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THEIR VOICES MATTER: PERCEPTIONS HELD BY BLACK MALES REGARDING THEIR TRANSITION PLANNING AND POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Dedication

I would like to send a special dedication to my father, John H. Payne. Thanks for being hard on me. I did not realize it at the time, but it was your way of being there for me and believing in me. I am glad that I have been blessed with another opportunity to make you proud. I also want to pay tribute to the late Dr. Charles Butler. Thank you for graciously agreeing to be a committee member. I wish I could have completed my studies before God summoned you to Heaven. My goal is to be like you when I grow up.

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Abstract

Black male students categorized with a high-incidence disability are not receiving secondary transition planning that enables them to obtain successful postsecondary outcomes in employment, education, and independent living. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of Black males identified as having a specific learning disability, intellectual disability, or emotional disturbance about their high school transition planning as well as their postsecondary outcomes. The researcher used a phenomenological qualitative approach to obtain in-depth knowledge about the participants. Participants were not afforded secondary transition activities such as student led conferences, transition assessments, self-determination and self-advocacy skill instruction, career planning, or collaboration with outside agencies. Results reveal the omission of effective transition practices and low expectations held by educators can hinder positive postsecondary outcomes. In addition, stigmatizing experiences affiliated with special education services resulted in the participants masking their inner feelings and employing mannerisms associated with cool pose as described by Majors & Billson (1992).

Chapter 1 Introduction

During my many years as high school principal, it was far too often I encountered former Black male students who presented me with stories of disappointment. Some were unemployed, or recently released from jail, and some were parenting multiple children with different mothers. They often appeared clueless and/or unconcerned about developing skills that would improve their chances for becoming productive citizens in today's competitive society. As a special educator, I feel a higher level of frustration after conversing with these Black males who received special education services. I can recall one specific instance when I sought job placement for a senior high school student categorized as "educable mentally retarded." The representative from a rehabilitation agency to whom I reached out for help told me that it was easier to place a one-armed veteran on a job than a student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). As a special education teacher, I realized that I would face many barriers in preparing Black male students with disabilities for life beyond high school. I remember thinking that I wanted to focus on teaching academic skills that would be highly relevant to their unique experiences and goals. More specifically, I wanted to teach skills that incorporated daily living, self-advocacy, perseverance, and integrity. Furthermore, as a person who had inside knowledge about Black people, I knew that in order to be a successful educator, I had to establish strong relationships with each Black male student that entered my classroom. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experience of Black males once categorized with a high-incidence disability as they transitioned from high school to postsecondary employment, education, and independent living.

I knew early on that the Black males' presence in special education mirrored Black people's experiences in American society. I had experienced racial oppression all my life and seen my Black family and friends pushed into marginalized spaces, from low income areas in cities to prisons. This has been a reality in my life as well as for the Black people with whom I interact. Later, when I began working in the field of special education, I realized the Black male students' removal from mainstream classrooms was the beginning of the indifferences they would endure for a life time. I saw clearly that Black male students were falling prey to the dysfunctions of the public school systems and special education, often because of ignorance about the special needs and gifts of Black people. Many of these young men had been denied the opportunities to receive a quality education. They were often viewed as dangerous, and I watched first-hand how they were avoided by teachers when they yearned for relationships with them. Their unique expressions of emotion, often anger and sometimes detachment, were seen as personal issues. They were victims of low expectations held by staff members who contributed to their diminished desire to excel academically. Therefore, my Black male students' abilities to dream beyond becoming a professional athlete or rapper were minimal. Poverty provided most of my students with limited exposure to positive experiences and role models at home and in their communities.

According to Jenkins (2006), Black males are often at a disadvantage when dealing with conflict upon entering the classroom because of lack of economic and educational resources. Furthermore, they are prone to generational poverty, which places them at a social disadvantage and hinders their ability to excel in the classroom. In

addition to poverty, Black males frequently face prejudice and experience oppression, also stated eloquently in an article by Jenkins (2006):

> the underachievement, lack of inclusion, backward progression of African American men within American society, and particularly within the educational arena, has once again surfaced as a trend that demands immediate attention. However, the challenges of reversing the negative circumstances facing African American men is daunting and requires working on the plight of the individual and transforming a broad array of social, political, economic, psychological, and educational issues that are deeply rooted in the very power structure of America. (p. 127)

In general, there is a vast difference in educational experiences shared by most Black male students in comparison to other student populations. Black male students are overrepresented at the bottom of the achievement ladder and most likely to be suspended and expelled from school than any other racial group (Conchas, Lin, Oseguera, & Drake, 2015). Black males have the poorest rates for completing high school (Noguera, 2012). According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010), more than half of Black males do not receive a high school diploma and out of all students in public schools they have the poorest achievement and lowest test scores. Black males' failure to complete high school has a strong correlation with incarceration rates. More than half of incarcerated individuals enter prison without a high school diploma (Wright, 2014).

One of the greatest issues impacting the Black male student is the unwarranted referral for special education (Kafele, 2009; Kunjufu, 2013). Research shows that impoverished Black students are frequently referred to special education due to several factors, including but not limited to classroom management, unequal opportunities in general education, and inexperienced teachers. Within the last two decades, multiple articles have cited cultural differences as one of the reasons for referring Black males for special education placement (Albrecht, Skiba, Losen, Chung, & Middelberg, 2012;

Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005). Literature reveals that throughout history special education has been used as a tool to remove Black males from the regular education classroom, resulting in what is commonly referred to as (re)segregation (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Dunn, 1968; Voulgarides, Fergus, & Thorius, 2017; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014). Black males with high-incidence disabilities are commonly placed in more restrictive environments than their White peers with disabilities. This practice removes them from the general education classroom and denies them the same opportunities as afforded to those in the general education classroom. Literature is replete with articles citing the aftermath of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. This landmark decision initiated the beginning of educators unjustifiably referring students from underserved populations, particularly Black males, for special education services (Artiles et al., 2010; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005).

This qualitative study will seek to explore the very limited, if any, amount of research literature that specifically examines the transition planning and dismal postsecondary outcomes experienced by Black males identified with high-incidence disabilities—specific learning disability (SLD), emotional disturbance (ED), and intellectual disability (ID). More than 70% of all youth with disabilities are served in these three [judgmental] categories (Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006). Research reveals Black males have been frequently overrepresented in high-incidence categories since the inception of special education (Dunn, 1968; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Trainor, 2010; Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010). In addition, despite IDEA mandates,

longitudinal studies, federal funding and initiatives, and the identification of evidence-based practices (EBPs), research continues to reveal that schools struggle with providing transition planning and practices that will enable students with high-incidence disabilities to secure successful postsecondary outcomes in employment (Rojewski, Lee & Gregg, 2015; U.S. Department of Labor, 2018), education enrollment (Banks, 2014; Hamblet, 2014; Madaus, Grigal, & Hughes, 2014) and independent living (Newman et al., 2011). Examination of research indicates disparate postsecondary outcomes are more prevalent among students of color with high-incidence disabilities and from low socioeconomic backgrounds as a result of inadequate secondary transition planning (Trainor, 2010; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). With this in mind, it is fair to say postsecondary outcomes for Black males with high-incidence disabilities are doubly discouraging in comparison to other student populations with and without disabilities.

Although it has been more than a decade since IDEA (2004) made amendments to secondary transition planning, research indicates transition service providers (e.g., secondary special education teachers, administrators, school counselors, rehabilitation counselors, outside agencies) are not using effective practices and programs to improve secondary transition services for students with disabilities with finesse (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Plotner, Mazzotti, Rose, & Carlson-Britting, 2016).

In response to the need to identify practices that were deemed evidence-based, researchers began to systematically review secondary transition literature to identify secondary transition curricula, practices, and programs (Mazzotti, Test, & Mustain, 2014; Mustian, Mazzotti, & Test, 2012; Test, Fowler et al., 2009). The evidence-based

secondary transition movement is founded on the premise that if teachers implement EBPs, it will improve postsecondary outcomes in employment, education, and independent living for students with disabilities. Research has identified evidenced-based practices such as, but not limited to, student led transition meetings (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013), active family involvement (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012), inclusion in regular education classes (Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg, 2015), self-advocacy skills (Roberts, Ju, & Zhang, 2016; Test, Fowler, Brewer, & Wood, 2005), interagency collaboration (Oertle, Plotner, & Trach, 2013), work-based learning, vocational rehabilitation services (Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos, & Stern, 2015), career and technical education (CTE; Lee, Rojewski, & Gregg, 2016), and career development (Webb, Repetto, Seabrooks-Blackmore, Patterson, & Alderfer, 2014) as effective transition activities for postsecondary success for students with high-incidence disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

Over the past decade the "cool pose" theory has enriched the interpretation of data collected about Black males. Cool pose is defined as "a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control" (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). The stylized movements and gestures are the Black males' symbolic outcry demanding acceptance by staff and their classmates (Majors & Billson, 1992). The cool pose theory will help the researcher explain the Black males' emphasis on acceptance while wearing a "mask" to conceal the pain associated

with poverty, family dysfunctions, and limited resources. This theoretical perspective will be elaborated on in Chapter 2.

I have had years of interacting with Black males, which has led me to become very fond of this population of students. I am also accustomed to their distinctive styles and understand why they desire to be viewed as cool by others. Many of the Black male students I knew had mastered a swag or stroll that set them apart from their peers. I realized behaviors viewed as aggressive and defiant by some educators were merely the Black male's efforts to mask the pain caused by their families, neighborhoods, and previous educational experiences. By and large, as both a teacher and administrator, I have witnessed how the Black males' behaviors are regularly misconstrued as aggressive, defiant, and a sign of being unmotivated by educators that are unfamiliar with their cultural differences.

Statement of the Problem

Transition planning focuses on improving the postsecondary outcomes in employment, education, and independent living for individuals with disabilities. As mandated by IDEA (2004), beginning no later than age 16, secondary transition plans must include the following: student invitation, measurable postsecondary goal(s), age-appropriate transition assessments, coordinated set of activities, outside agency invitation, annual individualized education program (IEP) goal(s), and transfer of rights at age of majority (§300.320(b)). Research has proven that effective secondary transition planning improves postschool outcomes for students with disabilities (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Trainor et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2012). Yet, studies have found secondary transition providers are not implementing effective transition practices, strategies, and instruction

that will enable students with disabilities to experience postsecondary successes that are commensurate to their peers without disabilities (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Plotner et al., 2016; Rowe et al., 2015). Although more special education students have access to services that help with securing postsecondary education and employment placement, many students are not aware of the services and are not properly prepared to access the services (Lane, Carter, & Sisco, 2012). As indicated by Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, and Sedaghat (2015) preparation must go beyond academics. Schools must provide skills needed for postsecondary employment, education, and independent living. Failure to utilize transition practices that are deemed effective hinders this marginalized population of Black males with high-incidence disabilities from acquiring a better quality of life post-high school.

Purpose of the Study

As an educator in public schools with a high percentage of Black males receiving special education services, I have witnessed far too often special educators merely including secondary transition goals on IEPs to meet federal compliance. Providing Black males previously identified with a high-incidence disability an opportunity to share their perceptions of their secondary transition planning will enable educators, transition providers, and policymakers to understand the importance of providing effective transition services, skills, and resources. This study demonstrates the need for secondary transition providers to receive training and implement activities that will allow Black males with high-incidence disabilities to achieve their postsecondary goals. Effective transition planning promotes skills which allow Black male students with high-incidence disabilities to acquire gainful employment, pursue educational aspirations, and live

independently within their communities. Nonetheless, there may be unique ways to support students that educators can learn from the comments provided in this study by Black students identified with a high-incidence disability.

Research Questions

The researcher seeks to hear directly from an underserved population, Black males once categorized with a high-incidence disability, regarding their perceptions and thoughts about their transition planning experiences and postsecondary outcomes. The following questions will be investigated:

1. How do Black males, formerly categorized with a high-incidence disability, describe the experiences of their secondary transition planning?
2. To what extent was the research participant actively involved in the secondary transition planning process during their high school years?
3. What instruction, training, resources, assistance programs, or other experiences were a part of the secondary transition planning?
4. How do these students describe their postsecondary outcomes?

It is my desire to take advantage of the opportunity to draw awareness to the postsecondary outcomes of Black males once identified with a high-incidence disability. This phenomenological study will give a voice to a marginalized population. There is not a sufficient amount of research that examines the perceptions held by Black males regarding their transition planning and postsecondary outcomes. Their postsecondary outcomes will allow educators at both the district and state levels to realize there is a need for immediate action.

Summary

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 begins by introducing the study. Then, the researcher identifies the theoretical framework, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions. Chapter 2 addresses the history of special education practices and federal legislative mandates; defines and identifies characteristics of students with high-incidence disabilities, components of secondary transition planning, review of transition research, postsecondary outcomes, and concludes with a summary. Chapter 3 identifies the components of this qualitative study by addressing phenomenology as the methodology, participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and concludes with a summary. Chapter 4 is divided into multiple identified common themes. The researcher includes quotes and dialogue from the transcribed interviews as well as brief summaries. The quotations and summaries are divided into sections according to the initial coding themes. Chapter 5 consists of a discussion of the themes garnered from the interviews as they are related to the participants experiences and the issues related to the secondary transition planning and postsecondary outcomes for Black males formerly identified with a high-incidence disability. Implications and suggestions for future research are identified. In conclusion, there are limitations and future research sections.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

This literature review will address topics that closely relate to Black males with high-incidence disabilities' secondary transition activities. First, I will discuss the correlation between the historical *Brown vs. Board of Education* court case, the Civil Rights Movement, and special education. Emphasis will be placed on the prejudices and discriminatory practices that segregated minorities many decades ago, and continue to cause (re)segregation in America's schools today. Second, I will identify the laws, mandates, and initiatives that have been created in hopes of providing equality for individuals with disabilities and marginalized populations. Third, I will address secondary transition barriers. Fourth, I will identify the results from various studies that address postsecondary outcomes for individuals identified with high-incidence disabilities. Fifth, I will provide information regarding urban Black males. Sixth, I will introduce the theoretical framework that will be used for this study. In conclusion, I will provide a brief summary.

Historical Perspective

Research depicts a strong correlation between special education, the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* court decision, and the Civil Rights Movement (Blanchett, 2009; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008). It can be said special education was born out of and owes a debt to these two initiatives. Considered to be the most important case on schooling in the history of the Supreme Court, the *Brown* decision struck down segregation in public school systems and allowed Black students to attend the same schools as their White counterparts. Although the intentions of the *Brown* decision were aimed in the right direction, this landmark case caused a backlash for economically-disadvantaged minority students (Ford & Russo, 2016; Gardner, Rizzi, & Council, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Due to White privilege and racism, teachers began referring minority students to special education. These students were placed in separate self-contained settings and denied access to a quality education with their peers (Blanchett, 2006; Ford & Russo, 2016). According to Ferri & Connor (2005),

> overt racially segregating schooling practices have given way to largely under-acknowledged and more covert forms of racial segregation, including some special-education practices. Since the inception of special education, the discourses of racism and ableism have bled into one another, permitting forms of racial segregation under the guise of disability. (p. 454)

Basically, the practice of legally dividing students based on racial differences was unconstitutional. Dividing students according to disability continues to be a common practice in school districts today. These exclusionary practices have led to special education being categorized as discriminatory (Albrecht et al., 2012), a new legalized form of structural segregation and racism (Blanchett, 2006), and another manifestation of institutionalized racism (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010).

