WAITING FOR BRUH MAN INSTEAD OF SUPERMAN: THE “INVISIBLE TAX”
ON BLACK MALE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Black male teachers comprise less than two percent of the teachers of color in education nationwide and even fewer than that teach in special education. There exists a paucity of research literature on the “invisible tax” placed upon them via the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of Black male special education teachers nationwide. This phenomenological study incorporated critical race theory and intersectionality and sought to answer the following guiding qualitative research questions: (1) In what ways does the invisible tax levied on Black male special education teachers deter them from entering the profession? (2) What supports mitigate the taxation?

Eight Black male special education teachers individually participated in a semi-structured interview and completed a fictive kinship narrative regarding their fictive kinship network. Within the fictive kinship network, members of the community are able to gain prestige, obtain status, survive, and oftentimes thrive despite the obstacles and impediments they encounter. The focus is consistently on survival of the group rather than the individual. This network also operationalizes the values of cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity in the daily, lived experiences of the recipient and the sources of social and psychological support.

In an effort to provide additional analysis for my study, each participant in the study was asked to complete a fictive kinship narrative to depict their sources of informal social and psychological support or compose a brief narrative discussing their sources of
informal social and psychological support. Various types of capital, funds of knowledge, and funds of identity were discussed. Results yielded seven emergent themes: nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, specific needs, motivation, recruitment and retention, transformational leadership, and mentorship. Each theme was discussed, and a proposal to develop a Summer-long Bridge Program for Black male rising high school seniors in the State of Utah was created. The Summer-long Bridge Program will provide the participants with personal development, altruistic community service, academic excellence, and socioemotional development.

In an effort to provide additional analysis for my study, each participant in the study was asked to describe their fictive kinship network. Participants were afforded a choice to either construct a fictive kinship diagram or write a fictive kinship narrative to depict their sources of informal social and psychological support or compose a brief narrative discussing their sources of informal social and psychological support. All participants chose to write a fictive kinship narrative and stated that constructing a fictive kinship diagram was too confusing to them. If the participants had chosen to construct a fictive kinship diagram, the information in displayed in the legend in Appendix C would have been utilized.

Various types of capital, funds of knowledge, and funds of identity were discussed. Results yielded seven emergent themes: nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, specific needs, motivation, recruitment and retention, transformational leadership, and mentorship. Each theme was discussed, and a proposal to develop a Summer-long Bridge Program for Black male rising high school seniors in the State of Utah was
created. The Summer-long Bridge Program will provide the participants with personal development, altruistic community service, academic excellence, and socioemotional development.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this Record of Study to my grandmother, Eunice Predetha Whatley Thomas, who was the loving, caring, always smiling and laughing matriarch of our family; the Christlike moral compass that led multiple generations of our family and countless others to Christ; and both lived and led by example. As the founder of the Girls Club of Rome prior to the Jim Crow era, as an active and stalwart “mother” at Thankful Missionary Baptist Church and in the community, and as a fearless, tireless, selfless advocate for civil, human, and religious rights, your courage, strength, tenacity, fortitude, devotion, perseverance, and passion have inspired me throughout the years and encouraged me during my doctoral process, especially during the times that I wanted to give up. I also dedicate this Record of Study to my Aunt Evelyn Colston, Aunt Julia Nious, and Uncle Clifford Thomas. Each of you sowed into me and inspired me in your own unique ways. Your memories, sense of humor, boldness, and advice will last forever in mind and heart. Lastly, I dedicate this Record of Study to Reverend Nim B. Russell. Thank you for your prayers, the late-night conversations, for always being available to me, your wise counsel, and for the jokes we shared. My wife laughingly reminds me often that you were the catalyst that helped me to earn her hand in marriage. Thanks, again, for that. Good looking out, Rev! Your memory will last forever, as well.
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I would like to thank the participants in my study. Although few in number, you all truly are Black Supermen and virtuosos in the field of special education, in your respective schools, and in the communities that you serve. Thank you for assisting me in bringing awareness to the “invisible tax” that Black male special education teachers endure on a daily basis despite not always having your unique needs met and persevering through racial battle fatigue on an ongoing basis.
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CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a Record of Study committee consisting of Dr. Radhika Viruru, committee chair, Dr. Sharon Matthews, committee co-chair, and Dr. Andrew Kwok of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture and Dr. Noelle Sweany of the Department of Educational Psychology.

All other work conducted for the Record of Study was completed by the student independently.

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There were no funding sources provided for this research.
NOMENCLATURE

Blackness  The state of being black

Blackmaleness “Both a personal journey and a social reality, tethering the life chances of Black males to an inescapable but navigable milieu of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunity that all Black males must masterfully traverse or face the certain consequences of disenfranchisement” (James & Lewis, 2014, p. 105)

Bracketing Used to create a non-judgmental mentality and a disregarding of any prior information, perceptions, or beliefs about the participants (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

BMSPED Black Male Special Education Teacher

Emergent Thematic Coding The process of identifying themes that emerge from interview transcript data after reading the interview transcripts multiple times to discern what themes emerge (Mortensen, 2019)

Fictive Kinship Term that describes the various forms of kinship obligations and relationships a person has with people who are not related to the person by blood, marriage, or adoption. These kinships serve to expand the mutual support and sense of community among the members
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Funds of Identity</strong></th>
<th>The utilization and social distribution of one’s funds of knowledge to define, express, and understand oneself (Esteban-Guitart &amp; Moll, 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funds of Knowledge (FoK)</strong></td>
<td>Bodies of knowledge and skills that are accumulated historically and developed culturally and are essential for one’s wellbeing, as well as one’s household and individual functioning (Moll, Amanti, Neff &amp; Gonzalez, 1992; Gonzalez, Moll, &amp; Amanti, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intersectionality</strong></td>
<td>The overlapping processes of privilege and oppression result in sundry inequities due to the interconnected essence of multiple social categorizations such as race/ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings &amp; Tate, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invisible Tax</strong></td>
<td>“Tax” imposed upon Black male teachers when they are the only or one of a few male teachers of color in the school building, when they are expected to fulfil the role of disciplinarian for Black male students and other students of color when they exhibit behavioral problems, and when they are seen as cultural experts who should be able to understand and explain their students of color codeswitching while also preparing their students of color</td>
</tr>
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to deal with the racism they will encounter outside of the classroom (King, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monolithic</td>
<td>To consider as a single unit or entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuanced</td>
<td>Slight variation in tone, expression, meaning, or response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person of Color</td>
<td>A person who is not of White or European decent or heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Specialized training and learning utilized to improve the professional knowledge, skills, effectiveness, and competence of educators, administrators, and other professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoeducational</td>
<td>The education offered to individuals with a mental health condition and their families to help empower them and deal with their condition in an optimal way (<a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoeducation">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoeducation</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Affinity-Based</td>
<td>Provides spaces of support and culturally responsive career development to Black teachers and critical professional development that seeks to assist Black teachers in increasing their critical consciousness in order increase their focus on and commitment to engaging in liberatory teaching (Mosely, 2018; Kohli et al., 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>Engaging in critical introspection and interpreting why one thinks, feels, and perceives the way one does (Patton, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Agency</td>
<td>The ability to work friends, family colleagues, students, and other community allies to gain access to resources that enable one to resolve existing pedagogical restraints and foster desired change (Moll, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Specialized instruction uniquely designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities in effort to assist them in developing their full potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick Description</td>
<td>The detailed description of field experiences, setting, participants, and cultural and social contexts by the researcher in qualitative research (Creswell &amp; Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Academy</td>
<td>An alternative school setting that provides a structured learning environment offering a variety of instructional methods and materials that meet the individual needs of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>The practice of relying on multiple methods of qualitative approaches for collecting and validating data</td>
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Black male teachers comprise less than two percent of the teachers of color in education nationwide and even fewer than that teach in special education (Tio, 2017; Honaker, 2017; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). There exists a paucity of research literature on the “invisible tax” placed upon them via the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs (i.e., racial affinity-based professional development that addresses their unique needs, purposeful and aggressive recruitment similar to how coaches recruit Black males and other athletes of color for sports, support systems, developing relative agency as Black male special education teachers collaborate with each other and mentor each other) of Black male special education teachers nationwide.

Several of the reasons many special education teachers either leave the profession altogether or transfer to general education teaching positions align with the reasons Black male special education teachers leave the field. Some of the reasons for the dire lack of Black male special education teachers and their high attrition rate in the American K-12 teacher workforce include, but are not limited to, lack of comprehensive, culturally-relevant teacher preparation training for special education; low status; low salaries; poor job design; burnout; consistently being assigned to high poverty schools; and lack of racial affinity-based professional development opportunities that meet their unique needs (Schneider, 2018; Zabel & Zabel, 2001; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Billingsley, 2004; Rice & Goessling, 2005; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Pabon, 2016; Brown, 2019).
Schneider (2018) posited that the mantra of “fix the training and you will fix the teacher” (p. 330) has existed for over 200 years, and it refers to the need to “fix” or improve teacher preparation programs in order to yield increasingly knowledgeable, competent, skilled, effective, and prepared teachers. Per Cuban (2001), a problem refers to the gaps that exist “between what is and what ought to be” (p. 4); whereas, a dilemma is unable to be resolved, but instead only managed, due to the inherent demand to make “undesirable choices between competing, highly prized values” (p. 10). To that end, Schneider (2018) purports that teacher educators have contended with and worked through a copious amount of problems during the past two centuries, and they will continue to identify and resolve problems in the future.

Scott (2016) made similar arguments regarding the dearth of Black male special education teachers nationwide and the urgent need for teacher preparation programs to actively and purposefully recruit and retain Black male special education teacher candidates. According to Scott, the dearth of Black male special education teachers in the nationwide K-12 public school system is at a crisis point due to the fact that there are an inordinate amount of Black male students receiving special education services, and they have markedly limited access to and interactions with Black male special education teachers being that Black males make up less than one percent of all of the special education teachers in the K-12 teacher workforce (Tio, 2017; Honaker, 2017; Scott, 2016; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Talbert-Johnson, 2001). The grave deficiency of Black male special education teachers has been correlated with poor academic performance, high number of disciplinary referrals, and anomalous special education
referrals and placement of Black male students into special education (Scott, 2016; Ross et al., 2016; Levister, 2000). Black male students share a cultural match with Black male teachers (Bryan & Jett, 2018; Scott, 2016; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008), and the abnormal amount of special education referrals and placement of Black male students into the special education system is a troubling matter. Scott (2016) recommended that college and university administrators must purposefully and aggressively recruit and retain Black male special education teacher candidates, and this recruitment must be conducted in conjunction with advocating for higher salaries, bonuses, and incentives for special education teachers; investing early in the teaching careers by collaborating with officials at high schools and other colleges and universities in the area, as well as local, state, and national organizations such as the 100 Black Men, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, etc.; and afford opportunities for potential special education teacher candidates to take advantage of innovative, distance learning teacher preparation training programs and alternative licensure programs.

Rice and Goessling (2005) asserted that the perceived low status and low salaries of special education jobs are two of the reasons it is difficult to recruit and retain male special education teachers. Per Rice and Goessling, society has traditionally bestowed upon men lofty social status if they pursue careers in “architecture, economics, engineering, law, and medicine” (p. 349), even though women have increasing pursued and excelled in the same careers in recent decades. Teaching, however, has been perceived as women’s work by many men in society due, in part, to the teaching profession being dominated by female teachers and the aforementioned traditional
perception of teaching not being comparable to other more male-dominated careers (Wood & Hoag, 1993; Rice & Goessling, 2005). Additionally, Rice and Goessling (2005) asserted that the perceived low status special education teaching jobs may correlate with low salaries that are often associated with a career in special education and teaching, in general. Furthermore, male special education teachers may not view teaching as a career but instead as a stepping stone to a more esteemed and higher paying career as a school administrator (Samuels & Harwin, 2019; Greenburg, 2018; Gross, 2018; Scott, 2016; Bristol, 2015; Wood & Hoag, 1993).

Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) posited that poor job design is one of the key hinderances to recruiting and retaining special education teachers. Poor job design would encompass inadequate resources, insufficient relevant information, restricted decision-making authority, and a lack of support from administrators (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001) and colleagues (Brown, 2019). Poor job design can result in special education teachers experiencing decreased self-efficacy and potentially imposter syndrome, decreased job satisfaction, increased physical and mental stress, and role dissonance (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). This seems to be especially true for Black male special education teachers (Brown, 2019; Bryan & Ford, 2014). According to Brown (2019), the roles for Black male teachers are already predetermined prior to them entering the classroom. They are expected to fulfill roles such as disciplinarian, father figure, coach, physical education teacher, and assistant principal (as an administrator), all of which relegate Black male teachers to disciplinary roles while placing little or no emphasis on their pedagogies and academic
achievements. Therefore, Black male teachers often find themselves “having to prove themselves socially, behaviorally, academically, intellectually, and professionally” (Bryan & Ford, 2014, p. 158).

Teacher burnout is another critical reason for the high attrition rate of special education teachers (Gewertz, 2019; Will, 2016; King, 2016). In their replicated study of 300 special education teachers, Zabel and Zabel (2001) proposed that there are three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is akin to “retiring on the job” (Yee, 1990, p. 120 as cited in Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001) and compassion fatigue (Portnoy, 2011; Davis & Palladino, 2011). Per Yee (1990), when “retiring on the job,” the special education teacher may put less effort into tasks, have decreased concern about the job, exhibit less compassion with the students, become less concerned about the opinions and demands of coworkers and administrators, and display decreased motivation to teach day after day. Comparatively, the special education teacher experiences compassion fatigue when they are preoccupied with assisting students who are markedly struggling and are in distress resulting in the special education teacher undergoing secondary traumatic symptoms, such as emotional exhaustion, hopelessness, feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression (Portnoy, 2011; Davis & Palladino, 2011).

Similarly, former U.S. Education Secretary, John King (2016) asserted that Black male teachers (both general education and special education) endure an “invisible tax” which can lead to burnout. According to King, Black male teachers experience the “invisible tax” when they are the only Black teacher or one of the few Black teachers at
a school, are expected to be disciplinarians for students of color (especially Black male students who exhibit behavior problems), or are expected to train students of color on how to recognize and deal with racism and microaggressions in society by code switching (Conwright, 2019; Cerna-Prado et al., 2019; Will, 2016; Givens, 2016). King later stated the “invisible tax” takes a toll on Black male teachers’ time when they have to establish and maintain relationships with students from all ethnicities throughout the school in addition to their already demanding schedules. King further stated that the “invisible tax” takes a toll on Black male teachers’ emotions when they are expected to assist students with acute needs. Both of these tolls can lead to burnout for Black male teachers (King, 2016). Correspondingly, Gewertz (2019) posited that teachers of color also experience the “invisible tax” when they exert extra efforts for a student but are not acknowledged and/or compensated for their efforts, when their workplaces shun their hairstyles or choice in attire, when they are not afforded the opportunity or allowance to create culturally relevant lessons for their students, and when their coworkers and/or administrators reject the ideas teachers of color present in meetings only to be accepted later once a White teacher or administrator presents the same idea. These experiences can also lead to burnout for Black male teachers and other teachers of color (Gewertz, 2019). Furthermore, Mosely (2016) argued that the “invisible tax” that “Black teachers and other teachers of color” (p. 269) experience include

(1) an expectation to serve as disciplinarians, rather than academic instructors, for Black boys, (2.) uncompensated time spent in informal leadership roles as the unofficial liaison with families of Color, (3) being skipped over for more formal (and often paid) leadership opportunities and (4) being expected to teach remedial—instead of advanced—courses (King, 2016) (p. 269).
Likewise, McCready and Mosely (2014) purported that there is an expectation for Black teachers to advocate for the families of their students of color and serve as liaisons for the schools in which they serve.

Working in high poverty schools also contributed to increased rates of burnout, compassion fatigue, and retiring on the job (Tio, 2017; Zabel & Zabel, 2001; Portnoy, 2011; Davis & Palladino, 2011). Teachers working in high poverty schools have reported encountering a high number of students with socioemotional and learning needs, lack of resources and funding, expectations to serve in multiple roles, lack of administrative and collegial support, elevated levels of stress, and low salaries that are not commensurate to job demands (Davis & Palladino, 2011). These conditions can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue for these teachers (Zabel & Zabel, 2001; Portnoy, 2011; Davis & Palladino, 2011).

