's sense of creativity has helped him see the larger picture when faced with challenges that require problem-solving. He shared many stories of problem-solving throughout his youth and adulthood. He sees problem-solving as a strategy for survival. *I just try to see all sides of it. I don't know, I guess I think something could go wrong. It was the defense thing. Maybe it was a survival thing. Like something could just go wrong so I just got to know what are the possibilities.*

Central to self-determination theory, choices should be plentiful, meaningful and made autonomously (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). In a meta-analysis of 41 studies on the effect of choice on intrinsic motivation, choice had a positive effect on intrinsic motivation, effort, task performance, perceived competence, and preference for challenge (Patall et al., 2008). The number of type of choice, numbers of choices and external rewards all had a positive impact on intrinsic motivation (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). James shared that he learned and performed best when he had choices. *I don't really know how I best learn, but I know I excel when I have options. That's the best I can explain it, if I could write a paper or make a PowerPoint. I can make amazing PowerPoints. So if I could do a project, if I could do a paper, if I could do a PowerPoint, do a presentation, that was great, but if I had to memorize facts for a test I didn't even like, I usually didn't do well.* In recalling one of his best memories from elementary school James described how he enjoyed getting food-based rewards for achievement. *There were some good times. We would get awards for achievements. I would get an award*

*every year. They would give us little food things, like McDonald's. I'm like oh, I get McDonald's for free because I did well. I did get a lot of awards in elementary school, certificates of achievement. Those made me happy especially the ones that were food-based. I like those.*

Self-determination requires an individual to understand and accept both strengths and areas of need (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Self-determined individuals value the interdependence needed to reach goals (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003). James knew he needed help to pass math throughout his education and utilized varying levels of support. He described how he worked with peers, tutors and math specialists to help him achieve his individual math goals.

### **Conclusion**

James did not explicitly speak of being taught self-determined behaviors or learning in environments that foster resilience. Self-determination and resilience are interrelated constructs and practices. Internal factors related to James's success are interconnected to the construct of resilience while self-determination processes are developed through external factors. Students who are resilient display specific characteristics of self-determination. Resilience has the potential to increase when students properly use processes of self-determined behaviors (e.g., time-management, planning toward a goal). Social settings where caring adults make connections with students and employees foster resilience and support the processes of self-determination. These broad constructs need to be studied and analyzed specific to African American males with disabilities.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter will discuss the summary of findings for the research questions investigated in the current study. In addition, I share a discussion of the challenges of the study, positionality, assumptions, and recommendations for future research.

This research study aimed to contribute to the educational literature by examining the educational and lived experiences of an African American male with disabilities. This study adds to the burgeoning literature examined through the theoretical lens of DisCrit. This study also adds to the narrative literature focused on the voice of marginalized persons. The methodology of narrative inquiry helped me identify two themes relevant to his educational and lived experiences, resilience and self-determination.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The summary of findings addresses the research questions. Interdisciplinary research germane to the identified themes and James's advice for educators are used to discuss the findings. James's stories are also recounted in this chapter. His stories are in italics.

#### **Research Question 1**

What does the educational narrative of an African American male with disabilities analyzed through the lens of DisCrit tell us about how we teach this student population?

The study was guided through the theoretical lens of DisCrit. In the current study race, ability, gender, and socioeconomic status were central to James's lived experience. In listening

to, transcribing, observing, and analyzing the data I was able to make connections to the three tenets of the theoretical framework in which this study is situated. The three tenets of DisCrit (Annamma, 2013) and emergent themes explicitly and implicitly situated in James's narrative were (1) understanding multidimensional identities while problematizing singular interpretations of identity, (2) the psychological impact of being labeled disabled, and (3) activism through resilience and self-determination. James did not always recognize how race, ability, gender and socioeconomic status affected his life. As he matured he understood that many incidents in his life were interconnected and impacted him in ways that may not have impacted others who do not share his identities. *I didn't know it was racism. I just knew something wasn't right.*

James described how most of his teachers across his entire education career did not reflect his culture. Most of his teachers were white females. He recalled having very few teachers and school personnel of direct contact of color. *White, everybody was white.* He found that the teachers often failed to support his academic and behavior needs. James questioned the legitimacy of his initial referral to exceptional student education. He was most concerned that he was described as aggressive. He questioned whether his behavior was over scrutinized, if it was even fabricated. *I was reading it (referral) and it said aggressive. I looked it up. What is aggression? I look like I'm about to attack or am I speaking in a tone that you think is going to lead to more aggression of something physical?* He was subsequently labeled as emotionally handicapped (emotional behavioral disorder) and as having a specific learning disability.