Could it be that the *Brown* decision, which was supposed to have helped Black students, has inadvertently resulted in their continued "resegregation"? Ever since this Supreme Court decision was rendered, Black students have been disproportionately placed into the LD, ID and ED categories (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Artiles et al., 2010; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Many researchers believe educators continue to use special education as a tool to segregate minority students from their peers. Black male students, especially those identified with a high-incidence disability, continue to spend more time out of the regular classroom in comparison to their White peers (Albrecht et al., 2012; Harry & Klinger, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). In fact, this study attempts to draw from this history of oppression found in education and other social institutions to gain deeper insights into the current psychological stressors and social prejudices that block the Black male's full development.

Unfortunately, the perils faced by Black males in the 1960s are parallel to the special education practices that are endured by Black males today. Racism and discriminatory practices prompted White educators to refer Black males for special education placement decades ago (Blanchett, 2009). Research conducted by Lloyd Dunn (1968) documented disproportionality when he discovered a large number of poor inner-city minorities were regularly labeled as mildly mentally retarded and placed in segregated classrooms in comparison to their White peers. When White students evidenced more visibly obvious disabilities, they were not labeled with a disability (Blanchett, 2009). Whereas today, literature posits special education referrals are mostly created due to cultural differences between educator and the Black male. Educators' views of minority students can be influenced by aspects of their race that are intertwined

with historical stereotypes of low intelligence, disruptive behaviors, poverty, or family circumstances (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Mirroring trends practiced several decades ago, minorities—particularly Black males—continue to be labeled "disabled" at a higher rate than other student populations.

Historically, labeling has been a very serious matter, often bringing with it an assortment of differential and unfair treatment. The price of a label, especially if misdiagnosed, can prove to be academically, socially, and mentally costly for students with disabilities (Gold & Richards, 2012). The inability to receive a quality education in the mainstream classroom hinders achievement and the ability to appropriately interact with peers (Blanchett, 2009).

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

The following section provides descriptions of laws and initiatives that were passed to bring about greater equality for individuals with disabilities. Contextualizing this study within these descriptions will help in our interpretations of lawmakers' effectiveness in providing environments where special education students can reach their full potential. The individual interviews in this study will help reveal any variance that exists between theory and reality as it regards the concrete experiences of Black males with high-incidence disabilities and the aspirations of the law. As previously mentioned, the first national special education legislation evolved from the actions of the Civil Rights Movement (Skiba, et al., 2008). In 1975, Public Law 94-142, also known as the Education for the Handicapped Act (EHA), was one of the first legislative mandates passed regarding the specific needs of children with disabilities. PL 94-142 was passed in response to congressional concerns regarding students with disabilities and their access

to the educational system (Prince, Plotner, & Yell, 2014). This law was developed to address the needs of students with disabilities that were denied public education or appropriate educational services. PL 94-142 guaranteed a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for each child with a disability in every state and locality across the United States. Special education programs grew. More children were also provided the needed resources and services in public school settings.

The EHA was reauthorized in 1990 and became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA (1990) was the first Act to require each student's individualized education program (IEP) include transition services by age 16 or younger, if the IEP team considers it appropriate. This reauthorization addressed Congress' concerns that too many students with disabilities were leaving high school unprepared or dropping out of school (Prince, Katsiyannis, & Farmer, 2013; Prince, Plotner, & Yell, 2014). IDEA (1990) addressed outcomes that were typical and desirable for exiting students with disabilities, such as postsecondary education, additional vocational services, employment, living independently, adult services, and community participation (Rusch, Hughes, Agran, Martin, & Johnson, 2009).

In 1997, IDEA (1990) was reauthorized and lowered the age for transition planning to age 14. The 1997 amendments mandated the IEP include an annually updated transition statement regarding the student's course of study. At age 16, or when deemed appropriate for the student, the amendment required a statement that identified needed transition services with links to outside agencies (Prince, Plotner, Yell, 2014). The amendments to IDEA (1990) also referenced providing instruction in employment-related activities during high school. Furthermore, schools were required to coordinate post-high

school-related services by coordinating the transition from high school to post-high school outcomes (Rusch et al., 2009). Legislation set guidelines and policies for the educational services for the 13 disability categories. The reauthorization emphasized the students' right to receive educational services in their least restrictive environment (LRE). This meant an increase in the number of students with special needs receiving instruction in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers. This required the general education teacher to assume more responsibilities for providing instruction to students with high-incidence disabilities. This is an area where participants in this study were able to provide input through their testimonies.

The most recent reauthorization titled Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was signed into law in 2004. IDEA (2004) reverted the age and mandated transition planning must begin no later than 16. IDEA (2004) defines transition as

> a coordinated set of activities that (A) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (34 C.F.R. 300.43)

This legislative piece was specifically designed to align with No Child Left Behind NCLB. IDEA (2004) used the same language to require that special education teachers must also use scientifically-based research practices and curriculum to provide instruction (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010). A major component of IDEA (2004) mandated that

regular education and special education teachers become "highly qualified" to teach their respective grade level or core content area(s). In addition, IDEA (2004) implemented a number of transition-related IEP requirements as follows:

> (a) measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills; (b) transition services, including courses of study, needed to assist the child in reaching those goals; and (c) a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority beginning no later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority. (20 U.S.C. 1414 (d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII))

IDEA (2004) also requires high schools to provide exiting students with a summary of performance (SOP). The SOP addresses postsecondary education, employment, and independent living goals, if needed. The SOP includes suggestions from the school and outlines how to attain these goals after the students leave high school.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires all states to provide secondary transition data on Indicator 13. This indicator monitors the incorporation of appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments and transition services. Schools evaluate the documentation of coordinated transition services within the IEP (Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009). Indicator 13 is defined as "the percent of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that will reasonably enable the child to meet the post-secondary goals" (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)). Another component of the State Performance Plan (SPP), Indicator 14, requires school personnel to document the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities one year after they exit school (Flexer, Daviso, Baer, Queen, & Meindl, 2011). Indicator 14 requires states to collect data on (1) the percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school (2) who

have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, (3) or both, within one year of leaving high school (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)).

Since there are procedural safeguards to ensure secondary transition planning is occurring at the state and local levels, the special education community, stakeholders, and parents should question why Black males identified within the high-incidence categories are not experiencing postsecondary success in employment, education, and independent living at the same level as their peers with and without disabilities. Is secondary transition planning another instance in which being a Black male offsets the opportunity to receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) as mandated by IDEA?

Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorizations

A civil rights law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), provided education funding to states and attempted to ensure every child had access to an education. ESEA authorizes federal spending to support K-12 schooling. It represents the nation's commitment to equal education opportunities for *all* students regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic status (Malin, Bragg, & Hackmann, 2017). This bill was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty." President Johnson believed equal access to education was imperative to a child's ability to lead a productive life (Darrow, 2016).

With growing concerns regarding achievement gaps that left poor and minority students in failing schools, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed by Congress in 2001. NCLB required historically underperforming student populations, including students with disabilities, be included in district and statewide assessments (Darrow, 2016); thereby, holding both general and special education teachers more accountable for

closing the achievement gap between the student populations. Schools were also required to use scientifically-based research practices and curriculum to provide instruction (Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian, 2014). NCLB required each school to use disaggregated student data (race, gender, socioeconomic status and disability categories) as part of the formula for computing adequately yearly progress (AYP).

In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorizes ESEA (1965). ESSA limits the role of federal government and gives states and districts more flexibility to provide students with a "well-rounded education". States are tasked with implementing assessments that measure "higher-order thinking skills and understanding." ESSA also requires each state's accountability system use multiple measures of student and school performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). ESSA continues to focus on using assessment data to focus on subgroups. Under this current law, no more than 1% of all students will be allowed to take an alternative assessment.

The current federal law also addresses achievement gaps by targeting low performing schools. States must identify the lowest performing 5% of all public schools that receive Title I funding, as well as high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Districts must complete a comprehensive plan that identifies how the low performing schools will be supported. The supports outlined in the plan must include long term goals, evidence-based interventions, school-level needs assessment, and the identification of needed resources (Darlington-Hammond et al., 2016).

It is often students graduate from high school without a path that guides them to college or a career. A key part of ESSA (2015) is the focus on college and career readiness. States are required to align their standards with college and career skills (Darlington-Hammond, et al., 2016). ESSA recognizes the inequities of opportunities and outcomes faced by underserved student populations. The federal law places emphasis on improving the preparation of K-12 students to increase successful transitions to college and employment (Malin, Bragg, & Hackmann, 2017).

The effectiveness of NCLB (2001) varies among researchers, educators, and stakeholders. What is known is the disaggregated assessment data brought the underachievement of underserved populations to the forefront. Data revealed Black males with high-incidence disabilities were not experiencing academic success in comparison to their nondisabled peers. The Act had merits, but it failed to close the achievement gap between Black male students and their White peers (Holzman, 2010).

Laws, initiatives, and mandates to address inequities in education have been in place for many decades. Yet, Black males continue to trail behind White and Latino males in reading. For example, the 2013 National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) data shows only 12% of Black males scored proficient in 8th grade reading. Whereas, the reading proficiency was 38% and 17% for White and Latino males, respectively (Schott Foundation, 2015). Still in its infancy it is far too soon to determine the efficacy of the provisions of ESSA. The hope is that the Act will close the achievement gap between Black male students with high-incidence disabilities and other student populations.

Secondary Transition Planning

Moving from high school to adulthood is a major challenge for most students with special needs. Transition into the real world can be a bigger hurdle for students with high-incidence disabilities. Although there have been some improvements, postsecondary research continues to reveal students with disabilities lag behind their peers without disabilities in obtaining employment, education, and independent living (Landmark & Zhang, 2012; Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg, 2014). When comparing minorities from low socioeconomic backgrounds –particularly for Black students— research shows they lag even further behind their peers (Landmark & Zhang, 2012; Newman, et al., 2011; Thoma, Agran, & Scott, 2016; Trainor et al., 2016). IDEA (2004) sets forth the expectations that it is the secondary special education teachers' responsibility to implement effective practices, curriculum, and programs. The implementation of secondary transition planning begins with the IEP, a major focus in this study.

The IEP is frequently revered as the cornerstone of special education. Every student who qualifies for one of the 13 disability categories under IDEA must have an IEP. The IEP is a written document that must be updated at least annually. At the very least the IEP team must consist of the student, parent, special education teacher, general education teacher, and an administrative representative. Current mandates outlined in IDEA (2004) require school districts to develop a transition plan with post-school transition goals based on the students' interests, assessment results, and parental input by age 16 (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens, 2009; IDEA 2004; Sitlington & Clark, 2007). Secondary transition meetings should be viewed as an opportunity for the student and family members to provide meaningful participation (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013;

Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015). IDEA (2004) mandates the special educator obtain consent to invite individuals from outside agencies such as rehabilitation counselors, career tech, and/or community members.

Although research has shown an increase in the number of students participating in their IEP meetings, it must be noted they are rarely provided the opportunity to actively participate or lead the transition planning (Martin et. al, 2006; Rusch et al., 2009). Educators must view active student participation as an effective practice as well as an opportunity to use resources to promote self-advocacy and self-determination skills. (Arndt, Konrad, & Test, 2006; Martin, et al., 2006; Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015).

Transition assessments. IDEA (2004) includes language that identifies the central role of transition assessments. The IEP must include "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills" (300.320(b)). As identified and defined by Sitlington and Clark (2007)

> Transition assessment is an ongoing process of collecting information on the student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future living, learning, and working environments. This process should begin in middle school and continue until the student graduates or exits high school. Information from this process should be used to drive the IEP and transition planning process and to develop the SOP document detailing the student's academic and functional performance and postsecondary goals. (p. 133)

The goals can be generated from, but not limited to, data collected from career assessments, functional assessments, person-centered planning, or vocational assessments. Transition assessments can be both informal and formal (Neubert & Leconte, 2013).

Transition assessments mark the beginning of appropriate transition planning. Transition assessments create the foundation for goals and services in the IEP and often lead to successful transition outcomes (Lindstrom et al., 2007). Student involvement in the transition assessment should be evident from the very beginning. The students should be provided the chance to advocate for themselves by deciding what needs to be assessed, gathering data through various mediums, interpreting the results, and using the information to decide postsecondary and annual transition goals (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Neubert & Leconte, 2013).

Information gained from assessments, input from team members, and involvement of outside agencies can be used to identify activities to assist the student with reaching postsecondary goals. The transition activities should address instruction, related services, community experiences, employment, and postschool adult living. If deemed necessary by the team, transition activities may be developed for daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Transition activities should provide opportunities for students to learn about school resources, explore career and college options, and identify community resources and agencies (Neubert & Leconte, 2013).

Self-determination and self-advocacy. Self-determination and self-advocacy are frequently used interchangeably. Some articles identify self-determination as a subskill of self-advocacy. Whereas, in most cases, authors commonly identify self-advocacy as a component of self-determination (Test et al., 2005). The commonality is both self-determination and self-advocacy are recommended skills for improving the postsecondary outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Self-determination has become common language in the field of special education amongst researchers (Carter, Trainor,

Cakiroglu, Sweeden, & Owens, 2010; Trainor, 2002, 2005). Test, Fowler, Brewer, and Wood (2005) define self-determination as follows

> Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society. (p. 101)

The researchers also identify choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, self-knowledge and understanding, self-observation, evaluation and reinforcement, independence, risk taking, safety, self-instruction, and internal locus of control as components of self-determination.

Research shows students who possess self-determination skills acquire better postsecondary outcomes as well as a better quality of life (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2013). Educators are encouraged to incorporate teaching self-determination skills in instruction and during IEP meetings. Teaching self-determination skills allow students to have an active role in their meetings (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013) in addition to acquiring skills that can be used in other capacities (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2012; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Wehmeyer et al. 2013). Although their postschool outcomes are not as positive as their peers without disabilities, research has shown students with high-incidence disabilities have the capacity to learn self-determination skills (Shogren & Shaw, 2016).

A study conducted by Shogren and Shaw (2016) used NLTS2 data to establish a link between self-determination and postschool outcomes. The degree to which autonomy, self-realization, and psychological empowerment predicted 10 adult outcome constructs was examined. The constructs included financial independence, employment,

social relationships, housing, and postsecondary education. The high-incidence disability group served as the reference group. Therefore, significant results are interpreted as the difference from the high-incidence disability group. The researchers found autonomy to be a significant positive predictor of multiple early adult outcomes constructs for students identified with a high-incidence disability group. Self-realization only predicted emotional well-being for individuals with high-incidence disabilities. The study also found autonomy predicted higher levels of independent living for people with intellectual disabilities as well as psychological empowerment predicted lower levels of financial support for adults with intellectual disabilities. For this study, the researchers did not include intellectual disabilities within the high-incidence category.