With compassion fatigue, the special education teacher may feel that her or his efforts are hopeless to provide her or his students with the care they truly need, and the special education teacher may even begin to experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Portnoy, 2011). Depersonalization refers to when the special education teacher psychologically withdraws from both the job and the students and subsequently develops a cynical, insensitive attitude (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). Personal accomplishment is slightly similar to compassion fatigue being that the special education teacher begins to doubt and question her or his own personal accomplishments academically, intellectually, and socially on the job (Zabel & Zabel, 2001) which also resembles symptomatology of imposter syndrome.
Relevant History of the Problem

The number of Black teachers in the American K-12 teacher workforce—both general education and special education—has decreased markedly since 1990 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In 1990, Black teachers comprised 8.3% of the entire American K-12 teacher workforce; however, since 1990, more than 26,000 Black teachers have seemingly left the teaching profession (Rizga, 2016). Teacher attrition and teacher turnover occur at higher rates for teachers of color than for White teachers (Gewertz, 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; King, 2016; Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016) for a variety of reasons. According to Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018), Black female teachers preferred to work in urban public schools and reported leaving the teacher profession when their job satisfaction decreased significantly and the work climate included a lack of support by the administration along with marked negative student behaviors. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) asserted that Black teachers and other teachers of color (i.e., teachers who identify as Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander or Polynesian, Asian, and those who identify with two or more races) often exit the profession due to their wages not being comparable to the wages they can earn in other professions; their preference to teach in schools that are comprised with wealthy, high-performing, White students; poor workplace conditions that included a lack of instructional resources, collaboration among the teachers, and support from the administration (Borman & Dowling, 2008); and lack of preparation and experience due to 25% of the first-year teachers of color entering the profession through alternative pathways.
Jackson and Kohli (2016) posited that teachers of color are often victims of “double-talking” (p. 1) where they are framed as both the problem and the solution in their school settings (Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013). Despite the victimization of “double-talking,” serving as role models for all of their students and not just the students of color (Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016), demonstrating a willingness and desire to work in urban schools with high minority student populations (Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016), and their intimate understanding of the cultural experiences of their students of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Kokka, 2016), teachers of color tend have high attrition rates and turnover rates due to low pay, working in schools with high teacher turnover rates, experiencing racialization in the predominantly White profession, lack of mentors, lack of support from administrators, the feeling of being silenced by the administration and coworkers when the teachers of color wanted to discuss and address issues of race, being assigned limited roles in the profession, and feeling overworked, dehumanized, undervalued, alienated, marginalized, and isolated (Jackson & Kohli, 2016).

**Significance of the Problem**

This study addressed the gaps in the literature on the lack of Black male special education teachers nationwide and the effects the “invisible tax” has on their nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs. The study also established a proposal for a future Summer Bridge Program to enhance the academic success, academic self-efficacy, and visibility of Black male students who are rising seniors in high schools throughout the State of Utah. Black male faculty and staff from a university in the southern region of Utah will provide anticipatory advising and strategic
mentoring to the program participants, and Black male student leaders will provide peer mentoring to the program participants. One goal of the program will be to present to the participants that a career in education—whether it be in American K-12 teacher workforce or at the collegiate level—can be a potential career option that is both intrinsically rewarding and in high demand, especially for Black male educators since there is an austere lack of Black males in the field of education. A second goal of the program will be to increase the high school graduation percentage of the Black males participating in the study followed by increasing the percentage of them applying to a college or university upon their high school graduation. The third goal of the program will be to prepare the Black male participants on how to recognize and overcome the “invisible tax” if they encounter it as a student and/or as an employee.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this phenomenological study is:

- How do the job demands of Black male special education teachers compare nationwide?

The two guiding qualitative questions are:

- What experiences constitute the invisible tax that Black male educators pay?
- What supports mitigate the taxation?

Researcher’s Roles and Personal Histories

From personal experience, I can attest that both Pabon (2016) and Brown (2009) are correct when they posit that Black male teachers are oftentimes perceived as a
monolithic cohort who are expected to fulfill multiple roles for their students, in general, and their Black male students, in particular. It was my experience while serving as the only Black male special education teacher in one psychoeducational school setting in Northwest Georgia for 10 years that my White coworkers (i.e., White female teacher in the elementary classroom, one White female paraprofessional in the elementary classroom, one White male paraprofessional in the elementary classroom, and White secretary) and my administrators (i.e., White female area coordinator, White male program director, and White female school psychologist) expected me to swoop in like “Superman” (i.e., the enforcer) and save the day by managing the aggressively acting-out, defiant, and/or disruptive students in the elementary classroom—in addition to the students in my own classroom—when the aforementioned students “got out of control” and when they could not “handle” them. However, I was expected to present as “Clark Kent” (i.e., meek, calm, ultra-professional, non-threatening) when I interacted with my White coworkers and administrators in the classroom, hallways, front office, staff meetings, during bus duty, in the parking lot, and during any impromptu interactions. This dichotomous role expectation was overwhelmingly taxing mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I oftentimes felt alone, taken for granted, burnt out, and underprepared to meet the demands of my job and the needs of the students. Therefore, I can relate to “the structural and systemic challenges” (Pabon, 2016, p. 917) other Black male teachers face which bespeaks of the paramount significance of this study.
Journey to the Problem

Although I began this study nearly two years ago while working as a Black male special education teacher in a regional educational service agency in Northwest Georgia, my wife and I moved to Utah one year ago to accept positions two universities in the western region of the United States. I currently serve as the Director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion at one university. Nevertheless, I taught special education for 10 years in a regional educational service agency Georgia that serves 17 school systems throughout Northwest Georgia. I, along with my Black female paraprofessional, taught severely emotionally and behaviorally disordered (SEBD) middle school students in a psychoeducational center in Northwest Georgia that was not housed inside one of the traditional schools in the area. The agency provided special education services for students accepted into the program from both urban and rural schools. The students I taught were in fifth through eighth grades, and they were referred from urban and rural schools in the city and county where the main psychoeducational center, its regional office, and six of the 33 classes are located. As required by the psychoeducational system, I taught all of the core subjects (i.e., Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Reading, English/Language Arts, and Physical Education) and conducted social skills and life skills group sessions each school day. I was the only Black male special education teacher in the center, and the other teacher was a White female who had two White paraprofessionals (one male and one female). Of the seven students in my classroom, five were Black (four Black males and one Black female); one was Latinx (male); and one was White (male). Of the 10 male students in the other classroom (who
the researcher also interacts with daily), seven were Black; two were Latinx; and one was White.

Throughout the 10 years, I encountered a myriad of microinvalidations, microinsults, episodes of White fragility, episodes of Black male misandry, stereotyping, and John Henryism resulting in me experiencing racial battle fatigue and imposter syndrome on several occasions. I encountered microinvalidations on occasions when my White coworkers, administrators, students’ parents, and/or students made comments such as, “All live matter, not just Black lives”; “You’re being too sensitive”; “You’re making a bigger deal of this than it needs to be”; “Why are you taking this so personally?”; and “We hear what you’re saying, but we think it would be better if...” I encountered microinsults when I was asked questions like “How did you get this job? You’re not even a teacher”; “Why do you talk White?”; and “Who do you think you are?” I also encountered microinsults on occasions during staff meetings and individualized education plan (IEP) meetings when administrators, IEP committee members, students, and/or parents ignored my attempts to speak or when they made seemingly frustrated facial expressions when I spoke about issues regarding race, inconsistency in administrative support, students’ need to take responsibility for their actions, and the need for parents to not make excuses for the children’s behaviors. In accordance with DiAngelo (2011), I encountered episodes of White fragility when I seemingly challenged “White racial codes” and “White authority” (p. 57) by confronting coworkers about racist comments they made about Barack Obama being elected President and many of the policies he tried to enact; when I seemingly challenged “White entitlement
to racial comfort” (p. 57) by discussing the inequity of necessary resources (i.e., outdated textbooks, computers, and desks, as well as the lack of funding and assistance from available resources officers in the school system) between the psychoeducational school I worked in located in poor, predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhood versus three of the home schools that some of my students came from that were located in middle class, predominantly White neighborhoods; and when I questioned “coded language” (p. 57) expressed by coworkers, administrators, IEP committee members, and some parents when they deemed certain schools in predominantly White neighborhoods to be “good schools” while deeming other schools located in predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhoods as “bad schools” (p. 57). Black misandry occurred when White coworkers, parents, and/or students seemed intimidated, surprised, or frustrated with my presence on occasions during impromptu and scheduled meetings. I encountered John Henryism when I experienced hypertension while attempting to cope with the microinvalidations, microinsults, and White fragility that I dealt with on several occasions. Lastly, I experienced racial battle fatigue when I encountered the aforementioned emotional, psychological, and physiological stressors.

**Significant Stakeholders**

I presently work in higher education at a university in the southern region of Utah. I hope to utilize the knowledge gained from my study to develop a proposal for the creation of a Summer-long Bridge Program at my university for selected rising Black male high school seniors in the State of Utah, and the stakeholders for my study will include, but not limited to, the staff and students of the Center for Diversity and
Inclusion at the university, the Chief Diversity Officer and other members of the administration at the university, the Black male faculty and staff at the university, school administrators of various high schools in the State of Utah, parents of selected Black males students at these high schools, and the Utah Division of Multicultural Affairs. The program will introduce the selected participants to Black male faculty and staff who will instruct and advise the participants with aims of increasing the academic success, high school graduation, and college enrollments rates of the participants. Black male student leaders will serve as peer mentors to the participants and also serve as role models for the participants. By sharing the same gender and race, as well as similar cultural experiences, the faculty and staff will have an “insider” status (Ross et al., 2016, p. 87) while serving as role models for the participants and demonstrating to the participants that Black men are capable of becoming effective teachers and that schools do not necessarily have to be a “site of suffering” (Ross et al., 2016, p. 94; Pabon, 2017; Dumas, 2014) for Black male students.

**Closing Thoughts on Chapter 1**

Like in the documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, there are a plethora of problems plaguing the American K-12 public school system but none more than the growing incongruousness between the rapidly accelerating level of diversity among the American K-12 student population and low level of acceleration of diversity among the American K-12 teacher workforce (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2014; Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016). The high attrition and turnover rates of teachers of color further exacerbate the ever-evolving diversity dilemma of the
American K-12 teacher workforce and the public school system (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2014; Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016). Despite their demonstrated willingness to serve as role models for all of their students (Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016), to work in urban schools with high minority student populations (Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Kokka, 2016), and utilize their intimate understanding of the cultural experiences of their students of color to better connect with them and effectively teach them (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Kokka, 2016), teachers of color tend have high attrition rates and turnover rates due to be victims of “double talking,” receiving low pay, working in schools with high teacher turnover rates, experiencing racialization in the predominantly White profession, lack of mentors, lack of support from administrators, the feeling of being silenced by the administration and coworkers when the teachers of color wanted to discuss and address issues of race, being assigned limited roles in the profession, and feeling overworked, dehumanized, undervalued, alienated, marginalized, and isolated (Jackson & Kohli, 2016). This seems to be especially true for Black male special education teachers (Brown, 2019; Bryan & Ford, 2014). Black male teachers comprise less than two percent of the teachers of color in education nationwide and even fewer than that teach in special education (Tio, 2017; Honaker, 2017; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). There exists a paucity of research literature on their nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs, as well as the “invisible tax” on Black male special education teachers.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

In the documentary, Waiting for “Superman,” Geoffrey Canada collaborated with Davis Guggenheim and Billy Kimball to issue a clarion call on the ills of the American K-12 public school system. Such ills included, but were not limited to, hiring unprepared teachers, retaining ineffective teachers (especially tenured teachers who were difficult to fire due to being protected by teachers’ unions), lack of funding and resources for schools, and lack of professional development for teachers, etc. While serving as an administrator in the Washington, D.C. public school system and as first-person narrator of the documentary, Canada advocated for the creation of charter schools in the Washington, D.C. area that rely on a lottery system for admission as an alternative to the many under-performing public schools that have resultantlly become, what Canada deemed, “dropout factories” and “academic sinkholes” for students from poor neighborhoods whose parents cannot afford to send them to private schools (Guggenheim & Kimball, 2011).

The title of the documentary was derived from what Canada considered to be one of the most disappointing and disenchanted moments of his life. The moment occurred during his childhood when he asked his mother if his favorite superhero, Superman, would ever come and rescue their family from the ghetto. Despite realizing the enchantment her son had for Superman, Canada’s mother felt it was necessary to inform her son that Superman is a fictional character who cannot and will not swoop in to save them from the ghetto. That was a valuable, albeit disenchancing, lesson for Canada
which he carried with him throughout his personal and academic life. Upon becoming an administrator in the Washington, D.C. public school system, Canada recalled witnessing and observing nearly the same desperation and anxious hope that he felt as a child while waiting for Superman in the eyes and lives of many of the parents and children he served. As the parents and students waited to see if they are chosen in the lottery for the school of their choice, they seem to want to believe that being selected in the lottery would metaphorically “save” them from the dysfunctional school setting and potentially bleak future that otherwise beset them.

The idea of Superman, in one form or another, swooping in to remedy the plight of poor, marginalized students is not ascribed to only Geoffrey Canada. Therein lies the reference to Bruh Man, which is a figurative term some Black people use to refer to Black men. For the purpose of this study, Bruh Man refers to Black male special education teachers. In her seminal study of the life histories of four Black male teachers, Pabon (2016) discussed how some urban school administrators and other stakeholders “wait for Black Supermen—a cohort of soldiers who will use their Blackness and maleness to lead Black male youth to academic success regardless of the structural and systemic challenges they face” (p. 917) which include a lack of professional development opportunities designed to address their unique needs, lack of mentors, structural racism, microaggressions, etc. According to Pabon, Black male teachers are oftentimes perceived by urban school administrators and stakeholders as a monolithic cohort whose mission is to serve as role models and father-figures for Black male students who grew up in single-parent homes without their fathers. Per Pabon, these
administrators and stakeholders hope that the Black male students will observe the fortitude, resilience, and resolve exhibited by their aforementioned teachers and learn to exhibit these same qualities. This same hope will be the hope of the Black male faculty and staff in the Summer Bridge Program who will serve as exemplars of educators and cultural role models. The peer mentors will exhibit this hope, as well, as they mentor the participants, discuss their lived experiences with them, and process the participants’ inquiries, concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams regarding their senior year in high school and the pending college application process.

**Relevant Historical Background**

The American K-12 teacher workforce does not reflect the prodigious increase in diversity of the student population (Tio, 2017; Honaker, 2017; Scott, 2016; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Talbert-Johnson, 2001). Data suggests that this stark disparity will only increase in the decades to come as non-Whites will become the majority student population in the schools (Hansen & Quintero, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019; Bryan & Ford, 2014). Per the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), the number of students enrolled in the American K-12 student population decreased by 0.6 million from 2011 to 2018. There were 53.7 million students enrolled in 2011 but only 53.1 million in 2018. The U.S. Census Bureau (2019) also reported that 52% of the American K-12 student population was non-Hispanic White with 15% of the student population reportedly being Black-alone. In a similar vein, Hansen and Quintero (2019) reported that despite a gradual increase from 12% to nearly 20% in non-White teachers from 1987 to 2016, the American K-12 teacher workforce continues to be predominantly White. Per Putman,
Hansen, Walsh, and Quintero (2016), the diversity gap within the American K-12 teacher workforce will continue grow. According to their report, the following trends reinforce their assertion:

- 76% of Black college graduates majoring in education express an interest in pursuing a teaching career versus 95% of White college graduates majoring in education.
- Black teachers remain in the classroom 90% of the time while White teachers remain in the classroom 93% of the time.
- The diversity gap will continue to widen between Black teachers and Black students beyond 9% (which was the percentage in 2016) and will likely remain at or near that rate through the year 2060.
- The diversity gap that exists between Hispanic teachers and Hispanic students will likely increase by 22% by the year 2060.

**Alignment with Action Research Traditions**

Throughout the 73 years since its origination, action research has been redefined multiple times by several researchers and has gained two distinct traditions (Watson, Nicolaides, & Marsick, 2016; Smith & Doyle, 2007). Kurt Lewin (1946) originally defined action research as follows:

The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice (p. 35).
Lewin’s approach to action research was cyclic in nature, oriented in problem-solving, and incorporated a spiral of steps (Smith & Doyle, 2007). The first step included a cycle during which the action researcher identified an idea of interest and examined the idea with available processes and techniques. Subsequently, the action researcher engaged in fact-finding with the goals of developing an overall plan to achieve the objective and the act of making a decision on the first step necessary for achieving the aforementioned objective (Smith & Doyle, 2007). The second step was comprised of a cycle of “planning, executing, and reconnaissance or fact-finding for the purpose of evaluating the results of the second step, and preparing the rational basis for planning the third step” (Smith & Doyle, 2007, p. 24). The third step, if needed, perhaps involved modifying the overall plan to better identify and examine the idea of interest (Smith & Doyle, 2007).