James believed teachers made assumptions about him based on his general appearance, race, and ability. James recalled being larger than his peers and the negative impact this had on his academic development in elementary school during his primary years, grades kindergarten through third. *I was never taught it (reading) because the way I looked, because I was so tall.*

*People assumed I was older so they just assumed that I knew. So when it came down to actually doing work I don't even know how it got that far. I don't know how I did work before. But once I learned, I just got it.*

He recalled being placed in classes for students with emotional behavioral disability as the wrong placement for him. He described these classes for students who exhibited behaviors. *Probably Black. Probably had issues. Probably were angry. I would just sit there like can we start?* He felt like he did not get what he needed in these classroom settings. When I asked him about memories from middle school he described how teachers may have perceived him. *It could have been they just assumed because of the previous students that I would be like those other African American male students. I showed up, I was ready to go, but then I just didn't get what I needed, I guess.*

Educational stakeholders must be aware of and explicitly address cultural influences on self-determination (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). Cultural backgrounds of both educational stakeholders and students and their families can influence self-determination. Educational stakeholders must build positive relationships with students and their families and create opportunities for success while considering cultural implications. James had very clear advice for educational stakeholders in their assessment of Black boys. *You can only group so much because if they're Black then they might be Dominican or Haitian or Jamaican or African American. Just try not to group so much. Just ask a question? Do you speak Spanish? Do you understand Spanish? Do you speak Creole? Don't assume so much. Just ask a deliberate question. It's not racist, it's informative.*

## **Research Question 2**

What can educational stakeholders change about their practice to support this student population?

### **Fostering Resilience**

Programs designed to protect students from environmental factors while promoting resilience all share commonalities. “Perhaps no single fact emerging from resilience research is more important than the finding that having contact with a genuinely caring adult (beyond the family) is important to every child” (Reynolds, 1994, p. 136). Ungar (2008) described five principles of resilience relevant to practice in child populations under stress; ecological multilevel interventions, focus on strengths of the youth, offer educational options, focus on social justice, and understanding cultural and contextual heterogeneity (pp. 25-32).

These principles are intended to connect school and community resources to facilitate the development of resilience. (1) Stakeholders must develop an ecological, multilevel approach to interventions (Ungar, 2008). Interventions and services must be coordinated when the youth is in crisis and during reintegration to mainstream services. In schools, we must be willing to work with parents and agencies to support student needs. (2) Stakeholders must contextualize and understand youth responses to situations while focusing on the strengths of individuals and communities (Ungar, 2008). In schools, we must analyze student behaviors and respond proactively rather than punitively. (3) Stakeholders must develop and foster multifinality or many routes to achieving goals (Ungar, 2008). In schools, these include access to alternate means of education such as those offered through career development programs; vocational programs and on the job training programs. (4) Stakeholders must help youth engage in social justice (Ungar, 2008). In schools, students must be taught self-determination and supported as

they make decisions to govern their own lives. (5) Stakeholders must understand the cultural and contextual contexts of youth and communities in order to successfully plan for, develop and utilize community resources. In schools, stakeholders can use readily available school- and community-based resources to address students in need.

Schools that foster student resilience should include specific characteristics. These characteristics include macrolevel and microlevel factors. “The macrolevel factors encompass the total school environment and related extraschool variables. Microlevel factors emphasize the effectiveness of classroom instruction, including replicable patterns of teacher behaviors and student achievement” (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, pp. 50-51). Building on years of research in Chicago inner city schools, Bryk (2010) developed a framework for essential supports for schools in disadvantaged contexts. The five essential supports include (1) administrative leadership as a catalyst for change and systemic improvement, (2) development and fostering of strong parent-community relationships, (3) development of professional capacity which includes hiring quality teachers that support school vision, and access to professional development and collaborative work, (4) nurturing student-centered climate, and (5) instructional guidance focus on student achievement (Bryk, 2010, pp. 45-46).