Based on the conceptual framework developed by Test et. al (2005), self-advocacy is defined as a broad skill that includes the domains of knowledge of self, knowledge of one's rights, communication skills, and leadership skills. Knowledge of self and one's rights are two skills that must be acquired before one can self-advocate. The knowledge of self allows an individual to understand one's strengths, preferences, goals, interests, learning styles, needs, accommodation needs, and discuss disability with authoritative figures. Also, one must develop an understanding of personal rights, community rights, consumer rights, educational rights, knowledge of available resources, and how to tactfully advocate for change.

Self-advocacy is a topic participants in this study will discuss. Self-advocacy is a skill that can and should be taught in schools. It is recognized as an important skill for students with disabilities to acquire. Self-advocacy promotes successful postsecondary outcomes among individuals with disabilities (Zhang, Landmark, Grenwelge, &

Montoya, 2010). Research has shown a link between self-advocacy and high school completion rates. Educators can teach students self-advocacy skills by allowing students to lead their IEP meetings. The acquisition of self-advocacy skills is a means to improve transition planning and postsecondary outcomes. Mirroring self-determination, self-advocacy is also a learned skill that individuals with disabilities can transfer to multiple postsecondary settings (Roberts et al., 2016).

Interagency collaboration. Research on best practices supports interagency collaboration as a service delivery model for transition planning (Oertle, Plotner, & Trach, 2013; Trach, 2012; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). Interagency collaboration is defined as "a broad concept that encompasses formal and informal relationships between schools and adult agencies in which resources are shared to achieve common transition goals" (Noonan, Morningstar, & Erickson, 2008). IDEA (2004) requires schools to invite any agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services to the IEP meeting. These services can be provided during high school or post school. Collaboration with these agencies can prove to be vital in assisting the student with achieving their postsecondary goals. These outside agencies can include, but are not limited to vocational rehabilitation (VR), career technology centers, disability services, and local businesses. It is the schools' responsibility to ensure the agencies provide the agreed upon services. If the services are not rendered, then the school must "reconvene the IEP meeting and identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives" [34 CFR 300.324(c)(1)].

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies are available in every state. VR and its partnering agencies provide pre-employment and employment services to students, youth,

and adults with disabilities. The partnering agencies can include the Mental Health Agency, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), and Centers for Independent Living (CILS). These agencies work directly with the state VR professionals and can provide families with critical information about their services. In order for the agencies' collaboration efforts to assist the family in reaching postsecondary goals, it is important that each individual have a mutual understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities as well as to know the expectations of the other team members (Trach, 2012).

According to NLTS2 data, many special educators are attempting to meet transition needs without the support of rehabilitation professionals. They typically do not attend meetings without referrals and an invitation from the special education teacher. Other barriers identified by the data showed the VR professionals did not receive the paperwork prior to the meeting and the expectations of their roles are unclear (Trach, 2012).

Youth leaving high school need assistance with career assessment, career guidance, and accessing employment and education opportunities. VR and other outside agencies can provide the links between school and the community. Bullis, Davis, Bull, and Johnson (1995) reported students who received assistance from three to six adult service providers were more likely to be engaged in employment or education than students that received assistance from only zero to two providers during high school. Interagency collaboration correlates to both post-school employment and education for students with disabilities. In addition, it is credited with being an evidence-based

transition practice for increasing school completion (Test, Fowler, White, Richter, & Walker, 2009).

Secondary Transition Barriers

Research reveals there are multiple barriers preventing effective transition planning and teaching self-determination skills. Studies have examined school personnel compliance with IDEA transition planning mandates on IEPs. A study conducted by Powers, Gil-Kashiwabara, Geenen, Powers, Balandran, and Palmer (2005) examined the quality of transition plans and compared the plans for different groups of students. The study took place in two large, urban school districts from two states in the western U.S. A total of 399 IEPs were randomly chosen for students categorized with learning disabilities, cognitive and developmental disabilities (i.e., mental retardation, autism, and multiple disabilities), emotional disturbance, and physical disabilities (i.e., deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind, visual impairment, other health impaired, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury). The 1,747 transition goals were sorted into 12 targeted goal areas. The results indicated goals related to integrated employment appeared most often (63.7%) followed by transportation (60.9%), and community recreation and leisure (50.4%). On average, students had goals in 4.38 of the 12 transition areas. The study indicated 63.1% of the goals provided minimal or no details on the specific achievements targeted, only 33% of the goals were rated as adequately detailed, 19% of all goals offered evidence of student desires or interests, and 6.4% of all goals made reference to accommodations or supports needed by students to achieve the particular goal. The study revealed 75. 8% of the IEPs were signed by the student, 78.2% were signed by a special education teacher, and a general education teacher was involved in 39.1% of the IEP

meetings. The involvement rates for transition specialists were 20.8%, school psychologists were 21.6%, and vocational rehabilitation staff members were 1.1%. The study also found student exposure to effective practices was dismal. Practices such as mentoring, participation in work experience, and self-determination were rarely referenced in the students' IEPs, indicating rates of 1%, 56%, and 7%, respectively.

Landmark and Zhang (2012) used IDEA (2004) mandates to examine transition planning compliance in IEPs, the documentation of best transition practices, the relations among disability category, ethnicity, compliance, and practices; and the relations between overall compliance and level of practices. Participants were students 14 to 22 years old identified with developmental disabilities (i.e., autism or intellectual disability), emotional disabilities, or learning disabilities and attended a secondary school within a seven-county region of Texas. The primary findings revealed the mean level of 100% IDEA compliance was low, the mean level of substantiated transition practices included in the IEPs was moderate, and a student's ethnicity or disability can predict compliance and whether transition practices are utilized. The overall compliance and evidence of transition practices in the IEPs were found to be positively correlated.

Although self-determination skills are deemed highly beneficial for students with special needs, instruction of these skills has not been highly utilized by educators on a consistent basis. Studies have examined the usage or lack thereof of self-determination instruction and, unfortunately, the results are not always favorable. A study conducted by Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) investigated whether special educators were learning about self-determination in their teacher preparation programs, what strategies they had learned, and how effective they felt these strategies were. Forty-three

out of the 500 selected special education teachers participated. The participants were asked to complete a 46-item multiple choice and Likert-scaled survey seeking their perceptions and skills related to self-determination components. Seventy-five percent reported being familiar with the term self-determination, whereas 25% were not familiar with the term. Sixty-seven percent reported their training was not adequate to implement self-determination strategies successfully. Thirty-two percent of the teachers indicated they had learned about self-determination in a graduate course. Twenty-five percent reported learning about self-determination through journal articles and 23% learned about it through workshops. The teachers were also asked if they had heard of the most used and recognized self-determination tools/curricula. Most of the participants were not familiar with any tools with a range of 90.7% to 100%.

A study conducted by Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) examined the capacities of high school students identified as LD and ED to engage in self-determined behavior. The researchers discovered that special educators rated these students as having little knowledge about self-determination and the behavior it requires. The educators also reported diminished ability to engage in such behavior and limited confidence regarding the efficacy of their efforts in this area.

Another study was conducted by Grigal, Neubert, Moon, and Graham (2003). The researchers surveyed the parents and teachers of high school students with high and low-incidence disabilities to obtain their views about teaching self-determination, the students' participation in IEP meetings, and the students' opportunities to make choices in school. The surveys required the respondents to answer questions using a Likert scale. Surveys were mailed to 984 parents/caregivers and 698 high school general and special

educators. The participants were randomly selected from two mid-Atlantic school systems. The results indicated parents/caregivers agreed students with disabilities should participate in the IEP process and be viewed as "informed and skilled participants" and these self-determination skills should be taught at school. The teachers slightly agreed they had some knowledge of self-determination and how to teach it. Approximately one-third of the teachers responded they were not familiar with the concept of self-determination. Both teachers and parents/caregivers slightly agreed their student had the opportunity to acquire, learn, and practice self-determined behavior at school.

Postsecondary Outcomes

Floundering is the term Halpern (1985) used to describe the transition for students in general from high school to successful employment and/or postsecondary studies. This study attempts to understand reasons for this "floundering." According to Halpern (1985), floundering occurs for at least the first several years after leaving high school. Unfortunately, floundering is documented to last for several years for students with disabilities (Test et al., 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2018), individuals with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed than are individuals without disabilities; just as individuals with disabilities are also less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs. Although it is not the only tool for collecting secondary transition data, the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) is commonly used by researchers to compare previously collected data to current data. This allows researchers to collect data on individuals with high-incidence disabilities' postsecondary employment, education, and independent living. Studies that identify the postsecondary outcomes on Black males with disabilities is somewhat scarce. Data indicates

improvements have been made, but those with disabilities continue to trail their counterparts without disabilities in postsecondary success.

As reported by the National Organization on Disabilities (2010), the largest gap exists in employment when comparing individuals with and without disabilities. Data shows only 21% of disabled individuals report having a full or part time job versus 59% of individuals without a disability. Data also reveals young adults with high-incidence disabilities' employment opportunities frequently consisted of entry-level positions that paid minimum wage or offered part-time work.

Rojewski, Lee, and Gregg (2014) used a risk-resilience framework to explore the postsecondary employment of students with LD and ED two years after high school completion. They found students with high-incidence disabilities worked fewer hours than those without disabilities. LD and ED students who aspired to low-prestige occupations were 2.17 times more likely to work more hours than those with high aspirations. Regardless of disability status, the researchers found higher grade point averages increased the likelihood more hours were worked. Having friends that aspired to attend college also increased the likelihood for working more hours.

Wagner, Newman, and Javitz (2017) used NLTS2 data to explore postsecondary employment outcomes for young adults identified as ED that participated in career and technical education (CTE) during high school. Data revealed a positive relation between taking CTE course in high school and post-high school employment. The findings showed that nine out of 10 high school students with ED participated in general education CTE, similar to the 93.5% of youth without disabilities. The study also found that although it was common for students with ED to take CTE courses, only 25.6% took the

concentration of occupationally-specific general education CTE courses which would have increased the likelihood of full-time employment.

The U.S. Department of Education (2010) show the number of students with disabilities' college attendance has increased dramatically in the last three decades. Yet, students identified with a disability are less likely than their nondisabled peers to pursue postsecondary education. According to NLTS2 Black students with disabilities remain underrepresented in postsecondary education in comparison to White students with disabilities (Banks, 2014). Once on campus, Black students with disabilities are not seeking accommodations. Educational attainment is a predictor for successful employment outcomes. For students with disabilities who graduated with a regular high school diploma, the employment rate is 36%. Whereas, it is 48% for adults with disabilities who acquire some college credits but no degree. The employment rate increases to 52% for those that have an associate's degree and to 71% for those who have a bachelor's degree (Smith et al. 2012).

A comparison between the first NLTS and the NLTS2 show employment outcomes for youth with high-incidence disabilities have improved during the past decade. The comparison also revealed young adults with high-incidence disabilities maintain employment for short periods of time. This finding is very concerning considering this is a period in which these youths' career pathways should be thriving and established employment maintained. In addition, the study revealed 61% of young adults with LD and 56% of those with ED reported to be working full time four years after high school (Morningstar, Trainor, & Murray, 2015).

Leaving school without effective transition planning can prove to be a hardship for most special education students, especially Black males. Again, the Black males' disposition is what is impeding him from experiencing success after high school. This may be due in part to not being exposed to effective secondary transition planning, being a student at a failing high school, and/or being a victim of generational poverty.

Urban Black Males

When examining the indicators of school success, academic achievement, and educational attainment, Black males are consistently at the bottom of the rungs in comparison to other student populations (Noguera, 2012). The Black males' underperformance continues to be a crisis point at local, state, and national levels. Graduating from high school should be a fundamental right easily obtained by all students. Yet, Black males continue to lag behind their peers. In 2012-2013, the estimated national graduation rate for Black males was 59% in comparison to Latinos at 65% and Whites graduation rate of 80% (Schott Foundation, 2015). This demonstrates that a large gap continues to persist between different races. Therefore, the observation previously made by the Schott Foundation (2010) that "the overwhelming majority of U.S. school districts and states are failing to make targeted investments to provide the core resources necessary to extend what works for Black male students" (p. 6) continues to have merit.

Numerous researchers have debated and identified the variables associated with poverty, educational experiences, negative perceptions, and a disconnect between the student and school as factors that negatively impact Black male students. More students in the U.S. are being identified as low income or living in poverty. Nationally, 46% of the public school population is considered as low income. By the year 2020, the majority of

U.S. public school students are predicted to be of color and low income (Washington, Hughes, & Cosgriff, 2012).

A large number of Black males grow up in impoverished home environments. Schools must be knowledgeable about the stressors associated with impoverished students, such as single parent homes, inadequate housing, high crime rate, drugs, limited health care, transportation, and abuse. Together, these factors have an impact on the student and family members' mental and physical health, causing stress, anxiety, depression, hypertension, and fear (Washington, Hughes, & Cosgriff, 2012).

According to Orfield (2009), students from low-income neighborhoods are also more likely to attend failing schools, and/or schools that are racially and ethnically segregated and have limited resources, low achievement scores, and poor graduation rates. These historically underperforming schools are usually underfunded, understaffed, and possess a large number of inexperienced teachers. Almost 50% of Black students, as compared to 11% of White students, attend schools in which the dropout rates exceed 50% and their peers are living below the poverty line (Orfield, 2009). Nationwide, the typical Black student attends a school in which almost two out of three students (64%) are low-income. This is nearly double the percentage of schools that are typically attended by White or Asian students (37% and 39%, respectively; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). According to the National Center for Statistics (2011), on average, Black students attend schools that are 48% Black; whereas White students, on average, are in schools that are 9% Black. Attending a high-poverty high school is considered a high-risk factor in itself due to limited curricular options and rigor, poor teacher preparation, low expectations, and poor parent participation (Barton & Coley, 2010).

Students from disenfranchised backgrounds are statistically less likely to achieve academically (Noguero, 2003). Inequities associated with high-poverty schools—limited resources and substandard academic preparation—are barriers to academic and postschool success (Barton & Coley, 2010).

Black males carry a multitude of social dilemmas with them when they enter school. Their home and community experiences together with poverty may annihilate them before they acquire the fundamental educational skills needed to begin school (Jenkins, 2006). Therefore, Black males need strong supports from the onset. Positive educational experiences give them an opportunity to improve their self-perception and grow academically. Therefore, it is of utmost importance school staff are provided the tools and instructional supports to successfully teach Black male students (Kunjufu, 2013).

The classroom teacher is the beacon of hope or desperation for the Black male student. A study conducted by Murray (2009) with low-income urban students found the quality of teacher-student relationships influenced engagement and academic achievement. Crucial to the focus of this study, another study conducted by Baker (2006) reported students who experience difficulties in the classroom but have a strong bond with a teacher show more positive outcomes than those who do not establish a relationship. Learning environments that offer encouragement and opportunities to experience success are essential to the academic achievement of Black males. When Black males experience nurturing learning environments and have high expectations for learning, they feel successful, their self-perception improves, and they are willing to strive for academic excellence. The path toward long-term outcomes, whether positive or

negative, is determined early and often first identified through students' experiences within their primary social environment—school (Toste, Bloom, & Heath, 2014).