Per Smith and Doyle (2007), one tradition that action research gained is the British tradition that is based primarily on the self-reflection of the practitioner. Carr and Kemmis (1986) defined this tradition as “…a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out” (p. 162). The second tradition involves systematically collecting data to expose unfair practices and threats to our environment in an effort to produce social change (Smith & Doyle, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This tradition is supported by several researchers who posit that the ultimate goal of action research is to take express action or a series of express actions to produce social change (MacDonald, 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Greenwood & Levin, 1998). It is within this tradition
that contemporary variations of action research have emerged. Three such contemporary variations are action science, collaborative developmental action inquiry (CDAI), and community-based action research (Watson, Nicolaides, & Marsick, 2016; Smith & Doyle, 2007). The goal of action science is to research and reflect upon the issues that manifest during precarious social encounters and determine transformative ways of dealing with these issues during future situations of a similar nature (Watson, Nicolaides, & Marsick, 2016). Comparatively, the goal of CDAI is for individuals and organizations to develop the ability to simultaneously take action and engage in inquiry in order to increase their awareness and effectiveness in dealing with the issue or issues at hand (Watson, Nicolaides, & Marsick, 2016). However, the goal of community-based action research is to assist members of a group, community, or organization in gaining an in-depth understanding of the problems presented to them and thus being able to resolve these problems based on the knowledge gained (Smith & Doyle, 2007). Per Stringer (1999), community-based action research is democratic, equitable, liberating, and life-enhancing and involves the following three phases: Look, Act, and Think (pp. 9-10). During the Look phase, the action researcher defines, describes, and investigates the problem, as well as describes the actions of participants. In the Think phase, the action researcher evaluates, analyzes, and interprets the situation while also reflecting on the actions of the participants and assessing the situation for any evidence of success or deficiencies. The Act phase seeks to find resolutions to the problem.

Although not perfectly, my study best aligned with the community-based action research approach. My study was democratic and afforded the eight participants the
opportunity to voluntarily participate in the study. It was equitable being that each participant’s answers to the semi-structured interview and their fictive kinship narratives were acknowledged with equal worth.

My study was liberating given its goal of bringing awareness to the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of Black male special education teachers. Also, my study was life-enhancing since it sought to cultivate camaraderie and fictive kinship among Black male special education teachers.

**Theoretical or Conceptual Framework**

Using a phenomenological approach, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the impact that the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of eight Black male special education teachers have on their pedagogical beliefs and practices. With Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality employed as the foundation within this phenomenological framework, this study included analysis of coded themes that emerged via the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and elicitation techniques. Elucidation of the themes were used as a foundation for developing a proposal for a Summer-long Bridge program at my university for selected rising Black male high school seniors in the State of Utah, and the stakeholders for my study included, but was not limited to, the staff and students of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion at the university, the Chief Diversity Officer and other members of the administration at the university, the Black male faculty and staff at the university, school administrators of various high schools in the State of Utah, parents of selected Black males students at these high schools, and the Utah Division of Multicultural Affairs.
The proposed program was designed specifically for the academic success of Black males at the university level.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was conceived in the late 1970’s and birthed in the early 1980’s as an outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies that sought to place race as the central feature of scholarly pursuits (Delgado, 1995). Per Nelson (2014), the five primary tenets of CRT are the “permanence of racism, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, counter storytelling, and Whiteness as property” (pp. 43-45). However, for the purposes of this study, only two of these tenets applied, and they were as follows:

- **The Permanence of Racism**—This tenet asserts that racism is a consistent component of the American society and viewed as the norm due to being legally, culturally, and psychologically ingrain in our beliefs and practices (Tate, 1997).
- **Counter Storytelling**—This tenet is a mode of storytelling that seeks to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths that are primarily held by the majority through both challenging privileged discourses and exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Counter storytelling also purports that power exists in hearing the voice of the subordinate tell the story (Decuir & Dixson, 2004).

In this study, the permanence of racism was identified and explored during the analysis of the interview data and fictive kinship data. As I coded the data and discerned any themes that emerged, I assessed if and how racism was being manifested in the educational programs and schools that the participants work in and how the participants viewed any overt and/or covert, as well as any intentional and/or unintentional, racist comments or acts that they have encountered. Also, I noted counter stories provided by the participants and examined the validity of premises or myths that were related to the stories.
**Intersectionality**

The term, “intersectionality,” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1989). While serving as a civil rights activist and legal scholar, Crenshaw researched and advocated against the oppression of African American women due to the failure of antidiscrimination laws to protect the them from the derogatory and debilitating and repressive ramifications of sexism and racism regarding employment barriers (Agosto & Roland, 2018), as well as male violence (i.e., battering and rape) inflicted upon them by men in society and/or their homes. Per Crenshaw (1989, 1991), African American women and other women of color experience an intersecting, interlocking pattern of racism and on a consistent basis resulting in a state of marginalization and societal sense of subordination.

Since its inception, however, the concept of intersectionality has grown to include increasingly more social identity structures, such as age, religion, ability, disability, class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and citizenship (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Collins, 2015). Gopaldus (2013) further extrapolated the concept and posited that marginalized people experience intersectionality on both a macro-level and micro-level. Per Gopaldus, multiple social identity structures interact to produce either privileged experiences or oppressive experiences. On the micro-level, Gopaldus posited that marginalized people are susceptible to experience social advantages or social disadvantages at their multiple intersections of identity. In a similar vein, Gillborn (2015) argued that Black youth who present with learning and/or behavioral difficulties in school disproportionately experience intersectionality on the macro-level when it
comes to being recommended and assessed for, as well as subsequently placed in, special education classes due to the intersection of their race, class, gender, and disability (i.e., learning and/or behavioral difficulties).

**Guiding Frameworks**

Given the present-day burgeoning imbalance between the American K-12 teaching force and the increasingly diverse American K-12 student population, as well as the states’ implementation of higher common core standards nationwide, the need for professional development for teachers has never been greater nor more pressing (Strauss, 2011). This is especially true for Black male teachers, in general, given their overall paltry numbers in the American K-12 teaching force, and especially for Black male special education teacher, specifically, being that even fewer of them serve in the American K-12 teaching force than do Black male general education teachers (Tio, 2017; Honaker, 2017; Data USA, 2016; and Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). Additionally, both Black male general education teachers and Black male special education teachers have to oftentimes grapple with their experiences as Black males teaching in a field that is comprised by mainly White female teachers, being deemed by hiring committees to be best fit for teaching in urban school settings given the high number of minority students and systemic problems that beset those schools, and not being afforded professional development that addresses their unique needs (Mosely, 2018; Schneider, 2017; James & Lewis, 2014; Lewis & Moore III, 2008; Cartledge & Lo, 2006). An initial approach for addressing this array of issues lied in Lewin’s (1946) assertion that the triad of action, research, and training should be viewed as an equilateral triangle with each concept
being equally as important and reliant on each other. Per Lewin, training is essential for improving the action patterns of school personnel, thereby, likely resulting in improved pedagogy and practices among teachers. With Lewin’s assertion in mind, the proposed Summer Bridge Program will seek to promote personal development from the Black male experiences presented by the participants, faculty, staff, and peer mentors, as well as afford opportunities for the establishment of fictive kinships by the participants with the faculty, staff, and peer mentors in the program.

Black Male Experiences

In their seminal article, James and Lewis (2014, p. 105) posed a riveting yet convicting question: “Are African American males a collective problem, American’s villains, or miseducated virtuosos?” Foundationally based on two profound quotes from W.E.B. DuBois, Ph.D. and Carter G. Woodson, Ph.D., James and Lewis asked a question that demands an answer, despite one’s race or gender, since each of us has conscious and unconscious biases, preconceived notions, and opinions based on our previous interpersonal interactions with African American males and/or the media’s occasional kaleidoscopic portrayal of African American males, at best, or its oftentimes negative portrayal of them, at worst. As a Black/African American male, myself, I, too must engage in self-reflection and answer that question. However, more importantly, James and Lewis posed the question as a preface to their introduction of the concept of Blackmaleness. Per James and Lewis, “Blackmaleness is both a personal journey and a social reality, tethering the life chances of Black males to an inescapable but navigable milieu of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunity that all Black males
must masterfully traverse or face the certain consequences of disenfranchisement” (p. 105). Blackmaleness is also “equally characterized by a transgenerational collective force, organized to contest, defy, resist, and persist despite the presence of social barriers particularly constructed to make war with the potential of Black males in American society” (pp. 105-106). The acts of contesting, defying, resisting, and persisting relate to the tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) referred to as counter storytelling since this tenet challenges privileged discourses and exposes and critiques normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). To that end, the paths that comprise the personal journey each Black male must masterfully traverse will include those that intersect and have been well-traveled, as well as those that have been less traveled in society and the academic arena.

In Society

Some people in society view Black males as an “endangered species” due to research implicating that Black men and boys do not cope, succeed, or thrive as well as any other group in this country (Butler, 2013, p. 485). As a result of marginalization and the intersection of being Black and male, many Black men and boys have endured through this state of “Black male exceptionalism” (Butler, 2013) in the past and continue to in the present. The lack of available positive same race, same sex role models and mentors; being deemed as “privileged victims” (i.e., hyperexposure, increased vulnerability, and increased perception of being “endangered” in the media primarily due to the high incarceration rates of Black males); and stereotyping were also presented as contributors to the state of Black male exceptionalism (Butler, 2013, pp. 504-505). In relation to
Blackmaleness, Black male exceptionalism would be deemed as ideological inopportunity given that systemic policies and practices are enacted on institutional and governmental levels in such a way that thwarts access to improved quality of life and opportunity for Black males (James & Lewis, 2014).

**Racial battle fatigue.** In the chorus of their classic rap song, “The Message,” Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five expressed a primal plea and an earnest warning when they stated, “Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge…I'm trying not to lose my head…It's like a jungle sometimes…It makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under” (https://genius.com/Grandmaster-flash-and-the-furious-five-the-message-lyrics). Most Black males (as well as other marginalized groups and populations) can relate to those words and experience many of the psychosocial stressors that Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five described throughout the song, such as poverty, crime, increased inflation rates, poor economic growth for certain areas and segments of the population, unemployment, inability to access or even afford necessary medical treatment, hostile school environments, school-to-prison pipeline, etc. In addition to the above psychosocial stressors, many Black males experience various forms of structural racism (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016), Black misandry (Smith et al., 2016), stereotype threat (Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011), hopelessness, anger, being viewed as a problem instead of a virtuoso (James & Lewis, 2014), and John Henryism (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011) on frequent basis, thereby, resulting in racial battle fatigue (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). William A. Smith, Ph.D. coined the phrase, racial battle fatigue, in 2003 while conducting research with his colleagues on the effects of racial
microaggressions and mundane, extreme, environmental stress. In a similar vein, Harper (2009) asserted that the structural racism, discriminatory barriers, stereotyping, misandry, and microaggressions that Black males experience at the hands of Whites in society and schools should be considered as “niggering” (p. 699). Harper based has assertion on Jenkins’s (2006 as cited in Harper, 2009, p. 698) article, “Mr. Nigger: The Challenges of Educating Black Males within American Society,” in which she, in part, “On one hand, the society espouses rhetoric of concern and desire to elevate Black males, but on the other hand, practices a policy of oppression, prejudice, and disregard. Put differently, the experience of the Black man in America seems to be one in which he is called ‘mister’, but is treated with a ‘niggardly’ regard…”

Per Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb (2016), racial macroaggressions and microaggressions experienced by Black males routinely in social, academic, and occupational spaces act as catalysts for racial battle fatigue. Whereas macroaggressions refer to institutional and structural racial acts, policies, and procedures, microaggressions refer to the microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations that Black males and other marginalized people encounter on a frequent basis. Similarly, Sue et al. (2007) proposed nine themed categories of microaggressions that people of color face: “alien in own land, ascriptions of intelligence, color blindness, criminality/assumption of criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class status, and environmental invalidation” (p. 2). According to Sue et al., these microaggressions are commonplace affronts that may or may not be committed intentionally and can be experienced through both human
encounters and environmental encounters (i.e., a person of color’s racial identity is unintentionally or intentionally attacked at work or in some other social setting).

**In Schools**

Black males have the ability to be whatever and whoever they want to be. They are not intellectually inferior to their White peers as many choose to believe. They do not have to succumb to the problem paradigm (James & Lewis, 2014) that the others ascribe to them. However, they must believe this themselves.

**White racial frame.** Feagin (2010b, as cited in Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 64) posited that Whites view society through a “White racial frame” that is comprised of a collection of racial stereotypes, images, narratives, and emotions solidified by a predilection to engage in discriminatory behaviors. It is within this frame where Black male students and Black male teachers, professors, and administrators must learn, work, serve, and thrive. It is within this frame that Black male students often encounter individual inopportunity via an ineffective and unjust school culture when their teachers, school counselors, and administrators view Black male students as a problem instead of virtuosos (James & Lewis, 2014). Correspondingly, Mills (1997) argued that Black male students are considered as substudents and Black male teachers are considered as subpersons under the Racial Contract (Leonardo, 2013) being that Whites are deemed to be persons and non-Whites are deemed to be subpersons. Per Mills, subpersons are characterized as “humanoid entities who, because of racial/phenotype/genealogy/culture, are not fully human” (p. 56). Additionally, within this frame, Black male students also encounter institutional inopportunitity when they experience “zero tolerance” policies, are
referred into the school-to-prison pipeline, and if they are suspended on the district level (James & Lewis, 2014).

In spite of the White racial frame, Black male students are still capable of succeeding and excelling. In order to spark the Black male genius that dwells within them, Black male students navigate through the “subtractive extreme of blackmaleness” and embrace the “transgenerational collective force” of the “productive extreme” so that they can “defy, resist, and persist despite the presence of social barriers” in their paths (James & Lewis, 2014, p. 273). Lastly, Black male students and Black male teachers alike must seek out and align themselves with “difference makers” who can serve as mentors and social support for them and help them to traverse and overcome “the void” (James & Lewis, 2014, pp. 273-274).

Black male teachers and faculty members also have to contend with the White racial frame. Johnson and Bryan (2017) argued that Black men are victims of “spirit murder” in the academy and that their “white colleagues and students attempt to use what we call the bullet of rejection, the bullet of silencing, and the bullet of disrespect to destroy Black males’ academic agenda” (p. 165). Per Johnson and Bryan (2017), the bullet of rejection metaphorically describes situations when White colleagues and/or students complain that Black teachers and professors discuss topics regarding race, ethnicity, diversity, and inclusion too much and accuse Black teachers and professors of not being supportive enough of the White race and topics of interest regarding the White race and related cultures. The bullet of silencing metaphorically represents the non-verbal reactions of White colleagues and students during discussions conducted by Black
teachers and professors regarding race, ethnicity, diversity, and inclusion (Johnson & Bryan, 2017). These reactions can include, but are not limited to, eye-rolling, disgruntled facial expressions, crumpling up paper, etc. This bullet also represents White colleagues who fear speaking up against issues in society and at the institution until they achieve tenure (Johnson & Bryan, 2017). Lastly, the bullet of disrespect metaphorically refers to situations during which White colleagues and/or students make rude and/or profane comments to the Black teacher or professor, or the White colleagues and/or students purposefully engage in disruptive, disrespectful behaviors during discussions and presentations on race, ethnicity, diversity, and inclusion (Johnson & Bryan, 2017).

Despite some Black male teachers’ desire to live up to the “teacher-as-candle” metaphor (Hill-Jackson, 2018, p. xv), they sometimes bump up against the White racial frame and receive push-back from other teachers and administrators. Additionally, some Black male teachers, as well as some Black male students, may experience imposter syndrome as a result of the perceived racial insensitivity expressed by peers and students (McClain et al., 2016). When experiencing imposter syndrome, Black teachers (and students) may not feel an internal sense of success despite that academic achievements, earned degrees, positive influence in the classrooms, scholastic honors, and praise from colleagues. They may, instead, maintain a sense of phoniness and avoid achieving success in an effort to not experience social rejection (McClain et al., 2016).

Black male teachers also deal with the expectation to fulfill nuanced responsibilities. These nuanced responsibilities are communicated to the Black male teachers via overt
and covert actions. Pabon (2016) argued that some urban school stakeholders have a panacean view of Black male teachers and hope that these teachers will present as “Black Supermen” (p. 917) who are able to be successful in assisting Black male students in improving their academic performance despite the institutional inopportunity (James & Lewis, 2014) they encounter. Halpin et al. (2016) and Lynn et al. (2002) posited that students of all races and ethnicities prefer and benefit from having a teacher of color in the classroom. According to Halpin et al. (2016), all students, despite race and gender, perceived teachers of color as more culturally aware of and sensitive to the needs of their students. Brown (2009) posited that Black male teachers employ and engage in three different pedagogical roles in order to connect with their students and invest in their improved academic achievement. The three pedagogical roles are “enforcer, playful, and negotiator” (p. 919). Comparably, Lynn et al. (2002) found that the Black male teachers in their study considered themselves to be change agents, role models, and father figures for their students. They also believed that it was duty to utilize the abilities and resources to change the lives of students living in working class and poor communities, as well as provide a deeper level of understanding of their students’ needs. Additionally, Wheeler, Haertel, and Scriven (1992) and Landsman and Lewis (2006) posited that the similar-to-me effect was effective for Black male teachers to utilize in order to establish and maintain rapport with their students who came from similar backgrounds, were similar in race/ethnicity, beliefs, gender, and culture to the teachers. Furthermore, Murray, Kosty, and Hauser-McLean (2015) suggested that the ability for Black male teachers to offer their students emotional, informational
(appraisal), and instrumental support was significant in the teachers’ ability to earn their students’ trust and respect. Lastly, as Black male teachers fulfill the aforementioned roles for their students and offer the above types of support to their students and each other, they are actually forming fictive kinships with their students and each other (Carter-Francique, Hart, and Cheeks, 2015; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000).