Educators in a three-year longitudinal study of seven single-sex schools for Black and Latino boys found they could instill resilience in their students through implementing five core goals (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014). The five core goals include getting students and educators to (1) value education as a pathway to college, (2) build strong student-teacher relationships, (3) proactively respond to community-based experiences, (4) increase self-esteem, and (5) develop supportive peer relationships (Fergus et al., 2014, p. 97).



School-age students with learning disabilities are at risk for emotional complications, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse that may extend into adulthood (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Schools can help foster resilience in African American students with learning disabilities by developing instructional programs that focus on individual and relationship resiliency instructional strategies (Jones, 2011). Individual characteristics of resilience include motivation, self-esteem, internal locus of control, positive attitudes, and goal setting (Jones, 2011). Relationship characteristics include family involvement, positive educational support, formation of social relationships, functioning positive in social relationships, and participation in extracurricular activities (Jones, 2011).

Students with disabilities enter postsecondary education programs encountering faculty who may not know how to best meet their needs (Orr & Goodman, 2010). In a study of 14 postsecondary students with learning disabilities, Orr and Goodman (2010) found that although these students persisted and completed K-12 schooling, they continued to carry the emotional impact of having a learning disability. In their interviews thirteen out of fourteen participants expressed feelings of stupidity, embarrassment, and shame. Faculty must understand that although resilient, some students with disabilities in postsecondary environments carry feelings of shame, self-doubt, and frustration (Orr & Goodman, 2010). Orr and Goodman (2010) offer specific practices faculty can engage in to support students. These include scheduling one-on-one meetings with students, presenting content in a variety of ways, allowing students multiple options for learning assessment, encourage student participation in an become a faculty advisor to extracurricular activities and student organizations, and support development of interpersonal relationships with students outside the classroom (Orr & Goodman, 2010, p. 223).

## **Fostering Self-determination**

In education, the construct of self-determination is usually situated in the special education literature, but can serve the needs of all students. Self-determination in the field of special education became more prominent as people with disabilities became more visible and included in society (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). To promote self-determination, students should be actively engaged in educational planning, decision-making and program implementation as early as possible (Field et al., 1998). When people exercise self-determination they are more likely to have positive life outcomes such as access to post-secondary education, gainful employment, and meaningful relationships (Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, & Shogren, 2006).

Like resilience, fostering self-determination requires a multitude of core processes, such as self-regulated behaviors, goal-setting, choice-making, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and interdependence (Abery & Standcliffe, 2003; Field et al., 1998). Field and associates (1998) describe school and family-based interventions to support the development of self-determination in youth. The following are only a few examples (for a detailed list, see pp. 6-7). Children should have an opportunity to make structured choices in early childhood. In early elementary children should have an opportunity to talk about and process what they have learned and options for task completion. In late elementary children should have an opportunity to systematically analyze past decisions and evaluate task performance. At the secondary level, middle and high school, youth should have an opportunity to make connections between daily goals and decisions made as well as planning long-term goals using short-term objectives. School administrators can promote self-determination through making appropriate curriculum decisions based on the needs of students with disabilities, give students the opportunity to choose courses of interest, and

provide teachers and other staff with in-service training specific to fostering self-determination in students (Field et al., 1998).

Self-determination is an ongoing process in which all students are capable of utilizing across their educational careers and into adulthood (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003). Students should be involved in individualized education and transition planning as early as second grade (Field et al., 1998). Students learn self-determination skills when they are actively engaged in educational and transition planning. Students should be taught self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, decision-making, self-evaluation and other skills pertinent to governing one's life (Field et al., 1998). Field and associates (1998) provide a detailed review of instructional materials to teach self-determination.

In a national study of 1,219 teachers providing instruction to students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21 with an individualized education plan, 60% of the participants were familiar with the self-determination construct (Wehmeyer, Argan, & Hughes, 2000). The participants in the study recognized the importance of teaching self-determination skills, but only 22% indicated that all their students had IEP goals in the area of self-determination (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). There were noted differences in the responses of teachers who taught students with more significant and complex disabilities. The researchers found that these teachers were less likely to teach self-determination. Between 35-73% of teachers in the study responded they taught self-directed learning strategies including self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, self-instruction, goal setting, self-scheduling and antecedent cue regulation. The researchers also found that teachers must have sufficient training in teaching self-determination and the authority and time to teach the skills of self-determination to their students (Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