The *Brown* decision made it possible for Black males to be educated in integrated schools. Unfortunately, the *Brown* decision has proven to be counterproductive for Black males. Historically and presently, Black males are labeled with a high-incidence disability which proves to be catastrophic. There is a continuance of Black males receiving special education services away from their peers. In addition, they are provided a subpar curriculum and taught by teachers with low expectations (Albrecht et al., 2012; Artiles et al., 2010). Considering the life-long impact the labeling has on Black males, educators must be more sensitive to the cultures that are not reflective of their norms. To effectively teach Black males an educator must respect their differences—language, behaviors, and style of movement.

Theoretical Framework

Black males have battled with obstacles in social advancements in the United States for over 400 years. There has been an unbroken cycle—beginning with slavery to the Jim Crow era, segregation, overt discrimination in hiring practices after the World Wars, living lives in poverty stricken urban areas, to this time when there are more Black men imprisoned than there were slaves prior to the Civil War (Alexander, 2010).

While it would be comforting for some to believe that education has been in the forefront for creating greater freedom and equality for Black people, such a statement may not be true. Wilson (2014) reports that there is an ever-widening gap in educational performance when comparing Black males with White males. Pettit and Western (2004) cite school failure and exclusion as correlated with negligible economic opportunities

associated with living in poorer school districts, economic poverty, and unstable living conditions. Jenkins (2006) argues that many of the problems in school classrooms involving Black males may stem from internalized negative views of Black people as well as conscious feelings of low self-esteem.

I have chosen the cool pose theory to help explain the behaviors that are regularly displayed by Black males. Cool pose theory proposes that for hundreds of years Black males have had to mask their anxieties to cope with the brutality of slavery, Jim Crow, and current social rejection and unemployment. The creators of this theory contend that Black males developed a joking repertoire to conceal feelings of humiliation and to express a facade of integrity and even superiority (Majors & Billson, 1992). Osbourne (1999) seized upon this theory and added that in contemporary United States, Black males project this façade to promote the idea that they are cool, virile, and confident. He argues that such a persona is a presentation that expresses self-control to cover feelings of nervousness. Werner (1993) writes the Black male's mask consists of appearing "content, unmotivated, and unconcerned" (p. 144).

To better analyze the Black males stylistic movements a study was conducted by Neal, Davis McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) that asked 136 suburban middle school teachers to view videos depicting one Black male and one White male student participating in different styles of movement (stroll and standard movement). The results found that the teachers rated students who engaged in culture-related movement styles (e.g., stroll) as lower achieving, aggressive, and more likely to need special education services than students who demonstrated "standard" movements (Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009). Culture provides a lens through which each person

views and evaluates the behaviors of others. Educators' misunderstandings of and reactions to Black male students' culturally-conditioned behaviors can lead to school and social failure.

Hall (2009) suggests that cool pose might adversely affect the Black males' academic achievement. Black males maintain a sense of "coolness" by adopting coping strategies when they lack the academic content knowledge, have disconnect with staff members, or sense rejection from their peers. Their behaviors may contribute to Black males being labeled as unmotivated and even lazy. Whereas, the Black male uses the stylish behaviors, gesturing, walking and stance to demonstrate pride, strength, and control. This theory may help in contextualizing some of the participants' comments collected during the interviews of this study. Readers, by gaining a deeper understanding of both the social and psychological predicaments of Black male students with special needs, may learn to have more complex views and responses to Black males as human beings.

Summary

This review forms a foundation for my study. This review allowed me to ascertain a better understanding of IDEA regulations, effective secondary transition practices as well as postsecondary outcomes experienced by minorities. Research articles and studies that specifically examined secondary transition planning for Black males with high-incidence disabilities were nonexistent. I was able to obtain an understanding of the Black males' struggles identified through research. The approaches employed in this qualitative study enabled me to examine and discern insightful information regarding Black males once identified with a high-incidence disability. The subsequent chapter

provides details regarding the research methodology and approach that was used to examine the perceptions held by Black males once identified with a high-incidence disability, regarding their secondary transition planning and postsecondary outcomes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research

Research reveals the utilization of research-based secondary transition planning increases the likelihood of students with disabilities to acquire gainful employment, pursue postsecondary education, and live independently. Unfortunately, studies show teachers continue to use practices which have little to no effect on outcomes of students with disabilities (Rowe et al., 2015). The omission of effective transition practices, strategies, and resources can prove to be detrimental for Black males identified with a high-incidence disability—specific learning disability (SLD), intellectual disability (ID), or emotional disturbance (ED). As demonstrated above, there is an enormous gap in special education research literature concerning Black males with a high-incidence disability in their secondary transition planning and postsecondary outcomes. This qualitative study allowed an ignored population to have a voice by sharing their perceptions of their secondary transition planning and postsecondary outcomes in employment, education attendance, and independent living.

Although qualitative research is used sparsely and represents a small percentage of special education research (Pugach, Mukhopadhyay, & Gomez-Najarro, 2014; Trainor & Leko, 2014), it is deemed very appropriate for capturing the experiences shared by the participants. This qualitative study focuses on the lived experiences of Black male students once identified with a high-incidence disability, which requires a more open qualitative approach. It is less structured because the study attempts to explore a population, as of yet, uninvestigated. Consequently, the reader will find it more organic and less formally structured. Qualitative research focuses on describing how people make

sense of their lives in natural settings and it empowers the participants by emphasizing their perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research allows for the examination of how individuals experience and understand a common phenomenon as well as how that understanding influences subsequent behavior. The researcher will discern and make sense of a phenomenon, a perspective, and the views held by the participants (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2009) cites the following definition for qualitative research:

> An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world". Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. (p. 13)

Creswell (2007) identifies qualitative research as complex, involving fieldwork for prolonged periods of time, collecting words and pictures, analyzing this information inductively while focusing on participant views, and writing about the process using expressive and persuasive language. This study recorded realistic, truthful, and informative descriptions of the subjects' perceptions of transitional planning and their postsecondary outcomes. A qualitative tradition facilitated a process that captured the essence of the phenomenon for the individuals that were a part of this study. The researcher employed qualitative measures to answer the following questions:

1. How do Black males, formerly categorized with a high-incidence disability, describe the experience of their secondary transition planning?
2. To what extent was the research participant actively involved in the secondary transition planning process during their years in high school?

3. What instruction, training, resources, assistance or other experiences occurred that were a part of the secondary transition planning?
4. How do these students describe their postsecondary outcomes?

The first question gained the perceptions held by the participants regarding their transition planning meetings. The second question examined the participants' level of involvement in their transition planning meetings. The third question explored the inclusion of effective transition planning, practices, resources, professionals, and experiences. The fourth question gained information about the participants' postsecondary outcomes.

Methodology

I used the paradigm of phenomenology. This approach allowed for the participants to potentially express feelings and thoughts that could not be fully expressed in other approaches, especially quantitative designs. Detmer (2013) defines phenomenology as follows:

> Phenomenology is neither a science of objects nor a science of the subject: it is a science of *experience*. It does not concentrate exclusively on either the objects of experience or on the subject of experience, but on the point of contact where being and consciousness meet. It is, therefore, a study of consciousness as intentional, as directed towards objects, as living in an intentionally constituted world. The subject…and the object…are studied in their strict correlativity on each level of experience (perception, imagination, categorical thought, etc.). Such a study…aims at disclosing the structures of consciousness as consciousness, of experience as experience; it means to unveil the…structures which constitute the mysterious subject-object relationship which we call consciousness of…In short, phenomenology is a study of phenomena. As such it is a more fundamental study than logic or psychology; it goes to the fundamental structures of conscious experience which constitute the very conditions of the possibility of any conscious experience whatsoever. (p. 19)

Phenomenology strives to create a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of an individual's everyday experiences. It typically uses qualitative methods such as storytelling or interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday experiences (Creswell, 2007). This method was utilized to focus on discovery and the intensive study of the phenomenon, rather than on empirical measures of prediction, numerical measurement of variables, and control (Laverty, 2003). A phenomenology study allowed me to interact with an underserved population, Black males formally identified with a high-incidence disability. This method allowed me to divulge the perceptions held by these individuals regarding transition planning and their postsecondary outcomes through open-ended questions. I enjoyed listening and watching how the young men expressed themselves. A better understanding of this marginalized population's perception of their educational experiences will allow policymakers, educators, and all secondary transition providers to identify effective strategies, resources, and interventions that will better address the needs of Black male students with disabilities.

Participants

As stated by Glesne (2006) in reference to qualitative research

> Qualitative researchers neither work (usually) with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is their purpose that of producing generalizations. Rather, qualitative researchers tend to select each of their cases purposefully. The logic and power of purposeful sampling…leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research…" (p. 34)

The six participants in this study represented a purposeful sample based on criterion sampling in that each participant experienced the same phenomenon. Each participant met the following criteria:

1. Each participant self-identified as a Black male between the ages of 18 and 29.
2. Each participant had been identified and received special education services for a high-incidence disability (SLD, ID, or ED).
3. Each participant received special education for at least five school years.
4. Each participant had exited high school for at least six months.
5. Each participant agreed to participate in at least one interview and provide follow up information if necessary.

During high school, five of the participants received special education services for SLD and one participant was categorized as ID. The participant who was identified as ED never contacted me after multiple requests. Each participant graduated from a high school within the same metropolitan area. Their ages ranged from 18 to 28. Three interviews were held in public libraries, one interview was held in a conference room, one interview was held in a dorm lounge, and the last interview was held in a quiet area at a local eatery. Distractions were either nonexistent or minimal during each interview. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Each participant was compensated for participating.

Data Collection

Permission was obtained from doctoral committee members and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. School district personnel (special educators, classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, building administrators) received written

correspondence outlining the study as well as the criteria for the participants. I also had a conversation with the school district employees either in person or via phone. Numerous professionals were asked to identify former students that met the criteria. The researcher requested the employees from districts in the metropolitan area to initially contact the potential participant and obtain written permission (text, e-mail, social media, note, etc.) for me to contact the young man. This method was not as successful as I had anticipated. Due to the extremely low response, I had to create other ways to recruit participants. This included actively distributing fliers and postcards on a college campus and I met with the special services advisor. The advisor graciously agreed to send e-mails to young men that met the criteria. The junior college also allowed me to post fliers on highly visible bulletin boards. I went to an adult transition agency, two rehabilitation agencies, and two blood banks. I contacted former educators, relatives, and church members. Eventually, I obtained contact information for a total of six potential participants. I contacted the young men by phone and provided information about the study. I confirmed a date and time to meet with each participant individually.

At the initial meeting participants were reminded their participation was voluntary and would remain confidential. I used the flier to reiterate the purpose of the study. I noticed the males seemed very pleased when I read "…allow <u>your voice</u> to be heard." The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before obtaining their written consent. The participants were given a written copy of the research questions (see Appendix A) and provided time to read them. Data was collected by asking open-ended questions. The interviews were semi-structured and carried out in a conversational style. This approach gave the participants a sense of comfort. The researcher noticed the Black

males' body language was very relaxed and they did most of the talking. Each interview was audio recorded and the participants did not seem concerned they were being recorded. Field notes allowed me to record the participant's body language, facial gestures, and overall demeanor. I personally transcribed each interview verbatim. This allowed me to closely analyze and digest the statements made by each participant. There were some occasions in which I contacted the participants for clarification and/or I asked follow-up questions. The typed interviews were sent to each participant via e-mail. The participants were told to communicate any concerns about the data via e-mail, phone, or text.

Ethical Considerations

All requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were honored during the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. All participants were at least 18 years of age. Each individual was provided a written and verbal explanation of the goals of the research study. The participants were informed about the impact their participation can have on transition planning and the postsecondary outcomes of Black males identified with a high-incidence disability. The Black male participants were informed they would be assigned a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of their information such as their identity, school, district, and other identifiable information. The participants were provided information about the risks associated with the study. They were advised they have the right to withdraw at any time. The participants were provided the opportunity to ask questions and obtain clarification before their consent was obtained. In addition, they were informed that at the conclusion of the study all recordings, transcripts, and related correspondence would remain in my possession.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. This method was originally put forth by Moustakas (1994) and later revised by Creswell (2007). This method consists of the following six steps:

1. The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon.
2. The researcher finds statements in the transcript about how the participants are experiencing the topic by identifying significant statements.
3. The significant statements are grouped into "meaning units" or themes.
4. The researcher reflects on the description, seeks all possible meanings and divergent perspectives.
5. An overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience is constructed.
6. The researcher concludes with a composite description of the experience.

An important aspect of data analysis is that it is used to respond to the research questions. Data received from the interviews, observation notes, and my personal research folder were included in this part of the process. I replayed certain parts of each interview several times, in addition to reading the typed transcripts multiple times. I transferred observations and other mental notes on the final transcript. I highlighted significant statements that were made by each interviewee. Then, the statements from each interview were placed into units. I used this information to identify themes. I then generated subthemes. Initially, Dr. Robbins and I examined data from two transcripts. The statements were so compelling it allowed us to have in-depth discussions regarding

the statements made by the participants. We tentatively agreed on themes and subthemes. Eventually, we met again and examined the remaining four transcripts. Again, we compared our notes and held very thought-provoking conversations that allowed us to agree upon the overarching themes that best portrayed the phenomenon experienced by the participants.

Instead of the traditional concepts of validity and reliability qualitative research utilizes trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). Trustworthiness was established by incorporating credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability techniques. Achieving credibility means the findings are believable to those reading the research. To strengthen credibility, I incorporated triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation means the researcher used at least three techniques of data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009;). Each interview was recorded, observations were made, my field notes were examined, and a comparison was made between the testimonies. During each interview, there were occasions in which I slowly repeated statements to ensure I interpreted the data correctly as well as paraphrased statements in an effort to decrease any misunderstandings. I also created a chart to assist with sorting the participants' personal information. The multiple forms of data collection allowed me to verify my findings were accurate and ensure each participant provided content-rich, comprehensive, well-developed information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking, identified as the most important criterion in establishing credibility (Merriam, 2009), provided the participants the opportunity to review the typed transcripts to verify the researcher's interpretation of the data. The participants were reminded information could be revised if necessary. Peer debriefing was obtained by

incorporating the assistance of my committee chair, Dr. Rockey Robbins. Dr. Robbins previously taught in a tribal school and has had experience working with marginalized student populations. Collaborating with Dr. Robbins helped me to decrease biasness and refrain from making negative assumptions. The meetings also allowed me to look at the testimonies through another lens. His psychology background provided an emotional element that I did not initially realize. Dependability of a qualitative study allows another researcher to reproduce the study by using the original researchers' descriptions of data collection and analysis, resulting in similar findings. Any researcher will be able to use my description to replicate this study. In qualitative studies, transferability means the extent the findings are transferable to other contexts or settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Therefore, each step of the study is thoroughly described, including collection of the data and the method used for analyzing and coding the data. Confirmability is the extent to which the findings can be corroborated by others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As the primary researcher, I provided precise details regarding the procedures used in checking the data. I have an audit trail which consists of raw data from the audio recordings, typed transcripts, color-coded transcripts, notes, and contents of my personal research folder, all of which enhance confirmability.