Exploring the concepts of Blackmaleness and Black male exceptionalism is essential for this study being that all eight participants are experienced Black male special education teachers; have “masterfully traverse(d)” the “navigable milieu of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunity” (James & Lewis, 2014, p. 105); and defied the “endangered species” (Butler, 2013, p. 485) perception as they work within the confines of the “White racial frame” (Feagin, 2010b as cited in Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 64). They also are in positions to engage in different pedagogical roles—such as enforcer, negotiator, change agent, role model, and father figure (Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2002)—in order to connect with their students and invest in their improved academic achievement.

**Fictive Kinship**

Fictive kinship is a term that describes the various forms of kinship obligations and relationships a person has with people who are not related to the person by blood, marriage, or adoption (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Nelson, 2014; Reid & Reczek, 2011; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Johnson, 1999; Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994). These kinships serve to expand the mutual support and sense of community among the members in each kinship, and the members are ascribed similar rights,
statuses, duties, and mutual respect as the members of consanguineal (i.e., blood-related) kinships (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Nelson, 2014; Reid & Reczek, 2011; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Johnson, 1999; Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994). Fictive kinships are more common than one may think and are oftentimes equally (if not more so) as meaningful to its members as kinships that are blood-related.

The concept of fictive kin has a history rooted in necessity, religious rituals, and close friendships (Nelson, 2014; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Johnson, 1999; Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994). Per Chatters, Taylor, and Akody (1994), the development and acknowledgment of fictive kinship ties among African Americans were recorded prior to the slavery era in North America. Among the various West African cultures prior to and at the time slavery, members of these cultures viewed fictive kinship as a normal part of their societal norms. Children in these cultures were taught to address adult members of the cultures who were not related to them by blood or marriage as “Aunt” and “Uncle” (Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994; Patterson, 1967; Guttman, 1976). Once the slave ships began to arrive and many of the West African adults and children were taken from their homelands, placed on slave ships, and forced into slavery, the practice of children calling adult members of their cultures “Aunt” and “Uncle” began to serve two key purposes (Guttman, 1976):

1. This practice enabled the children to socialize within the slave community; and
2. This practice also served to bind unrelated children and adults together in sense of community and fictive kinship which would prove to be necessary and helpful once
many of the biological family members were separated, sold, and/or killed once they arrived at their various slavery destinations.

During the Civil War, African American adults routinely engaged in informal adoption of African American children who were orphaned by either the deaths of the parents as a result of fighting in the war or due to slave-related circumstances, the selling of their parents by slave masters and/or slave traders, being separated from their parents during the war for various reasons, or possible desertion of their parents (Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994; Guttman, 1976). Additionally, African American parents have historically chosen “godparents” for their children, and that practice continues through present day (Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994, p. 298). Godparents are close friends of the family and serve as surrogate-like parents when the family needs them to. This practice of godparents (also called co-parenting in some other cultures) was also adopted by other countries--such as Spain (“compadre”), Latin America (“compadrazgo”), and England (“godparents”)--during Catholic baptisms and other cultures’ ceremonial and religious rituals (Nelson, 2014; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994; Dill, 1998).

Historically, cultures other than the African American/Black culture have embraced fictive kin systems in one way or another. Per Ebaugh and Curry (2000), anthropologists and sociologists have provided literature on the dharma-atmyor fictive kin system among the Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh; the oyabun-kobun fictive kin system in Japan; the “paper sons” in China; and the kouzin fictive kin system in the Haitian Creole culture (pp. 192-193). Also, in Japan, the oyabun-kobun fictive kin
system functions similarly to a member’s immediate family (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Ishino, 1953). The members participate in a ceremony during which roles are assigned. The leader of the ceremony assumes the role of a ritual parent, and the followers in the ceremony are deemed the symbolic children. As symbolic children, they are considered ritual siblings, and they are formally placed recognized in order of seniority. Once the ritual family is established, it can expand over multiple generations (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Ishino, 1953).

In China, the “paper sons” fictive kin system was developed by Chinese immigrants during the exclusionary era in an effort to circumvent the immigration laws at that time (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Li, 1977). The system was actually a fraudulent scheme that involved Chinese men claiming to have a fictive kinship with their supposedly Chinese American “father” who lived in America. The Chinese American “father” would then falsely report that he has a son residing in China and that he needs to obtain a birth certificate for the son. Once the birth certificate was obtained, the “paper son” could then proceed with applying for citizenship in America. Per Li (1977), there were some cases where the Chinese American “father” and his “paper son” actually formed genuine fictive kinships, but those cases did not occur often. Additionally, after the birth certificates were purchased and used, they would sometimes be sold to other immigrants. This became a lucrative business for some “paper sons” and Chinese American “fathers” (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Li, 1977).

In South Florida, the Haitian extended family system is comprised of both biological kin and fictive kin (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). This broad
range of consanguineal and fictive kin has proven to be necessary and beneficial for many of members as they struggle to survive financially, physically, legally, and socially on an ongoing basis while other members of the extended family system actually prosper in the South Florida region (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). The members may or may not live in different cities and states, but they are all still committed to and expected to assist each other in any way possible no matter their geographical location. The *kouzin* Haitian Creole family system, however, is more mutually obligatory than the extended family system of the Haitians in South Florida and may also include both consanguineal and fictive kin members (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985).

Currently, there are numerous terms used that depict different forms of fictive kinship. For example, Alexander and Goodman (1991) described the fictive kinship relationships that formed between several older women in Anglo society who had all never married and never birthed any children. They called their fictive kinship “constructed” kin (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000, p. 193). Weston (1991) and Cherlin (1991) described how many gay fictive kinships consider themselves as “quasi-kin” families (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000, p. 193). Stack (1974) described a practice that also continues to this day: referring to close, older adult friends as “play mother” or “play father” and referring to other close friends nearer one’s chronological age as “play sister,” “play brother,” or “play cousin” (Stack, 1974 as cited in Ebaugh & Curry, 2000, p. 194).

Lastly, people of color have at their discretion “the value of culture and cultural wealth” (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015, p. 159). Bourdieu (1977) coined the term, *cultural wealth*, and described it as “instruments for the appropriation of symbolic
wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (p. 488). Put more simply, Yosso (2005) described cultural wealth as “the compilation of a person’s abilities, knowledge, skills, and contacts that are utilized by people and ‘communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression’” (p. 77). Additionally, Yosso (2005, pp. 77-80) proposed the following six interdependent forms of capital that community cultural wealth encompasses:

- Aspirational capital: The capacity to continue to hope and dream about the future despite any real or perceived barriers that one may encounter;
- Navigational capital: The capacity to move through social institutions that were not established with consideration regarding People of Color;
- Social capital: Social networks and community resources that provide effectual, emotional support;
- Linguistic capital: The capacity to speak more than one language and/or more than one style of a language or languages;
- Familial capital: Cultural knowledge that involves an awareness of community history, implicit and explicit memory, and cultural intuition; and
- Resistant capital: Antagonistic behavior that confronts inequality.

To expand further, social capital’s utility is valuable for people of color since it is comprised of the current and potential formal and informal social networks a person has, as well as the person’s knowledge and accomplishments, which the person can utilize to receive privilege and access to more social networks and privileges (Carter-Francique, Hart, and Cheeks, 2015). One other benefit of social capital is the affordance of increased social support as the person’s social capital increases (Carter-Francique, Hart, and Cheeks, 2015). According to House (1981 as cited in Carter-Francique, Hart, and Cheeks, 2015, p. 161), there are four components that comprise social support:

(a.) appraisal support (i.e., information, constructive criticism, affirmation); (b.) emotional support (i.e., trust, love, care); (c.) informational support (i.e., advice
information, suggestions); and instrumental support (i.e., tangible service(s), assistance).

These synergistic nature of these components increases the value of one’s social capital and helps to the person to cope with life’s stressors (Carter-Francique, Hart, and Cheeks, 2015). This is true for Black male special educators, as well (Scott, 2016; Carter-Francique, Hart, and Cheeks, 2015; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994). Even though they are few in number, share cultural wealth, and provide social support, they still need additional support via professional development that meets their unique needs (Mosely, 2018; Scott, 2016; Bristol, 2015).

Fictive kinships are intersectional by nature. The intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, culture, occupation, identity, ability, and citizenship exists among the participants in the study (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Collins, 2015). The interdependent forms of capital that community cultural wealth encompasses in fictive kinships also relates to intersectionality (Gopaldus, 2013). Regarding the pending rising Black male high school seniors who will participate in the Summer Bridge Program, they, too, will share similar intersections, such as gender, race/ethnicity, culture, age, and potentially ability.

Exploring the concept of fictive kinships was essential to this study since the participants in the study were all raised in the Black communities, shared common lived experiences, and benefitted from the cultural wealth and social support provided by fictive kinships given the dearth of Black male special education teachers in the American K-12 teacher workforce and their ability to relate to nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs that they each have. Additionally, the “bonds of
solidarity and reciprocity” (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000, p. 204) provided by fictive kinships proved to be beneficial for the Black male special education teachers participating in the study. Furthermore, the Summer Bridge Program can help incoming students see the value of these networks and help them to create them. It will also afford them the opportunity to establish and exchange funds of knowledge (FoK), which are bodies of knowledge and skills that are accumulated historically and developed culturally and are essential for one’s wellbeing, as well as one’s household and individual functioning (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Intersectionality and Black Male Special Education Teachers

The motto of the 100 Black Men of America, Inc. is, “What they see is what they’ll be” (100blackmen.org). This motto aligns with the assertions of Wheeler, Haertel, and Scriven (1992) and Landsman and Lewis (2006) who posited that the similar-to-me effect was effective for Black male teachers to utilize in order to establish and maintain rapport with their students who came from similar backgrounds, race/ethnicity, beliefs, gender, and culture to the teachers. Per Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry (2012), the intersectional markers of race, class, and gender greatly impact how Black males construct their identities, how they are perceived by others through social imagery, and how they interpret their lived experiences. Regarding gender, Black males also experience “racialized gendering” (Givens, Nasir, Ross, & de Royston, 2016, p. 168; Baldridge, Hill, & Davis, 2011; Noguera, 1996) in the form of stereotyping. Some of the many stereotypes ascribed to Black males are “anti-intellectual and anti-social…prone to criminality” (Givens, Nasir, Ross, & de Royston, 2016, p. 168);
“...physically strong, mentally inept, hyper-sexed brutes who were well suited for slavery, and deemed to be subhuman...lazy, docile, and inhumane savages...Sambo or minstrel character...pimps, thugs, hustlers, and law-breaking slicksters...‘menace to society’...” (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012, p. 89). These stereotypes are pervasive and can adversely affect how Black males view themselves and other Black males (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012; Givens, Nasir, Ross, & de Royston, 2016; James & Lewis, 2014).

Pabon (2016) posited that Black male educators are considered to be “Black Supermen” and that they are desperately needed to provide intangible, transferable qualities and skills that their colleagues cannot match, especially when it comes to teaching, identifying with, and modifying the behaviors and thought processes of Black and Latinx male students. Regarding Black male students, Black male educators possess the inherent ethnic and cultural credence and ability to assist Black male students in debunking the negative stereotypes assigned to them by others and subsequently helping them to reimagine their Black male identities, redefine Black manhood, and “come to see themselves as boundary crossers and develop strong academic identities and strong proactive racial identities” (Givens, Nasir, Ross, & McKinney de Royston, 2016, p. 169). Gause (2005) deemed Black male educators to be “Ghetto Sophisticates” (p. 17) who epitomized Black masculinity and assisted Black male students in understanding and working through “fracture of the self” (p. 18) which occurred when “the intersections of their race, class, and gender” (p. 18) collide with the hegemonic values and pedagogy of the “dominant middle class” (p. 17). Gause seemed to agree with
Major and Billson (1993) that Black male educators can relate to and have themselves engaged in the “cool pose” that their Black male students engage in at some point in time. Per Major and Billson, cool pose can be defined as a:

Distinctive coping mechanism that serves to counter, at least in part, the dangers that black males encounter on a daily basis. As a performer, cool pose is designed to render the black male visible and to empower him; it eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities…Cool pose is constructed from attitudes and actions that become firmly entrenched in the black male’s psyche as he adopts a façade to ward off the anxiety of second-class status. It provides a mask that suggests competence, high self-esteem, control, and inner strength. It also hides self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil (p. 5)

**Closing Thoughts on Chapter II**

Similar to Geoffrey Canada, Pabon (2016) introduced the concept of Superman as she discussed how some urban school administrators and other stakeholders “wait for Black Supermen—a cohort of soldiers who will use their Blackness and maleness to lead Black male youth to academic success regardless of the structural and systemic challenges they face” (p. 917). Per Pabon, Black male teachers are frequently perceived by urban school administrators and stakeholders as a monolithic cohort whose mission is to serve as role models and father-figures for Black male students who grew up in single-parent homes without their fathers. However, Black male teachers comprise approximately 2% of the American K-12 teacher workforce and have to contend with the inopportunities of Blackmaleness and being deemed as an endangered species (i.e., Black Male Exceptionalism), along with Black males students, by many members of society and education system (James & Lewis, 2016; Butler, 2013). As a result of encountering the White racial frame (Feagin, 2010b) and coping with historical trauma (Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998; Evans-Campbell, 2008) on an ongoing basis, Black male teachers have
to overcome being categorized as subpersons while their Black male students are
categorized as substudents per the Racial Contract (Mills, 1997; Leonardo, 2013);
experiencing racial macroaggressions and microaggressions (Osanloo, Boske, &
Newcomb, 2016); encounter “niggering” (Harper, 2009); and persevere through episodes
of racial battle fatigue (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

In addition to the aforementioned challenges that Black male teachers face, they,
along with other teachers of color, are often assigned to work in urban schools.
Demographically, the urban school student population is frequently comprised of Black,
Latinx, English-learners, and poor students while the majority of the teachers are
frequently White and middle-class (Lewis & Moore III, 2008; Cartledge & Lo, 2006). It
is the hope that these Black Supermen (Pabon, 2016), who sometimes are from the same
or similar marginalized communities that their students are members of, will avoid
perpetuating the deficit paradigm by reinforcing deficit thinking (Anyon, 1997 as cited in
Lewis et al., 2008, p. 141). To make matters worse, though, these teachers are presented
with Herculean tasks oftentimes without the training, resources, and support that they
need (Pabon, 2016; James & Lewis, 2016).

Using a phenomenological approach, the purpose of this qualitative study was to
understand the impact that the “invisible tax” had on the nuanced responsibilities, lived
experiences, identities, and needs of eight Black male special education teachers. With
Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality employed as the foundation within this
phenomenological framework, this study included analysis of coded themes that
emerged via the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and fictive kinship
narrative. With the fictive kinship narratives, the study sought to understand the intersectional nature of the kinships and how those kinships served to expand the mutual support and sense of the Black male special education teachers participating in the study, as well as how they were ascribed similar rights, statuses, duties, and mutual respect as the members of consanguineal (i.e., blood-related) kinships (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Nelson, 2014; Reid & Reczek, 2011; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Johnson, 1999; Chatters, Taylor, & Akody, 1994). Regarding the pending rising Black male high school seniors who will participate in the Summer Bridge Program, they, too, will share similar intersections, such as gender, race/ethnicity, culture, age, and potentially ability.
CHAPTER III
SOLUTION AND METHOD

The juxtaposition of the dearth and underrepresentation of Black male special education teachers in the American K-12 public education school system teaching force and the high number of special education referrals and placement of Black male students into special education is a critical national crisis (Levister 2000; Campbell-Whatley 2008; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; James & Lewis, 2014). A pilot study was first conducted with five Black male special education teachers to initially become aware of the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of these teachers. After completing the pilot study, I verbally inquired with each of the participants via cell phone in May 2019 if they would be available for follow-up semi-structured interviews for this study, and three of them stated they would be available. However, in adherence to the advice provided by the Record of Study committee to add more participants to study, five additional Black male special education teachers were added to the study in an effort to better understand the nuanced responsibilities, lived realities, and identities of these Black male special education teachers.

I was hired to serve as the Director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion at a nearby university two months ago. Given my new position and passion for assisting Black males, I propose developing a Summer-long Bridge Program at my university for selected rising Black male high school seniors in the State of Utah, and the new stakeholders for my study will include, but not be limited to, the staff and students of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion at the university, school administrators of various
high schools in the State of Utah, parents of selected Black males students at these high
schools, and the Utah Division of Multicultural Affairs. The program will endeavor to
increase the participants’ academic success, graduation rate, and college application rate.
Additionally, the overarching goal of the program will not necessarily be to recruit the
students to become special education teachers, but, instead, the insights of the study will
be used more generally to prepare Black male high school students for experiences they
may have in the workplace.