Differences in opportunities to engage in self-determination are noted between students with learning disabilities (LD) and emotional disturbance (ED). In a study of 85 high school students with emotional disturbance or learning disabilities receiving special education services Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) found that students with ED had less capacity to engage in self-determination (ability, perceptions, and knowledge) and less opportunities to engage in self-determination. Teachers most often perceived students with ED as having less capacity to engage in self-determination and as having less opportunities to engage in self-determination than their peers with LD (Carter et al., 2006). Students with ED would benefit from increased opportunities of explicit instruction in self-determination (goal-setting, choice making, problem-solving, self-evaluation) and the ability to apply those skills to a contextual experience (Carter et al., 2006). Unfortunately, teachers often feel they do not have enough time and opportunity teach self-determination skills (Lancaster, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002).

### **Challenges**

The main challenges encountered in this study were related to scheduling and access to one observation location. During the time of data collection James held three jobs. Each job had a flexible schedule where work times varied daily. James's best days to meet and or speak included Friday and Sunday. These were the days he worked fewer hours. Gaining access to the public school where James worked as a substitute custodian required I get approval from a district-level custodial specialist. I had to speak with the regional custodial specialist and he met with his supervisor, the district-level custodial specialist to gain approval for my access to the school. This process took several days of phone calls and responses to voicemail messages before I received approval to observe James.

One minor challenge I encountered was maintaining stamina for interview transcription, which is not uncommon (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). The interview transcription process was extensive and took me approximately five days to transcribe each interview. I learned in the past and it still holds true, this is my least favorite part of data review.

### **Positionality**

While conducting this research, I was constantly reminded of the African American male students with disabilities I taught in the past. I wondered where they were. Did they fair as well as James? This is always something that haunts me. I know most teachers think about students from the past and their general well-being, but when I think about my former students there is an added layer of anxiety. I hear the stories about how so and so got shot, got locked up, or has three baby mammas and it breaks my heart. Then I hear positive stories that draw me in with a desire to hear more, which is what lead me to study the educational and lived experiences of African American males early in my graduate school career.

Before and during the study, I questioned how someone who works as hard as James does not have all the he wants and needs. In the eight years since graduating college, James has not been able to gain fulltime employment in a field of his choice. He has worked several part-time jobs some would describe as beneath his qualifications. James does not agree. *I didn't feel degraded or anything. I just try to make the best of it.* This attitude is what makes James resilient. Despite years of meeting challenges, he is still determined to move forward and pursue a career in education or higher education. James described how youth might perceive his hard work and dedication. *They see that I have options. I think they see I'm trying; I can clean the floors and teach a class.*

How can James succeed and not some of my previous students? What can I learn that may hold value for educators and my future public school and higher education students? My relationship with James will continue as it has in the past, but perhaps we can move forward in sharing his story in a meaningful way that impacts people on a larger scale. There's something motivating about James, something motivating about listening to him speak and share day-to-day mundane stories and those germane to the current study.

### **Assumptions**

I realize I made several assumptions prior to beginning the study and during the data collection and analysis phases with the support of my qualitative reviewer and dissertation committee members. I used my reflexive journal to document and make sense of my assumptions and how they may have influenced how I made meaning of James's stories. I assumed James had strong familial support and consistent strong academic and social emotional support from educational stakeholders. How could he be successful without them? My assumptions were based off my experiences of teaching African American male students with disabilities who typically do not achieve academic and or employment success. The students I considered to have met success typically had abundant familial support.

### **Familial Support**

James expressed he did not have a large amount of familial support. He described how was essentially a latchkey kid in elementary school beginning around 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. *I lived with my mom. I would get ready for school everyday. She'd help me. I would go to school. I'd come back. Sometimes she'd be there, sometimes not. But I just let myself in. Strange thing. She thought if I had a key I'd be a latchkey kid. But I was like, no. I was alone for a few minutes. It was great. I watched Gilligan's Island.* James's mother enforced discipline in response to

suspensions related to maladaptive behaviors in elementary school. As I immersed myself in the data, I realized I had to redefine systems of support looking for small, but impactful supports not explicitly stated in James's stories.