Summary

There are disparities between Black males with disabilities and their peers with or without disabilities in obtaining gainful employment (Newman et al., 2011; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005;) educational aspirations (Schott Foundation 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2012), and living independently (Newman et al., 2011). The primary goal of this study is to seek a deeper understanding of the perceptions held

by Black males once classified with a high-incidence disability regarding their transition planning and postsecondary outcomes. As stated by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) the goal of the qualitative researcher is to uncover these meanings, as expressed by the research participants, "by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction". Moreover, I want to alert policy makers, school districts, and communities about the dismal secondary transition planning and conditions of this marginalized population. The implementation of evidence-based practices is greatly needed to assist with preparing Black males with high-incidence disabilities for life beyond high school. In addition, there is a need for educators and transition providers to receive professional development that addresses the implementation of effective secondary transition planning, practices, and resources.

Research depicts the postsecondary outcomes for Black males, in general, are in a state of crisis (Kunjufu, 2005; Tatum, 2006) in comparison to all other populations. This phenomenological study allowed the participants to provide intense descriptions of their experiences. Their testimonies should allow special educators, policy makers, and communities to realize Black males' secondary transition planning is not meeting the needs of this student population. Hopefully, their testimonies will confirm the need to make immediate changes to current special education policies and procedures. Furthermore, improved transition planning and successful postsecondary outcomes will benefit society as well as enable more Black males to become productive members of society.

Chapter 4 Findings

Phenomenological research methods enabled six Black males, formerly identified with high-incidence disabilities, to paint a vivid description of their secondary transition planning services and their postsecondary outcomes in employment, education, and independent living. This chapter contains an in-depth analysis of the testimonies provided during the semi-structured interviews. The researcher used the participants' verbatim typed transcripts, observations of their body language, and field notes to identify four major themes. The individual, semi-structured interviews provided rich information regarding the participants' perceptions. Written narratives which provide a description of each participant as well as information regarding their postsecondary outcomes follow.

Participants' Profiles

Participant 1. Trae is 18 and the youngest of the participants. He is completing his first year of college at a local university. He is enrolled in 10 hours this Spring semester and completed 12 hours in the previous Fall. He commutes from his home. He currently resides with his mother, grandmother, and two siblings. His father passed away shortly after he was born. Trae was categorized as ID, which was confirmed by one of his former special education teachers. According to Trae, he played on the basketball team all four years of high school. He attended career tech his sophomore and junior years. Trae has a very strong relationship with his mother. He credits her for helping him make it through high school and she continues to help him with his college coursework. He continues to have difficulty with reading and writing skills. He receives accommodations at his university and is very committed to meeting as a group to receive assistance with coursework. Trae stated that he pays his car insurance and occasionally helps his mother

with bills. He plans to try out for the university's basketball team. He would like to get an apartment in the Fall.

Participant 2. JR is 20 years old and has been out of high school for one year. According to JR's mother, he was categorized as SLD. During his freshman year, he attended a four-year university that is approximately 50 miles from his home. He played football and resided in the dorms. He decided not to return to college this school year due to unsatisfactory grades and inability to experience success on the football team. He currently lives with both parents and one sibling and works at a local fast food restaurant. He played on the football and basketball teams during high school. He attended career tech for two years, but stopped attending because he missed activities at the high school and interacting with his friends. Trae has a strong relationship with both parents. He does not drive or hold a driver's license. He has three horses and enjoys fishing. He enjoys exercising in order to stay physically fit.

Participant 3. Ashton is 21 years old. According to Ashton and a former teacher, he received special education services for SLD. Currently, he attends a four-year university and resides in the dorms. Due to poor grades, Ashton was not allowed to enroll at this university for one semester. Although he was an athlete in high school he decided not to play sports in college. During high school, he resided with his mother and siblings. Ashton has a very strong relationship with his mother and grandmother. He worked at various jobs in his community during high school. Despite his academic difficulties, Ashton is very determined to receive a bachelor's degree. Therefore, he takes full advantage of accommodations offered by the university, attends tutoring, and is very active in a mentoring group called Bros.

Participant 4. Kevin is 27 years old. He works full-time in the oil field and is one course away from receiving a bachelor's degree. During high school, he was categorized as SLD, although discipline was always a major issue throughout his years in school. He attended career services at the suggestion of a regular education teacher and as part of a bet with another student. He played basketball and football during high school. He was raised by a coach and mentored by another coach during high school. He did not see his biological mother for several years. He currently resides with his fiancé and a one-year old daughter. He recently met his son that he conceived during middle school. Kevin played football at a four-year university in another state before transferring to a junior college. He then returned to a university in another state. He came close to being drafted in the NFL before playing semi-professional football for several seasons. Eventually, he returned home. He has since maintained full-time employment at various jobs.

Participant 5. Denzel is 27 years old and currently works part-time at a local toy store. He said he received special education services for SLD. During high school, he was active in the band and football. He was the drum major during his senior year. He also participated in JROTC. During high school, he resided with his mother and sisters. Upon graduating from high school, he attended Job Corp at the recommendation of his special education teacher. He did not experience success a Job Corp, so he returned home. He enrolled in an area trade school and earned an associate degree. He first learned about Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) through a relative after he received his associate degree. DRS assisted Denzel with getting a job as a custodian. He worked for almost nine years before being terminated. Denzel has worked at multiple jobs for short periods of time and has dealt with unemployment on multiple occasions. He currently

resides with his mother and depends on her to transport him to work. He has strong ties with an aunt and several other family members. He has never had a driver's license, because he can be easily distracted.

Participant 6. Cam is 28 years old. He was recently married and is the proud father of a newborn baby. Cam qualified for special education under the SLD category. Cam resided with his aunt and uncle after his mother lost custody. He currently works full-time at a manufacturing company and has been at the company for six years. During high school, he attended career tech after taking a tour with an assistant principal. His trade is masonry and he still uses this skill to earn extra money. He also established a strong relationship with his mentor. Cam doesn't recall any special education meetings, although he remembers receiving extra assistance from special education teachers. He recalls his case manager's name. His inability may be due to the lapse in time, his poor memory, and/or he received services in the mainstream classroom the majority of the school day. He was not allowed to work during high school per his guardians' request. After graduating from high school, he worked in construction laying bricks. Due to the low demand for masonry he had to get another job.

Emergent Themes

To feel the true essence and acquire a vivid picture of the participants' experiences the researcher felt it was imperative to include each participants' verbatim statements. Emergent themes are listed along with the participants' statements expressing each theme.

No voice. This theme emerged as participants described their memories of their IEP meetings.

Ashton: *Sometimes they would tell me to come to the room. Then they would call me in. Sometimes they would tell the teacher to tell me to come down there and we would have a meeting, or I would know the day before that we have a meeting and my mom would be up there. We all would be up there. The school counselor she was asking me…*

Trae*: Probably my mother. Yeah, my mom. Yeah, I was very quiet. I was trying to listen.*

JR*: I remember that sometimes they have let me come in with them to the meetings--it was my mom or--most of the time it was my mom but sometimes it was both of them--my mom and dad. My English teacher, it was some other teacher--I don't know. A counselor was there. It was mostly the teachers and counselor that did most of the talking. Then there was my mom. Then they just asked me questions. Naw, I wasn't in charge.*

Kevin*: Yeah, it was um me, one of my parents, um the assistant principal, at that time and the teacher that was conducting the IEP [did most of the talking].*

Denzel*: Basically, my mom, my auntie, some teachers at my high school. I was present for some of the meetings. I didn't know about the rest of them. My mom told me about some of them. Like I was in one of my classes I was in there I didn't know about the meeting until they said, "Hey, Denzel you were supposed to be at the meeting." I was just sitting there listening. Shaking my head and saying okay.*

Five participants recalled a special education teacher, a school counselor, and their parent or guardian regularly attending IEP meetings. The participants did not remember anyone that was not a staff member being at the meetings. They remember

both discouraging and encouraging remarks. When a counselor attempted to be "realistic" about Ashton's future, it was taken as being unsupportive. He had the strength to challenge the counselor's comments. Trae's comments indicated he was very pleased with the reinforcing remarks made during the IEP meetings, although he did not contribute much to the discussions about his education.

Kevin and Denzel claimed that they had "no voice" in their IEP meetings. They also credited the IEP meetings for initiating modifications to their class schedules. In order to graduate they were placed in easier classes. They viewed the easier classes as preparation for college. Denzel remarks that it is important to consider which areas in which a student needs modification as it might actually contribute to problems when one attends college. Challenging high school courses might be helpful when in college. Both appreciated the human element of support they were given.

Denzel criticized the IEP for what he sees as their failure of not giving him an overall idea of what special services were supposed to do for him. He also had concerns about not being involved in the process. He appreciates the efforts they made to help him be a better reader.

Essential components missing. I asked the participants what was shared with the team regarding their postsecondary goals and transition activities.

> Ashton*: I was like yeah I understand you know she was like you know college don't work out what you wanna do and I was telling her like college is where I really want to do and I really want to finish.*
>
> Trae*: Yeah, I told them I really don't know to be honest because I wasn't really thinking about that---to be honest thinking about that. I asked them I wanted to go*

to college_____ (inaudible). When I get done in college _____ (inaudible) Homework---you know work that's all the teacher helped me---all my teachers. I asked all my teachers I got accepted at ____ University. They were very very proud of me.

JR*: Yes, I told them I wanted to go to college. It was kinda like my junior or senior year I told them I wanted to go ahead and go to college and play football and stuff like that so I could _____ and make my good ACT score and just do that. They had moved me around some classes--easier classes. Then they notified the teachers I needed more extra help and they had worked with me after school. Um, after practice and stuff like that to make sure I was doing pretty well.*

Denzel*: Some of the meetings was about what I'm going to do after high school. I didn't really have a plan for it. I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't know what to expect for someone who had an IEP. In my high school they really didn't tell me. They just had a class for it. Like if you had an IEP they just sent you to this classroom. They would help you out. They never told me about the whole situation.*

Um, I guess learn the interest of the student other than the procedure that they went through. I think if they find out and know the student I think they can better help them. I think that was why I didn't excel in high school. They didn't ask me my interests. I think they hit more so on--focused on the outside world to help you with things that you need. They really don't know your interests first.

Kevin*: When those questions would come about I would joke and be like I don't know if I want to go to college. College is always a goal that I never thought was*

achievable, but they believed in me that I could achieve that and they probably set up to where the IEP was putting me in the right direction. They made sure I had all the requirements I needed to successful graduate high school and not have to go get a GED or something like that.

The participants may have taken vocational classes at their schools within the school day. I specifically inquired about career technology. The participants were more familiar with the term vo-tech versus career tech.

Cam*: Well, I don't know if it was a career building thing or vo-tech, but I remember taking a tour. A certain person kinda guided me into masonry. She said it would be a good job. It was about making money so I took that and ran with it. Masonry was fun. I remember more things about masonry than I do about being in high school. I think when it came to me going to masonry class I would always be ecstatic to go to that. So I remember masonry more than anything. It was more hands-on. I still use it outside of work--outside my regular job I do it on the side.*

Ashton*: Oh, I heard about that place but no body ever talked to me about it.*

Kevin: Mrs. Bryant what can I do so I get money when I graduate high school. I remember her saying what do you want to do. I'd like to help people. Well, okay I'm going and then Ms. __ and Ms. ___ had a FT career fair out here which is beneficial. She said I bet I can pass this CNA class faster than you. I'm like I bet you can't so I end up enrolling into the CNA program and I beat her.

Trae*: I really enjoyed vo-tech you know I did career services. You know we worked on cars---cleaned cars all that. I had fun even though I didn't go a third year but you know I should have gone a third year because I really did enjoy it. It*

teach me how life is. It teach me everything. I really enjoyed those two years being at vo-tech.

JR*: Yes, I went to vo-tech for construction. I went there my junior year. I really liked it but it was kinda getting in the way from other things that was going on so I didn't go [back to career tech], I was gonna miss out on some stuff that was important so I just didn't go—cause you there half of the school day and I wasn't there for like the assemblies, workouts, missing practice and stuff--just wanted to be around my classmates.*

Denzel*: Yes, the lady that helped me in high school. Her name was Ms. __ (a school staff member). She talked to me about Job Corp the first time I went. She said how they could help me get a trade or anything. At first I didn't like it. I really didn't like it… this is the place that they said you can do it on your own. I got kicked out cause I really didn't like it.*

Career tech offered the above students practical skills that they were able to utilize after graduating from high school. They both describe their experiences at career tech as joyous. Cam was invited to attend a tour by the assistant principal. He found his enrollment as not merely academic, but an experience where he learned about life, money matters, and about relating to his teacher. JR enjoyed vo-tech, but complained that it took him away from other students and pep assemblies. Ashton and Denzel said no one talked to them about attending career tech during high school.

The participants were questioned about their work-related experiences during high school.

Kevin*: I worked at Crest and I didn't know how to fill out an application until that*

instance where he (track coach) showed me.

Ashton*: Yes, I worked at McDonald's. I worked at Lil Caesar's. I worked at AMC movies, and that's really it. I worked at McDonald's the longest. I worked there for a year.*

JR*: Yes, I had a job my junior and senior year. I worked at Schlotzsky's. It was like a part-time job. After practice I went over there. Mom picked me up and took me to work.*

The above statements are discouraging because students and families should be informed about services that can facilitate career awareness. Vocational education and work experience are predictors for postsecondary employment. Five of the participants were not familiar with outside services such as Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). Denzel learned about DRS several years after he had graduated. Another element that is missing is collaboration between school, student, family members and outside agencies.

Relationships and Supports

A reason to care. The participants described relationships they had with staff members. They identified individuals they felt believed in them.

Ashton*: The teacher that was always helping me was Ms. ___. She was always there. Ms. ___ she was always there keeping me up knowing what I needed to do. She was my history teacher. Teachers were always there keeping me up. Like you know I be down sometimes and they will talk to me and be like you can do it. Just keep it up you know keep me encouraged. (He smiled as he discussed these teachers).*

JR*: I received extra assistance on my work if I needed to, after school---after practice [small group tutoring] I received extra time and even in the classroom they gave me--even on the homework assignments they gave me extra time to turn in homework assignments.*

Kevin*: I probably had one of the best mentors anybody can ask for as a kid--an angel principal. She raised me from a boy to a man and I'm sitting here today. I mean she taught me everything that I needed to know about discipline, being meticulous you know. Caring about other people, being happy, being appreciative of people around you cause I was a loss cause and I really didn't care, but she gave me a reason to care.*

Denzel*: I was in regular classes and at my high school we had special ed room like right after you get your assignment they would have sent me down to the room. They would help me out with some of my work I had to do like my math and history---everything. I was like in mostly regular classes. They would sit right beside us and they would help us like find---like I had trouble finding some of the answers like everybody else, but they would sit me down and say okay we would go over it what you need to do and then they would tell me what I had to do and everything so when they help me out I got a little bit better in it.*

Ashton was very appreciative. He established strong relationships with several teachers. He credited the teachers with helping him complete a college application and applying for financial aid. He also believed that their affection and verbal support provided a security base that made his struggles worthwhile. Kevin continues to maintain strong ties with his former assistant principal and her family. The strong relationship

served as a turning point for Kevin. Denzel felt his teachers did not get to know him and learn his interests in order to support him and his postsecondary aspirations. JR appreciated most of the modifications with his assignments during high school. He found the extra time to complete tasks and assistance with difficult readings helpful. While he liked the A's and B's he attained in his classes, he bemoans the fact that the help may have actually hindered his reading development. Denzel emphasized the notion that reading assistance was vital to his learning. He believed he improved as a student when a teacher was sitting right next to him, helping him focus "on everything." He then uses the individual reference of "I" to suggest that after such close proximity he was able to separate and be responsible for his own learning.