**Justification of Proposed Solution**

Per the most recently conducted United States Census (U.S. Census, 2010), people
who identified as Black or African American accounted for 1.4% of the total population
for the State of Utah. This statistic is comparable to percentage of students who identify
as Black or African American at the university where I serve. The 195 students who
identify as Black or African American account for only 1.7% of the total student
population as indicated on Table 1 below.
Table 1

Total Student Population Based on Race/Ethnicity

Note: Reprinted from https://my.suu.edu/dashboard/

Neither the United States Census nor the university’s statistics indicated how many members of each population are Black males. The percentage of Black males who reside in Utah and the percentage of Black males enrolled at the university at which I serve are both anemic. Similarly, Tanner (2019) stated that minorities constitute only 7% of the 2,859 total number of full-time and part-time faculty and staff employed for the 2019-2020 school year at the university at which I serve. That percentage would
equal 200 minority faculty and staff at the university. I have been able to identify a total of 10 faculty and staff at the university this school year who identify as Black or African American. Out of the 10 faculty and staff at the university who identify as Black or African American, six are males, and four are females. The six male faculty and staff who identify as Black or African American constitute approximately 0.0021% of the faculty and staff at the university. This statistic is also anemic and alarming.

Similar to a model of a Summer-long Bridge Program sponsored by the Student African American Brotherhood annually at various colleges and universities around the nation, the Bridge Program at this university will focus on enhancing the academic success, academic self-efficacy, and visibility of Black male students who are rising seniors in high schools throughout the State of Utah. The program model will be based on four pillars of success: personal development, altruistic community service, academic excellence, and socioemotional development. One aim of the program will be to increase the high school graduation rates and college application rates of the participants. Per Bir and Myrick (2015), the likelihood of Summer Bridge program participants to graduate from college within six years increased by 10 percentage points (p. 24). The proposed Summer Bridge Program for this university will seek to achieve or surpass a 10-percentage point increase in the likelihood of its participants to graduate within six years from a college or university of their choice. Other aims of the program will be to provide the participants with anticipatory advising, strategic mentoring from Black male faculty and staff, and peer mentoring from Black male student leaders at the
university. To that end, the mentoring component will be vital as described by a professor quoted in article authored by Hughes (2010, p. 56) in *Gifted Child Today*:

Students of color are often out of touch with faculty of color. Since they don’t see us, it is easy for them to believe that we do not exist. It is up to us to be more visible and available to students of color even before they enter college. This lets them know that there are other careers out there. And in fact, becoming a professor is a viable career for everyone. This a good message to send to White students as well.

Furthermore, the Bridge program will afford the faculty, staff, and peer mentors opportunities to form fictive kinships with the participants, share their cultural wealth with them, and provide social support to the participants.

**Study Context and Participants**

Using a phenomenological approach, this study included semi-structured interviews with a national sample comprised of Black male special education teachers who taught in Georgia, Louisiana, and Illinois in an effort to understand the nuanced responsibilities, lived realities, and identities of these Black male special education teachers. Three Black male special education teachers taught in Northwest Georgia and are three of the five participants who initially participated in the pilot study for this case study. The additional five Black male special education teachers were invited to participate in the study via specific Facebook groups (i.e., Black Male Educators United and Black Male Educator Alliance) that I am a member of. Their addition to the study assisted in increasing the truth value, trustworthiness (consistency), and applicability of the study.

BMSPED #1 was a 35-year old married Black male who taught all subjects to special education students in grades 6 through 12 in a transitional academy that served an urban middle school and an urban high school in Georgia. He lived with his wife, nine-year
old daughter, and two-year old son in a city in Georgia. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from a university in a neighboring state. He later earned his Master’s degree in Special Education through an online program provided by an online university in the western region of the United States. In high school and college, he was a star athlete and reportedly overcome numerous seemingly insurmountable obstacles and setbacks in his life along his path to becoming a special education teacher.

BMSPED #2 was a 47-year old married Black male who taught all subjects to special education students in grades 7 through 12 in a transitional academy that served an urban middle school and an urban high school in the State of Georgia. He lived with his wife, one of his four biological children (i.e., 13-year old son), and two stepsons (ages 14 and 16) in a city in Georgia. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from one of the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) in the southeastern region of the United States and later earned his teaching certificate in special education after completing the alternative teacher preparation program provided by Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (Georgia TAPP). Additionally, he was a star athlete in high school and a scholar in college, and he reportedly felt closer to his fictive kin than his biological family on many occasions. Furthermore, after growing up in poverty and overcoming familial and societal challenges, BMSPED #2 stated that he was passionate about teaching and has advocated for special programs for the personal, academic, and socioemotional development of Black and Latinx males.

BMSPED #3 was a 37-year old married Black male who teaches adaptive special education classes to special education students in grades 9 through 12 in a large urban
high school in the State of Georgia. He lived with his wife and two-year old daughter in a suburb in Georgia. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from a college in Tennessee and later earned his teaching certificate in special education after completing the alternative teacher preparation program provided by Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (Georgia TAPP). He was a star football player in high school and college, and he coached football at the school where he taught. He was reportedly passionate about teaching, mentoring, and coaching young male students.

BMSPED #4 was a 50-year old married Black male special education teacher who taught fifth graders at an elementary school in the State of Georgia. He taught four classes of fifth graders each day. He and his wife resided in in a large city in Georgia, although they were originally from Nigeria. BMSPED #4 earned his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from a university in Nigeria. He reported that teaching was his way to give back to the younger generation and to society. He desired to serve as a role model, mentor, and source of inspiration for other young Black male students.

BMSPED #5 was a 49-year old married Black male special education teacher who taught eighth graders at a middle school in the State of Illinois. He resided in a large city in Illinois with his wife and children where he also coached football at the middle school where he taught. He earned a Master’s degree from a university in Illinois. He was a star basketball player in high school and college. He reported a passion for teaching and mentoring students of ethnicities, cultures, and abilities. He also reported having empathy for them and stated that he grew up in urban, poverty-stricken conditions similar to his students.
BMSPED #6 was a 43-year old Black male special education teacher who co-taught special education students in grades 9 through 12 at a high School in the State of Georgia. He was married and resided with his wife and children in a large city in Georgia. BMSPED #6 pulled special education students out of their classes and provided instruction to them throughout the school week. He earned a M.Ed. in Special Education from a university in the State of Georgia, and he reportedly enjoyed coaching football at the school where he taught. BMSPED #6 reported that he understood the plight of many of his students, especially his male students of color, since he shared similar lived experiences with them.

BMSPED #7 was a 45-year old Black male special education teacher who co-taught special education students in grades 9 through 12 at a high School in the State of Georgia. He pulled special education students out of their classes and provided instruction to them throughout the school week. BMSPED #7 resided with his wife and children in a large city in Georgia. He earned a Bachelor’s degree in Ethnic Studies from a university in Hawaii and a Master’s Degree in Special Education from a university in Georgia. Per BMPSED #7 self-report, he related to the familial, societal, academic, and financial struggles of his students because he experienced similar struggles throughout his life.

BMSPED #8 was a 42-year old Black male special education teacher who was a Certified Adaptive Physical Educator in the State of Louisiana. He taught adaptive physical education to special education students from multiple grades at schools in a mid-size city in Louisiana. Many of his students experienced physical disabilities (i.e.,
Down Syndrome, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, etc.) in addition to mental, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. BMSPED #8 resided in the aforementioned mid-size city Louisiana with his wife and children where he also coached football at a local high school. He earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Health Kinesiology and Recreation and a Master’s degree in Kinesiology from a university in Arkansas University, as well as a certification in Certified Adaptive Physical Education from a university in Louisiana. According to BMSPED #8, his inspiration for pursuing a career in special education began with caring for a cousin of his who was diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome when they were young. As he grew older and began college, he changed his major from Criminal Justice to Special Education so that he could learn how to teach and serve students with disabilities.

Criterion sampling was employed since all cases met a predetermined criterion of importance. Three of the participants initially participated in the pilot study, and they provided informative insight on how the “individual tax” manifested in their nuanced responsibilities, lived realities, and identities as Black male special education teachers. Criterion sampling was employed with the addition of the five additional participants, and they each met the criteria for the study. Each of the participants provided informative insight regarding their perspectives on the nuanced responsibilities, multiple roles, lived experiences, and unique needs of Black male special education teachers.

**Proposed Research Paradigm**

I chose to employ a qualitative research methodology because I seek to understand the “individual tax” on Black male special education teachers regarding their nuanced
responsibilities, multiple roles, lived experiences, and unique needs. Therefore, I will choose to employ phenomenology as my qualitative theoretical framework given that this approach investigates and describes how people experience a particular phenomenon from their perspectives via first-person accounts (Rawat, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Lester, 1999). Phenomenology also seeks to ascertain what the experience means to each of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is also a research method, and I will employ as such. In alignment with the phenomenological research process, I will engage in epoche by bracketing any assumptions, prejudgments, and biases that I may have (Rawat, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Lester, 1999). Next, I will listen to the participants in an effort to discern their noesis—i.e., the manner in which each participant experiences the impact that their nuanced responsibilities and multiple roles have on their pedagogical beliefs and practices—in order to determine the noema—i.e., the impact that their nuanced responsibilities and multiple roles have on their pedagogical beliefs and practices (Rawat, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Then, I will employ phenomenological reduction to suspend my embedded intersubjectivity with the participants and record my exact insights, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in my notes regarding the participants’ interview answers and fictive kinship diagrams or narratives (Rawat, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Afterwards, horizontalization will be utilized to provide each of the participants and their interview answers and fictive kinship diagrams or narratives with equal value while also applying imaginative variation to identify the varying meanings and perspectives inherent in the participants’ answers, diagrams, and narratives as I code the
themes that may emerge (Rawat, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I will synthesize the meanings discerned from the data collected and essences of the experiences of the participants (Rawat, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Lester, 1999).

**Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Per Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher is the instrument in the study in qualitative research given that the researcher collects the data herself/himself via examining various documents, artifacts, and audiovisual data related to the study; observing the behaviors of the participants in the study, as well as the behaviors of others present with the participants, if required by the study; and conducting interviews with the participants utilizing open-ended questions. As the key instrument in the study, the researcher must apply reflexive thinking by keeping in mind and routinely reflecting upon how her/his personal background, past experiences related to problem being researched and/or with the participants in the study, and culture in the researcher identifies as being a member of could possibly shape her/his interpretations about the themes that may emerge from the study, as well as the meanings that she/he may attribute to the data collected. Per Patton (2015), reflexive thinking can possibly be viewed as providing “…a pocket of intersection between the personal and the professional” (p. 33).

In addition to reflexive thinking, there are other characteristics of qualitative research that are salient to my study:

- The practice of collecting data from semi-structured interviews and fictive kinship narratives to examine rather than relying on only one particular source of
data affords participants with the opportunity and freedom to freely express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings without the constraints levied by employing only one data source. In qualitative research, researchers engage in inductive reasoning as opposed to deductive reasoning in order to differentiate patterns, develop categories, and discern themes that emerge from the data collected.

- Patton (2015) posits that qualitative research imparts upon the researcher the potential to gather and produce an abundance of detailed data about a small number of participants or cases which could yield an increase in the depth of understanding of the participants or cases being studied. In my study, I will have eight participants, and I hope to gather and produce an abundance of detailed data from my semi-structured interviews with them, as well as their fictive kinship narratives.

- Qualitative researchers attempt to develop a holistic account of the problem they are studying by looking at the big picture that emerges while reporting the different perspectives, identifying the various factors that surface during their studies, and how these perspectives and factors interact (Creswell & Creswell, 2015). To qualitative researchers, the big picture that emerges reflects how events occur in real life, and I will attempt to see the big picture in my study through the interaction of the perspectives of the participants and the various factors that emerge in my study.

- The practices of using data collected from semi-structured interviews and fictive kinship narratives to utilize inductive analysis to discover patterns or themes in
the data and transcriptions which will add trustworthiness and credibility to my qualitative study.

**Data Collection Methods**

In my study, I collected data from elicitation techniques after I collected data from the semi-structured interviews. I conducted the interviews with the eight participants, and I collected data from the interviews and data from fictive kinship narratives. I engaged in inductive reasoning as I sought to differentiate patterns, develop categories, and discern themes that may emerge from the data I collected.

In my study, I applied reflexive thinking by writing notes about my personal experience while facilitating my study, my observations of the participants during the semi-structured interviews, any epiphanies that may arise regarding what I learned throughout the study, and any concerns, if any, that occurred regarding the participants or the study. Additionally, I routinely reflected upon and remained aware of how my personal background, past experiences related to the problem being researched and/or with the participants in the study, and how the culture in which I identify as being a member of could possibly shape my interpretations about the themes that emerged from the study, as well as the meanings that I attributed to the data collected.

**Justification of Use of Instruments in Context**

In my attempt to describe the lived experiences of eight Black male special education teachers and what these experiences mean to them, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the participants. I conducted semi-structured interviews because this type of interview afforded me the opportunity to ask the participants open-ended
questions which allowed for discussion of their answers and follow-up questions. Also, conducting semi-structured interviews enabled me to formulate an interview guide prior to the interviews and, thereby, permitted me to appear competent and prepared at the onset of the interviews.

I also solicited each participant to complete an elicitation technique in an effort to gain additional data on the participants’ sources of emotional, social, and moral support regarding their job as a Black male special education teacher. An elicitation technique is a research task that provides a participant with verbal, written, or visual stimuli as a prompt to encourage the participant to discuss her or his ideas (Barton, 2015), and I asked each participant to complete a fictive kinship narrative to describe their fictive kinship support system. Fictive kin are people who are not related to the participant by blood but serve as the participant’s chosen kin and support system (Barton, 2015). I wanted to know this information because research shows that Black male teachers, as well as other teachers of color, often experience alienation, isolation, invisibility, lack of administrative and coworker support, dehumanization, marginalized, and undervalued on their jobs (Jackson & Kohli, 2016). Therefore, their fictive kinship support systems were essential for the participants in mediating the “invisible tax” that they endured. Subsequently, I derived general meanings from the elicitation task data and interview data which allowed me to engage in reflective structural analysis in order to gain a better understanding of the essence of their experiences.
Data Analysis Strategy

First, I transcribed each interview and fictive kinship narrative line-by-line. I forwarded the transcribed interviews and fictive kinship narratives via email to the respective participants for member checking. After each participant reviewed the transcripts and verified their accuracy, I then searched for themes that emerged in the data I collected from the interviews and the fictive kinship narratives. Seven themes emerged. I developed four categories for coding: interview text, interview extracts, in vivo codes, and emergent themes. Using a color-coded system (i.e., blue, green, brown, red, purple, grey, and yellow), I discerned the in vivo codes. Next, I discerned the aforementioned seven themes that emerged from the in vivo codes. Lastly, I used rich and thick description, reflexive thinking, consistency/neutrality, and applicability to add authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility to my study. No discrepant or negative data emerged.

Timeline

The informed consent form, recruitment letter, and a stamped envelope were sent to each of the three participants by postal mail service on June 29, 2018. The participants were requested to return the consent form using the enclosed stamped envelope via postal mail service prior to the interview which were scheduled according to the participants availability and convenience. The semi-structured interviews with the participants were conducted at their homes. The interviews were comprised of open-ended, fact-based and opinion-based questions in an attempt to understand their nuanced responsibilities, lived realities, identities, and needs. The meeting with the investigator
took no more than 60 minutes. With their permission, the investigator recorded the interview with a recording app on his cell phone. Additionally, each participant was asked to complete a fictive kinship narrative, and they all submitted their fictive kinship narratives to the researcher one week later via email.

A recruitment letter, an informed consent form, and an enclosed stamped envelope was sent to each of the additional five participants via postal mail service on August 26, 2019. The semi-structured interviews were conducted according to the participants’ availability and convenience. Transcription and coding of the interview and fictive kinship narrative took place over the course of an eight-week period from November 2019 to January 2020. The additional five participants were recruited from two Facebook groups that I am a member of: Black Male Educator Alliance and Black Male Educators United. Each participant was asked to complete a fictive kinship narrative, and they submitted their fictive kinship narratives to the researcher one week later via email. Afterwards, content analysis of the coded interview data from the interviews was conducted over an eight-week period from November 2019 to January 2020, and the fictive kinship diagrams and narratives were analyzed for any corroborating or dissenting data in relation to the data collected from the interviews. Lastly, the results and implications of the analyzed data were determined.

**Reliability and Validity Concerns or Equivalents**

In quantitative research, internal validity reflects how effective the structure of an instrument or test is, whereas, external validity reflects how well do the results of a study, instrument, or test apply to real world scenarios (Creswell & Creswell, 2015).
This is similar to how inductive analysis is utilized in the early stages of qualitative research to try to discover any patterns, themes, or categories that might exist in the data collected, whereas, deductive analysis is utilized later in the study to affirm the authenticity of inductive analysis discovery of patterns or themes interpreted from data collected from interviews, observations, documents and artifacts, personal statements from participants, and negative or discrepant information (Creswell & Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2015). Researcher bias, the ability of the researcher, reactivity, discrepant data, and selection bias pose threats to the authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative research. I engaged in bracketing, reflexive thinking, and triangulation to avoid or limit these threats to my qualitative case study. Additionally, I sought to increase the truth value, trustworthiness (consistency), and applicability of my study. The truth value of the study was increased through my maintenance of a reflective journal in which I documented my personal experiences and perspectives; the willingness of all eight participants to share their experiences openly in depth; the use of rich, thick description of the participants’ experiences; and inviting the participants to comment on the findings of the study and the themes that emerge. Next, trustworthiness, or consistency, was increased by clearly explaining the research process undertaken for the study and the themes that may emerge from the participants’ interviews. Then, applicability was increased due to the fact that the additional five participants do not work or reside in Northwest Georgia; one of them lives in a state in the Southwest region of the country while another participant lives in a state in the northern Midwest region of the country; seven of the eight participants teach students in multiple grades; one of the
participants is an adaptive physical education teacher who teaches physical education to middle school students with a variety of physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. This diverse needs, ages, grades, abilities, and geographic locations of these students bespoke of the potential for the findings and emergent themes of this study to be applicable to other contexts, settings, and groups.

Additionally, I used the following forms of triangulation in my study:

1. Triangulation of qualitative sources: Consistency will be reached across interviewees’ answers to the semi-structured interview. The emerging themes will provide further evidence of consistency across interviewees’ answers.

2. Member checking: Researcher will allow each of the eight participants to review the findings for accuracy and feedback.

3. Peer debriefer: A peer debriefer will be afforded the opportunity to assess any potential biases, perspectives, or assumptions the researcher may have taken for granted, as well as test an defend emergent themes that they may find reasonable and plausible.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS/FINDINGS

The rationale of this study was to explore the individual viewpoints and gain an understanding of how Black male special education teachers perceive their nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs; their dependence on fictive kinship support systems; and the “individual tax” placed on them. Subsequently, from the knowledge gleaned from this rationale and the results of this study, a proposal for creating a Summer-long Bridge Program for Black male high school seniors in Utah was created. The Black male high school seniors will be viewed as incoming prospective Black male teachers, from one viewpoint, given that the faculty and staff serving in the program were all educators and seek to provide the program participants with an awareness of the need for more Black males to choose to be educators both in the American K-12 teacher workforce and on the collegiate-level given their cultural match with Black male students and their positive influence on all students despite their ethnicity (Halpin et al., 2016; Lynn et al., 2002). The faculty and staff also seek to provide the program participants with an awareness of the intrinsic rewards of being a teacher or serving in some other capacity in the education arena. From the other viewpoint, the faculty and staff will assist the program participants who express no interest in being a teacher with developing an awareness of what they are passionate about and interested in regarding potential their future careers and their corresponding major of study in college. During this process, the faculty, staff, and peer mentors will advise and mentor the program participants.
I interviewed eight Black male special education teachers with open-ended questions that fostered in-depth and open dialogue about what they perceived their responsibilities to be in the classroom with their students versus any nuanced perceptions their colleagues and administrators perceived may have regarding the responsibilities of Black male special education teachers in the classroom; what, if any, effect did their lived experiences have on their pedagogy, the expectations they have for their students, and how they relate to their students; how their chosen identities were viewed and respected by their students and coworkers; and what unique needs they felt that experienced, whether or not their needs were being met by their jobs, and, if not, what do they suggest their coworkers and administrators could do to meet their needs. I utilized emergent thematic coding for descriptive analysis. Through content analysis of the transcribed interviews and fictive kinship narratives, five distinct themes emerged across all eight interviews. The same five themes plus two additional themes emerged across all eight fictive kinship narratives. I achieved answers to the research questions through the interviews, fictive kinship narratives, and content analysis. Data analysis of the interviews and fictive kinship narratives was conducted by hand and took place between November 2019 and January 2020.

The Summer Bridge Program will be facilitated by Black male faculty, staff, and peer mentors at the university where I work. The participants will be Black males who will rising seniors in high school during Summer 2020. They will receive anticipatory advising, strategic mentoring, personal development, socioemotional development, academic instruction, and community service potentially resulting in increased academic
self-efficacy and academic success. The intent of the program will be two-fold: (1.) view the program participants as potential teacher candidates and make them aware of the need for more Black males as teachers on all levels of education, as well as the intrinsic rewards of teaching and/or serving in some other area of education; and (2.) assisting the program participants who do not express an interest in becoming a teacher with identifying their passions and interests regarding their potential future college majors and careers. The Black faculty, staff, and peer mentors will share their cultural wealth and social support with the participants and afford themselves the opportunity to develop fictive kinships with the participants.

**Presentation of Data**

In this chapter, I provide an inclusive depiction of this research. I discuss the findings in alignment with each research question. The themes will be delineated by the structure of the research questions and will be described through deliberately selected text from the coded interview and fictive kinship narrative transcripts. My research questions were as follows:

1. What experiences constitute the invisible tax that Black male educators pay?
2. What supports mitigate the taxation?

Eight Black male special education teachers were interviewed. Overall, the sample size was appropriate to gather rich, thick descriptions of the perceived nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of Black male special education
teachers. The informed consent form, recruitment letter, and a stamped envelope was sent to each of the initial three participants by postal mail service on June 29, 2018. The participants were requested to return the consent form using the enclosed stamped envelope via postal mail service prior to the interview. Interviews were scheduled according to the participants availability and convenience. The individualized semi-structured interviews with the participants were conducted in their homes. The interviews included open-ended, fact-based and opinion-based questions in an attempt to understand their nuanced responsibilities, lived realities, identities, and needs. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. With their permission, the investigator recorded the meeting with a recording app on his cell phone while interviewing the participants in-person. Afterwards, each participant was sked to complete a fictive kinship narrative and to submit to the researcher one week later via email. All participants complied with the request within the time frame provided. Transcription and coding of the interview and fictive kinship narrative took place over the course of a six-week period from August 2018 to mid-October 2018.

Each of the participants presented as willing to participate, articulate, and engaging during the interviews. During the three in-person interviews, the participants exhibited good posture, consistent attentiveness, good eye contact, and normal voice tone throughout the interviews. They were all dressed in casual attire. During the Zoom and Skype interviews, the participants also presented as willing to participate, articulate, and engaging during the interviews.
Based on the data collected from the answers to the questions posed in the interviews and social support described in the fictive kinship narratives, seven distinct themes emerged during the coding process that followed the transcription phase. The following themes emerged resultant of the content analysis and emergent thematic coding of the interviews and fictive kinship narratives:

- Nuanced responsibilities
- Lived experiences
- Specific needs
- Motivation
- Recruitment and retention
- Transformational leadership
- Mentorship

Each teacher’s interview responses were broken down into interview extracts, in vivo codes, and emergent themes in order to gain insight into their perceptions of their nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs. Next, each teacher’s fictive kinship narratives were broken down into narrative extracts, in vivo codes, and emergent themes in order to gain insight into their fictive kinship support systems.

Table 2

*Principal Interview Themes*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Coded Extractions</th>
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<td>Nuanced Responsibilities</td>
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Table 2 cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Coded Extractions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Lived Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific Needs</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and Retention</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Themes (in the same extraction)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 1**

**In what ways does the invisible tax levied on Black male special education teachers deter them from entering the profession?**

All eight participants described several key factors that were resultant of the invisible tax levied on them and how this tax deters potential Black male special education teacher candidates enter into the profession. The participants described the various responsibilities that their jobs demanded, as well as the nuanced responsibilities perceived by their students, coworkers, and administrators. They also described the various roles they have to play in the classroom in order to reach their students, establish and maintain rapport with them, acknowledge and honor the diversity among their
students and coworkers, and help their students get a point where they are willing and
eager to learn.

Regarding his nuanced responsibilities and roles, BMSPED #1 stated, “I am looked
upon and perceived to be a disciplinarian for students of color, as well as all students in
my class and building.” Similarly, BMSPED #8 purported, “They expect us to be able
to tame those kids with the firm fist because that's what they see us as.” BMSPED #5
used a superhero analogy and proposed, “Either you are going to be a Superman,
because you’re able to block everything out and save everyone faster than a speeding
bullet. Or, they want you to be a Spiderman because you’re able to maneuver through
obstacles, and you can get kids caught up in your web of greatness.” BMSPED #4
discussed the roles he has to play in order to best serve his students. He claimed,
“Because most of our kids, I said earlier, have been rejected and abandoned by their
fathers. I play the role of the absent father. I play the role of the uncle. I play the role
of the grandfather. I play the role as a counselor in the life of the children. But, these
kids…I must gain their trust for them to open up to me. By doing so, once they open up
to me, then I can work with them and make a difference in their life.” Also, according to
BMSPED #2, “I believe if a student walks through the door that we should provide them
with all the tools and resources that we can provide in order for them to succeed.”

In continued alignment with addressing their nuanced responsibilities and roles, the
participants discussed their passion for helping students learn, achieve their academic
and behavioral goals, improve their self-esteem and self-efficacy, and develop a sense of
agency. They all denied favoritism towards any particular student or groups of students,
but they admitted that their lived experiences helped them to identify with and easily establish rapport with their students of color since they shared similar cultural experiences, living environments, and cultural expectations. BMSPED #1 stated that he had a passion for “helping others to not allow a disability or diagnosis to define their identity,” whereas BMSPED #3 stated that he had a passion for teaching students who have “a chip on their shoulders” because “they are geared more toward being successful in the classroom.” BMSPED #1 also stated, “I feel as if the students of color are more open to receive redirection and seek to understand educational and life lessons more from someone who looks like them and have experienced similar upbringing.” BMSPED #4 stated that he has a passion for making “a difference in the life of our young scholars,” and BMSPED #5 reported that he has a passion for helping Black youth who are “misunderstood” and “frustrated” with the educational process and how their predominantly White teachers and principals view them and treat them.

Each of the participants believed their responsibilities and roles were further exacerbated by the dearth of Black male special education teachers in their respective schools and nationwide. They all described similar barriers to recruiting and retaining Black male special education teachers. Per BMSPED #8, “Just like the Army recruits, just like anybody else recruits for their career, there should be somebody recruiting the Black men to be educators and special educators.” BMSPED #2 suggested, “I think if we’re honest about having more Black males in education, and special education specifically, we have to truly recruit and come up with a recruiting strategy
BMSPED #5 stated, “I’m very confident in my ability to lure people, but I couldn’t lure a lot of Black men into special education because really the schools are not built to support special educators.” In an effort to appeal to Black men’s sense of pride and their warrior mentality, BMSPED #5 went on to say, “And letting them know that this is a warrior’s field. If you’re interested in being a warrior, this is a truly warrior’s field.” Regarding low pay and other barriers, BMSPED #2 stated, “For so many Black males, their experience with the educational system was not good, uh, combined with low pay compared to other professions and a lack of recruitment.”

Regarding their special needs, the lack of professional development that meets their unique needs was a concern for all participants. As Black males teaching special education, they all learned that they have scant fellow Black male special education teachers with whom to discuss the social-emotional challenges that they individually face and to develop a culturally competent space for themselves to reflect on their pedagogical efforts toward student learning. The participants viewed all other Black male special education teachers, as well as Black male general education teachers as intellectual peers who would be able to teach each other culturally sustaining curriculum and learn from each other, if given the opportunity. BMSPED #1 asserted that the “one size fits all” approach to professional development is ineffective and should tailored to fit the needs of the diverse student population being served in special education, as well as the Black male special education teachers who are teaching them. BMSPED #5 argued, “They don’t let the professionals control the professional development. They
tell us. They instruct us. Sometimes the data has no reference to the IEPs. What schools worry about is not always what the special educator worries about.” He then followed up with a question regarding the lack of professional development that meets his needs. He asked, “If you’re not responding to my necessary needs, how can you keep me as a professional?” Additionally, BMSPED #8 addressed the issue in realistic terms and claimed, “And you know, when they come up with these professional developments, they are talking about Cosby show type kids instead of addressing what would be effective with kids who had parents who are not at home, parents in and out of jail, or no food at home, or you know, kids coming to school with clothes ain't washed.” Lastly, BMSPED #7 referred to the lack of cultural competency available in the professional development that he has received when he posited, “I think that they address a template of a student or an ideal of a student, but that student doesn't have special needs and that student probably is not of color.”

Another factor was their intrinsic motivation to remain in the special education field despite the low pay and other challenges. For BMSPED #1, the “school-to-prison pipeline, and those of the system who support it, motivate me to give a greater effort to reach students of all race, color, or creed of whom their circumstances have led them to the cracks.” He went on to declare, “I am inspired to end the chain of recycling broken homes and hopefully lay a foundation so that my kids can begin the construction of a kingdom for the (our) family and those to come.” BMSPED #1 was motivated due to the dearth of Black male special education teachers and stated, “An African American male in the field of education is not present in an abundance in urban communities.
across the nation. Our youth are not extrinsically motivated or even giving the inkling that it is relevant or a desirable profession.” BMSPED #6 reported that he “fell in love with education in terms of just the impact that I had on those kids.” Comparatively, BMSPED #4 asserted, “For me, as a Black man, I believe it’s my obligation and my responsibility to our young children to make a difference in their lives…to have an impact in their lives.”

Furthermore, some of the participants were motivated by the transformational leadership that they observed or received from others. BMSPED #1 gave honor to fathers of color and recognized his fictive kinship with them “as a Black father inspired by all fathers of color who take on the responsibility of being present full-time to lead their kids by example.” BMSPED #8 revered the transformational leadership exhibited by his Black male principal and reported, “He was influential because he showed us that Black men can be leaders.” Also, BMSPED #7 shared, “I had some teachers, coaches, friends, and professors who were great leaders and had a positive influence on me and mentored me at times in my life.”

Regarding their lived experiences, BMSPED #1 posited, “I feel as if the students of color are more open to receive redirection and seek to understand educational and life lessons more from someone who looks like them and have experienced similar upbringing.” BMSPED #2 provided a corresponding answer by stating, “And so, I think for many Black males establishing relationships with students comes easily due to background and experiences.” In reference to prior examples, BMSPED #3 reported, “I didn't have a Black male teacher growing up, but I think if I did, I would have looked up
to him and would have tried to follow his example.” In a similar vein, BMSPED #4 stated, “When I grew up in Africa, most of my teachers were Black men. My father was an educator. He was a teacher. He was a university professor. So, I grew up with men teaching me. Black men teaching me. Even when I came to the United States, most of my professors were Black men also. So, I'm used to being taught by Black males.”

BMSPED #5 discussed the cultural connection between Black male special education teachers and Black male students by stating, “Um, so, do I think that uh, ethnicity has an impact on success? Of course. Because it's a reference tool. You know…we have something in common.” Comparatively, BMSPED #6 asserted, “When you're able to relate to somebody and see them, and in your same eye, in your same color, then things are a little different.” Correspondingly, BMSPED #7 posited, “I think that as children, we look for people that look like us to pattern our lifestyles after or to set our goals behind.” Lastly, BMSPED #8 claimed, “Because they feel like, ok, well this Black man, nine times out of ten, he went through something hard in his life to make it here, to be able to teach me, to be able to be in front of me, to be able to have graduated from college or whatever. So, the struggle that he went through, if he made it, then I might be able to listen to him because he has a message that will help me make it.”

All participants expressed a desire to receive strategic, culturally competent mentoring from other Black male special education teachers. BMSPED #7 stated, “Additionally, I had some teachers, coaches, friends, and professors who were great leaders and had a positive influence on me and mentored me at times in my life.” BMSPED #3 reported, “At the time, the 100 Black Men was starting a mentor
program for troubled youth. I was lucky enough to be a part of the initial mentoring program. During that time, (name of mentor) went above and beyond to make sure we had every opportunity to be successful young men. The saying, ‘JUST SAVE ONE’ means a lot to me because of that reason, and I thank (name of mentor) for giving me the opportunity to become a productive citizen.” Also, BMSPED #2 discussed a former teacher who he viewed as a “mother figure” and his “greatest mentor in education.”

Each participant completed a fictive kinship narrative, and they all reported relying heavily on the social support they receive from their fictive kin. However, only BMSPED #2 mentioned fictive kin directly when he stated, “My life as an adult male had relied primarily on my fictive family. Several members of the 100 Black Men have clearly become fictive relatives. My fictive family is more influential and closer than my biological family.” Based on their fictive kinship narratives and interviews, all of the participants seemed to achieve navigational capital as evidenced by them being able to move through social institutions that were not established with consideration regarding People of Color; social capital as evidenced by each of the participants being able to establish and maintain social networks and community resources that provide effectual, emotional support to them; familial capital as evidenced by each of the participants acquisition of cultural knowledge that involves an awareness of community history, implicit and explicit memory, and cultural intuition; and resistant capital as evidenced by all of the participants exhibiting antagonistic behavior that confronts inequality when necessary.
Research Question 2

What supports mitigate the taxation?

To lessen the taxation imposed on each of the participants by the “invisible tax,” they each completed a fictive kinship narrative, and they all reported relying heavily on the social support and cultural capital they received from their fictive kin. However, only BMSPED #2 mentioned fictive kin directly when he stated, “My life as an adult male had relied primarily on my fictive family. Several members of the 100 Black Men have clearly become fictive relatives. My fictive family is more influential and closer than my biological family.”

During the interviews, some of the participants expressed how changes to the professional development they received and the support they received from coworkers and administrations helped mitigate the taxation placed upon them by the “invisible tax.” BMSPED #1 stated, “This will provide faculty and staff to some degree of how to more effectively approach and address every student in a fair and just manner. Also, it will help faculty and staff get away from the one size fits all approach to learning…” BMSPED #2 reported, “I'm very supported by my administration.” Per BMSPED #3, “And, as a Black male, they are going above and beyond that I have everything that I need to be successful in the classroom.” BMSPED #4 vocalized that he feels appreciated by his administration when he stated, “We have a new administrator, and I think he likes what I'm doing.” Similarly, BMSPED #7 claimed, “I feel like they're open to the needs of myself as a teacher and the students in the program.” Likewise, BMSPED #8 reported, “So, the administration in our special education team does look
for me, in different fashions, to do different things, as a Black man.” In conclusion and
on a personal level, BMSPED #6 declared, “…this is what I love to do.”

In the fictive narratives, the participants discussed how their lived experiences, their
intrinsic motivation, the mentorship they have received, and the transformational
leadership that they were exposed to helped mitigate the “invisible tax.” Regarding their
lived experiences, BMSPED #2 explained how certain fictive kin (i.e., 1st Petty Officer
and a Human Resources Officer in the Navy, mother-figure and mentor, supervisor and
coworkers, friends, members of the 100 Black Men, Inc.) provided him with ongoing
support, advice, assistance, and acceptance since his adolescence. He stated he feels
closer to his fictive kinship family than he does his biological family. BMSPED #3
reported how he would get suspended from school on almost a weekly basis until one of
his childhood football coaches became a father-figure to him and remained in that role
throughout the college years of BMSPED #3. BMSPED #5 explained how one of his
former elementary school teachers offered to tutor him after school and how they formed
a genuine bond that continues to this day. Lastly, BMSPED #8 discussed how he
attended all-Black elementary, middle, and high schools where he was surrounded by
great Black teachers, coaches, and school counselors throughout his K-12 school years.

Transformational leadership was also instrumental in mitigating the “invisible tax”
the participants experienced. BMSPED #1 noted that he has been inspired by all fathers
of color who take on the responsibility of being present full-time to lead their children by
example. BMSPED #2 discussed how a particular 1st Petty Officer became a father-
figure to him and exhibited transformational leadership, and the Human Resources
Director at that time became a big brother figure to him while BMSPED #2 served in the Navy. BMSPED #3 reported that a member of the 100 Black Men, Inc. exhibited transformational leadership to him and his family by making sure that the family of BMSPED #3 had food to eat, provided transportation as needed, and provided wise advice and guidance even unto this day. BMSPED #5 explained how a teacher exhibited transformational leadership by volunteering to stay after school to tutor him and by consistently modeling professional, yet caring, behavior daily. BMSPED #7 posited that he had had several teachers, coaches, friends, and professors who were great leaders and had a positive influence on him. Finally, BMSPED #8 described how his elementary school principal wore a suit every day and conducted himself in an ultra-professional manner. The principal was influential because he showed BMSPED #8 and his peers that Black men can be leaders and that Black men can be strong and caring. He was well respected by the faculty and staff. The principal was reportedly a firm, fair, assertive disciplinarian who earned everyone’s respect.

Mentorship also mitigated the “invisible tax” for the participants. BMSPED #2 reported how his 1st Petty Officer and the Human Resources Director in the Navy mentored him and became a father-figure and big brother to him, respectively. BMSPED #3 told how a member of the 100 Black Men, Inc. mentored him and assisted him in joining the Young 100 Mentoring Program. BMSPED #5 discussed how his single mother inspired him and motivated him to be the best person that he could be and how she led by example. BMSPED #6 stated that his mother, grandmother, and various teachers and coaches mentored him throughout his life and warned him that society will
try to paint him and all other Black males with a “broad brush” as a monolithic unit. BMSPED #7 described how several teachers, coaches, friends, family members, and peers served as mentors for him throughout his life and continue to mentor him currently. Finally, BMSPED #8 discussed how his elementary school and high school football coaches motivated and mentored him throughout his K-12 school years and his collegiate years.

In a similar vein, the participants’ intrinsic motivation mitigated the “invisible tax” that they endured. BMSPED #1 reported that his students and the educational system motivated him to believe that change must come from within the system in order to help the youth reach their full potential. He later asserted that the school-to-prison pipeline, and school administrators and teachers who support it, motivated him to give a greater effort to reach all of the students whose circumstances have caused them to fall through the cracks in the system. Then, BMSPED #1 reported that his wife and children motivate him to be the best husband, father, and special education teacher that he can be. He further stated that he was inspired to end the chain of recycling broken homes and that he hoped to lay a foundation so that his children would be able to construct a kingdom for their family and the families to come. BMSPED #2 asserted that he was motivated and compelled to invest in his students, their families, and their communities beyond his teacher role. BMSPED #5 discussed how his mother inspired him and motivated him to be the best person that he can be and to be passionate about life. Finally, BMSPED #6 reported that he was motivated by an English teacher who told him that he would not make a “B” in her class, and she reportedly told him this in front of the
class resulting in his classmates laughing at him. He proved her wrong at the end of the semester by working hard and earning a “B” in her class, after all.

Furthermore, based on their fictive kinship narratives and their interviews, all of the participants seemed to achieve navigational capital as evidenced by them being able to thrive in social institutions that were not established with the presence, needs, and desires of People of Color in mind. One such institution was school which each of the participants experienced as a student. At the time when the first American schools were created, White males were the original student group that school administrators focused on providing an education based on the societal and cultural norms of that era. Each of the participants successfully completed K-12 education and later earned a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s degree. One participant had also earned an Educational Doctorate (Ed.D.) degree. All of the participants completed the K-12 education and college education in a timely manner and without incident. Comparatively, schools also served as institutions for employment for the participants, and, akin to the societal and cultural norms of past eras, the initial school teachers were not People of Color during the era when the first American schools were established. They were White women and men. Therefore, even though the school-related profession of the teaching was not established with People of Color in mind, all of the participants have effectively served as Black male special education teachers for the past several years, and they are still teaching. Another example of an institution that was established without People of Color was middle-income housing. For many years, Black people were often denied access to middle-income housing prior to and even during the Civil Rights Movement via various
discriminatory methods including, but not limited to, being denied approval for housing loans and enacting terroristic threats and harassment. Many White middle-income homeowners believed People of Color would lower their property values, exhibit undesirable and potentially dangerous and/or criminal behaviors, etc. In the past decades, middle-income housing was not developed with People of Color in mind as potential, desirable homeowners alongside their potential White neighbors. The self-reports of all of the participants revealed that they reside in middle-income housing with their families.

Each of the participants gained social capital as evidenced by being able to establish and maintain social networks and community resources that provide effectual, emotional support. All of the participants mentioned friends, members of organizations, coworkers, and other fictive kin who provided emotional and social support over the years. Participants expressed that the support they received was encouraging, inspiring, and helpful.

The participants gained familial capital as evidenced by each of them acquiring cultural knowledge that involves an awareness of community history, implicit and explicit memory, and cultural intuition. Each of the participants was connected socially and familially to the communities in which they served, and they were knowledgeable of the history of those communities and the schools in which they served. No impairment in the participants’ implicit and explicit memory was reported nor observed. Also, the participants were able to express and draw from their personal experiences, professional
experiences, and collective experiences as Black male special education teachers, Black fathers and father-figures, and Black males, in general.

Additionally, participants gained resistant capital as evidenced by all of them exhibiting antagonistic behavior, when necessary, that confronted inequality. All of the participants stated they were advocates for their students—and for themselves and their coworkers—and were willing to address issues of injustice, inequality, misunderstanding, and misinformation when necessary. BMSPED #8 explained how he addressed the inequality demonstrated in how one of his Black male students was disciplined by the administration harshly for a minor behavior that is listed in his IEP while a White female student was not disciplined at all for exhibiting defiant and aggressive behaviors on multiple occasions. BMSPED #4 expressed his concern about the inequality in standardized testing on Black students. Per BMSPED #4, all of his Black students (along with all of his other students) are tested by White school psychologists who, in his opinion, are not culturally competent, and their interpretations of the testing data is sometimes culturally insensitive and occasionally inaccurate, per BMSPED #4.

Interaction between the Research and the Context

The school settings in which participants worked were a good fit for the study since they afforded the participants opportunities to utilize their skillsets in teaching their diverse special education students and provided them with the freedom to present with their identities and specific needs. The participants expressed no resistance to participating in the study and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their stories. Their shared stories provided inspiration for developing a proposal for a
Summer-long Bridge Program from Black male high school seniors under the notion that some of them may be prospective special education and general education teachers. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of the eight Black male special education teachers, and the objective was achieved through the content analysis of their semi-structured interviews and their fictive kinship narratives.

Content analysis revealed all participants had a strong dependence on fictive kinship support systems based on their fictive kinship narratives and the themes that emerged. They each felt they would not be able to survive in their oftentimes chaotic, undervalued, and ultra-demanding jobs without the social support and cultural wealth that their fictive kinships provided them. Although they each possessed aspirational capital (resilience), navigational capital (ability to move through social institutions), social capital (social networks and resources), and familial capital (cultural knowledge), they desired to share those forms of capital with other Black male special education teachers and establish relational agency with them. Moll (2015) posited that relational agency refers to the ability to work friends, family colleagues, students, and other community allies to gain access to resources that enable one to resolve existing pedagogical restraints and foster desired change. Once relational agency was established with other Black male special education teachers, as well as other Black male general education teachers, the Black male special education teachers were able to exchange their funds of knowledge and funds of identity with each other as they built each other’s cultural wealth.
According to Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005), funds of knowledge (FoK) are “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 72). The funds of knowledge concept was initially introduced into the literature as a means of describing the manner in which Mexican families who were deemed either working class or economically disparaged utilized their social networks and cultural wealth to endure their socioeconomic challenges (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Prior to the concept being fully actualized, the foundation was partially laid by Wolf (1966) who described funds as knowledge which could be bartered as a form of currency exchange among households and social networks.

The use of knowledge as funds to be bartered in exchange for increased access to and navigability through social networks, as well as being bartered within the household and with other households, relates funds of knowledge to both social capitl and cultural capital (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Regarding social capitl, funds of knowledge can be used as currency to barter with in order to gain access to more resources via increased access to social networks and members of other households (Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992; Wolf, 1966). Given that funds of knowledge are “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 72), funds of knowledge relate to cultural capital based on the hegemonic views of the dominant
society on the value or worth of the funds (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), thereby, opening the door to inequality (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011).

We live, however, in an “identitized” world (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 37) that abounds in resources that people can use to form their identities as they establish and exchange funds of knowledge. Per Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), “funds of knowledge are repositories of identity” (p. 37) that are accessible to people, and “funds of knowledge are funds of identity when people use them to define themselves” (p. 37). To that end, “funds of identity are historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 37).

Exploring relational agency, funds of knowledge, and funds of identity were essential to this study because all three concepts related to each other and were utilized by the eight Black male special education teachers who participated in the study. Three members of the national sample worked in the same school system were able to develop relational agency with each other. They were able to exchange their funds of knowledge and funds of identity with each other as they built each other’s cultural wealth. The other five participants lived in different cities in different regions of the country and expressed a desire to develop relational agency with other Black male special education teachers. Oftentimes, though, they found themselves to be the only Black male special education teacher in their school and/or school system. Therefore, they were unable to exchange their funds of knowledge and funds of identity with each other in order to build each other’s cultural wealth.
How the Research Impacted the Context

The results and the transcripts were shared with each participant for their review and suggestions for revisions, if needed. Each participant stated that the transcripts were accurate and agreed with the themes that emerged. All of the participants expressed a hope that this study brings forth a greater awareness of the dearth of Black male special education teachers, the barriers that exist in recruiting and retaining Black male special education teachers, and nuanced responsibilities and specific needs that have. A peer debriefer was also afforded the opportunity to review the study and the transcripts, and she found no biases, taken for granted assumptions, or inconsistencies between the transcripts and the content analysis. Overall, the research was perceived as enlightening and useful to the participants, the peer debriefer, and this researcher. Suggestions for further study would include increasing the sample size by inviting more Black male special education teachers from across the nation to participate. Being that all of the participants taught in public schools, it would be interesting to invite Black male special education teachers who work in private schools, charter schools, and other non-public school settings (i.e., psychiatric hospital school settings, therapeutic residential program school settings, juvenile detention center school settings, group home school settings, court-ordered boot camp school settings, etc.) to participate in the study along with Black male special education teachers who work in public school settings and compare the data provided by them. Including other male special education teachers of color (i.e., Latinx, Native American, Asian, etc.) would add to the authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study. Finally, comparing the nuanced responsibilities, lived
experiences, identities, and needs of Black male special education teachers with the
nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of Black female special
education teachers would greatly add to the literature, as well.

**Summary**

In summary, the results of the study answered the research questions and provided
greater insight into the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs
of eight Black male special education teachers. Each participant felt that recruitment
and retention of future Black male special education teachers is urgently needed, and
they provided several suggestions on how to achieve this goal. However, they also
discussed some of the potential barriers that seemingly have prevented the purposeful,
aggressive recruitment and retention of Black male special education teachers. Per their
interview responses, all of the participants were intrinsically motivated to remain in their
jobs to help teach their diverse students and serve as an advocate for them, among the
several roles that they each play in their classrooms on a consistent basis. The
participants’ lived experiences and fatherly roles—both at home and in the classroom—
made it easier for them to gain the respect and obedience of their students, especially
their male students of color. Despite their specific needs not always being
acknowledged or met, they all felt that it was their responsibility to reach and teach all of
their students equally, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability,
ESL status, citizenship status, or learning abilities. They all were disappointed and
frustrated with the lack of purposeful, targeted, and aggressive recruitment of potential
Black male special educators, and they offered several suggestions on the topic. Finally,
each of the participants expressed a deep need of and appreciation for their fictive kinship support systems.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The eight Black male special education teachers who participated in the study expressed gladness to have their voices heard on the topics covered, an urgent need for school administrators to purposefully and aggressive recruit more Black males as teacher candidates for special education, a selfless desire to reach and teach their students, and feeling that they were not—and still are not--properly trained to teach the diverse special education students entrusted to them. Each participant discussed how rare it was to discuss the needs and realities of Black male special education teachers and seemingly felt empowered and “heard” as they provided answers to the open-ended questions in the interviews and described their fictive kinships in their fictive kinship narratives. The more empowered and “heard” they felt, the more comfortable and open they each seemed to become throughout the interviews. Also, each of the participants felt that school administrators need to urgently ramp up their efforts to engage in purposeful, aggressive recruitment of more Black male special education teachers to assist with reaching and teaching the immense number of Black male students and other students of color receiving special education services. Per the participants, Black male special education teachers are presumably culturally competent and better equipped and able to relate to, reach, and teach the aforementioned students since Black male special education teachers frequently have similar lived experiences and interests (i.e., music, sports, food, etc.) as their students of color. Additionally, the participants all stated that they were not fully informed about the true nature of special education beyond what they either learned in the college or university courses, what they already knew about
teaching in general, and what they gleaned from their own K-12 school experiences and life experiences. They each used these funds of knowledge and funds of identity to enable them to work effectively with their coworkers and school administrators and compassionately teach their students.

The results of the study provided insight into the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of the eight Black male special education teachers who participated in the study. According to the coded transcripts of the semi-structured interviews and fictive kinship narratives, seven overall themes emerged:

- Nuanced responsibilities
- Lived experiences
- Specific needs
- Motivation
- Recruitment and retention
- Transformational leadership
- Mentorship

In accordance with their interview responses, all of the participants were intrinsically motivated to teach and empower their students and to serve as an advocate for them despite the several other roles that they each fulfilled for their students and coworkers on a consistent basis. They each felt obligated yet happy to teach their students, and they all seemed to believe that special education teachers—despite their ethnicity and gender—should be genuine, open, honest, culturally competent, compassionate, creative, patient, encouraging, forgiving, stern, and consistent in order to be respected and
accepted by the diverse students in their classrooms. They each accepted the various roles that they had fulfill consistently for their students and coworkers, although they varied in manner in which they fulfilled those roles. The participants’ lived experiences, cultural competency, and cultural wealth were beneficial for the teachers as they established trusting relationships with their students, especially their male students of color who seemed to identify more with the Black male special education teachers than they did with their White teachers. Regarding their specific needs, the participants expressed a passion for their jobs and a desire to form fictive kinships with other Black male special education teachers while also participating in professional development with them. They all felt that they need racial affinity-based professional development and that the school systems do not provide it for them.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Extant Literature or Theories

The results of the study related closely to the extant literature. Being that all of the participants were Black males who had learned how to navigate their own educational processes and achieved the status and social capital that currently have, their journeys and abilities to overcome inopportunities can be related to Blackmaleness as described by James and Lewis (2014). Per James and Lewis, “Blackmaleness is both a personal journey and a social reality, tethering the life chances of Black males to an inescapable but navigable milieu of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunity that all Black males must masterfully traverse or face the certain consequences of disenfranchisement” (p. 105). In a similar vein, the participants in the study were able to avoid falling victim to Black male exceptionalism (Butler, 2013) while experiencing
various forms of structural racism (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016), Black misandry (Smith et al., 2016), stereotype threat (Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011), hopelessness, anger, being viewed as a problem instead of a virtuoso (James & Lewis, 2014), John Henryism (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), racial battle fatigue (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), and microaggressions which include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016). Furthermore, despite their lack of access to racial affinity-based professional development and, in some cases, understanding from their coworker and administrators, these Black Supermen (Pabon, 2016) have achieved aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, and familial capital (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015, p. 160) through their fictive kinships despite frequently bumping up against the White racial frame (Feagin, 2010b as cited in Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 64). They desired to share those forms of capital with other Black male special education teachers and establish relational agency with them. They also freely and unselfishly provided their students with appraisal support, emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015, p. 161).

**Discussion of Personal Lessons Learned**

I learned three personal lessons from this study. The first lesson I learned is that although all eight of the Black male special education teachers shared similar lived experiences, high levels of cultural competency, and intrinsic motivation, they still had find the wherewithal within themselves to continue to genuinely care about their jobs, passionately teach their students, and work collaboratively with their coworkers despite
their specific needs oftentimes not being met, receiving low pay, and fulfilling their nuanced responsibilities and multiple roles on a daily basis. Their selfless, tireless efforts were inspiring and encouraging. Each of the teachers were intrinsically motivated to keep teaching despite some of their specific needs being met, and they felt it is their duty and responsibilities to compassionately teach their students and serve as role models, father figures, advocates, and change agents in the lives of their students.

The second lesson I learned was the importance of fictive kinships, cultural wealth, social support, and the exchange of funds of knowledge and funds of identity. All of the participants in the study were raised in the Black communities, shared common lived experiences, and could benefited from the cultural wealth and social support provided by their fictive kinships. The three participants who worked in the same school system in Northwest Georgia were able to develop relational agency with each other, and they were able to exchange their funds of knowledge and funds of identity with each other as their built each other’s cultural wealth. The other five participants lived in different cities in different regions of the country and expressed a desire to develop relational agency with other Black male special education teachers. Oftentimes, though, they found themselves to be the only Black male special education teacher in their school and/or school system. Therefore, they were unable to exchange their funds of knowledge and funds of identity with each other in order to build each other’s cultural wealth.

The third lesson I learned was this study provided a much needed, long sought after voice to eight Black male special education teachers who, in some ways, felt voiceless in
the system. One participant expressed that he was glad to be asked to participate in the study because no one had asked him to provide his thoughts and feelings about being a Black male special education teacher. Other participants expressed their appreciation for allowing them to tell their story, and they hoped the study will not only add to the overall literature on Black special education teachers but also bring about much needed changes in the field.

**Implications for Practice**

The literature reinforced the results of the study. The participants in the study each had to traverse their own milieus of inopportunity as they embodied Blackmalenessness (James & Lewis, 2014). The participants reported encountering the confines of the White racial frame (Feagin, 2010b as cited in Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 64), not succumbing to imposter syndrome, and continuing to selflessly teach their students despite having to fulfill multiple roles and nuanced responsibilities. These “Black Supermen” (Pabon, 2016) utilize and exchange their funds of knowledge and funds of identity to establish relative agency with their coworkers and students. Their fictive kinships are essential for social support, and their cultural wealth continues to increase.

The study had a significant impact on the Black male special education teachers who participated in the study. Per their interview responses and fictive kinship narratives, all of the participants felt comfortable and accepted on their jobs, and they felt that they are making an impact on the lives of their students, as well as the lives of their students’ families and communities. They each felt that more Black male special education teachers are needed, and they suggested various purposeful, target, and aggressive
strategies for accomplishing that task. Also, most of the participants felt supported, appreciated, and understood by their coworkers and administrators.

This study will contribute to the literature on a variety of topics, such as Black male special education teachers, fictive kin, funds of knowledge, funds of identity, cultural wealth, types of capital, racial battle fatigue, Blackmaleness, Black male exceptionalism, and racial affinity-based professional development. It is my hope that the results of this study leads to further research on how to best address the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, needs, identities, and needs of Black male special education teachers.

Connections to Field of Study

The results of study aligned significantly with the extant literature. As stated previously, each of the participants was able to overcome the lack of opportunities that they were presented with in their lives as they learned to embrace their Blackmaleness and traverse and surmount the consequences of disenfranchisement (James & Lewis, p. 105). Each of the participants was able to thrive despite being deemed an endangered species as purported via Black male exceptionalism (Butler, 2013). The participants weathered various forms of structural racism (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016), Black misandry (Smith et al., 2016), stereotype threat (Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011), hopelessness, anger, being viewed as a problem instead of a virtuoso (James & Lewis, 2014), John Henryism (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), racial battle fatigue (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), and microaggressions (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016) while still remaining motivated to unselfishly serve their students and their families to the best of their abilities. Even with their lack of access to racial affinity-
based professional development and, in some cases, understanding from their coworker and administrators, these Black Supermen (Pabon, 2016) achieved aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, and familial capital (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015, p. 160) through their fictive kinships despite the perceived restrictions and oppressions of White racial frame (Feagin, 2010b as cited in Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 64). They desired to see more Black men recruited to be special education teachers, and they are willing to share their various forms of capital with them. They provided their students with appraisal support, emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015, p. 161) with only the desire to be respected for their efforts and presence.

**Lessons Learned**

I learned is that, despite the nuanced responsibilities and specific needs the participants experienced on their jobs, they were still intrinsically motivated to find the wherewithal within themselves to continue to genuinely care about their jobs, passionately teach their students, and work collaboratively with their coworkers despite their specific needs oftentimes not being met, receiving low pay, and fulfilling their nuanced responsibilities and multiple roles on a daily basis. I also learned about the importance of fictive kinships, cultural wealth, social support, and the exchange of funds of knowledge and funds of identity. Lastly, I learned that there is a need for Summer Bridge Programs for Black male students facilitated by Black male faculty, staff, and peer mentors. Black male students and other students of color often do not see faculty and staff of color which causes these students to be out of touch with faculty and staff of
color and to believe that faculty and staff of color do not exist (Hughes, 2010).

Therefore, the Black male faculty and staff serving in the Summer Bridge Program will provide the program participants with visibility and availability, as well as demonstrate for the program participants that a career in education is a viable career option for them. Additionally, the Black male faculty, staff, and peer mentors will serve as role models, anticipatory advisors, strategic mentors, and fictive kin for the all of the program participants, including the ones who do not express an interest in pursuing a college major in education nor a career in teaching.

Limitations

Despite the addition of five participants, the sample for the study was still small. There were only eight participants, and that was one limitation of the study. Another limitation of the study was that all of the participants were special education teachers who taught in public schools. No Black male special education teachers from private schools, charter schools, or other non-public schools were invited to participate in the study. Another limitation to the study was the lack of diversity among the male special education teachers who were invited to participate in the study. Only Black male special education teachers were invited to participate in the study due to the focus of the study being exclusively on Black male special education teachers. Additionally, one final limitation was the lack of comparison regarding the “individual tax” on Black female special education teachers versus the “individual tax” on Black male special education teachers.
**Recommendations**

I recommend include increasing the sample size by inviting more Black male special education teachers from across the nation to participate. Being that all of the participants taught in public schools, it would be interesting to invite Black male special education teachers who work in private schools, charter schools, and other non-public school settings (i.e., psychiatric hospital school settings, therapeutic residential program school settings, juvenile detention center school settings, group home school settings, court-ordered boot camp school settings, etc.) to participate in the study along with Black male special education teachers who work in public school settings and compare the data provided by them. Including other male special education teachers of color (i.e., Latinx, Native American, Asian, etc.) would add to the authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study. Finally, comparing the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of Black male special education teachers with the nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs of Black female special education teachers would greatly add to the literature, as well.

**Closing Thoughts**

It takes an intrinsically motivated, culturally competent, well-trained, not-easily-offended, and compassionate person to be an effective special education teacher. Given the exorbitant number of special education referrals for Black male students and other male students of color, Black male special education teachers are an invaluable source of knowledge, wisdom, lived experiences, and discipline in their classrooms. As they display transformational leadership in their own ways, they, too, have oftentimes been
inspired by a mentor or another transformational leader who had a significant impact on their lives. Despite the dearth of Black male special education teachers in the American K-12 teacher workforce, they are not deterred by the nuanced responsibilities and multiple roles they have to fulfill each day. These Black Supermen are in need of ongoing racial affinity-based professional development, higher wages, increased administrative support, and fictive kinships. After completing this study, I feel that I am better informed about their nuanced responsibilities, lived experiences, identities, and needs. Furthermore, I learned how the proposed Summer Bridge Program is supported by the literature. For example, Scott (2016) posited, in part, that teacher education programs should collaborate with high schools, other colleges and universities, and local and state organizations to encourage more Black males to become teachers.

Comparatively and in alignment with Lewin’s (1946) triad of action, research, and training, the Summer Bridge Program will seek to promote personal, academic, and socioemotional development from the Black male experiences presented by the participants, faculty, staff, and peer mentors, as well as afford them the opportunity to establish fictive kinships and mentoring relationships. Finally, James and Lewis (2014) argued that Black males must seek out “difference makers” who can serve as mentors and social support for them. In the Summer Bridge Program, the Black male faculty, staff, and peer mentors will serve as “difference makers” to the Black male high school seniors by providing them with anticipatory advising, strategic mentoring from the faculty and staff, and peer mentoring from the peer mentors.
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APPENDIX A

20 RECORD OF STUDY SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
THAT WERE ASKED (SELECTED FROM AN ORIGINAL LIST OF 37 QUESTIONS)

1. What was your personal motivation to enter the special education teaching profession?

2. Do you believe the Black male is motivated extrinsically, intrinsically, or a combination of both to enter the special education teaching profession? Explain.

3. In your opinion, what will it take to motivate more young Black males to enter and remain in the special education teaching profession?

4. In your opinion, what are the reasons for an underrepresentation of Black males in the special education teaching profession?

5. Does background and life experiences factor into Black males either deciding to enter or not enter the special education teaching profession? Explain.

6. On October 5, 2016, Science News published an article entitled, “Students of all races prefer teachers of color, finds study.” What are your thoughts about those findings and the theory that Black male teachers have a more positive impact on the academic performance of Black male students than do non-Black male teachers?

8. During your personal experience in school, did you ever have a Black male teacher, and, if so, what type of impact did he or they have on your academic performance and self-efficacy? If you did not have the opportunity to have a Black male teacher, what type of impact do you think he would have had on your school experience?

10. In your opinion, do you feel the criticism of the recruitment efforts by the educational system to get more Black males into the profession is justified? Explain.

11. In your opinion, what strategies and techniques can be used to recruit more Black males into the special education teaching profession?

12. In your opinion, does the professional development you receive in special education meet the unique needs you have as a Black male special education teacher? If so, how does it meet your needs? If not, what suggestions do you have for improving the professional development you receive so that it will meet the unique needs that you have?
13. Do you feel that I as a Black male special education teacher you have unique needs and experiences that your White coworkers and administrators do not have? Explain.

14. If you could make a suggestion to your school system’s Board of Education on how to specifically address your unique needs and experiences, what would you suggest the Board should consider changing and implementing, and how would you suggest the Board undertakes these changes?

15. Lynn et al. (2002) found that the Black male teachers in their study considered themselves to be change agents, role models, and father figures for their students. Do you ever consider yourself to be a change agent, role model, and/or father figure for your students? Explain.

16. What identity or identities do you present to your coworkers, administrators, and students on your job (i.e., Black cisgender male, Black transgender male, etc.)? Do you feel that your coworkers, administrators, and students respect your identity or identities? Explain.

17. Do you feel appreciated by your colleagues? Explain.

18. Do you feel as if you are perceived to be and/or expected to be the “expert” on issues regarding students of color? Explain.

19. Do you feel as if you are perceived to be and/or expected to be the disciplinarian for students of color? Explain.

20. If you could offer suggestions to your school system on how to specifically address your unique needs, lived experiences, nuanced responsibilities, and identity, what would you suggest the Board should consider changing and implementing, and how would you suggest the Board undertakes these changes?

Thank you for participating in this interview. As a follow-up to this interview, I will ask you to develop a fictive kinship diagram to acknowledge the people who you, as a Black male special education teacher and father, deem as supports for you.
APPENDIX B

RECORD OF STUDY SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was your personal motivation to enter the special education teaching profession?

2. Do you believe the Black male is motivated extrinsically, intrinsically, or a combination of both to enter the special education teaching profession? Explain.

3. In your opinion, what will it take to motivate more young Black males to enter and remain in the special education teaching profession?

4. In your opinion, what are the reasons for an underrepresentation of Black males in the special education teaching profession?

5. Does background and life experiences factor into Black males either deciding to enter or not enter the special education teaching profession? Explain.

6. On October 5, 2016, *Science News* published an article entitled, “Students of all races prefer teachers of color, finds study.” What are your thoughts about those findings and the theory that Black male teachers have a more positive impact on the academic performance of Black male students than do non-Black male teachers?

8. During your personal experience in school, did you ever have a Black male teacher, and, if so, what type of impact did he or they have on your academic performance and self-efficacy? If you did not have the opportunity to have a Black male teacher, what type of impact do you think he would have had on your school experience?

10. In your opinion, do you feel the criticism of the recruitment efforts by the educational system to get more Black males into the profession is justified? Explain.

11. In your opinion, what strategies and techniques can be used to recruit more Black males into the special education teaching profession?

12. In your opinion, does the professional development you receive in special education meet the unique needs you have as a Black male special education teacher? If so, how does it meet your needs? If not, what suggestions do you have for improving the professional development you receive so that it will meet the unique needs that you have?

13. In your opinion, does the professional development you receive in special education adequately address the diverse needs of your multicultural students? If so, how does it address their diverse needs? If not, what suggestions do you have for improving the
professional development you receive so that it will better address the diverse needs of your multicultural students?

14. In your opinion, does the professional development you receive in special education adequately address the nuanced responsibilities that you are expected to fulfill on your job? If so, how does it address those responsibilities? If not, what suggestions do you have for improving the professional development you receive so that it will better address the nuanced responsibilities you are expected to fulfill on your job?

15. How do you define professional development?

16. What types of professional development have you had in the past?

17. Did you find the professional development you had in the past beneficial for the job you were working on at the time? If so, in what ways? If not, what do you feel was missing from the professional development opportunity that you needed to have gained?

18. What types of professional development opportunities have you been afforded since you have been teaching?

19. What types of professional development opportunities have you been afforded so far this year?

20. Do you feel that I as a Black male special education teacher you have unique needs and experiences that your White coworkers and administrators do not have? Explain

21. Do you feel the professional development you have received in past years specifically addressed your unique needs and experiences? Explain.

22. Do you feel the professional development you have received this school year specifically addressed your unique needs and experiences? Explain.

23. Describe what you think would be ideal professional development that would specifically address your unique needs and experiences.

24. If you could make a suggestion to your school system’s Board of Education on how to specifically address your unique needs and experiences, what would you suggest the Board should consider changing and implementing, and how would you suggest the Board undertakes these changes?

25. Do you feel that as a Black male special education teacher you have unique needs and experiences that your White coworkers and administrators do not have? Explain.
26. In your opinion, do your administrators and coworkers understand the nuanced responsibilities that you are faced with and expected to fulfill on your job? Explain.

27. Lynn et al. (2002) found that the Black male teachers in their study considered themselves to be change agents, role models, and father figures for their students. Do you ever consider yourself to be a change agent, role model, and/or father figure for your students? Explain.

28. What identity or identities do you present to your coworkers, administrators, and students on your job (i.e., Black cisgender male, Black transgender male, etc.)? Do you feel that your coworkers, administrators, and students respect your identity or identities? Explain.

29. Do you feel appreciated by your colleagues? Explain.

30. Do you feel that your White colleagues view you as an equal to them? Explain.

31. Do you feel that your White colleagues respect you and your pedagogical efforts? Explain.

32. Do you feel appreciated by the administrators at your school? Explain.

33. Do you feel that the administrators at your school respect you and your pedagogical efforts? Explain.

34. Do you feel as if you are perceived to be and/or expected to be the “expert” on issues regarding students of color? Explain.

35. Do you feel as if you are perceived to be and/or expected to be the disciplinarian for students of color? Explain.

36. If you could offer suggestions to your school system on how to specifically address your unique needs, lived experiences, nuanced responsibilities, and identity, what would you suggest the Board should consider changing and implementing, and how would you suggest the Board undertakes these changes?

37. Do you have any final comments, thoughts, or suggestions regarding Black males in the special education teaching profession?

Thank you for participating in this interview. As a follow-up to this interview, I will ask you to develop a fictive kinship diagram to acknowledge the people who you, as a Black male special education teacher and father, deem as supports for you.
A fictive kinship diagram or narrative describes the various forms of kinship obligations and relationships a person has with people who are not related to the person by blood, marriage, or adoption. You can construct either a fictive kinship diagram or a narrative. A fictive kinship narrative can be a short paragraph explaining all or several of the people (who are not your blood relatives) who have been influential in your life and career as a Black male special education teacher.
APPENDIX D

SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM DIAGRAM

Personal Development

Altruistic Community Service

Socioemotional Development

Academic Excellence