There are clear connections of a strong bond between he and his grandmother. James has resided with his grandmother during some school age years into adulthood and has even used her vehicle for transportation to work. James shared a story about how his grandmother helped him with an issue in high school. His grandmother was the first person he called for help. *So I walk back home and then I pickup the phone and I call my grandma...* This story speaks to the close relationship and trust they share. In addition, James shared school and medical records his grandmother saved for many years. These records dated as far back as kindergarten. There is great level of care to have preserved documents for this duration of time.

#### **Academic and Social Emotional Support From Stakeholders**

James recalled receiving support from several teachers, a college outreach program, and vocational rehabilitation, but with limitations and inconsistency. James expressed several times that his educational settings did not match and meet his academic and social emotional needs. He described most of his educational experiences as a fight. He felt he was constantly fighting, figuratively and literally, in a system that did not provide him with consistent access to an appropriate curriculum and accommodations. James believed in elementary and middle school his educational placement was related to maladaptive behaviors while ignoring academic needs. Gaining access to the college outreach program was a challenge. He was initially denied entrance, but through persistence gained entrance and was able to take advantage of the resources available from 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Although James qualified for services through vocational rehabilitation that assisted with college tuition, he did not receive full accommodations through students with disabilities services because his psychological evaluation was limited. Vocational rehabilitation did not pay for all components of the psychological evaluation to ensure James received full accommodation services, which he could not afford to pay for independently.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the educational experiences of an African American male with disabilities who completed K-12 public education and higher education. I was concerned with the intersectionality presented in his narratives as it relates to race, gender, ability and socioeconomic status. The literature review focused on the educational and life experiences of African American males with disabilities. In the current study, resilience and self-determination were identified as two common themes or processes that helped James navigate educational and lived experiences. The literature review and findings from the current study suggest there is more work to be done to specifically address the educational and lived experiences of African American males with disabilities.

I offer the following recommendations for future research: (1) Examine resilience in African American males with disabilities. (2) Examine self-determination in African American males with disabilities. (3) Examine risk and protective factors for African American males with disabilities in the areas of resilience and self-determination. (4) Examine the outcomes for African American male students with disabilities who have been taught in classrooms that foster resilience and self-determination. (5) Examine cultural competence in K-12 schools and universities specific to the needs of African American male students with disabilities. (6)



Examine the complexities associated with underemployment of African American males who earn an undergraduate degree.

### **Conclusion**

James did not explicitly speak of being taught in environments that foster resilience or of being taught behaviors of self-determined individuals, but did experience teachers and employers who supported him and encouraged him to make positive decisions for himself (e.g., high school learning strategies teacher, movie theater supervisor). In my research on resilience and self-determination I found that most studies on self-determination had large sample/participants sizes of non-African American males. It would be interesting to see the data specific to African American males with disabilities in order to determine what skills and processes support these students best. In addition, I would like to know more about resilience in African American males with disabilities. Much of the resilience literature was specific to African American males, but not those with disabilities. What are the challenges to resilience when disability is added to the life experience?

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Interview 1

Background, broad educational experiences during K-12 public education and higher education

Considering the identities as an African American male with disabilities:

Elementary School

1. Describe your classroom setting.
2. When did you start your education?
3. When did you receive your disability labels and what were they?
4. What was your favorite subject and why?
5. What was your least favorite subject and why?
6. What were your best memories?
7. What were your worst memories?
8. What did you learn about yourself during those years?
9. Were there teachers you found helpful and teachers you found harmful? What were some of the things they did and did not do?
10. What type of support did you have at home?

Middle School

1. Describe your classroom setting.
2. What was your favorite subject and why?

3. What was your least favorite subject and why?
4. What were your best memories?
5. What were your worst memories?
6. What did you learn about yourself during those years?

#### High School

1. Describe your classroom setting.
2. What was your favorite subject and why?
3. What was your least favorite subject and why?
4. What were your best memories?
5. What were your worst memories?
6. Describe your work experiences during high school.
7. What did you learn about yourself during those years?
8. Describe your transition from high school to college.

#### Undergraduate College

1. What academic supports did you receive in college?
2. What financial supports did you receive in college?
3. What were your best memories?
4. What were your worst memories?
5. What did you learn about yourself during those years?

#### Interview 2

#### Document Review and Post-School

Considering the identities as an African American male with disabilities:

## Graduate School

1. Describe your experiences during the graduate program.
2. Describe your employment experiences.
3. Describe your goals.
4. Describe your relationships.
5. Describe the most positive and or negative experiences during this time period.