Strong family support. Each participant had very supportive family members and guardians that provided support beyond their years in high school.

> Ashton*: My grandma and my mom they were talking to people out here and we found her and we found the disability lady here and we had a meeting with her…. But me I'm still in school doing something like they all happy that I'm doing something. My uncle's happy. He's happy because he is a ____ graduate. He graduated from ___ in 1996. He wants me to just keep doing what I'm doing and just stay out the way.*
>
> Denzel*: The Department of Rehabilitation Services helped me get the job at Tinker. My auntie's friend told me about the whole situation. Me, my mom and my auntie we all went up there and they told us about everything we can do that could help us out in the whole situation, so they told me about Tinker for you to work as a janitor. I got the job as soon as I filled out the application. I was out*

there for almost 9 years. I did not know about DRS when I was in high school. I found out about it after Job Corp and Heritage."

Ashton's transition into college was not easy. Due to his grades, he was not allowed to return to college for a semester. He returned in the fall and has been successful. He advocates for his accommodations. His grandmother and mother ensured he met with the disability advisor. Further, his cousin modeled for him how not to succeed in college and how his decision disappointed the family. His uncle provided hope through his modeling, demonstrating that someone in his family could successfully complete college. Lastly, he expresses his individual success is pleasing his family. His highest value seems to be the happiness of his family of which he is a part. Denzel also has a very supportive family. He frequently mentioned the various ways his family has supported him with obtaining jobs. JR has a very supportive family. Although they were not raised with their parents Cam and Kevin had very supportive guardians.

Personal Responsibility and Persistence

Ashton*: My GPA right now, uh, it's a 2.1. I did bad by freshman year because I didn't take it serious. My advisor she can tell you. Like she said I've changed cause I felt sad after I did a whole year and then the next Fall I couldn't come back cause I was on probation and I failed a class and I couldn't come back and then being at home for them five months. I was like I can't do nothing. Like I was home doing nothing. I took some online classes at ___, but it gave me a reality check. This is not what I wanted to do. Like I didn't want to do that so I was like I have to go back to school. So that next spring I enrolled and they let me come back. I was on probation and I passed all my classes. I passed all my classes last*

semester and now I'm here.

Cam*: My childhood I think it was rough for the fact I was bouncing back from home to home--from place to place--not really having my mom raise me. I guess for the most part that took a toll on my schooling days. I lived with my aunt, uncle and cousin at the time. I would never take that back because of the fact they did go out of their way to basically adopt me and my sister so I think that was kinda a distraction--I guess but they did push me to put school first and make nothing less than a C and some um... yeah.*

JR*: Life is not always going to be fair. You just gotta bounce back and make it the best that you can and everything should work out if it is something you are supposed to be doing it will come to you right.*

Kevin*: I never asked for accommodations. Like I said I hit my knees and it was hard for me to read. I struggled in comprehension. I struggled in paying attention and it was bad. It begin to diminish and deteriorate right before my eyes and I was looking like you're an A student on the field but you a F- student in the classroom. I would get a reading assignment and I would lock myself in my room. Then I would speak the words or text the words into my I phone. Then I would use my I-phone---I would copy it and I would press speak on my I-phone and Suri would actually read the words to me. So after a while I could--it was like I developed this plan for myself to succeed. I would type in all the words and press speak and that's how I would be able to answer the questions. If I couldn't read if I couldn't pronounce a word---it was small words I had lacked thereof two syllable words I couldn't even fathom to speak and after she would speak the*

words I would repeat it, repeat it, repeat it, repeat it. I would write it down on my arm, my hands, whatever, on a piece of paper. Then I would repeat it to where I had created this rhythmic pattern of doing that and it helped me learn how to read better, to speak better, and speak more eloquently. I used that method for two and half long years. Then every semester, every class everything I would be the first one in class to ask for help and I would be the last one in class to ask for help. It would be like sometime my professor would be like look just follow me. Whatever you need to know---I will give you my personal number. I was lucky enough to have a group of teachers/people around me that wanted me to succeed and they didn't even know me so that's how I did it.

Ashton laments having "did bad" and "failed" and was put on probation before being allowed to return to the university for a semester. He sees it as a moral as well as an academic inadequacy. He took online courses, but felt unsatisfied with his education, wanting to return to a college campus. He describes his personal persistence and eventual success in returning to school and passing his classes. He ends with the interesting spatial remark that he "is here." It was obvious Ashton deemed his presence on campus as an accomplishment. He was excited and grateful for the opportunity to be around other college students. His engagement at the college validated his sense of belonging and connectedness.

Cam puts his educational experience in a wider social context. Influencing his academic education were factors such as family instability and feelings revolving around the absence of his mother. He describes this as a distraction and as taking "toll" on his schooling. Yet, in the midst of his dismay and his feeling like his extended family "went

out of their way" to care for him, he expresses appreciation for their efforts and their high academic expectations for him. He persisted in spite of his difficulties. Kevin echoes several of the other participants' sentiment that ventilating negative feelings may not be helpful. The hesitancy to express anger and sadness reflects the "cool pose" posture which preserves one's dignity in the face of difficulties. Kevin also relates an incredible struggle to get up off his "knees" to becoming a more confident student in college, capable of asking professors questions and doggedly pursuing success in the classroom. He describes the creative use of technology to help him learn to read, to pronounce difficult words and becoming more eloquent.

Challenges Associated with Disability and Being a Black Male

Special education as a crutch. The participants discussed how their teachers provided "assistance" to support them with completing assignments.

> Kevin*: It would be---instead of multiple choice there were like four choices to choose from they would mark out two of them and they would give us the option of two so that would be modified. In test time similar modified situation where the teacher would remove us and put us in a smaller classroom and there would be another teacher that would read the questions.*
>
> *I could manipulate the teacher that was in the classroom and be like," Well, I don't know answer one." If I complained enough that teacher would show sympathy and be like, "What do you think about answer B?" Maybe that might be the right question.*
>
> Ashton*: In high school you can just chill you do your work that morning, but college you have to do the work, you have to do it on time.*

Denzel*: There was a guy my freshman year he came to help me and another girl out with our tests so all the rest of the high school years. From my sophomore to junior year they stopped doing it. I don't know why. I still had trouble with class. I couldn't understand some of the stuff like math they say go down to the room, so you can do your math test.*

JR*: I feel like they [modifications] both helped me and hurt me because I really feel like I never got better at my reading--at all. ___ helping me, but they helped me---the good thing they did was I had got my grades---my grades were good and stuff like that and I kept my grades up A's and B's.*

Reading is vital. The participants provided perspectives regarding their experiences with reading.

Ashton*: Ah, I say like speaking out. I used to be scared to talk. Sometimes I'd stutter. I stutter a little bit or I couldn't say a big word I wanted to say, but other than that--Uh, that would be it just like speaking out and that was just really it speaking out to people… I mean they should like---like with me like I didn't expect me to be out here this long and like with my ability---learning ability. I'm still in school so it like for all it shouldn't be hard it should be hard for all like me--to me I just think do what you got to do and like I want you know everybody to come to school and be great.*

Trae*: Um, I think my mother helped me more a lot cause a lot of people said when I was a baby---the doctors said I wasn't going to be a good talker. I'm not going to be a good reader. She (his mother) helped me with my reading a lot. In my high school years—she helped me a lot more my high school year. I had problems with*

English.

Cam*: I don't know if I thought it was easy. I don't know if it was because I was forced to do that. I don't think I was forced to do it. I think I was influenced I guess. I could have done anything that normal kids did but I think I was put in those classes and so they kinda were a crutch to me--I think.*

Cool pose. The participants expressed the embarrassment they experienced and how they "masked" their feelings.

Cam*: I was okay, but I think I was more so embarrassed because I wasn't with the regular kids and I think that going out and it was kinda a finger pointed at me so I don't know (in deep thought--shaking his head)--I don't know. Um, the test--studying, I struggled with that a lot. Um, I guess some students... (mumbled "How can I say this?" Cam appeared frustrated) I think in my situation I should not have been in those classes.*

Kevin*: I kinda got in trouble with my grades and stuff like that but they had to know--teachers had to know I wasn't comfortable with my reading---sometimes because kids make fun of you and stuff like that and I wasn't comfortable and I didn't want to be in there. (He seemed frustrated as he relived the experience.) I didn't want to read out loud because I made to feel insecure about my own voice or I might feel I can't proper pronounce the words and I had a stuttering issue and I would resort to showing out instead of asking for help or trying. In the hallway, all the kids that are on an IEP they sit together. All the other kids is like they just walk around them as if they don't exist. Cool kids hang with the cool kids and you know the slow kids---you know that's a terrible term---slow kids*

hang with the slow kids. We don't mix.

JR*: Yeah, when we have like---the teacher have group reading and stuff like that. I didn't want to read at all. I really didn't participate in that really and I kinda just went to a different--to a different--to my other teachers that usually helps me with stuff like that so I really didn't participate in that sometimes I kinda got in trouble with my grades and stuff like that but they had to know--teachers had to know I wasn't comfortable with my reading---sometimes because kids make fun of you and stuff like that and I wasn't comfortable (and I didn't want to be in there). (JR seemed frustrated as he relived the experience).*

Ashton expresses feelings that his learning disability was related to the physical act of stuttering and developing a psychological block about expressing himself to others. He describes a fear that he associates with strangling his self-expression and freedom to communicate with others. Kevin and JR were also self-conscious about reading and stuttering so their response was to misbehave or act out to mask the pain. Trae relates that doctors had early on made remarks that might have curtailed his achievements if he had accepted them at face value. He felt that he had little help from anyone as he faced the challenges his reading disability presented him with, except his mother. Despite his low reading ability, Trae proudly informed me that he never missed turning in an assignment and he always completed his homework. In the form of giving advice to others, Ashton relates that his learning disability had suggested to him that he was inadequate for being a success in college. Simply going to college is not seen as a normative accomplishment but a "great" accomplishment. To be "great" he has learned to approach the hardships with confidence and hope.

Each participant was stigmatized about their disability. Cam felt embarrassed about being in special education and assures the interviewer he could have done anything as well as the other students. Then he suggests that he used special education as a "crutch. Kevin relates that he felt "uncomfortable" and suggested that it bothered him that "teachers must have known." Both participants exhibited discomfort and frustration as they relived their experiences. Kevin vividly describes feeling ostracized and the invisibility of students who are placed in special education classes. He resents the fact that they are misunderstood, and he despises the word "slow" which is often used to describe special education students.

I can be myself. The participants are continuing to adjust and make sense of their past and current experiences as Black males.

> Ashton*: I don't want to be home in that area in the streets I really don't want to be around that--that's just not me. I like being in school. I feel like I can be myself. I can have fun. I can just walk. Everybody from different states. Everybody happy---just survive. I say everybody can do it. They can just keep pushing and shove and being something they not. Like they just think--yeah school is expensive---yeah it is expensive, but you just fill out scholarships. Like I still got to fill out some scholarships, but that's just how it is."*
>
> Cam*: I'm blessed with seeing the better aspect of things rather than people pointing a finger at me. I don't--personally I don't--like I said personally--being a black man I don't feel like there is a finger pointed at me. I don't know if it is because I don't pay attention to it or because I'm blessed to the fact I don't have to worry about it, you know--so personally I don't think it is."*

Kevin*: I feel like some of the times you have to bite your tongue to make it through certain days you know whether it be jokes. You know we have our President using profanity on television so it likes it okay with everybody so I can joke with you if I'm a Caucasian and I'm African American I can joke with you be like get over here boy you know giving you these terms and labeling you as a boy or making monkey jokes and you as a person. You know I'm struggling. Like I feel like I'm being mistreated verbally---may not be physically. The majority of the time it's verbally---and take those proper steps to let that be known---I don't feel comfortable with you labeling me whether it's joking you know quite candidly I don't period you know so yeah, yeah there's a whole lot going on out there. Cause like I said I grew on them and they had this enormous amount of sympathy for someone that grew up in that type of environment. It was all over our faces. We were sad kids. No need for a kid to be sad. You don't even know life and with us having adopted parents---you know I went seven years without seeing my family after I got adopted. I feel like that was a mental strain on me and the kids I had lived in the household with it was the same thing. You know it was the same thing---It was a different story.*

As for being Black, Ashton's associations are with danger in the streets and a lack of freedom to enjoy the moment. He gives a glimpse of the freedom he has on campus of walking without fear and being happy. He offers meaningful descriptions of Black students being on college campus "to be what they are not." Ashton's testimonies indicate being on campus poses fewer risky environmental factors than those faced in his home community. Then he follows this remark with the necessity to "push" and "shove"

to survive and "be happy."

Cam wrestles with how he feels about the topic of challenges with being Black. He invokes the religious term of being "blessed" for not "seeing" or "paying attention" to racial "finger pointing." He is determined to look on the optimistic side of issues of race in his environment, thus avoiding "worry."

Kevin makes many sophisticated connections concerning racism that many Black men may experience. He references the President's use of profanities and sees the double standard that Black males experience in this regard. He resents the racist taunting and joking and feels sympathy for Black children who still endure such racism. As he has mentioned before, he looks at poverty-stricken environments and broken homes that many Black children experience and feels great empathy because he himself has lived through such a childhood. He seems to want educators to really know what is "hidden" from their often-superficial views of Black students in special education.

Summary

A detailed analysis of the typed interviews, observations, and field notes were utilized to identify the following four themes: No Voice, Relationships and Supports, Personal Responsibility and Persistence, and Challenges Associated with Disability and Being a Black Male. Some of the participants' testimonies reflected findings that have been documented throughout secondary transition literature, such as the passive roles students and parents play during IEP meetings as well as the implementation of effective secondary transition practices by special educators. The results indicated the participants had strong family support and some teachers that supported them emotionally.

Research indicates students are passive during their IEP meetings and this was

indicated by five participants in this study. The participants indicated the school staff members or family members did most of the talking. The occurrences during the participants' meetings were contrary to what is promoted in literature. Student-led IEP meetings are highly encouraged and believed to develop self-determination skills (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). Both practices promote positive student outcomes (Test, Fowler et al., 2009). The utilization of transition assessments in IEP meetings are opportunities to identify and discuss the students' interests, strengths, and needs. In addition, transition assessments allow IEP teams to identify activities and resources to assist the student with meeting their postsecondary goals (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). Acquiring the assessment data would allow the students to have a better understanding of their abilities, skills, and talents.

A major component missing from the participants' transition planning was collaboration between school, student, parent, community partners, and outside agencies. Four of the participants attended career technology centers and enjoyed the experience. The involvement in career tech provided the students with a hands-on experience. Concerning is the fact that two of the participants learned about career tech from other staff members. Three of the participants were employed during high school. They did not recall anyone from the school communicating with their employer. Open communication between employer and school personnel supports the student with developing work ethic and involvement in the community. Furthermore, paid work experiences are predictors for positive postsecondary employment for students with high incidence-disabilities (Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009).

The participants' family members regularly attended meetings. The families were

not provided with information that would have assisted the family members with supporting their students' post-high school goals. The families' need for outside support is beneficial to all involved parties. For example, I noted Denzel's family enrolled him in Job Corp at the teacher's recommendation immediately after he graduated. Once the family learned about DRS. they made an application, which leads one to believe the family might have taken advantage of DRS services sooner had they been informed, just as they might have taken advantage of other services if provided the knowledge. Denzel seemed discouraged that the school staff members never took the time to learn about his interests. They knew that he loved to perform and wishes that the team would have steered him to an acting school.

Four participants informed the transition planning team they desired to attend college after high school. The researcher provided examples of transition activities, such as college application completion, career inventories, financial aid packet completion, college tours, ACT prep classes, and taking the ACT or an equivalent assessment. Some of the participants recalled being assisted with the above-mentioned tasks by a mentor teacher, parent, or football recruiter. The participants' description of their placement settings consisted of being in the mainstream classroom for most of the day or a portion of the day. Two participants received most of their instruction in the mainstream classroom and received support as needed. Students taught in the mainstream classroom versus those taught partially in the mainstream classroom perform academically better in high school (Newman, Madaus, & Javitz, 2016). Yet, students with high-incidence disabilities are regularly removed from the mainstream classroom during the school day (Albrecht et al., 2012).

Two of the participants stated their schedules were changed to easier courses so they could graduate from high school. It is often that students with high-incidence disabilities are exposed to less rigorous curriculum (Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2014). In addition, as demonstrated by the statement made by Kevin, teachers can have low expectations for students with high-incidence disabilities, especially Black male students.

Four of the participants were aware of their disability categories. Concerning is throughout the interviews each participant informed the researcher about their reading difficulties without being directly asked. It appeared their reading difficulties continue to cause the participants a sense of frustration. Because of their low reading skills, the participants struggled with maintaining their grades in college. It appeared the participants experienced failure due to circumstances beyond their control. In addition, the participants were reluctant to read in the presence of their peers, hoping to minimize getting bullied. Moreover, the males' responses to the stigma associated with special education placement resulted in techniques associated with the Cool Pose theory.

This study showed transition activities were not utilized at a level that exposed the participants to various career paths, college preparation, community involvement, and knowledge about services offered by outside agencies; thereby, hindering the participants' opportunities to obtain postsecondary outcomes in employment, education, and independent living that are commensurate to their peers. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the analyzed data, purpose of the study, discussion of research findings, discussion of essential themes, implications, limitations, recommendation for future research, and a summary.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This study examines perceptions of secondary transition planning and postsecondary outcomes of Black males once identified with a high-incidence disability. This study involved the participation of six Black males between the ages of 18 and 28. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, typed transcripts, and the researcher's journal entries. This study gave the researcher an understanding of six Black males' experiences, dilemmas, and obstacles impressed upon them due to a stigmatizing label that possibly could have been wrongfully assigned to them. This study extended the emerging literature that supports the utilization of qualitative research to capture the in-depth testimonies of an otherwise marginalized population, Black males with high-incidence disabilities. Following the initial interviews, participants were provided the opportunity to alter any comments. All six participants were asked follow-up questions. Each responded via text on multiple occasions. In addition, conversations were held via telephone with three of the participants. All participants were satisfied with the typed transcript.

The coders began by organizing the interviewer's comments according to diverse categories closely related to the interview questions. Then, having written textual descriptions of these comments arranged according to agreed upon general descriptions, the coders independently coded the textual descriptions, or the essential themes for discussion. Once the primary researcher completed all the interviews, only one new code was added, "persistence," though some of the labels of the themes were negotiated. For instance, one person used the code phrase "affiliative needs" while the other person coded "relationship needs."

A triangulation revealed the themes arrived through the coding were matched in previous research, though sometimes in ways that expanded our views about special education. First, we derived large categories from the typed transcripts. Next, we tried to answer the specific research questions according to themes we had agreed upon. Lastly, having summarized those areas, we parceled out the essence of the themes and agreed upon the following overarching themes to write about in our final discussion: 1) No Voices, 2) Relationships and Supports, 3) Personal Responsibility and Persistence, 4) Challenges Associated with Disability and Being a Black Male. Within the four overarching themes the following subthemes were identified: 1) Essential components missing, 2) A reason to care, 3) Strong family support, 4) Special education as a crutch, 5) Reading is vital, 6) Cool pose, and 7) I can be myself.

Purpose of the Study

This study allowed six Black males who had graduated from high school, approximately eight months to nine years ago, share their perceptions regarding their secondary transition planning and postsecondary outcomes. Their testimonies allow educators to hear directly from this underserved population, Black males once identified with high-incidence disabilities. This study will demonstrate to the special education communities, policy makers, and stakeholders that effective secondary transition practices are not utilized on a consistent basis. In addition, the families are not informed about available resources. Black males desperately need effective secondary transition planning in order to obtain postschool outcomes that will enable them to acquire a better quality of life. Hence, the employment, education, and independent living outcomes obtained by Black males with high-incidence disabilities are doubly discouraging in

comparison to any other student population. This study sought to qualitatively answer the following research questions:

1. How do Black males, formerly categorized with a high-incidence disability, describe the experiences of their secondary transition planning?
2. To what extent was the research participant actively involved in the secondary transition planning process during their high school years?
3. What instruction, training, resources, assistance programs or other experiences were a part of the secondary transition planning?
4. How do these students describe their postsecondary outcomes?

Each interview was comprised of these four overarching questions which guided the conversation and prompted other discussions. The participants were very relaxed which motivated them to talk flowingly and freely about their experiences. The researcher asked follow-up questions before and after the participants approved the typed transcript in order to paint an accurate picture of their stories. The data were coded by the researcher and committee chairperson, Dr. Robbins, to arrive at themes outlined in the preceding chapter.

Discussion of Research Findings according to Research Questions

Research Question 1. How do Black males, formerly categorized with a high-incidence disability, describe the experiences of their secondary transition planning? The data revealed the six participants perceived their special education placement as stigmatizing. Their difficulties with reading, especially in the presence of their peers, caused embarrassment, humiliation, and hindered student achievement. Special education is meant to assist students with disabilities by offering additional services and resources.

Unfortunately, the participants were removed from the mainstream classroom, exposed to low expectations, and received a weaker curriculum. These are trends that are all too common for students identified with high-incidence disabilities (Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013).

The participants realized they were viewed as inferior by their peers; first, due to their race; second, due to their disability. Therefore, these males resorted to behaviors that are closely associated with the Cool Pose theory. Cool Pose gives the Black male a sense of control that allows him to express bitterness, anger, and distrust toward the dominant society (Majors & Billson, 1992). As two of the participants revealed in order to feel accepted by their peers they would seek attention by displaying inappropriate behaviors. In dealing with the pain caused by their harsh environments, oppression, and opposition, it is often that Black males have been known to mask their inner feelings.

Research Question 2. To what extent was the research participant actively involved in the secondary transition planning process during high school? The data revealed five participants provided statements which indicated they were not actively involved in their transition planning meetings. One of the participants could not recall meeting with his IEP team. The 1997 amendments to IDEA called for students to be actively involved as well as actively invited to attend IEP meetings. IDEA (2004) reauthorizations furthered increased the students' role in IEP meetings by requiring (a) transition goals and services reflect students' strengths, interests, and preferences; (b) transition plans state postsecondary goals that reflect assessments related to employment, education, and independent living; and (c) transition services, including an appropriate course of study to help students achieve goals. In addition, parents are expected to be full

partners with school staff in their student's educational planning (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012). The promotion of student driven meetings is an opportunity for self-determination and self-advocacy skills to be taught to students. The development of these skills is shown to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with high-incidence disabilities (Roberts, Ju, & Zhang, 2016; Shogren & Shaw, 2016; Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015).

Whether or not transition assessments were administered could not be determined by the participants' statements. One of the participants recalled taking a career assessment online, but did not recall anyone discussing the results with him. It is likely the results were not used to guide the transition planning meetings and were not used as an ongoing process. Incorporating transition assessments as part of transition planning identifies information that can assist with developing postsecondary goals as well as promote career and college readiness (Carter et al., 2009; Neubert & Leconte, 2013; Sitlington & Clark, 2007).

Research Question 3. What instruction, training, resources, assistance, programs or other experiences were a part of the secondary transition planning? According to IDEA (2004), a course of study must be a part of the transition plan. Considering each of the participants graduated, it is reasonable to assume a course of study existed for each participant. One participant mentioned his schedule was modified to enable him to take easier classes. The participants responses indicated they received some instruction in the mainstream classroom as part of an inclusion model. Two participants recalled occasions in which two teachers (general and special education)

were in the same classroom. When necessary, they would be taken to another location for tests or individual assistance. One of the participants recalled being sent to another room for assistance after receiving the assignment from the regular education teacher.

The participants were not specifically asked about their involvement in career and technical education (CTE) courses, although one of the participants mentioned taking prevocational courses at his high school. Research shows higher school completion for non-college-bound students, postsecondary employment, and higher wages for students with disabilities that participate in CTE. Although the postsecondary outcomes vary between the three categories, CTE participation has proven to be beneficial for students identified with high-incidence disabilities (Lee et al., 2016; Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2016; Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2017).

Four of the participants were enrolled in career technology (referred to as vo tech by the participants). The participants were very excited about attending career tech. Enrollment in career tech proved to be beneficial to the participants. Each stated how they enjoyed learning skills and the hands-on experience. One of the participants used his masonry skills to earn extra income.

Although the participants were employed during high school, they did not recall any other transition activities that assisted them reaching their postsecondary employment goals, such as internships, job shadowing, or mentoring. Excluding one of the participants, the participants did not recall learning how to complete applications. The participants also did not recall participating in such activities as role play, mock interviews, or learning job-searching skills.

It is concerning the participants do not recall being informed about vocational rehabilitation services (VR) during high school. VR agencies help transition-age youth with disabilities reach vocational goals, attend higher education, and achieve employment aspirations (Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos, & Stern, 2015). One of the participants sought services from the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) after he had graduated from high school. A relative was informed about DRS by an aquaintance. The participants did not recall any individuals that were not school staff members being at the transition planning meetings; thereby, leading the researcher to believe collaboration between the school and rehabilitation agency professionals, individuals from the community, student, and family members were minimal at best. Collaboration should be viewed as an opportunity to draw upon the expertise of the different members to pool their information to inform decisions or recommendations for the student (Trach, 2012). Research has demonstrated successful collaboration among team members must be viewed as a priority that consists of structured planning and coordinated activities from the onset in order for students with disabilities to obtain meaningful postsecondary employment, education, and independent living (Webb et al., 2014)

Research Question 4. How **do these students describe their postsecondary outcomes?** Currently each participant is employed and/or furthering their education. At the time of the study, four of the participants had a job. Two of the participants held full-time employment and their hourly pay was far above minimum wage. Two of the young men are enrolled full-time in college. One participant only needs to pass one course to receive a bachelor's degree. Each participant was able to articulate goals they wish to acquire or pursue. Two of the participants are married or engaged and serve as the head

of their households. The participants were able to indicate engagement in activities that demonstrate independent living.

Unfortunately, four of the males that attempted to further their education initially experienced failure. Unsatisfactory grades caused them to be placed on probation or dismissed from college. One of the participants stated he took English Comp I three times before passing the course. This participant stated he was made aware he could seek accommodations before he began college by high school staff members. The other participant did not seek accommodations, but advocated for a meeting with his guardian and coach to discuss his unsatisfactory grades. He demonstrated a high level of ingenuity by using his cell phone to read and define words for him. In addition, he confined himself to his room to study and frequently sought support from the professors. A study conducted by Pellegrino, Sermons, and Shaver (2011) revealed Black students with disabilities do not seek evaluation documentation for postsecondary accommodations. Black students with disabilities have been found to request accommodations after they have failed. This might be due to fear of being negatively labeled as incompetent by college staff (Banks, 2014). A third participant said the professors failed to provide accommodations after multiple reminders. During the interview, he appeared extremely frustrated that his requests were disregarded. He did not return to college the following year. Another Black male participant was unsuccessful at Job Corp due to his inability to perform tasks independently, which caused him to leave the program. Although he did obtain an associate degree from another institution, he admitted his peers frequently assisted him with completing various tasks.

Most of the participants indicated they had a checking account, credit card(s), and were registered voters. One participant mentioned he voted in the most recent presidential election. Three of the participants are actively involved in church. Two of the participants stated they were married or engaged. Each participant identified their hobbies and interests. All were able to state future aspirations, such as obtaining an apartment, returning to school, starting a nonprofit organization, or applying for another position at their place of employment.

Despite the setbacks, each of the participants discussed a level of persistence that they had exhibited. Each participant credited the support received from family members or guardians for allowing them to overcome barriers. In addition to IDEA (2004) mandating supports are provided to parents, research continues to show parent involvement increases the likelihood of positive postsecondary successes (Hirano & Rowe, 2016). The involvement of a parent or guardian enabled the males to experience more postsecondary success than obtained by most Black males with high-incidence disabilities. Furthermore, literature reveals the importance of Black males having strong relationships with faculty members. A bond between teacher and student increases the probability that a Black male will remain in school and feel a sense of connectedness.

Discussion of Essential Thematic Issues

Participants described being ostracized from other students who were not designated as special needs students at their high schools. Interviews revealed that by being in "special classes" they felt excluded from many common activities and privileges that other students enjoyed. The participants also described feelings of otherness, or alienation, due to being viewed as "slow." And, they described feeling invisible, as other

students often ignored them or simply avoided interaction with them. While they never used the word stigma to describe the social condition, they often felt that they had a mark of disgrace which impacted their self-esteem and social life.

One participant used the phrase "psychological blocks" when asked about the challenges he faced in high school. He and others spoke of their "disabilities" in psychological ways. They claimed to be highly self-conscious in their interactions, always wondering if others viewed them as lesser persons. One participant said that he generalized the feeling of being inadequate in most areas of life because of "his disability" and reflected that he was "as good as anybody," but let himself be separated from other "regular" students. Another student contended that he engaged in much "misbehavior" as a "reaction" to feeling inadequate. He felt that his toughness and bad attitude was a way of equalizing things with everyone who succeeded more than he did in school (Jackson, 2018). He reflected that he felt this form of compensation worked well in high school, but had not worked so well in junior college and the work world, but he really did not see much alternative when in school.

Participants expressed different views about their experiences with IEP meetings. Most described the same people (teacher, counselor, mother and self) in their meetings. Some said they felt cared for, but none felt they had much voice in the meetings (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). For the most part, they claimed to have listened, but did not contribute to the discussion. Participants most frequently described the meetings leading to help with their reading problems. A few said their grades improved when they received tutoring and extra time to complete tests. A couple of participants said they felt that the extra help actually hurt them when they went to college. They did not receive the same

type of modifications they had become accustomed to receiving in high school, causing the participants to have a hard time completing assignments independently at their postsecondary education settings.

Interviewees reported opportunities and lack of opportunities for training and work. Interestingly enough, a couple of participants claimed never to have been steered into career tech or outside work. Career tech was much appreciated by the rest, as they described what they learned was useful in terms of learning practical skills they were now using on their job or in their private lives. The one negative experience mentioned by a couple of participants was that career tech sometimes took them away from fun activities at their school. One student was thankful for his outside job because he had learned how to complete job applications.

The role of relationships in the educative process was the most pervasive theme in the interviews, at all education levels. Recurrently, participants spoke of how they gained confidence when they felt they were in some way connected to their teachers, counselors, classmates and principals, often speaking about the ones who related to them as extraordinary. They offered many stories about when someone went beyond their assigned role to talk with, encourage, or help them. They connected these acts of kindness with their success, contentment, and self-confidence. Such experiences were more likely to occur at the high school level but also occurred with college instructors. Family members who helped them enroll, went to IEP meetings, talked with them, or acted as role models were much appreciated and helpful to their educational experiences. It should also be noted that a couple of the students literally defined their individual successes only in terms of their connections to their family, rather than as self-

affirmations. These affiliative emphases for Black persons is supported in psychological literature.

The participants' testimonies indicate varying levels of persistence and self-advocacy demonstrated at some juncture in their lives. While students emphasized their educational journeys as social ventures, they also frequently spoke of their feelings of personal responsibility for success. A couple of participants mentioned that many frustrating obstacles such as racism and ableism blocked their way, but they refused to focus on these distractions and, consequently, gave their energies to achieving their goals. This hesitancy to ventilate negative feelings directly, at least in a way that they feel their integrity was harmed, harkens back to the cool pose theory. Another interesting motivator that one participant mentions was that failure in junior college would have been a moral transgression. To not succeed would harm his family, so after being removed from college he took measures so that he would be allowed to return and pursue his degree.

One student offered an incredible story of how he was not going to let his reading disability stop him from completing college. He utilized extraordinary creativity and obstinate persistence, as he wrote in words and found definitions that he could neither pronounce or understand and then practiced saying them aloud until he learned them.

A few participants described deplorable environmental conditions that they grew up in. They discussed the extreme poverty they confronted daily. They also described being raised in multiple homes and constantly changing parental figures from parents to grandparents to uncles and aunts, big brothers and sisters, and foster care. They spoke of violence in the streets they roamed. They occasionally interwove emotions such as vulnerability, fear, and lack of freedom. One participant described his junior college

environment as a green paradise of security and freedom. They spoke of constantly hearing taunts and racist joking and endured double standards everywhere, from notions of proper English to using of "dirty language" and how Blacks were judged unfairly. Most significantly and in line with the Cool Pose theory, one participant said that Black people keep these atrocities hidden from educators, but when they found someone who was willing to really connect with them, their lives changed significantly.

The "cool pose" theory proved to be helpful in understanding some of the participants' comments. Anxiety about achieving perfection has marked persons attempting to achieve success in capitalist society. Anxiety is often referenced as helpful in motivating persons to achieve success (Tillich, 1962). In certain respects, the "cool pose" may be described as an unconventional response to this pervasive anxiety and what may be seen by people of color as efforts by persons in control to get them to breathe this stressful air, which has become associated with leading to success. Some of the participants wanted to become successful in a conventional sense, but even they spoke from a "cool pose" perspective. They were careful not to wallow in anxiety about their futures.

A couple of participants spoke of the importance of emptying themselves of some of the pain and anger that they bring into their schools, but they chose to keep it "hidden." Participants reported that in addition to the pressures at school, they could not saunter down the street without any real certainty that they would not have violence visited on them or experience some kind of mockery. No experience can be casual to them. As indicated in the interviews, teachers have a difficult time working with Black students, not because they do not care, but because they do not understand the complex

histories and the day-to-day hardships resulting from racial prejudice that this group of students experience.

There is an irony in this self-protective "cool pose" stance. To be cool is to be equipped to deal with those who put you down, but it is to remain hopelessly incommunicative and vulnerable to violent outbursts. It is a psychically-armed rebellion that comes out of the most intense conditions of exploitation, cruelty, violence, and frustrations and it does not always keep the anger at bay, as suggested about what happened in "Ferguson."

Implications

Though there were some positive comments about the outcomes of IEP meetings, there was a general dissatisfaction about them, focusing primarily upon the students' lack of input and decisions that removed them too frequently from "regular" classes. IEP meetings can be alienating for students and parents. The use of jargon and acronyms can be off-putting to many involved in the meetings. While such deprivileging speech may have contributed to the silencing that the participants in this study experienced, there may also have been problems with the content of the discussions. The meetings would benefit from attempts to provide more space for students to speak about their wants and needs. Educators should use meetings as opportunities to teach self-determination or self-advocacy skills. One participant suggested that students would speak their minds more freely if they were given the opportunity to meet as a group of students where they would feel greater power to delineate their wishes with a counselor or teacher.

This study resoundingly made clear that students with special needs would benefit if they could be supported in their interactions with other students. McCelland and Scalzo

(2006) focused on students with special needs withdrawing from other students, but this study revealed that these participants felt that other students excluded and ignored them, using terms like feeling "invisible". More efforts might be made to educate all students about social interaction skills, with an emphasis on inclusion of students who have been viewed as "others."

Teacher support was the most referenced point made by the participants regarding their development in school. Kavale, Mathur, and Mostert (2004) emphasize the importance of teachers modeling behavior and taking time to teach special education students behaviors such as reading social cues. But Strain, Odom and McConnell's (1984) classic study encouraged teacher reciprocity in their relationships with students with special needs. They emphasized a careful exchange between teachers and students, which kept teachers in a teacher role. Participants in this study expressed an appreciation of a more intimate relationship with their teachers. They often spoke of how proximity when working on assignments was helpful for focus. They also talked about wanting a relationship where 'hidden" personal issues could be expressed (home and street life, in particular). While often a student would be referred to a school counselor for some of these issues, participants needed to feel their teachers knew something about them.

Others spoke of their family's high aspirations for them and role modeling. Participants typically spoke of their families as being "extended". Some did not live with their biological parents, but with aunts and grandparents who offered them some form of stability. Research demonstrates that parent involvement increases the likelihood of positive postsecondary outcomes (Hirano & Rowe, 2016; Test et al., 2009). Special educators would do well to create more spaces for parents and family members to be

more involved with their children. First, educators might be offered workshops that help them understand the nature of Black families and the complexity of the problems they and their families face. They would do well to create situations where they could hear directly from these parents what their strengths are, so they might build upon them.

Transition into college and work was often talked about indirectly, in terms of what persons were role models for them. But some students did talk about how career tech and work experiences taught them to fill out forms and learn skills that were helpful. Some mentioned excursions to colleges. Some complained about work experiences and vo-tech sometimes interfering with school activities. It was family members who they claimed helped them to get into college or fill out application forms for work. They also often stated that colleges were not exceptionally helpful to them. This suggests that workshops may be set up in schools for parents, students, and those who work with them at the school. As much as this implications section has emphasized helping Black students with special needs, participants also want to feel they have autonomy. The examples of perseverance in the result section demonstrate that these participants are strong. While providing proximity and guidance are crucial, students with special needs need to learn from the school of hard knocks as well. Teachers might receive training on how to give their students independence, yet also learn how to be there when they fail and to instill hope in those moments.

One of the uniqueness' of this study is that it focuses on race, namely Black male students with special needs. The participants described double standards, racist remarks, taunting, broken homes, street violence, fear, and lack of freedom in their interviews. They helped us to see that the issues they face are complicated and imbedded in history

and oppressive society, including all institutions, not just education. One participant had gone back and worked at a school and talked about how he could understand these Black children with special needs in a way other teachers could not. The interviews in general showed how many of the participants had internalized negative views of themselves. It appears they continue to adopt characteristics affiliated with the "cool pose" to preserve their pride, strength, and control. There is a great need for there to be more Black educators in general, and efforts such as more scholarships should be provided specifically to students who are going into special education. And, schools should bring in persons who conduct workshops which truly challenge not just stereotypes of individual and institutional prejudices and ignorance's about Black students, but in particular, those with special needs.

Furthermore, educators would do well to understand the "cool pose" theory and how it is applicable to the students they teach. This might be accomplished with multi-cultural workshops for teachers which specifically address this concept. It is important to see both its positive and negative aspects. The participants also gave some general suggestions about how to approach the negative aspects of the "cool pose." Participants spoke of reaching out to relatives and other Black people who might have attained educational position, but there are few they can go to for help in their educational endeavors. Possibly, greater efforts might be made to bring in "successful" Black mentors to talk to students. Some of the participants want to directly discuss some of their home problems and they mentioned at least a few teachers who understand more profoundly the horror of a society that oppresses them, and they appreciated this. Many of the males' issues might be better suited for the school counselors. Sadly, there are too few Black

counselors in schools. More support must be given to facilitating Black college students who might be interested in school counseling.

Limitations

I used snowballing sampling to acquire the participants for this study. While this is a purposeful approach, it does not achieve the randomness that would have been ideal. As with other qualitative studies, the generalizability of the findings in this study are limited. But, the in-depth inquiry into the depths of the participants' emotional and cognitive experiences allows for greater complexity and profundity about the issues investigated. The fact that all of the participants graduated from high schools within the same metropolitan area also limits the scope of this study. I would have liked to have had a broader sample of the wide range of disabilities, especially a participant identified as ED. It is also significant the age range of the participants was limited to 18-29.

Research bias can be considered as a limitation. The researcher frequently taught and advocated for Black males identified with a high-incidence disability. In order to help limit the influence of the researcher's biases strategies were employed. One such strategy involved the researcher using pre-established questions during the interviews. At a minimum, each participant was asked the listed questions. The researcher utilized member checking to ensure the typed transcripts were accurate and acceptable. As an additional safeguard, the researcher sought the assistance of the committee chairperson. He reviewed and approved the interview questions and participated in identifying themes within each interview.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended future researchers attempt to acquire documentation identifying the participants' disabilities. For example, one of the participants stated his disability was questionable. I hope it may also be possible to examine the provided themes and explore them quantitively. For instance, one might compare Black males with Black females, or other groups in a study that correlates race or gender with any of the above themes, such as parent or teacher support, and persistence. Qualitative studies may pick any of the above themes and explore them in greater depth. In order to obtain participants that are experiencing unfavorable postsecondary outcomes approval can be obtained to recruit individuals that did not graduate or are detained in juvenile facilities or prisons.

Summary

This study was an attempt to not only address the gap in literature that examines Black males' secondary transition planning practices, but also to attempt to give voice to this marginalized population who may offer ideas for needed changes in special education that would promote interventions that would be more relevant to persons coming from diverse ethnicities and cultures.

The present social condition in our contemporary society is desperately unequal. Black males are often put into special education programs that do not promote their success. This study revealed that many of the components of secondary transition planning that should be occurring are not being implemented. The participants experienced failure in college, but despite the odds, they demonstrated persistence to

maintain their enrollment. In addition, each participant has strong family support and has established strong relationships with school staff members.

Luckily, the participants in this study have learned to advocate for themselves. Considering the fact Black males are more likely to encounter institutionalized racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes, self-advocacy is an important skill to possess. Black males must continue to use their voices and make their presence known in a manner that is conducive for all involved parties. Just as the *Brown* decision has not fulfilled its intentions, neither has IDEA in regards to Black males. Historically and presently, due to cultural differences, Black males are assigned a label affiliated with a high-incidence disability which prevents them from obtaining a quality of life that is commensurate to their peers. For the sake of current Black males identified with high-incidence disability, educators, policy makers, and parents must advocate for this marginalized population by seeking professional development, implementing effective transition planning practices, learning the culture, maintaining high expectations, and providing a rigorous academic curriculum.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research at the University of Oklahoma

You are invited to participate in research about African American males that received special education services in high school for specific learning disability (SLD), intellectual disability (ID) or emotional disturbance (ED). You are between the ages of 18-25.

If you agree to participate you will be interviewed by researcher ____ The interviews will be audio recorded and the researcher will take written notes. The recording and notes will be transcribed by the researcher. You will receive a typed copy of the interview. You will have the opportunity to request changes be made to the transcript.

You may experience these risks: Re-living your experiences can be sensitive and cause hidden emotions to surface and/or a little embarrassment relating to certain questions. You have the right to refuse to answer questions you feel uncomfortable answering. If necessary, the researcher will stop the interview if a significant amount of stress is displayed.

You may experience these benefits: Reflecting on and sharing your experiences may be a positive experience. You may feel empowered by speaking about your experiences. You may feel rewarded knowing that your voice could improve transition planning in high schools which could potentially improve postsecondary outcomes for African American males.

If you participate, you will receive this compensation: A $25 gift card after the first interview. You will receive an additional $15 gift card after you read and approve the typed interview transcript.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be confidential. You have the right to use your name or remain anonymous.

Can we include your name with any quotes? ___ Yes ___ No

If you would like me to contribute your data to an archive, please provide the name of the organization. _____

Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason. Your data may be used in future research studies, unless you contact me to withdraw your data.

If you have questions about this research, please contact:

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Their Voices Matter: Perceptions Held by Black Males Regarding

Their Transition Planning and Post-Secondary Outcomes

Greetings,

My name is ReJeana and I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma (OU) in the Department of Educational Psychology. I am requesting your assistance with recruiting black males who were once categorized as specific learning disabled (SLD), intellectual disability (ID), or emotional disturbance (ED). The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions held by black males regarding their high school transition planning and postsecondary outcomes. The participants must meet the following criteria:

- Self-identify as a black male between the ages of 18 and 29
- Received special education services for SLD, ID, or ED for at least five school years
- Received a diploma or certificate of completion from a high school or alternative program
- Exited high school for at least one school year but no more than five school years
- Agree to participate in an interview and read the typed transcript
- Provide copy of most recent Individualized Education Program (IEP), if requested

If you know male(s) that meet the identified criteria, please contact me at @gmail.com or 652-___. Please provide the male with the attached flier. It is requested he contact me or give consent for me to contact him by completing the bottom of the form.

The participant will receive financial compensation for participating in the study.

Thank you, in advance, for your assistance!

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Their Voices Matter: Perceptions Held by African American Males Regarding Their Transition Planning and Post-Secondary Outcomes

The researcher will use the following to guide the interview:

1. The participant will share his high school experiences.
    - What do you remember about the interactions that occurred during your IEP meetings? Who did the most taking? What thoughts about what you wanted to do with your life after graduation were you able to express?
    - Who were the people (the case manager, regular classroom teachers, parent/guardian, school or vocational counselor, principal, etc.) that helped you the most with planning for life after graduation? What information about options, resources, or agencies were you informed about?
    - Describe the activities (work study, career tech, career courses, site visits, counseling, etc. that prepared you for life after high school? Which were most helpful?
    - What are challenges you faced during high school that you believe were due to your disability?
2. How do the participants describe their postsecondary outcomes?
    - Describe your current employment, postsecondary education, and living arrangements?
    - What skills have proven to be most beneficial to your current status?
    - What are some goals you would like to pursue within the next year?
3. Discuss experiences the participant perceive were influenced by race and/or gender
    - …in relation to your high school experiences
    - …in relation to your current experiences (college, employment, living, etc.)
    - How do you perceive the fact you are black and male impacted the way you were treated, supported or not supported, by those people who were given the responsibility to help you move toward employment and/or college?
4. Conclusion
    - What do you believe needs to occur to improve the postsecondary outcomes of African American males?
    - Do you have any additional comments?