## Advice

1. What advice do you have for educational stakeholders of African American male students with disabilities in public schools?
2. What advice do you have for African American male students with disabilities in higher education?
3. What advice do you have for educational stakeholders of African American male students with disabilities in higher education?
4. What advice do you have for African American males with disabilities post-school?
5. What advice do you have for employers of African American males with disabilities?
6. How do you feel about the interview process?

## Interview 3

### Review of Chapters 5 and 6

1. Did you remember anything we did not discussed?
2. Was everything represented correctly?

## APPENDIX B:

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This form below is the letter of consent which will be given to the participant:



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

**Pro # 00027041**

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

**Learning in the Margins: The Educational Experiences of an African American Male with Disabilities**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Aisha Holmes. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Brenda Walker, Ph.D., J.D.

The research will be conducted at a setting chosen by the participant and researcher that are convenient and comfortable for both.

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**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships among race, gender, disability, and the school experiences of an African American male with disabilities in K-12 public and higher education. I am interested in examining the perceptions of the participant as he constructs meaning at the intersections of race/ethnicity, disability, and gender.

### **Why are you being asked to take part?**

We are asking you to take part in this research study because your narrative is unique. Statistically, African American males with disabilities do not achieve your level of academic success (completion of an undergraduate degree). In addition, I want to explore the meanings you ascribe to the concepts of race and disability as factors of impact on your academic success.

### **Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Spend approximately two months in this study. The research study will consist of ongoing interaction to include one informal meeting, four formal interviews, two observations in your natural settings, and collection of additional artifacts (timeline, photographs, artwork, participant journal).
- Attend one informal meeting. The researcher will use this meeting to review the purpose of the study, discuss the interview and observation protocols, discuss artifact collection, clarify questions the participant may have, determine a pseudonym for the participant, and gain written informed consent.
- Participate in four semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol created by the researcher.
- All interviews will be digitally recorded for transcription purposes. All digitally recorded interviews and transcriptions will be saved to a password-protected computer only the researcher has access to.
- The participant will be asked to choose a location that is convenient and comfortable for him to conduct the informal meeting and four interviews. The location will be secured at least one week in advance.
- Each interview will be approximately 90-120 minutes.
- During interview one I will collect background information using a demographic sheet and discuss the participant's completed lifeline.
- During interview two I will use interview protocol one to gather life stories about the participant's broad educational life experiences in K-12 public and higher education. In addition, we will discuss my observation notes collected during observation one.
- During interview three we will discuss participant selected artifacts (e.g., artwork, pictures) and my observation notes collected during observation two.
- During interview four I will use interview protocol two to gather additional life stories and ask clarification questions based on the previous interviews, observations, and artifacts.
- During any of the interviews, the participant can share artifacts (participant journal, lifeline, artwork, photographs).
- All artifacts will be secured in a locked file cabinet.
- At each interview, the participant will be able to review the transcript and preliminary analyses to ensure I am accurately describing and interpreting the data.
- The researcher will observe the participant two times in his natural setting(s). I will use an observation protocol during the observation to record descriptive (summarize flow of activities) and reflective notes (summarize process, reflections, conclusions), reflections, insights, ideas, confusions, hunches, initial interpretations, and breakthroughs. The observations will occur after interviews two and three. The observation protocol will be shared and discussed with the participant during interviews three and four.
- All artifacts will be returned to the participant at the conclusion of the study.
- All digital recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed after five years.

Total Number of Participants

About one individual will take part in this study at USF.

#### Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

#### Benefits

The potential benefits of participating in this research study include sharing your narrative at education conferences and the potential for co-writing and publication opportunities.

#### Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

#### Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

#### Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

#### Conflict of Interest Statement

**As a member of the study team, I understand that I have responsibilities related to the conduct and oversight of this research study. I will ensure this research study is conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Belmont report, institutional policies, and federal and state regulations.**

**Neither an immediate family member nor I hold equity interest in, receive personal compensation from, or have a business relationship with an entity related to the research outlined in this proposal.**

**Neither an immediate family member nor I have a proprietary interest associated with the research outlined in this proposal.**

#### Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, faculty advisor, and research committee members.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

**You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Aisha Holmes at 941-388-8594.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at [RSCH-IRB@usf.edu](mailto:RSCH-IRB@usf.edu).

**Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent