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Until superheroes learn how to use their power: Exploring the triple consciousness of African American male students identified as dis/abled

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UNTIL SUPERHEROES LEARN HOW TO USE THEIR POWER:
EXPLORING THE TRIPLE CONSCIOUSNESS OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS DIS/ABLED

by

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A Dissertation

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Dedication

With God all things are possible, if we believe…

—Eugene and Alethia Smith, 1979

This dissertation is dedicated to my greatest gain, my parents and my greatest lost, my father, thank you for always believing in me! Mom and Dad you have always allowed me to use my voice while challenging me to understand who I was within a world that did not always reflect me. You have both guided me with encouragement my entire life and expected more of me even when I wasn't sure it was possible. I am, because of you!

To my muses and superheroes, Freddie, Xavier, Ethan, and Trey, you are my inspiration. Freddie, thank you for being my best friend, sounding board, while still working extremely hard as a father and standing in my role of mother when I had to work early mornings and late nights. You supported me through my triumphs and tragedies and loved me when I was at my best and worst. I would never have accomplished this without you. You made sure that I reached the end zone, even when I didn't believe it was possible. To Xavier, Ethan, and Trey, thank you for being my inspiration and motivation. I want you to believe deep in your heart that you are capable of achieving anything you put your mind to and that you will never lose, you either win or learn. Aim for the stars and I know someday you will reach them, I will make sure of that!

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To God be the glory, for He has blessed me with the resilience and ability to undertake a journey such as this. I am thankful for all of the support He has placed in my life so I did not have to do this alone. There are so many individuals that took a part in this process with me. I have spent 35,040 hours in pursuit of my terminal degree and this time did not pass without the generous support and encouragement of many. For this, I am so very indebted. I am grateful for the individuals who have offered their prayers, time, and counsel, in support of this study. I can truly say I have seen the very best of people who in turn have inspired the very best in me. Thank you to my family, friends, Sorors, Rowan University family and the Williamstown Village for always being there when I thought I could not write another sentence.

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Abstract

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UNTIL SUPERHEROES LEARN HOW TO USE THEIR POWER:
EXPLORING THE TRIPLE CONSCIOUSNESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE
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As early as elementary school, African American students are labeled and passed along from teacher to teacher with negative stigma and stereotypes (Wright, 2018). This negative academic self-concept adversely affects and shapes a deficit lens rather than a strength-based perspective and may further perpetuate trauma, mirroring the disproportionate inequities within education (Banks, 2017; Wright, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore how African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their triple consciousness and what particular experiences influence their post-high school decisions (Stake, 2006). The study investigated the multidimensional lived experiences of eight African American male high school seniors identified as having specific learning dis/abilities. The findings redrew the generalizations of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness as a new perspective of awareness and critical consciousness for students with multidimensional identities that are interdependent of race and ability (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The conceptual framework of triple consciousness was used to guide the study and recognize the varied lived experiences, influences, and self-awareness of an individual with multidimensional identities.

Keywords: African American Males, Disability Studies in Education Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), triple consciousness, multidimensional identities

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking

at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a

world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

—Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

In his autoethnographic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, William Edward

Burghardt Du Bois (1903) asserted that African Americans experience a dual awareness

of identity. This duality of identity occurs when an individual attempts to merge their

African identity with their American identity as they navigate oppressive systems. As a

result of the merger, dual identity and consciousness are realized as a product of one's

race and experienced racism in America. Du Bois's (1903) explanation of this awareness

was illustrated by the term *double consciousness*. The concept of double consciousness

provides a pathway for a deeper understanding of the intersections of multiple identities,

consciousness, and the current colloquialism of being *woke*. The term woke is not a new

colloquialism. Instead, it has re-engaged within the United States culture that dates back

to its origin in the Black civil rights movement (Kelley, 1962). The resurgence of this

present-day vernacular sits within the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement

emerged in response to the 2013 shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, which

triggered a realization that those who have been embodied and racialized as a threat

because of their Black bodies should no longer be simply tolerated, but instead included,

valued, and seen by the world around them (Kunda, 2019). Subsequently, scholars have

unpacked this present-day awareness of identity and defined being woke as a critical

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consciousness to intersecting systems of oppression (Ashlee et al., 2017; Domenech Rodríguez, 2018). Like the seminal assertions of Du Bois (1903), being woke is another metaphor for African Americans that illustrates an awareness or consciousness of one's self within oppressive systems while challenging oneself to engage in the work of social and racial justice.

Du Bois (1903) understood the African American experience to be complex; however, he was remiss with extending his analysis upon individuals who experience multidimensional identities interdependent upon race and ability. While some researchers have sought to understand and expand the examination of the intersectionality of race and consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Woodson, 1990), race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989), race and identity, (Cross, 1991; Hartigan, 2010) and race and ability (Bell, 2011). Additional researchers (Annamma et al., 2013; Gill & Erevelles, 2017; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2014) sought to explore the intersections of race, gender, and ability within educational settings as they impacted students. Through their various lenses multidimensional identities were unpacked to highlight individual perspectives and experiences as they navigated educational systems that were oppressive for minoritized students identified as having dis/abilities. Conversely, there has been limited research that examines the consciousness of the multidimensional identified individual that is raced, gendered, and identified as having a dis/ability.

The results of the study offer additional generalizations when understanding DuBois's (1903) double consciousness concept and how students who have multidimensional identities that are interdependent upon race and ability understand themselves and their post-high school decisions. DuBois (1903) asserted that adolescents

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begin to learn of their dual identities as their consciousness develops. This study aimed to examine how adolescents respond when they are provided with deliberate opportunities to reflect on their multidimensional identities, and think critically to begin the development of their consciousness. This awareness or consciousness of their multidimensional self, stimulates adolescents' student voice to speak against oppressive systems that are present within their educational settings as they are raced, gendered, and identified as dis/abled. Given the complexity of multiple identities, it is crucial to assist minoritized students in process of grappling with their triple consciousness as they are faced with multiple variables that may impact their upward mobility. The insights provided to this study are framed with the triple consciousness framework through the lens of Disability Critical Race Theory in education, in-depth focus group interviews, graphic elicitations and member checks.

Triple Consciousness Conceptual Framework From the Lens of DisCrit

To add to the continued examination and understanding of intersected human experiences, this study was posited within a triple consciousness framework and narrated through the lens of dis/ability critical race theory in education (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013). The intentional use of dis/ability was used within the study to align with the terminology of DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013). Dis/ability challenges readers to disrupt and reframe their thinking regarding ability, as dis/ability has been historically associated with the inability to perform tasks when interpreted by society (Annammaet al., 2013). This conceptual framework explored the experiences of African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities as they understand their identity and share their consciousness of how the world views them as raced, gendered, and dis/abled

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(McDonald et al., 2007). The concept and theory of triple consciousness is an emerging lens that has been used to explore the intersections of multiracial terrains of Afro-Latinxs' experiences (Flores, 2005; Flores & Roman, 2009; Rivera, 2011), the multiple relationships among African American women, race, and gender (Welang, 2018), race, gender, and sexual orientation (Patton & Simmons, 2008), and as an applicable model to understand how students navigate the multiple factors that make them feel othered as they develop their multiple identities (Robinson, 2017) as a variant of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness phenomenon. Collectively, these studies illuminated how I began to view and understand triple consciousness based on Du Bois's (1903) concepts of double consciousness.

While researchers have looked to examine how individuals experience and understand multidimensional identities and consciousness, I selected Du Bois's (1903, p. 2) seminal piece of literature that captured the "two-ness or double consciousness" and current political ideology of being woke as an impetus to extend the research to explore the "three-ness or triple consciousness" experienced by African American male high school seniors identified with specific learning dis/abilities and how they understand their multidimensional identities as they make post-high school decisions.

To further assist with the understanding of multiple identities and consciousness, the triple consciousness conceptual framework was utilized to provide context and analyze post-high school pathway trajectories of African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities (see Figure 1). The conceptual framework of this research study is comprised of the three distinct concepts of race, gender, and ability to explore how students understand and make sense of their identity and experiences to inform post-

high school decisions. These concepts are contextually placed to privilege the voices of the participants and narrated through the lens of DisCrit.
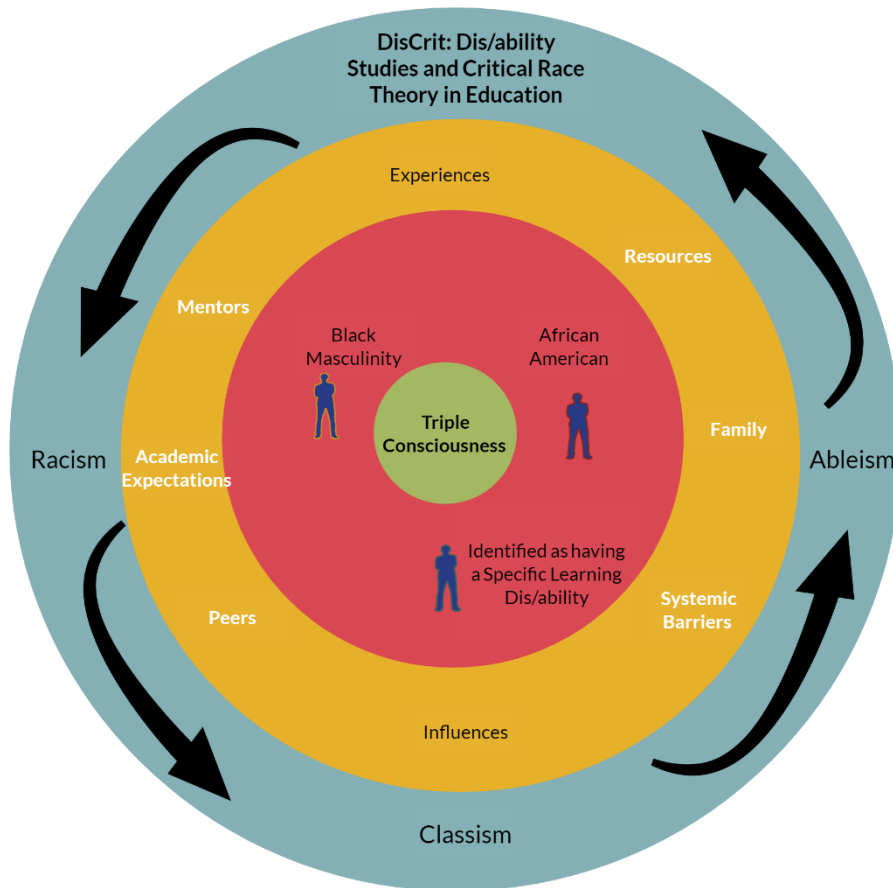
Figure 1. Triple Consciousness Conceptual Framework

Dis/ability Critical Race Theory in Education Lens

By exploring the three intersecting identities of individuals who self-identify as African American males and are identified with specific learning dis/abilities, I used the seven tenets of DisCrit to narrate the study by recognizing the historical molding of individuals who have been labeled negatively by their race, gender, and ability; highlighting the voices of the multidimensional experiences; and providing opportunities of resistance through critical consciousness. DisCrit provided a central lens of focus with understanding multiple identities and consciousness development that is constructed by society as well as privileging the voices of African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities who are not traditionally acknowledged within the research (Annamma et al., 2013). This focus centered on the students' experiences around the impacts of the disproportionate lack of materiality (e.g. exclusionary classroom settings, limited cultural sustaining instructional praxis, and the inadequate post-secondary transitional supports), as seen through the lens of DisCrit. "DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 19). Materiality recognizes whiteness and ability as property, and when individuals with multidimensional identities are not privileged to these ownerships, they are excluded from their material gains (Annamma et al., 2013; Song & Freedman, 2019). Due to the documented lack of materiality for African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities, there is limited literature that expands from the student's narrative regarding their perspective and experiences of being raced, gendered, and identified as learning dis/abled.

Researcher's Positionality

Qualitative research requires the researcher to immerse oneself within the inquiry to allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Stake, 2008). However, it is important to state one's research positionality within this approach, especially when participants and researchers are connected by race or ethnicity (Milner, 2007). My positionality has contributed to the study, and it is essential to note.

As a self-identified African American female who is rooted in Black culture within the United States, I frequently negotiate my minoritized identities. Thereby, causing me to think and act within two different realms of reality, awakening me with a double consciousness while in raced and gendered oppressive systems. I interact daily with African American males, specifically my husband and three sons. My personal experiences with African American males began early, as I was raised by a father who identified as an African American male, alongside male family members who were identified with specific learning dis/abilities. Further, my professional experiences were also linked with instructing African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities in a classroom setting, as a P-8 administrator, a postsecondary faculty member, and a professional within the field of strategic enrollment management in higher education. I share these interactions to provide context as an external insider (James, 1998; Zion & Blanchett, 2015) to the understanding of African American males and my intrinsic inquiry with the phenomena of African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities and how they understand and make sense of their multiple identities. Collectively, I brought my sophisticated understanding and my own bias as a researcher within this inquiry. Although my insight may be an asset to the

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phenomena from various lenses that aided in candid conversations to further participant discussion, it was also a limitation, as I am not male, 17-18 years of age, nor have I been identified with specific learning dis/abilities. This limitation simultaneously placed me as an indigenous outsider (James, 1998; Zion & Blanchett, 2015). As a result of being surrounded by African American males within the present political climate, I began to question: How do African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand who they are, and how do they think the world views them? If faced daily with a double consciousness, how are they navigating three realities and making post-high school decisions?

Statement of the Problem

African American students with dis/abilities have challenging paths to navigate their post high school decisions that do not begin after graduation. Durodoye at al. (2004) and Harris et al. (2017) reported that many African American students identified as having a dis/ability do not disclose their dis/ability or need for accommodations within their post high school placements until they are post failure and are deemed academically incompetent. Harris et al. suggested that students who did not advocate for academic resources were psychologically impacted from past academic experiences that stigmatized them as inferior, leaving them with a diminished motivation and self-worth. Other researchers indicated that African American students with dis/abilities were given subpar academic preparation and lacked the needed transition goals that were given to their general education peers (Banks, 2017; Walker & Test, 2011).

Beginning as early as elementary placements, African American students are labeled and passed along from teacher to teacher with negative stigma and stereotypes

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(Wright, 2018). Too often, African American students are characterized as inattentive, overactive, unready, and/or a troublemaker, rather than inquisitive, competent, and promising students. The influence of academic self-concept activates how students begin to see themselves (Harter, 1999; Wright, 2018). This negative academic self-concept adversely affects and shapes a deficit lens rather than a strength-based perspective and may further perpetuate trauma, mirroring the disproportionate inequities within education (Banks, 2017; Wright, 2018). Banks, (2014) post-secondary data suggests that African American students with dis/abilities recognize their transition is or was perplexing and inadequate. Consequently, it is necessary to examine how the disproportionate barriers, supports, and experiences have impacted students' multidimensional identities and consciousness as they navigate educational settings as they make post high school decisions.

The U.S. Department of Education found that African American students are generally twice more likely to be identified with subjective classifications such as specific learning dis/abilities than their White peers (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016). Substantial scholarship supporting the claim that there is an overrepresentation of African American students identified with dis/abilities throughout their elementary, secondary, and postsecondary experiences has been a topic of study for more than three decades (Annamma et al., 2013; Blanchett et al., 2005; Blanchett, 2009; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Patton, 1998). Disproportionality and overrepresentation are issues that have been ongoing and are still a problem. Overrepresentation was first discussed by Dunn (1968) before special education legislation was enacted in 1975:

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60-80 percent of the students in the classes for the mildly retarded were students

from low-status backgrounds; Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexicans,

Puerto Ricans; children from nonstandard English speaking, broken, disorganized,

and inadequate homes; and children from other non-middle-class environments.

(p. 6)

This foreshadowing has materialized for more than 40 years with patterns of African American male students overrepresented (Dever et al., 2016). Specifically, these patterns show high incidence categories of dis/ability, which are more subjective (e.g., learning and behavior dis/abilities; Rynders, 2019). Despite decades of research supporting the claim of overrepresentation, a group of scholars recently disputed the existence of overrepresentation. Morgan et al. (2017) found that when students are identified to receive special education services, context matters. Accounting for variables such as family income, achievement, and student-level characteristics, minoritized students, specifically African American students, are less likely to be identified for special services (Hibel et al., 2010; Morgan et al., 2017). Although these findings are well-established with quantifiable measures, it has been a controversial topic within the academy (Harry & Fenton, 2016).

In response to the claim of underrepresentation, researchers Harry and Fenton (2016) affirmed Morgan et al.'s (2015) statistical findings but critiqued their results by asserting that they lacked the *how* and *why* of disproportionality and its historical patterns and connections to minoritized populations. Additional qualitative studies found that students were directly impacted by poverty and inequitable funding in specific districts and were a contributing rationale of increased special education placement (Harry &

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Fenton, 2016; Skiba et al., 2016). Authors contended that when speaking directly with stakeholders to gain first-hand perspectives, it was evident that increased special education placements were based on IQ scores that were a result of opportunities to learn rather than a student's intelligence (Harry & Fenton, 2016; Skiba et al., 2016). At the most basic level, unequal risk factors such as economic disparities and racial disparities contribute to students' lives and impact the instruction of students (Kauffman & Anastasiou, 2019). Whether students are under or over-represented with socially constructed subjective identifiers, they are psychologically impacted, and attention must be given to the student and their educational journey.

The National Center for Education Statistics found that 37% of African American students aged 3 to 21 served under Part B of the Individuals with Dis/abilities Education Act (IDEA) are identified with specific learning dis/abilities, compared to 31% of White peers (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Presently, African American students with specific learning dis/abilities are more likely to be placed in restrictive settings at a rate of 71% (Rynder, 2019). Leaving African American students identified with specific learning dis/abilities less likely to transition to postsecondary degree-granting institutions (Newman et al., 2011). A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) addressed an increase of 12% of African American students transitioning to four-year institutions compared to the 10% increase of their White dis/abled peers. Banks and Gibson (2016) found this increase in enrollment of African American students with dis/abilities only yielded half the retention rate when compared to their White dis/abled counterparts. Banks and Gibson (2016) pointed to multiple P-12 school factors that contribute to a student's transition and implore educators to systematically analyze

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school-based variables that influence students' transition and resilience that lead to retention in four-year institutions. Variables such as restrictive academic settings that lack academic rigor, the intersections of racism and ableism, and social inferiority can lower a student's self-concept, thereby deterring them from pursuing postsecondary options and persisting after enrollment (Banks & Gibson, 2016). African American students identified as having dis/abilities often face challenges after leaving their P-12 educational landscape, specifically accessing postsecondary options that do not begin during their senior year. It begins with knowing their identity as they face understanding their multidimensional identities of race, gender, and ability.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their triple consciousness and what particular experiences influence their post-high school decisions through the lens of DisCrit. This study used a qualitative instrumental case study (Stake, 2008) to answer the research questions:

1. How do African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their multidimensional identity development?

2. What are the particular experiences that influence African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities post-high school decisions?

Using paradigms and theory to frame methodological choices and inquiry is essential when conducting qualitative research (Mertens, 2019). In planning my proposed study, I recognize that my epistemological stance allows me to interpret the world

through a critical constructivist lens. I believe knowledge is culturally and socio-politically constructed. This worldview supports my research inquiry by encouraging participants to identify and recognize dominant systems while using their knowledge of self to impact change within their world (Macleod, 2009). Mertens (2019) asserted that researchers who subscribe to a constructivist paradigm might use qualitative approaches by framing inquiry using critical realism. Critical realists integrate constructivism by understanding that knowledge is socially constructed but are also aware that one's knowledge sits within a world that is independent of our perceptions and constructs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). These beliefs guided my choice to propose a qualitative approach when exploring the triple consciousness phenomena of African American male high school seniors identified with specific learning dis/abilities. African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities are faced with the intersectionality of three identities juxtaposed with how an independent world views them as raced, gendered, and abled by societal constructs.

Theoretical Framework

I conducted the proposed study through the theoretical lens of DisCrit. DisCrit is a bridge between dis/ability studies, dis/ability studies in education, and critical race theory that addresses macro-level intersectional issues of race and ability through the day-to-day experiences of students of color who have been identified as dis/abled (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). DisCrit theorists argue that race and ability are interdependent and shape the self-concept of normalcy against the standard of whiteness for students of color (Connor et al., 2016). This interdependence of race and ability leaves students with multiple identities and feelings of incapability of body and mind (Connor et al., 2016).

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Scholars (Annamma et al., 2013; Banks, 2018; Erevelles et al., 2006) framed their research to explore how the interdependence of race and ability transform institutional structures, such as educational systems, by conceptualizing frameworks to understand how interrelated socially constructed identities impact the human experience. However, DisCrit theorists Annamma et al. (2013) sought to move prior research toward a formalized theory that revealed ways to dismantle the *isms* that are socially constructed and that are encountered by many students of color who are identified as dis/abled. DisCrit is based upon seven tenets for examining ways in which racism and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education as they affect minoritized students qualitatively different than their White counterparts.

Through each tenet, DisCrit explains that racism and ableism have been built in concert to marginalize and segregate students based on the White standard of normalcy within the educational system (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Students of color are living within the multiple perceptions of the White standard of normalcy, where race influences perceptions of ability and ability influences perceptions related to race (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit also highlights and values the multiple identities and voices students of color position within their lived experiences. These identity markers of ability, gender, socioeconomic class, language, and sexuality add complexity to a minoritized individual's understanding of identity. DisCrit empowers a multidimensional voice and challenges individuals to resist systems of oppression Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Further, DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and recognizes the material and psychological duality of being labeled as raced or dis/abled. Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) recognize that the seven tenets highlight the beliefs

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that race and ability are located within social and institutional structures as well as personal attitudes, thereby advancing inequalities within educational structures.

Procedures

The researcher used an instrumental case study method (Stake, 1995). "When the purpose of a case study is to go beyond the case, we call it 'instrumental' case study" (Stake, 2013, p. 8). This instrumental case study offered the opportunity to learn more about individuals who self-identify as having multidimensional identities and their triple consciousness through the experiences of African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities. Using triple consciousness as a conceptual framework alongside the theoretical lens of DisCrit guided the design of the formal study. This study involved two primary steps. An initial identity survey (Appendix A) was given to participants to identify how participants viewed themselves through their multiple identities. Next, students were selected by stratified sampling to discuss further how they understand and make sense of their identity development and post-high school decisions. Selected participants participated in two 120-minute, in-depth, semi-structured focus group interview process to develop graphic elicitations that would aid in unpacking participants' triple consciousness.

Study Rationale, Relevance, and Significance

Issues of access, success, and equity related to marginalized groups' experiences are not new topics of research within the field of education. Rather, researchers have made continuous efforts to identify, examine, and expose issues related to inclusive education and exclusionary instructional practices, teacher preparation, and the school-to-prison pipeline for groups of people oppressed by those with power and privilege within

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the United States educational system. African American male students specifically have been identified by socially constructed identifiers such as race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status (Annamma et al., 2013; Harry & Klinger, 2014; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011) that resulted in multiple consciousness of divided realities that have influenced how students find a sense of belonging educationally and influence how students make post-high school decisions.

Inclusive Education and Exclusionary Instructional Practices

Historically, court decisions have influenced policies that led to laws to protect and advocate for students who have experienced the implications of being identified as dis/abled (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998). In 1974 under the protection of IDEA, students identified with dis/abilities were assured a free and appropriate education regardless of race (Winzer, 1983). Despite the enactment of IDEA assurances against racial bias alongside 40 years of scholarship to dismantle discriminatory practices, African American students are still experiencing disproportionality in the form of overrepresentation and restrictive placements.

Although the field of special education was developed by holding the coat tail of the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision for equitable educational spaces, special education has yet to live up to its promises. *Brown v. Board of Education* was the landmark decision that overruled the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896, which affirmed separate but equal education settings for White and students of color (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). Special Education Policy (P.L. 94-142, Individuals with Dis/abilities Education Act or IDEA) mimicked the underpinnings of the case to demand equitable spaces for all students inclusive of ability and race (IDEA, 2004). After IDEA

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was established, scholars began to critique and highlight new issues of segregation

related to students identified as having earning deficits (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

Researchers argued that there were clear benefits of receiving special education services,

such as small classroom sizes, intensive instructional practices, and additional support for

students that would close achievement gaps and allow students to return to general

instructional spaces. However, due to inconsistent practices of not meeting the goals of

IDEA within regions, states, and school districts, African American students began to

remain and be set apart via identification within restrictive classroom settings (Blanchett,

Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). Additional revealed that special education practices were

becoming the new method of segregation by placing students identified with learning or

emotional dis/abilities in restrictive special education classrooms (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

Zion and Blanchett (2011) contended that once African American students have been

identified with a dis/ability, they have an increased rate of being placed within a

restrictive academic environment and experience dual academic disparities: (a) denied

academic rigor and progress; and (b) treated as inferior dependents—outliers of the

educational system. Additional scholarship confirms this new means of segregation by

asserting that African American students are overrepresented in more restrictive

academic environments and underrepresented in less restrictive environments relative to

their White peers with the same dis/ability (e.g., emotional disturbance, mild intellectual

dis/ability, moderate intellectual dis/ability, learning dis/abilities, and speech and

language; Skiba et al., 2006).

Harry & Klinger (2014) discussed that students placed within restrictive settings

were identified with socially constructed classifications by educators who may have

implicit biases. One critical interpretation of the special education identification process is that students have varied levels of cognitive and behavioral competence and are referred for special education services upon the perspective of an educator that may deem the student tolerable or manageable compared to his or her peers within their current setting (Blanchett, 2010). For example, the prior year's educator may have had a different view of the student based on different variables. The child's identification then becomes layered with human bias as the assessor may be influenced by external beliefs and outside pressures. Critical perspectives such as this have added to the research, related to inclusive education and exclusionary instructional practices as they look to the disproportionate identification originating from subjectivity in evaluation and placement. This raises additional issues of critiquing the effectiveness of the special education process (Blanchett, 2006). As a result, African American students have experienced academic disparities, such as restrictive classroom settings, biased instructional practices, and increased discipline referrals, that have directly impacted their post-high school trajectories (Chance & Lewis, 2013). Researchers have begun to look at African American students' experiences within the educational setting and the impacts of the disproportionality once identified with a dis/ability, specifically students identified with specific learning dis/abilities. Banks (2017) examined students' recollections of their educational experiences who have been admitted to and attended at least one semester at a historically Black college or university who were identified as needing special education services. Students reflected and shared they lacked rigorous support compared to their peers' education in the general education setting (Banks, 2017). These experiences resulted in feelings that left them desiring to prove themselves academically,

as they associated their education from a deficit perspective and hoped to change their educational story by attending college.

Teacher Preparation

Currently, classrooms reflect students who have multidimensional identities at a higher rate than 8 years ago, yet instructional teachers are not reflective of the classroom. Pre- and in-service teachers are challenged with implementing instructional practices to meet the diverse needs present within their classrooms (Shifrer, 2018). With a lack of culturally relevant instruction, there has been a direct correlation between achievement and expected modeled behavior (Larson et al., 2018) This inconsistency triggers teachers to feel helpless and look to special education for support (Blanchett, 2014). Ahram et al. (2011) stressed that teachers should be mandated through policy to infuse culturally responsive instructional practices. In practice, educators should promote, celebrate, and become critical of the multiple and evolving ways that students engage with culture within the classroom (Alim & Paris, 2017). As a result of using said practices, teachers and school administrators face and minimize their current cultural biases that may influence the disproportionate number of students referred to special education services. Decades of research contend that the process may be slow to unwind the years of disproportionate identification but is needed for equitable spaces for all students and those who instruct them (Annamma et al., 2017). When asked how or why educators continue biased instruction or practices, researchers Skiba et al. (2006) interviewed teachers to get a deeper understanding. Their findings illustrated that teachers felt underprepared to support economically disadvantaged students, a lack of relationship with students, a yielding in poor classroom management, and feelings of discomfort when

discussing race and achievement (Skiba et al., 2006). Teachers felt that special education

was an appropriate resource to support students who are not achieving according to

district benchmarks. The current scholarship provides an inside peek into the minds of

those educating and supporting the journey of all students, including African American

male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities (Banks, 2017, 2018).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Scholars have continued the examination of race and discipline related to the

disproportionate rates of students identified for special education services. Carter et al.

(2017) shared that there are still biases after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education*

case, and students are impacted by stereotypes that fast track them into the prison

pipeline through exclusionary discipline practices. Noguera (2009) stated that schools

serve as holding cells of marginalization rather than a source of opportunity for African

American males by excluding them from demanding classes and opportunities that

anticipate enrollment in postsecondary four-year degree institutions. In *Making*

Difference Matter: Teaching and Learning in Desegregated Classrooms, Freidus and

Noguera (2017) furthered this sentiment by asserting that educators and researchers

found that students who are identified by lower socioeconomic statuses and are

minoritized are commonly viewed through a deficit lens when connecting teaching,

learning, and desegregation. These assertions support the notion that African American

students are significantly more likely than their White peers to be referred for disciplinary

actions. Specifically, African American males identified with specific learning

dis/abilities have a consistent pattern of increased suspension and expulsion rates that

correlates to their gender, race, and ability (Welsh & Little, 2018). Researchers

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Darensbourg et al. (2010) studied the impacts of suspension rates and postsecondary placements with African American male students. They found that disciplinary incidents were interrelated to students having a loss in instructional time and disengagement, which led to a negative path toward prison rather than postsecondary placement (Darensbourg et al., 2010).

Keeping in mind that students who experience multidimensional identities that are interdependent upon race and ability experience multifaceted disparities (e.g., underprepared teachers, exclusionary discipline, and instructional practices) it is important to understand how they understand and make sense of their identities. Often African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities are overlooked and not considered when trying to understand and discuss barriers faced as they make postsecondary decisions. The interlocking of multiple identifiers (e.g., race, gender, and disablement within educational constructs) leaves students without a sense of academic and social belonging. To extend the current research related to African American students, specifically African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities, this study attempted to capture how these students understand and make sense of their intersecting identities and experiences as they make decisions about their lives after high school.

Postsecondary Transition Planning

Postsecondary transition planning is a required process when developing a student's goals after high school and is mandated by the IDEA for students as early as age 14. This process allows for "effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment and/or education" (Individuals with Dis/abilities Education

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Improvement Act, 2004, (c) 14) to assist students identified with dis/abilities to meet their post-high school aspirations. Unfortunately, students who have identities that interdependent upon race and ability lag behind with post-high school outcomes. Thoma, Cain, Wojcik, Best, and Scott (2016) state that there has been a plethora of research that provides effective strategies to support the transition post-school outcomes for all students who are identified as having multidimensional identities. However, post-high school rates for African American students identified as dis/abled remain low, as these students are less likely to be employed or attend a postsecondary institution when compared to their white dis/abled peers. To explain this disparity for African American students, researchers Landmark and Zhang (2007) and Hirano et al. (2018) point to the lack of family and school partnerships with non-White families and families from lower socioeconomic statuses. If or when parents are asked to participate within the transition planning process it is requested passively through a form or questionnaire with limited involvement from the student and family (Landmark et al., 2012; Wagner et al., 2014). To aid in understanding how this is happening, researcher Banks (2014) stated that specifically African American students are faced with additional barriers and lack quality transitional planning compared to their White dis/abled peers. Students in this study had limited involvement within the high school transition planning process, were not exposed to how to critically advocate for themselves and were not taught their rights and responsibilities as the IDEA outlines (Banks, 2014). These findings support further exploration in understanding the particular experiences that influence students with multidimensional identities who are interdependent upon race and ability and their post-high school decisions.

Extensive research focuses on African American students identified with learning dis/abilities who attend P-12 educational settings, but it is often from a deficit-based understanding rather than a space of strength (Harry & Klingner, 2007; Morgan et al., 2015). There are even a considerable amount of studies that have contributed to furthering research to explore the intersectionality of race and ability and its implication of disproportionality of the overrepresentation of students identified as needing special services and the underrepresentation of students identified as gifted and talented (Mayes & Moore, 2016; Robinson, 2016). However, there is a limited scholarship that addresses the African American male students' intersections of identity from a strength perspective. By examining more than 40 years of scholarship, conducting this study, and relating findings to this literature related to the disproportionality and concepts of triple consciousness, I hope to assist other researchers with finding strategies to awaken students with developing a critical consciousness to dismantle oppressive systems. Strategies may support pre- and in-service teachers with additional resources to understand how students are impacted by implicit and explicit bias and how through culturally relevant practices, relationship building, and varied instructional strategies, achievement gaps will decrease and identification will become less subjective.

Definition of Terms

Specific Learning Dis/ability: According to IDEA, a specific learning dis/ability is a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Terms included as specific learning dis/abilities are conditions such as perceptual dis/abilities,

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brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. However, disorders that are not primarily the result of a visual, hearing, or motor dis/abilities, of intellectual dis/abilities, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage are not included under specific learning dis/abilities. (Section 1401 (30) (A, B, & C)

Minoritize: The preferred term used to describe racial-ethnic groups rather than using minority. Researchers Chase et al. (2014) assert that the use of minority indicates less than and does not recognize the historical experiences of systematic exclusion and oppressive systems placed upon groups.

Triple consciousness: An emerging lens (Flores & Román, 2009; King, 1988; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Thomson, 1999) that looks at the intersectionality of experiences as a variant of the double consciousness theory posed from Dubois (1903).

Woke: A modern colloquialism that started with the Black Lives Matter movement. Its intention is to communicate consciousness and awareness of the socio-political environment in which you live and are perceived. Ladson-Billings (2016) defined staying woke as "the need to be vigilant and informed, especially concerning social and political issues." during her 2016 graduation ceremony commencement speech.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 2 of this study illuminates the historical elements of race, Black masculinity, dis/ability identity, and critical consciousness, as discussed within the conceptual framework of triple consciousness. This section defines the dis/ability critical race theory in education and expounds on its connection to dis/ability studies and critical race theory.

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Chapter 3 provides the study's methodological context: design, data collection, and analysis. In this chapter I share my epistemology and rationale for methodology. The chapter defines my participant selection methods, interview procedures, and graphic elicitation rationale while providing an overall analytical plan to triangulate the data for the trustworthiness of results. Finally, this chapter identifies how this qualitative instrumental case study was validated.

Chapter 4 describes the participants, presents participants' experiences and the findings collected during the study within the theoretical framework and concepts under DisCrit. The literature provides a lens for readers to understand the experiences of African American students, specifically males, identified with specific learning and or behavioral dis/abilities and post-high school decisions.

Chapter 5 presents the study's findings and makes recommendations for program improvement. Included in this section is a discussion of areas for future study in order to enhance our understanding of significant disciplinary disproportionality as it affects African American special education students.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time.

—Baldwin et al., The Negro in American culture

To frame my study, I considered the triple consciousness of students who self-identify as an African American male with a specific learning dis/ability. Through the conceptual framework of triple consciousness, I looked at the intersections of race, gender, and ability as I explored how students were cognizant of their multidimensional identities within the P-12 educational pipeline as narrated through the lens of dis/ability critical race theory in education (DisCrit). While intersectionality of race, class, and ability have been explored by scholars (Banks & Hughes, 2013; Blanchett, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Mayes & Moore, 2016; Robinson, 2017; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) there is a gap in the literature that does not explore how multidimensional self-identified students understand their triple consciousness and decision-making on their postsecondary trajectory. Although Robinson (2017) contends that triple identity theory is a variant of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness concept, it is an instructional model for understanding how students navigate the multiple factors that make them feel othered as they develop their identity. His recent scholarship does not fully unpack how students within secondary educational settings understand and make sense of their consciousness as African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities when making post-high school educational decisions.

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To further our understanding of the understudied research regarding triple consciousness and its relationship to one's critical consciousness (Freire, 1968/2018), this chapter reviews DisCrit and the major components of the triple consciousness framework: DisCrit, identity development, and triple consciousness, as outlined in Figure 2.

Literature Review

Disability Critical Race Theory in Education
Disability Studies
Disability Studies in Education
Critical Race Theory

Identity Development
African American (Black) Identity Development
Black Masculine Identity Development
Disablity Identity Develpment

Triple Consciousness
Critical Consciousness
Double Consciousness
Triple Consciousness

Disability Critical Race Theory in Education

African American Identity Development

Triple Consciousness

Black (male)masculine Identity Development

Disability Identity Development

Figure 2. Structure of the Literature Review

Research related to the access, success, and equity of populations who live and experience impairments have been an emanate interest within academia. As early as the 1800s, research explorations related to scientific, psychological, and medical

classifications (e.g., brain injury and mental impairment) have been studied to understand variations of ability (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). Much of the early research led to medical-based findings and conclusions of abnormalities for individuals perceived as a tragic who needed support (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002; Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Woods & Thomas, 2003). As scholarship continued, so did the legal issues addressing the disparities related to uncovering the needs of students deemed exceptional, as exhibited in such cases as *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (*Mills, V. (1972). Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 348 F. *Supp*, *866*, 877-78). The litigation eventually led to the 1975 legislation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-132, guaranteeing free appropriate public education to each child with a dis/ability regardless of race. During a span of 20 years (1976-1996), P.L. 94-132 was transformed through revised amendments to benefit students identified with dis/abilities beginning at birth.

In 1997, the Clinton administration officially changed The Education for all Handicapped Children's Act to the Individuals with Dis/abilities Education Act (IDEA) to address students' needs comprehensively. Despite the numerous iterations, IDEA seemed to be influenced by a medical model approach to "fixing" an individual's limitations rather than changing a deficit lens that sought to eradicate the notion of disablement, race, and gender, by looking at an individual first and an impairment second. Hence, the theoretical frame was developed to support individuals through a lived experience that IDEA did not address.

Dis/ability Studies

  Simi Linton (1998) thought the discourse and research regarding a dis/ability should no longer be looked at through a medical deficit understanding. She was seminal in defining *ableism*, discrimination in favor of the non-dis/abled as well as looking at individuals through a social lens (Linton, 1998). Scholars during this era understood that the success of the civil rights movement and its impact on equitable treatment and practices. Taking into consideration both the civil rights movement and the success of P.L. 94-132, dis/ability studies addressed ableism and its impact on marginalized communities who experience impairments (Linton, 1998). The success of calling for equity provided a space to discuss equitable practices surrounding dis/ability and the need to deconstruct disablement. Disablement was framed around the experience of an individual with an impairment, rather than the social construct of dis/ability that others placed upon individual experiences (Oliver, 1990). Gleeson (1997) highlighted the need to look at disablement across fields (e.g., literature, liberal arts, humanities, general education) that touch lives outside of the P-12 classroom setting. Historical citizens with impairments were viewed only through a medical model of deficiency rather than as individuals who happen to have an impairment. Dis/ability studies challenged the thought of dis/ability being a societal burden and applied the notion of inclusivity (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). Dis/ability studies research also called for the inclusion of intersectional studies but never fully engaged in the issues of race, ethnicity, and disablement. This gap in scholarship for this budding theory caused scholars to reference dis/ability studies as White dis/abilities studies (Bell, 2006), due to dis/ability studies'

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lack of scholarship that addresses the issues of race outside of the standard middle-class White student.

Dis/ability Studies in Education

As the structures of disablement were introduced broadly under dis/ability studies, there were additional gaps found by educational researchers. Educational scholarship stressed the need to look at disablement through the lens of critical inquiry, political advocacy, educational research, teacher education, and graduate studies (Connor et al., 2008; Gabel & Connor, 2009). Dis/ability studies in education provided principles to engage students and practitioners with understanding varied perspectives without the limitations of the singular perspective of the deficit-based medical model (Gabel, 2005). The foundational principles of dis/ability studies in education are: (a) centering dis/abled people in theorizing about dis/ability, (b) recognizing and privileging the knowledge derived from the lived experience of people with dis/abilities, (c) adherence to an emancipatory stance; namely, working with people with dis/abilities as informed participants or co-researchers and not subjects, (d) challenging research methodologies that objectify, marginalize, and oppress people with dis/abilities, (e) primarily recognizing dis/ability and valuing it as a natural part of human diversity and not as a dysfunction, and (f) supporting dis/abled students in the development of a positive dis/ability identity (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). Dis/ability studies in education is sometimes referred to as critical special education, given its foundation of critical inquiry of special education practices and policies (Freedman & Ferri, 2017). Dis/ability studies in education guide scholarship that provides space for understanding student experiences and social context within the academic setting (Baglieri et al., 2011).

Dis/ability studies in education intended for the education field to understand the human experience as inclusive, yet this evolved model of dis/ability studies fell short again. Dis/ability studies in education studies have compared issues of social justice and the civil rights movement to the dis/ability movement. Yet, research framed with dis/ability studies in education was negligent in addressing the needs of minoritized students who were impacted by exclusionary practices as prescribed by the principles of dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education (Ferri, 2009).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory was originally based on a legal scholarship that asserts that racism is interwoven within American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, once expanded into the education landscape, researchers began to expose and disrupt the inequities of White supremacy that were still present after monumental rulings like the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Critical race theory was introduced to education in the mid-1990s to explain the educational inequities faced by marginalized students within the classroom due to recognizing the element of interest convergence. Once critical race theory was used within education, it theorized and set the context of microaggressions that students experienced due to race, spanning from the preschool to the postsecondary educational space (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory allows researchers to address the inequitable outcomes that schooling practices produce daily through the lens of race.

Dis/ability Studies Critical Race Theory in Education

The grounding foundations of dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education provided space for the scholarship to evolve from a deficit-based medical

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model to a social model by way of understanding the human experience narrated by individuals living with identified impairments. Neither of the two lenses looked to analyze or theorize the intersections of racism and ableism. Dis/ability studies and critical race theory speak to ableism and racism separately but fail to address the inequities that populations with impairment face when the social construct of race and ability intersect. In search of an equitable scope to understand dis/ability studies in education for marginalized populations experiencing impairment, researchers Ferri and Connor (2005) discussed the interplay of ableism and racism as it produced exclusionary practices and called for studies to recognize their interdependence. Bell (2006) directly critiqued dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education for not considering the intersectionality of race and ability and argued that dis/ability studies in education were off to a modest start but had work to do as it related to marginalized populations. Others (Blanchett, 2006; Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Reid & Knight, 2006) took a different approach and spoke to the gaps of dis/ability studies in education, discussing how the intersections of race, culture, language, gender, and ability converge within teacher preparatory programs and curriculum, leaving a disproportionate amount of students within exclusionary settings. Regardless of how they discussed the lack of intersectionality, researchers explored and identified the need to address the interlocking experiences of race and dis/abilities. As a result, DisCrit theorists Connor et al. (2013) linked and theorized dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education with critical race theory to understand macro-level issues of race and ability through the day-to-day experiences of populations minoritized by race and disablement. Through these connections, the human experiences of race and ability are seen as interdependent and

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explain how a minoritized population's self-concepts are shaped against the standard of Whiteness (Connor et al., 2016; Morrison et al., 2017).

Through the dis/ability studies perspective, understanding dis/abilities allows dis/abled populations to share their truths of human differences and their lived experiences. Dis/ability studies acknowledges the ethical implications of understanding the experiences of populations marginalized by ableism (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). Understanding dis/ability studies allows us to reconstruct our understanding of pushing back onto oppressive systems, specifically through dis/ability studies in education. Dis/ability studies in education guide educational research, teacher education, and graduate studies to center the work on theorizing dis/ability around the lived experiences of people experiencing disablement. While dis/ability studies in education seek to ground and define dis/ability in education, it also understands that the research academy must co-explore and examine human diversity without marginalizing or oppressing those who will give insight into their lived experiences. By adhering to the core principles of dis/ability studies in education, scholars believe their research will yield positive identities inclusive of individual differences (Baglieri et al., 2011; Connor et al., 2008; Gabel & Connor, 2009).

Dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education researchers have theorized and framed interdisciplinary scholarship to counter the deficit-based medical model used to explain human differences. Dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education both miss the mark in addressing the multidimensional lived experiences of minoritized populations by underpinning their lens of study within middle-class Whiteness without regard for intersectionality (Bell, 2006; Ferri, 2009). DisCrit acknowledges the principles

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and beliefs of contributory models of dis/ability studies, dis/ability studies in education, and critical race theory as they sought to dismantle the inequities of *isms* but goes further to unpack consequences of the interdependence of racism and ableism within the educational system. Students of color are living within the multiple perceptions of the White standard of normalcy where race influences perceptions of ability and ability influences perceptions related to race (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit also values the multiple identities and voices students of color positioned within their lived experiences. These identities of ability, gender, socioeconomic class, language, and sexuality add complexity as they are empowered through DisCrit to use their multidimensional voice to support all forms of resistance. DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and recognizes the material and psychological consequences of being labeled as raced or dis/abled. As this theory has many contours, it also considers the legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

Dis/ability studies theorists assert that dis/ability should be examined across multiple disciplines and viewed as social constructs rather than through the traditional deficit-based medical model (Linton, 1998). Dis/ability studies provide dis/ability studies in education and DisCrit with their foundational tenets of understanding human differences and valuing participatory research to aid in understanding lived experiences. While dis/ability studies emerged to reshape how society understood individuals with impairments, its ambiguity left gaps to be filled by dis/ability studies in education and DisCrit. Dis/ability studies in education sought to address the growing need for

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advocacy-based approaches within the educational setting by adding critical examinations of instructional practices through research, teacher preparation, and graduate studies (Baglieri et al., 2011; Gabel & Connor, 2009). Dis/ability studies in education attempted to fill the gaps of dis/ability studies but failed to critically examine the needs of marginalized populations that traditionally were not acknowledged within the research. DisCrit is informed by dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education tenets but recognizes that Whiteness and ability are forms of power and privilege that students of color do not have access to obtain. Prior studies that recognized the interdependence of ability and race critiqued dis/ability studies in education as advocating for equitable spaces for all students with dis/abilities only when their interest converges for the benefits of White, middle-class students. DisCrit fundamentalist outlines the disproportionality of exclusionary practices that still exist after the promises of inclusive practices of dis/ability studies in education (Ferri, 2009).

While there is an overlap of beliefs related to dis/ability studies and dis/ability studies in education, DisCrit embodies the multiple constructs of understanding of how African American students identified as learning dis/abled describe their identity as it relates to how the world sees them. DisCrit seeks to value and understand the voices of multidimensional identities of African American students identified with learning dis/abilities within their educational setting (Annamma et al., 2013). Annamma and Morrison (2018) asserted that through the dialectical relationships between student and teacher, the deconstruction of dominant school practices would occur.

DisCrit bridges components of dis/ability studies, dis/ability studies in education, and critical race theory that address macro-level intersectional issues of race and ability

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through the day-to-day experiences of students of color with dis/abilities. DisCrit states

that race and ability are interdependent and shape the self-concept of normalcy against

the standard of Whiteness for students of color, thereby leaving students who have

multiple identities feeling incapable in body and mind (Connor et al., 2016).

Scholars (Baglieri et al., 2011; Banks, 2018; Bell, 2006; Connor et al., 2008;

Connor & Ferri, 2009; Erevelles et al., 2006; Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012; Ferri, 2009;

Gabel, 2005; Linton, 1998; Reid & Knight, 2006) who subscribe to connecting critical

race theory and dis/ability theory to discuss the interdependence of race and ability have

examined and framed their research to explore and transform institutional structures (e.g.,

educational systems) by conceptualizing frameworks to understand how interrelated,

socially constructed identities impact the human experience. However, DisCrit theorists

(Annamma et al., 2013) sought to move this prior research toward a formalized theory

through seven tenets that revealed ways to dismantle the isms that are socially

constructed that many students of color who are identified as dis/abled face. DisCrit uses

these seven tenets to examine ways in which racism and ableism are built into the

interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education as they affect

minoritized students qualitatively different from their White counterparts:

1. DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate

   interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of

   normalcy.

2. DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of

   identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on.

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3. DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.

4. DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within the research.

5. DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.

6. DisCrit recognizes Whiteness and ability as property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have primarily been made as to the result of interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens.

7. DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance.

Tenet 1 focuses on how racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy (Annamma et al., 2013). Connor et al. (2016) assert that race and ability are seen in tandem through hidden curricula within the educational pipeline for educators. Tenet 1 outlines that race does not exist without color while color does not exist without ability; both are used as benchmarks that build on each other to understand academic and social success within the classroom. Studies of administrators' and teachers' perceptions related to an overrepresentation of students of color in special education have revealed that administrators and teachers were uncomfortable with discussing and understanding the intersections of race and achievement (Galindo & Newton, 2017). Administrators and teachers commonly used the referral process, as they believed that special education was

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the appropriate resource to support students who are not achieving and not understood by the district educational benchmarks (Galindo & Newton, 2017; Skiba et al., 2006).

Tenet 2 values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity, such as race, ability, class, gender, and sexuality. Annamma & Morrison (2018) use Dubois's understanding of double consciousness to invite the participation of African American students to the center of the analysis to understand the intersections of race, gender, and ability. Tenet 2 provides students a strength-based approach to understanding their multiple identities through a participatory process. By understanding multiple consciousnesses, participants recognize, identify, and understand oppressive systems, as they are directly impacted (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Through continued research, studies support students' understanding of consciousness and the components needed to navigate an educational system that has disproportionately situated them within restrictive placements.

Tenet 3 emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms. Zion and Blanchett (2011) assert that the interlocking of race, gender, and disablement leave students with academic disparities: (a) denied academic rigor and progress and (b) treated as inferior dependents, outliers of the system, that limit their academic outcomes and trajectory.

Tenet 4 privileges voices of marginalized populations traditionally not acknowledged within the research. This tenet provides a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative of connecting special education to race and poverty. Counter-narratives are captured from the first-person perspective to disrupt systems of oppression

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from those immediately impacted. The privileging of voices acknowledges students' infinite capacities, recognizing their brilliance rather than focusing on deficiency and reminding them of their rich intellectual and cultural legacies.

Tenet 5 considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens. Harry and Klinger (2014) state that race has always been an essential ingredient in the construction of the American educational system. History shares that the minoritized and children with impairments were always regulated to margins of the norms within the educational system. This dates back to the eugenics movement and the belief that non-White people were inferior and were unable to academically compete with those who were members of the White race.

Tenet 6 recognizes Whiteness and ability as property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have primarily been made as to the result of interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens. This tenet supports the understanding that all students have access to educational and social advantages based upon our multiple identities; however, the closer we are to the desired norm of White, male, and heterosexual, the more access there is to academic and social success (Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

Tenet 7 requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (Annamma et al., 2013p. 19). Paulo Freire (1968/2018) asserted that the educational structure is the power dominance that intrinsically disempowers people that they consider different. Tenet 7 calls on scholars to refuse to accept deficit notions regarding people of color identified as dis/abled, instead asking them to seek to understand the learning and behavior of people

identified intersectional within context. Engaging in intellectual activism, the scholars both refute traditional ways of being in the academy and also document ways students resist the processes and practices that position them as less than.

Through each tenet, DisCrit explains that racism and ableism have been built concertedly to marginalize and segregate students based on the White standard of normalcy within the educational system (Annamma et al., 2013). Students of color are living within the multiple perceptions of the White standard of normalcy, where race influences perceptions of ability and ability influences perceptions related to race (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit also highlights and values the multiple identities and voices students of color position within their lived experiences. These identity markers of ability, gender, socioeconomic class, language, and sexuality add complexity but are empowered through DisCrit to use their multidimensional voice to support all forms of resistance. DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and recognizes the material and psychological consequences of being labeled as raced or dis/abled. Researchers (Annamma et al., 2013) recognize that the seven tenets highlight the beliefs that race and ability are located within social and institutional structures as well as personal attitudes, thereby advancing inequalities within educational structures (Annamma et al., 2013).

Through the intersectionality of race, gender, and dis/ability, the Crenshaw's (1991) study highlighted the salience of multi-dimensional identities as a tool to understand how students' multi- lived experiences interact. In essence, intersectionality was developed to understand individuals within a complex educational pipeline rather than simply looking at individuals through a singular lens (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983;

Crenshaw, 1989; Grant & Sleeter, 1986). Intersectionality is a prism that allows the study to look at the specific and combined challenges that African American males identified as specific learning dis/abilities face when making post-high school choices. Often, studies analyze the consciousness of individuals through a single axis, continuing to marginalize the other dimensions of variables that impact an experience (Crenshaw, 1991). For this study, I used the intersectionality of identity to understand how participants' triple consciousness influence and challenge oppressive systems and norms (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Black Identity

Historically, scholars have interpreted racial identity as the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs that an individual has about his or her racial group in comparison to the others (Swanson et al., 2009). However, when examining Black identity, researchers have defined it through different lenses. Cross (1985, 1991, 2001) and DeCuir-Gunby (2009) define Black identity as evolution or process throughout life. This perspective conceptualizes the fluidity of a person's identity and interprets how an individual sees themselves in comparison to their ascribed racial group during a lifespan. While Demo and Hughes (1990), Phinney (1990), and Thornton et al. (1997) view Black identity as multidimensional, arguing that Black identity encompasses a broad array of connections to self that are more than closeness to one's racial group, they believe individuals have separate feelings that are not simplistic and include subgroups (e.g., masses, elites, and rebels) within Black group identity. Omi and Winant (1994) and Cornell and Hartmann (1998) stated that society and environment construct Black identity. Hence, if the concept

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of race is socially constructed, one's identity is shaped by an individual's negotiation of ethnic identity during societal encounters.

Variables Related to Black Identity

Psychological. A discussion regarding Black identity must include the seminal work of William Cross's (1971, 1991, 2001) nigrescence theory. Cross's (1971, 1991, 2001) nigrescence theory developed a foundation for racial and ethnic identity within psychology by illustrating how African Americans understand their racial identity through a developmental process across one's life course. He termed this process nigrescence because when translated, it means the process of becoming Black. Nigrescence is a "resocializing experience; it seeks to transform a preexisting identity (a non-Afrocentric identity) into one that is Afrocentric"(Cross, 1991, p. 44). Although the nigrescence theory has been published with several iterations, the broad scope of the model unpacks how individuals who identify with dominant White culture make distinctions between groups and personal identity through several stages toward a personal sense of Blackness (Vandiver et al., 2002). In 1971, the nigrescence theory was comprised of five stages that set the framework for later revisions as research developed: (a) pre-encounter, (b) encounter, (c) immersion/emersion, (d) internalization, and (e) internalization-commitment (Citation). The pre-encounter stage is the period when an individual does not use their Black identity to interact with the world. Afrocentric individuals are unaware of the social implications that are associated with being non-Eurocentric. Rather, they see their Black identity as a separator and a negative identifier, and they focus on other aspects of their peers, such as socioeconomic status, religion, or lifestyle. An adolescent may largely be unaware of racial implications and how they

affect their life. Unconsciously, they may subscribe to notions such as *White is right* and *Black is wrong.* These beliefs help the individual minimize their connection to their racial group (Cross, 1978).

The encounter stage is an event or series of events that forces a person to examine their Black identity and how they are situated and interact within their worldview. These events cause anxiety around social conformity, as this is the first time an individual's racial consciousness is awoken. Subtle stereotypical remarks by classmates, teachers, or administrators may trigger a racial identity awakening. An adolescent is faced with racism for the first time and acknowledges that they are not part of the dominant culture but rather a member of a targeted group (Cross, 1978).

Immersion/emersion is the stage when someone delves completely into their ethnicity to learn everything there is to know about Black culture and history. They then look disparagingly on others who are not within their ethnicity-racial group orientation as they prove their Blackness. This stage concludes with an emersion stage when the individual learns how to interact with others and see other points of view. During this stage, adolescents may seek to surround themselves with peers of the same race and desire to learn as much as they can about their racial identity. The adolescent may feel disconnected from their White friends as they may not understand the microaggressions the adolescent is noticing. This may be exhibited through dress, action, or speech as they think they should be within the racial group, often from what is portrayed by the media (Cross, 1978).

The internalization stage is a transition period for individuals who understand their Black identity and can successfully interact with others through dialogue and forge

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relationships with other racial and ethnic groups. In this stage, the individual is now secure in their Black identity and has a strong sense of self and how they interact with their world. The adolescent has now developed a stronger racial identity and can navigate conversations with peers outside their racial group while acknowledging their racial identity (Cross, 1978).

The internalization-commitment stage focuses on an individual who has a healthy racial development and has internalized who they are within their worldview. The individual recognizes racism, domination, and privilege and chooses to help people through a social justice lens, specifically those within their ethnicity. The individuals focus on their racial-ethnic group not because of anger and hate from outsiders. Rather, they have more salient experiences with those who are reflective of their experiences. Adolescents during this stage find new ways to translate their racial identity as Black within and outside of their racial group (Cross, 1978).

Although Cross's (1971, 1991, 2001) nigrescence theory is the most cited Black identity model, it was the byproduct of Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. Fanon (1952/1967) wrote about Black identity and the internal conflicts of those who identify with an Afrocentric experience. Both scholars brought awareness of how Black identity impacts one's psychological being and how one interacts with the world in varied dimensions.

Sociodemographic. Personal identity is related to one's racial group orientation and development through childhood (Baldwin et al., 1991; Clark & Clark, 1939a, 1939b, 1940, 1947, 1950; Cooper et al., 2019; Spencer, 1982). Clark & Clark (1939a, 1939b, 1940, 1947, 1950) were seminal in finding that African American students preferred the

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attributes that were Eurocentric rather than their own attributes. This study was foundational by examining the connection between African American self-identification correlated to racial groups by using photographs, drawings, and dolls representing Black or White identity as a context with students as young as preschool. Spencer (1982) used Clark and Clark's seminal studies to argue that preschoolers with limited cognitive development could have racial preferences related to personal identity and racial group orientation. Spencer (1982) further stated that students could prefer the characteristics of their Eurocentric counterparts and not have a negative impact on their personal identity or self-concept. Baldwin et al. (1991) asserted that if African American students were provided with positive images and attributes of themselves, they would select images reflective of themselves. Baldwin et al. (1991) found that students require advanced cognitive abilities and must understand their racial group first to understand one's self as associated with their racial group. To support this claim, Baldwin et al. (1991) used an Afrocentric perspective to develop students' schemas. Students were presented with positive African American images, and when asked to select the preferred racial identity depiction, they selected the Afrocentric image after the intentional schema development. Cooperman et al. (2019) as they explained this distinction by asserting that positive racial socialization directly impacts the cognitive racial development of African American males. Cooperman et al. (2019) found that African American males' racial identity beliefs were associated with ethnic-racial socialization (e.g., cultural pride and cultural history) that were shaped by their parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices in the home. Mostly, these studies point to how Black identity is defined within families and how images are communicated for African American male students.

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Experiential. Neville and Cross (2017) state that lived experiences, or observations, education, and activism, are pivotal in developing one's Black racial identity and awakening. DeCuir-Gunby (2009) asserts explicitly that when we examine Black racial identity within educational settings, we must understand that it is "impacted by the school context, including interactions with teachers, relationships with peers, and academic issues" (p. 118). Students who are developing their Black identity within the school context are critically impacted during the adolescence period (Leath et al., 2019). During this period of racial development, students are at a peak point and are becoming aware of how others view them and experiencing social interactions amongst social and academic settings. Gurin et al. (1980), Broman et al. (1989), Demo and Hughes (1990), and Leath et al. (2019) found that students with more interactions with intraracial groups (i.e., teachers and social peers within their racial group) have an increased Black racial identity development in comparison to their peers who are exposed more to interracial groups with a decreased racial identity development. Given these researchers' findings, Zirkel and Johnson (2016) supported their stance by further stating that students with a strengthened Black racial identity have been linked to higher academic achievement and overall well-being.

*[Black] Masculine Identit*y

Similar to racial identity, scholars assert that there is no one definition for masculine identity, as it varies across race and culture (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Pelzer, 2016). Generally, within any society when a person is sexed as male, that person is given a set of socially constructed masculine behaviors that are taught through interactions and relationships (Dancy, 2011; Kimmel & Messner, 2007; Steinberg, 1993).

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To define the heterosexual Black masculine identity, scholars assert that Black males must choose to identify with being either promiscuous, a predator, degenerate, or to aspire to have characteristics similar to the dominant ideologies of White culture (Cooper, 2006; Fanon, 1952/1967; Harper & Davis, 2012; McClure, 2006; Oliver, 1989).

Constructing the [Black] Masculine Identity. Historically, African American males have been linked to the African civilization of community, courage, protector, and provider (Pierre et al., 2000). An example of this historical trope is the great Mandingo Warrior, a warrior who conquered lands, united people, and was revered by his nation (Niane, 1965). Meek (1931) added to this commentary by stating that manhood pre-colonialism was bestowed upon all men and was not an individual consideration but rather a communal acknowledgment. This understanding of masculinity was undermined during slavery when African-American male identities were reconstructed by the dominant Eurocentric culture (Majors & Billson, 1992). African American males were emasculated and individualized when developing their manhood as a result of slavery and systemic racial discrimination (Alexander, 2012; Pierre et al., 2000; Richardson, 2010).

> When masters whipped slave men in front of their families, they undercut male slaves' the pretense of authority over their wives and children. Moreover, despite the efforts of enslaved men to provide necessities and material comforts for their families, they typically did not supply the bulk of the family's essential needs. All these factors restricted the power male slaves maintained in their day-to-day lives. For masters, the ideal slave man was the perpetual "boy," the childlike, dependent, and submissive Sambo. (Forret, 2011, p. 26)

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African American males looked to the White dominant culture as a standard to measure identity that was thought to gain access to opportunity (Blackwell, 1975; Hooks, 1992; Majors & Billson, 1992). Individually, White males were viewed as the definition of masculinity that yielded power and control. Individuals who identified as Black and masculine sought to adapt to these individualistic Eurocentric paradigms to define their masculinity while negotiating their own Black masculinity and historical collectivist identity.

> In the slavery period of the old South and later in the harder-to-read North, the black male learned through almost daily experience that, somehow, he had been assigned a restricted role. He learned to play that role with finesse and artistry that became part of his culture. Around whites he mastered the art of concealment, his mask constructed…of innocence and ignorance, childishness and humility, and obedience and deference. (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 59)

Dubois (1903) and Fanon (1952/1967) explained this mask construction within their seminal works like the Black identity experience. Both scholars revealed that African American males were regulated to negotiate between two cultural models of masculinity, being conscious of themselves as well as how the world views their identity. Dubois (1903) continued his sentiments by asserting that African Americans were forced to see themselves through a negative perspective as depicted by a Eurocentric society. Fanon (1952/1967) added that this way of experiencing the world forced a double consciousness that was a necessity of balancing mental health and survival techniques. Fanon (1952/1967) stated, "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was

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damned" (p. 106). African American males primarily must develop a dual masculine identity and become conscious of both identities through an encounter of racism as a mode of adaptation (Moore, 2005).

Understanding [Black] Masculinity. Despite the entrenched racial oppressive stereotypes and images placed upon individuals who identify as African American and male, Black masculinity was redefined in the post-slavery era. African American males were seen in multidimensional settings within the reconstruction, civil rights, Black power, and Black Lives Matter movements. During post-slavery African American males continued to balance their worlds by developing their Black masculine identity through an active process by which they asserted their Black masculinity in opposition to the dominant culture. Researchers Majors and Billson (1992) referred to *cool pose* as a developed identity strategy that was used by African American males to cope with racialized oppressive systems:

> By cool pose, we mean the presentation of self-many black males use to
> establish their male identity. Cool pose is a ritualized form of
> masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing,
> impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver
> a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control. (p. 4)

Through cool posing, African American males would express and define their masculinity, social competence, pride in self, and protection through speech, gesturing, handshakes, walking, body stance, and fashion expression (Majors & Billson, 1992; Pierre et al., 2000). Although this developed strategy used by African American males provided the redefined foundation for self-respect, it did not fit within the

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reconstructed Black masculine identity created by the dominant Eurocentric culture. This coping mechanism of cool posing often impedes African American males from expressing their fears or worries at the cost of losing their masculinity. In order to be cool, African American males may appear distant from their emotions to uphold their cool pose and subliminally oppose the White male masculine norms (Harris et al., 2011; Majors & Billson, 1992; Pierre et al., 2000). This detachment from emotion appears threatening to the dominant culture and continues the historical images and definition of Black masculinity, fueling "pejorative stereotypes that distinguish African American males as troublesome and threatening" (Monroe, 2005, p. 46). Norfleet (2006) inferred that African American males are still underpinned with stereotypical images of being "exotic, dangerous, and feared, while simultaneously being appealing and marketable" to the dominant Eurocentric culture (as cited in White, 2011, p. 25). Images of African American males are defined by the media and affirmed within educational settings, despite the efforts of the African American male's counter-narrative of cool posing to define themselves. An example of how African American masculine identity is redefined by the media and the dominant culture may be observed by how the African American male athlete is regarded as the apotheosis of physicality and strength. This idea of the African American male athlete reinforces the *Black savage* or *big Black buck* symbols placed on African American male bodies during the reconstruction of the redefined Black male during slavery. Feber (2007) stated that these athletic images are "depictions of African American athletes that reinforce the traditional hierarchy by reifying stereotypes of their animal-like nature, emphasizing their sexuality, aggressiveness, and physical power" (p. 19). This affirms the dominant Eurocentric culture to be compelled to control

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the bodies of the African American male, as this stereotyped individual has been entertaining but still feared (Feber, 2007; Hooks, 2004; Isom, 2007; White, 2011). Adding to this example, the media has displayed the White dominant male figure coach to be a father figure to the African American male athlete. The coach's role becomes one of setting boundaries for the athlete that will ensure that he becomes good and acceptable to society (Collins, 2005). Similar to the White male coach, educational settings have taken the role of managing and controlling the African American male, defining them as endangered, at-risk, a problem, and in crisis (Marsh & Noguera, 2018). These labels are consistently present and are influencers for African American males throughout their educational experiences while they are developing their identity as Black and masculine.

> For Black male students, labeling can occasionally begin on the first day
> of school, particularly when the transition from home to school is
> strained and made more difficult by cultural differences. When mostly
> white, middle-class female teachers are unfamiliar with the values and
> norms exhibited by Black male students they may regard them as
> deviant and fail to provide them with the assistance needed to
> successfully transition from home to school. (Marsh & Noguera, 2018,
> p. 452)

As a result, African American males must still develop their Black masculinity through the lens of home and school, continuing the dual consciousness of their ancestors.

Dis/abled Identity

When unpacking the triple consciousness of African American males identified as learning or behavior dis/abled, it is important to understand how one develops their identity as dis/abled specifically within the P-12 experience. Seminal researchers Charmaz (1995), Gill (1997), and Frank (1993) found that an individual may experience dis/ability at any point; however, they disagree on how one develops an identity of dis/ability. Gill (1997, 2001) asserted that identity formation is fluid and may occur in multiple stages. Gill's four stages are: (a) coming to feel we belong, (b) coming home, (c) coming together, and (d) coming out. These stages of identity assert that an individual becomes aware of self in relation to their peers. During the coming to feel we belong stage, students look for their social roles and express that they want to be with their peers in inclusive classrooms and schools. While students enter the coming home stage, they find peers with similar dis/abilities and may feel like they have a similar bond to a peer who understands them. In the third stage, coming together, students internally negotiate their distinct abilities while connecting shared identities with the dominant culture. During this stage, the student becomes aware of their identity as dis/abled within the broader dominant culture. Gill (1997) explained that the individual splits themselves into good and bad with the attempt to gain acceptance. Finally, the student enters the integration stage of coming out and expresses who they are, inclusive of their identified dis/ability and without internal conflict or social discomfort (Gill, 1997).

In contrast, Charmaz (1995) and Frank (1993) defined dis/ability development as an acquired layer in addition to an already achieved identity. Charmaz (1995) completed a longitudinal study of 55 adults with chronic illness that revealed that individuals with

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dis/abilities are aware of who they are and are not in constant turmoil with their identity. Rather, they define their identity, understand the tradeoffs, and brace for the ever-changing experiences that accompany their dis/ability. Frank (1993) explained from his survivor narrative that one develops their identity regarding their acquired dis/ability through critical reflection that produces a new self that values the person and the new dis/ability identity.

Racial Identity Meets Dis/ability

Racial identity literature captures the development of becoming aware of self, yet it is limited in addressing how the development may differ for those identified with a dis/ability. Researchers Alston et al. (1996) shared that it was challenging to endorse models such as Cross's nigrescence model (1971, 1978) as it was not clear with including individuals identified with a dis/ability. As a result, African Americans may identify with either a racial group or with individuals who share their dis/ability and development. After much criticism, researcher William Cross (1971, 1991, 2001) revisited his racial identity model to address race and ability development with seminal researcher Carol Gill (1997). Gill and Cross (2009) asserted that the development of dis/ability identity for African Americans is filtered on how the individual views their dis/ability. If the individual's primary influence is by their racial group, they are likely to develop through this lens, while if the primary influence is grouped by dis/ability, they are more likely to develop through dis/ability development stages. Essentially, African American males identified with dis/abilities must navigate the development of race and gender while compounding it with a dis/ability regarding intellectual and social development.

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Zheng et al. (2014) asserted when African American students who are identified with learning dis/abilities are aware of their self-concept or identity, they are more likely to have academic success. Hence, when a student has a lower sense of self or identity, they may have a lower level of academic achievement. Wright (2018) agreed and stated that when minoritized students are passed along from teacher to teacher with negative stigma and stereotypes, they begin to believe the negative stigma associated with their racial identity. Banks (2017) added to this discussion and specifically shared that African American male students internalize the mischaracterization of being problematic, inattentive, overactive, and unready, rather than inquisitive, competent, and promising students. This additional consideration of race, gender, and ability becomes a burden for students who now are at the center of an intersection of identity. These burdens impact students' consciousness and academic confidence.

Raced individuals identified with a dis/ability are often layered with an intersection of other identity categories. Intersectionality may be inclusive of sexuality, socioeconomic status, and visible or hidden dis/abilities. Those who have been identified with a dis/ability and are also identified with other socially constructed identifiers face a web of social conditions relevant to the discussion (Liasidou, 2013). However, for the purposes of this study, individuals who are impacted by race, gender, and dis/ability were prioritized.

Critical Consciousness

In Paulo Freire's (1968/2018) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and (1973) *Education for Critical Consciousness*, he theorized the need for marginalized individuals to be critical of their social conditions, thereby leading to the dismantling of their societal

inequities. The concept of critical consciousness is to be aware of social conditions concerning one's self in society. Once an individual begins to think and become aware of oppressive social structures, they become less influenced by inequitable conditions and begin to develop agency and capacity to change those conditions (Diemer et al., 2016). Freire (1970) asserted that oppressive systems and inequitable practices are sustained when individuals are unaware of and not conscious of their social conditions:

> The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 73)

Contemporary research has built onto Freire's (1970) seminal theory to understand how youth and adults reflect and act to change oppressive systems they are in. Diemer et al. (2017) contended that critical consciousness is developmental and measurable and can be defined through critical reflection and critical action. Critical reflection measures how one analyzes social inequalities, such as racial/ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic constraints. Critical action measures the intentional collective action to produce sociopolitical change within their educational or occupational setting. When a student enters critical consciousness development, they first recognize and understand the inequitable norms within the educational system (critical reflection), then they become empowered to take a stand (the socio-political efficacy), and finally they commit to taking action (critical action). This developmental process has been used to explain the

relationship between minoritized students and the increased enrollment in postsecondary institutions (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013). Hipólito-Delgado and Zion (2017) use critical consciousness to influence school-based strategies and experiences to assist with empowering students to take intentional action within the P-20 pipeline by developing an awareness of oppressive educational forces. When students are placed within educational settings that encourage critical consciousness, they are more likely to have increased ethnic identity, psychological empowerment, and civic self-efficacy that leads to developmental academic and social assets for minoritized students. Godfrey and Burson (2018) took an intersectional approach when applying critical consciousness to youth who self-identify as having multidimensional identities. They argued that current research focuses on marginalized youth rather than looking at marginalizing systems, overlooks sociohistorical context, and does not take into account the interlocking oppressive systems that multidimensional youth face. They urged additional focus be placed upon factors that are specific to identities and not collapsed under one umbrella of critical consciousness. They recommended that an individual who experiences intersectional identities may benefit from an expanded measurement tool that assists and connects their awareness to multiple systems of oppression they may experience. As a result of these operationalization and extensions of Freire's (1970) seminal theory, the concept of being woke is befitting to understand how youth explain their resistance against oppressive systems. To be woke is a slang term used to describe one's sociopolitical awareness and intentional action in the name of social justice related to racism (Garofalo, 2016). The concept of being woke is not a modern term, as it has been discussed and used by seminal writers of Black consciousness (Baldwin & Giovanni,

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1973). Baldwin (1968) proclaimed that popular culture within the late 1960s wanted to depict the images and narratives of African Americans amidst the emergence of the Black power movement and compel them to ignore the ever-present systems of oppression. Baldwin's (1968) sentiments reminded African Americans that they are to stay aware and conscious of discriminatory practices as sociopolitical climates were shifting and they were not aware they would be collaborators of the oppression rather than resistant. The echoes of being woke are resonating today as they did 60 years ago. Popular culture continues to narrate the imagery of African Americans and rationalize overtly bias and racist behaviors. As a result of the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been an outcry for individuals, particularly youth, to be socio-politically aware of dominant ideologies that state that oppressive systems are no longer present. This generation must stay woke and divorce themselves from such damaging rhetoric.

Double Consciousness

In DuBois's (1903) seminal piece he asserted, "the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better self" (p. 9), suggesting that African American males struggle with their consciousness. Dubois (1903) explained that men who identify as African American either are aware or must become aware of who they are in and out of their community, while simultaneously defining who they are to themselves and to society. Through this discovery of self-consciousness, African American males fought to understand who they were and how to become liberated within a society who did not see them as they saw themselves. In *The Soul of Black Folks*, DuBois (1903) explained the double consciousness concept:

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The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with

second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true

self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of

the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this

sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of

measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused

contempt and pity. (p. 9)

The metaphor or concept of double consciousness is the prequel of Cross's (1971)

internalization-commitment stage. In this stage, an individual, specifically an African

American male, becomes more conscious and knowledgeable of their racial identity

within their two realities. As a result of becoming aware of one's space or dual identity,

the consequence of double consciousness is produced and forms capital for an individual.

The skill to code switch within varied environments is the individual's second sight to see

two complex worlds simultaneously within one experience. Dubois (1903) understood

that African American males needed to have a deeper insight into a world that was

oppressive. This insight would be an essential tool in navigating dominant systems.

An Intersectional Approach to Consciousness

As the brief overview of critical consciousness reveals, an individual who

understands one's self within oppressive systems and takes steps to move toward taking

action in changing inequitable norms will have increased academic and social growth.

For the purposes of this study, an intersectional consciousness approach was used to

understand how African American males identified with a specific learning dis/ability

understand their critical consciousness as raced, gendered, and dis/abled. Researchers

have constructed fundamental understandings to move toward practical applications and
theorized frameworks to understand the multiple competing identities that African
American males identified with a specific learning dis/ability experience within the P-20
educational pipeline.

Fundamental Understandings and Practical Applications

Banks (2013) discussed the academic experiences of African American males
identified as dis/abled and their perspectives of attending postsecondary institutions.
African American males identified as dis/abled are challenged with navigating three
identities as they develop counternarratives to dispel negative stereotypes placed upon
them by dominant culture. Banks (2013) recommended that educators, specifically those
within postsecondary settings, assist students in the development of a self-identity that
counters deficit-based narratives. Mayes and Moore (2016) added that African American
students who have been identified as having intersectional educational identities (e.g.,
gifted and identified with a high incidence dis/ability) experience discrepancies between
ability and dis/ability due to educators being unaware of how to support them
educationally. As a result, these multi-minoritized students face greater educational
barriers and are in need of additional research to explore and assist pre- and in-service
teachers. To meet the need for additional research for students who are identified and
having intersectional educational identities, specifically African Americans, Robinson
(2017) developed a triple identity theory framework as an approach to understand how
identity factors influence students' academic journeys. Robinson (2017) contended that
the triple identity provides a:

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cultural lens to examine the educational experiences of students who experience intersectional educational identities and other culturally and linguistically . . . throughout the P-20 educational pipeline. The Triple Identity Theory serves as a phenomenological approach to help understand: (1) identity formation may impact students' academic and social experiences, (2) marginalized students who feel a sense of "otherness" may be navigating multiple factors as they develop identities, and (3) do identities (e.g., salience; p. 151).

While several scholars chose to explore the fundamentals of multidimensional identities, other scholars selected to frame and extend their understanding of intersectionality and self-identity from seminal researcher Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness. Flores and Román (2009) and Rivera (2011) directly spoke to Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness and argued that he is not speaking exclusively to African Americans but to the colorism that exists globally and in the United States. They proposed that Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness inadvertently omitted the largest group of Black people, Afro-Latinxs (Román, 2009; Rivera, 2011). Afro-Latinx individuals experience a triple consciousness, as the world depicts them as Hispanic and non-Black, resulting in the silencing of their Blackness. Yet, their reality speaks to a three-ness of being ethnically Latinx, racially Black, and nationally American within a transnational experience. It was evident that this extension of double consciousness was not to diminish the African American dual experience but align the concept with the individuals who are often forced to select racial identity of being Black or non-White but never both. Researchers explained that the triple consciousness experienced by Afro-Latinx is developmental, as

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they make intentional decisions regarding when to assimilate within the dominant culture.

In contrast, Welang (2018) selected to reconceptualize Du Bois's (1903) double

consciousness and theorized triple consciousness. Welang (2018) contended that African

American women view themselves through three lenses: African (Blackness), American,

and as a woman, not two as outlined by a double consciousness. The researcher continued

by detailing that the synthesized depiction of double consciousness from Du Bois's

(1903) *Souls of Black Folk* was told from an African American boy's perspective and was

flawed as it did not address the African American female experience. From this

foundational basis, Welang (2018) theorized critical areas of consciousness through three

tenets of three-ness that African American women experience as a triple consciousness:

(a) Blackness [a racial space that prioritizes the interests of Black men], (b) womanhood

[a hierarchical gendered identity with White women at the top and Black women at the

bottom], and (c) American [represented by the hegemony of White patriarchy] (p. 298-

299). Furthering this theoretical lens, Welang (2018) continued to look at current issues,

such as the Black lives matter movement, through her triple consciousness theory.

Welang (2018) highlighted that despite the Black lives matter movement being founded

by Black women, Black female victims receive less coverage and do not receive the same

attention as given to their Black male counterparts. By addressing the gender limitations

of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness, Welang (2018) continued the African

American experience by developing a triple consciousness theory that prioritizes African

American women's voices that have been marginalized. On the other hand, Patton and

Simmons (2008) considered the context in which Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness

revealed itself as the second sight of being a gift. They found that individuals who

experienced the triple identity of being African American, female, and a lesbian experienced a triple consciousness of oppression. An individual's race, gender, and sexual orientation placed them within three societal oppressed identities that at times forced them to choose an identity, rather than owning their three-ness. If an individual selected to act in a feminine manner, they risked not being acknowledged as a lesbian, "You are too pretty to be gay" (Patton & Simmons, 2008, p. 207). Patton and Simmons (2008) concluded that individuals who self-identify as having multiple marginalized identities experience oppressive spaces but can find value and appreciate their triple identities as one if supported.

In summary, Du Bois (1903) asserted within his autoethnographic work that African Americans are aware of themselves and how the world sees them. His seminal literature supporting self-consciousness informed my conceptual framework of triple consciousness and how I viewed the phenomena of how African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities may encounter a world as they see themselves, how the world views them, and how they interpret this in ways that inform their choices for postsecondary/life. As the concept of having a triple consciousness is emerging, this study used the proposed triple consciousness conceptual frame to add to the current literature.

Chapter 3

Methodology

> At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness.

> —Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their triple consciousness and what particular experiences influence their post-high school decisions through the qualitative approach via an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005. The focus of a case study is to develop an in-depth analysis for a comprehensive understanding of the process, bounded system, activity, event, program, or individuals that researchers seek to understand (Ary et al., 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2017). More specifically, the purpose of an instrumental case study methodology is to provide insight, extend the experiences of participants, redraw generalizations, or build theory (Stake, 1994, 1995, 2005). Researchers Trainor et al. (2016) examined the transition planning of students placed in programs with high-incidence dis/abilities and found that students revealed having goals for enrollment in college or postsecondary settings. Despite their findings, the researchers did not include further examination of the disparate relationship between planning and outcomes. Though the research provided preliminary measures, my study adds to the literature to understand how students who have multidimensional identities, specifically African American male students identified with high incidence dis/abilities understand their triple

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consciousness identity and post-high school transition planning. To guide the study, two questions of importance were posed:

1. How do African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their multidimensional identity development?

2. What are the particular experiences that influence African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities post-high school decisions?

By using a qualitative instrumental case study approach, I identified and chose to illuminate students' understanding of how they made sense of their triple consciousness and their influences of post-high school decisions. The following chapter describes the study's research design and rationale for methodological choices, while the second part of the chapter focuses on how the study was conducted. I hope to provide a deeper understanding of how one's understanding of triple consciousness may influence post-high school pathways, with the intent to support the transition process as students move from secondary to postsecondary educational settings.

Epistemological Framework

As a researcher, I position my work within a critical constructivist paradigm (Anderson & Barrera, 1995; Campos, 2009; Kincheloe, 2005; Piaget, 1965/1995; Watts et al., 1997). I understand there are multiple realities through which I construct my worldview. However, my reality is continually developing and becoming more complex as I critically question and increase my awareness of my historical, political, and social context. This paradigm is embedded within the qualitative research approach I have selected but also suggests generalizability as an extension of experience for future

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quantitative studies (Anderson & Barrera, 1995). By allowing the inquiry process to be shaped by a critical constructivist epistemology, the study centers on how participants critically construct their triple consciousness within their educational journey. Toward this broad objective, I have sought to interpret and theme how participants' knowledge of their multiple realities influence their decision making and how they understand and or make sense of the world. The theoretical frame of my research is grounded in the interpretations of how the intersections of race, gender, and ableism impact student experiences and social context within the academic setting (Annamma et al., 2013).

Case Study as a Strategy of Inquiry

The Use of Case Studies

Although the use of the case study approach is discussed by foundational researchers as a primary qualitative strategy, it rests along a philosophical continuum. To expand my understanding as a novice researcher, I needed to decipher which direction was befitting to make sense of the phenomenon under study. Merriam (1998) an educational researcher, offered a practical and accessible application of this design. Stake (2008), an educational psychologist, espoused that a case study must include an emphasis on an interpretive and constructivist approach to understanding the experiences of the participants. However, Stake (2008) was not opposed to using a disciplined approach to the process and acknowledges that a case study may use quantitative methods to support findings. Yin (2014), a consultant in policy research, asserted that a researcher must look at case study as a logical process and distance oneself from the case by having rigorous data collection, multiple sources of evidence, and methodological analysis that result in precise results and findings. In choosing a stance within a case study, I understood that

although there are variations of case study approaches, a case study is different from other strategies as they are focused on particular phenomena, descriptive, and heuristic, as they provide new insight into the phenomena.

There are varying philosophical approaches when using case studies (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 2008; Yin, 2014) within qualitative research. Most commonly referenced is Yin (2009, 2014), a foundational author who firmly stated that case studies should be viewed from a post-positivist lens. According to Yin (2014), case studies are a form of empirical inquiry that should be approached from a realist perspective, while maintaining objectivity within the methodological process (pp. 16-17). Once a researcher has chosen to design a case study from a post-positivist approach, they look at the case objectively as a way to generalize results viewed as quasi-experimental. This type of researcher understands that measurement is imperfect, they must use multiple methods to triangulate data to connect real-life experiences to the concreteness of science. Yin (2014) distinguished his view from experimental studies by stating that case studies are based within the context and "real-world settings" (p. 16). Precision, accurate reporting, and practicality are foundational when using Yin's approach to case study design. When this approach is used, the investigation is structured sequentially with meticulous data collection that addresses possible bias while acknowledging limitations (Yin, 2014). When conducting a case study, a researcher must be independent of data to develop a process that is set within context without manipulating any behavior of the case (Yin, 2014).

In Contrast to Yin's (2014) systematic approach to inquiry, two other seminal researchers have chosen to look at phenomena quite differently. Merriam (1998) uses a

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pragmatic constructivist approach to case study from a practical lens. Her approach supports a researcher who assumes that reality is constructed by one's understanding and is developed socially and experientially. According to Merriam (1998), case studies are a way for researchers to gain a full and rich understanding of a unit, entity, or phenomenon with defined boundaries. She furthered her perspective by stating that once a researcher selects the case study design, they are interested in the process of inquiry and not the outcome. Merriam (1998) claimed that the case study design is emergent and does not have a rigid data collection method or analysis and does not need to be systematically recorded or managed, instead it "focuses on holistic description and explanation" (p. 29). However, Merriam (1998) does discuss pragmatic structures within the case study process, such as thematic content analysis and triangulation, to ensure the quality of a study for a complete chain of evidence. Through the case study process, the researcher must be intuitive while analyzing the data, allowing for the construction of themes and categories that allow the heart of the case to emerge (Merriam, 1998). "The investigator retreated with the data, applied his or her analytic powers, and emerged butterfly-like with findings" (Merriam, 1998, p. 156). While this approach to case study allows researchers to ground their research philosophically in a practical manner, other researchers state that the most crucial role of the researcher is to be an interpreter.

Stake (2008) approaches a case study from a constructivist and interpretivist lens that acknowledges that reality is subjective. When looking at a case study through Stake's (2005) philosophical assumption, a researcher should have an emphasis on the holistic understanding of the phenomena with a variety of contexts, such as economic, historical, political, social, and personal. This constructivist and interpretivist position supports

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researchers who interact with the phenomenon by encouraging the relationship between the researcher and the participant. This approach affords the researcher with an insider view to understand and illuminate the human experience. Stake (2005) noted "the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case … the utility of case research to practitioners and policymakers is in its extension of experience" (1994, p. 245). Stake (2005, 2008) challenges researchers to understand that case study may be qualitative or quantitative, analytical or holistic, measured or interpreted, but ultimately a researcher must interpret and construct meaning and understanding of the case. The interpretation allows the researcher to clarify the phenomenon and provide insight on an issue through explanation and description, while the constructivist approach allows the researcher to construct meaning through dynamic relationship and evolving interpretation of participant's perspectives and lived experiences.

As Merriam (1998, 2009) and Stake (2005, 2008) contended, a case study should be approached through a constructivist lens. Contrary, Merriam (1998, 2009) and Yin (2014) stated that a case study design must have a process of inquiry as structure. Stake (1995) does not subscribe to set inquiries, stating that the issue of the study is dominant and provides a conceptual structure and guides the process. As a result, I have selected an instrumental study inquiry to investigate real-life situations that are bound by a single participant or group of individuals, as described by Stake (1995). The goal of this study is to align my worldview, research questions, method, and design to assist with the exploration and awakening of the triple consciousness of African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities and their post-high school decisions.

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Instrumental Case Study

Because case studies have an in-depth, multi-sided approach, case studies cannot be generalized to larger populations, are difficult to replicate, and are time consuming (Crowe et al., 2011). However, Stake (2005) introduced instrumental case studies to allow researchers to use the bounded case to facilitate a broader understanding of similar cases. When conducting this approach, I used the case of African American male high school seniors identified as specific learning dis/abled as secondary information to understand the broader implications of triple consciousness for individuals who have been raced, gendered and identified as dis/abled. This instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) was framed by DisCrit, which distinguishes the unique phenomenon of students who have multidimensional identities, similarly to the triple identity experience of African American males, who have been identified as specific learning dis/abled. DisCrit is unique as it is the bridge between dis/ability studies, dis/ability studies in education, and critical race theory and addresses macro-level intersectional issues of race and ability through the day-to-day experiences of students of color with dis/abilities (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit scholars state that race and ability are interdependent and shape the self-concept of normalcy against the standard of Whiteness for students of color. Students who have multiple identities may feel incapable in body and mind (Connor, et al., 2016). This theoretical framework shaped the research inquiry to examine ways in which racism and ableism were built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education as they affect minoritized students qualitatively different from their White counterparts (Annamma et al., 2013).

By using the instrumental case study, the examination of the case was thorough and interpretative, while simultaneously allowing generalization for the purposes of extending the experiences for additional research associated with cases like African American males who have been identified as specific learning dis/abled. Remaining consistent with the approach of case studies, an instrumental case study was appropriate when exploring African American male high school seniors identified as specific learning dis/abled, and their multiple experiences. Capturing a student's understanding of their multidimensional identity was difficult and required a variety of in-depth explorations to reveal participants' explanations of their intersectional identity (Harper, 2011; Ivankova & Stick, 2007). As the researcher, I explored the particular case of students who self-identify as African American, male, and recipients of services for students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities. The goal of this study was to use the case as an instrument to understand the larger issue and to redraw generalization to extend the understanding of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness phenomena.

Research Design

To better understand the triple consciousness as it redraws generalizations of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness, a qualitative, single instrumental case study design was developed to examine the multidimensional identities of a specific case. The participants in the selected case were African American male high school seniors identified as specific learning dis/abled. The intentions of this study were to explore the depth of experiences that manifest in African American males who have multiple consciousness and the decision-making process of their post-high school choices. Given that the proposed case was used as a vehicle to understand students who have been raced,

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gendered, and identified with subjective classifications, I used an instrumental case study. Stake (1995) recommends researchers to use instrumental case studies when the expected outcome of the study is focused on a particular issue, and the bounded case provides an illustration of that issue comprehensively. The design provided an extrinsic look at the phenomenon that began with "a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding and a feeling that may give insight into the question by studying a particular case" (Stake, 1995, p. 5).

As shown in Figure 3, the study design had four steps. First, a 145-question adaptive identity survey (Appendix A) was used to capture how participants thought of their triple identities and critical consciousness. Evaluation of the responses was then used to stratify and purposefully select a case to be examined. This method of selection aligned with qualitative methods techniques, in which a research participant is selected using stratified purposive sampling (Patton, 2014). Patton (2014) asserted that when selecting strata or groupings of participants, researchers may have homogenous samples and later discover major variations as they emerge in the analysis. The second step involved selecting participants from the stratified purposeful sample that displayed variations along with being identified as being dis/abled. Once participants were selected, they were subdivided into focus groups to discuss how they understood and made sense of their multidimensional experiences as African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities and their post-high school decisions for semi-structured interviews. The third step incorporated the adaptive identity survey results and research questions to guide the group's semi-structured interviews. After the first of the two focus group interviews, participants' member checks and responses were discussed with a peer

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debriefer to address any strengths, weaknesses, or impartialities before completing the second small focus group interview. This first debriefing was followed by the second of the two focus groups, which afforded participants to present their superhero graphic elicitations. Following the final group interview, participants' graphic elicitations, responses, and member checks were discussed with the peer debriefer and then evaluated. Once all initial evaluations and transcripts were completed, participants engaged in individual face-to-face meetings and phone calls to discuss their responses and confirm, update, or refute what was captured from each data collection point (e.g. semi-structured focus group interviews, graphic elicitations, and member checks).
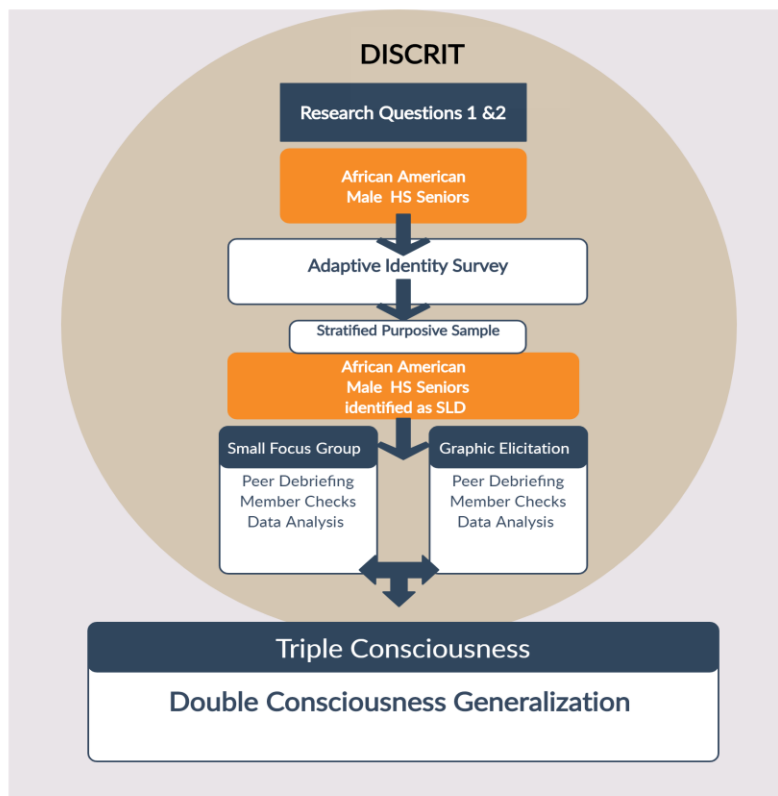
Figure 3. Research Design

Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that case studies are an in-depth descriptive analysis of a system bounded by time and place, designed to study one particular case or phenomenon, and characterized by the collection and analysis of extensive data. Furthering this broad definition, they continue by stating that a case study's design includes, research questions and propositions, validity and reliability, and a deductive approach to the case under study. This design was the opposite of grounded theory or inductive approaches, as this required the researcher to gather research questions and proposition in advance, rather than having them emerge (Rowley, 2002). A case study's design includes components that allow a researcher to connect the research questions to conclusions.

Research Questions

Two research questions are used to explore the triple consciousness of African American male students who have been identified as specific learning dis/abled and their post-high school decisions.

1. How do African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their multidimensional identity development?

2. What are the particular experiences that influence African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities post-high school decisions?

Site and Population

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their triple consciousness and what particular experiences influence their post-high school decisions. To draw this desired

sample, the population of interest for this study were students who self-identify as African American and male who are entering their 12th grade year of high school within the Northeast region of the United States. Participants were recruited from traditional public and charter high schools and educational mentor groups, such as Friday is Tie Day, Sigma Beta Club, the school district's men empowerment group, and the Give Something Back foundation, within urban, suburban, and rural communities. For African American students, mentoring can be particularly vital to their post-high school decision making (Wolf, 2017). Therefore, the inclusion of mentoring programs was added to the recruitment plan. The researcher emailed school counselors, program directors, and her professional network to provide information about the study as well as seek permission to contact students and parents of students under 18 years of age.

Students were informed that participation involved the completion of an identity survey and two 120-minute small focus group interviews. The goal of the researcher was to have a minimum of 50 participants complete the initial data survey and 6 to 15 participants to engage within the prescribed small focus groups. However, in application the researcher was met with the limited enrollment of African American male high school seniors within the targeted proposed sites. Several of the sites enrolled less than 25% of their senior high school class with African American males. Once consent was received, 42 participants completed the survey and only 32 participants consented to be considered for the two 120-minute focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Participant Sample Selection and Criteria

According to Stake (1995), cases are not preselected in an instrumental case study; rather, they allow for typical and atypical cases to be examined. To assist with

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finding the varied perspectives of the selected case, a stratified purposive sampling method (see Figure 4) was used for this study. Participants were divided into different subgroups or strata based on their identity survey responses, then purposefully selected to share their lived experiences and post-high school decision-making process as African American, male, while being identified with specific learning dis/abilities. Patton (2014) defined stratified purposive sampling as selecting participants from homogenous groups, for example, selecting from 12th grade students who identify as African American, male, and with specific learning dis/abilities but who also have the variation of being raised in a one-parent household. Stratified purposeful sampling was useful for examining the variations of participants and how their characteristics manifest within the lived experiences of African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities, allowing for additional comparison. Patton (2014) shared that stratified purposive sampling is an appropriate technique for individuals within subgroups to use agency. Through the study's sampling, African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities made meaning of their triple consciousness and the role it took when making post-high school decisions. The sample size for this study was eight participants. The process for stratified purposive sampling included the steps illustrated in Figures 4 and 5:
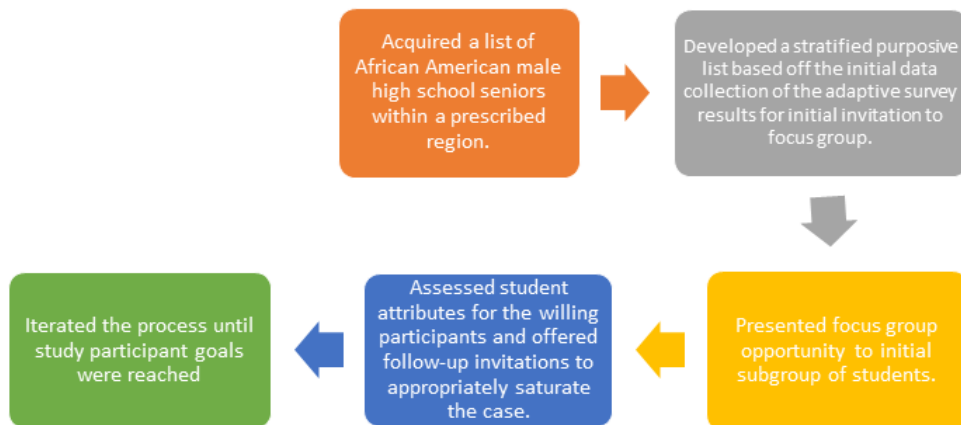
Figure 4. Stratified Purposive Sampling Process
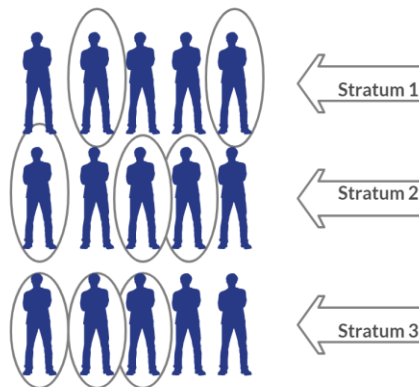
Figure 5. Pictorial Example of Stratified Purposive Sampling Process

There were five students under the age of 18, six who lived in a two-parent household, four who had a mother and/or father who started or completed a postsecondary degree, five who earned 2.6 or greater grade point average. The entire sample ($N = 8$) identified as specific learning dis/abled. The selected participants provided varied perspectives to assist with redrawing generalizations of Du Bois's (1903)

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double consciousness concept through their lived experiences and backgrounds. Table 1

provides participant profiles for this study.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant	< 18 years of age	Two-Parent Household	Mother and Father > HS	GPA > 2.6	Identified as Dis/abled
Harmony		X	X	X	X
HEAT	X	X		X	X
King Fearless	X	X	X		X
Lone Wolf	X	X		X	X
Withered Conjurer		X	X	X	X
Quick Feet	X				X
The GOAT	X	X	X	X	X
Black Ghost					X

Data Collection Procedures

To increase the accuracy of conclusions, I chose to collect multiple data sources

to allow for triangulation (Patton 2005). This collection served as answers to the posed

research questions (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The study included a survey and semi-

structured focus group interviews in conjunction with graphic elicitations.

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Adaptive Identity Survey

The first data were gathered from a 145-question adaptive identity survey (Appendix A). That was used to assist with the sampling method for the 42 participants. Questions from four validated surveys along with demographic questions were entered into Qualtrics for participants to complete online:

- The Masculinity Inventory Scale (MIS) for Black Men is a 50-item inventory on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The tool measures how Black young men view themselves related to stereotypical roles and masculinity (Mincey et al., 2014). The MIS was developed to understand what elements influence how Black men develop masculinity and what elements define masculinity for Black men. The subscales of the MIS consist of three themes: (a) masculinity/manhood: views of mainstream society on what a man or Black man should be, (b) perceived barriers or challenges to becoming men, and (c) parental influences; social networks; role models; and support, including influence of fathers, mothers, and friends, on male development. The mean of each subscale is calculated to determine which scales have a higher mean. A higher mean score is associated with a higher endorsement of that type of masculinity.

- Critical Consciousness Scale is a 22-item Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly disagree) that measures marginalized students' capacity to critically analyze their social and political conditions, endorsement of societal equality, and action to change perceived inequities (Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017). The scale is comprised of three subscales: (a) critical reflection—perceived

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inequality: critical analysis of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered constraints on educational and occupational opportunity; (b) critical reflection—egalitarianism: endorsement of societal equality, or all groups of people treated as equals within society; and (c) critical action—sociopolitical participation: social and political activities to change perceived inequalities.

The critical consciousness scale was developed intentionally for youth and adult populations to understand and use their consciousness as an antidote to oppressive structures. High scores indicate a high degree of critical reflection or critical action on the subscale in question. Each subscale is distinctly different.

- Cross-Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) is a 40-item rating scale based on The expanded nigrescence theory (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). The subscales of the CRIS assess six racial identity attitudes, including (a) pro-American (PA), (b) pre-encounter miseducation (PM), (c) pre-encounter self-hatred (PSH), (d) immersion-emersion anti-white (IEAW), (e) internalization Afrocentricity (IA), and (f) internalization multiculturalists inclusive (IMCI). Each subscale consists of five items that are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The adapted scale does include the 10 filler questions assigned within the original scale. A mean score was obtained for each of the subscales, and together the six subscale scores provide a profile of an individual's racial identity attitudes.

- Dis/ability Identity Development Scale (DIDS) is a 33-item inventory on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me) that measures dis/ability identity (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017). The scale categories

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identity through four statuses: (a) acceptance: person accepts and owns dis/ability, including aspects of frustration via internal and emotional, (b) relationship: person meets others like themselves, (c) adoption: adopts and feels a strong connection to the dis/ability community, and (d) engagement: recognizes others who may be in other statuses and becomes a role model to those within the dis/ability community. DIDS was developed in response to previous scholars' contributions to understanding internal and external dimensions of dis/ability identity and how individuals engage within the dis/abled community (Darling & Heckert, 2010; Dunn & Burcaw, 2013; Gibson, 2006; Gill, 1997). Once scores are tallied, higher scores for each subscale indicate greater agreement with the corresponding dis/ability identity status. Lower scores for each subscale indicate less agreement with the corresponding dis/ability identity status.

The primary goals of the survey were to identify adolescents' consciousness by self-report; discover adolescents' perspectives about their identity as Black, male, and dis/abled; and develop subgroups to determine participants' similarities and differences.

Focus Group Interviews

According to Morgan (1997), focus group interviews may be used as a primary source of data collection, a method to generate survey questions, or for triangulation purposes. As a way to capture the natural conversation amongst adolescent participants, the focus group served as a triangulation component. Each group consisted of four participants. Dilshad and Latif (2013) contended that the group must be large enough to gain adequate information but small enough to allow for

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group synergy. Although this method is less structured, Stake (1995) contended that this approach allows the case to transform naturally.

Graphic Elicitation

During the focus group, participants were asked to complete a graphic elicitation in the form of a superhero portrait. Students were given the option to color, collage precut words, and/or orally explain their superhero graphic via a template. Elicitation techniques are a research category inclusive of visual, verbal, or written stimuli used to engage students in sharing sensitive topics (Barton, 2015). For this study, the graphic elicitation was used in conjunction with the focus group to encourage experiences and sensemaking that may be challenging to capture with words (Bagnoli, 2009). By utilizing graphic elicitation, participants were provided with increased focus to share complex answers to interview questions (Crilly et al., 2006). The graphic elicitation also aided with students connecting their triple identity and consciousness as a superhero during the focus group. The focus group format mimicked the participants' 120-minute class schedule and was planned as a two day lesson plan (see Figures 6 & 7).

Duration	**Resources**
120 minutes	Graphic novel template, photo of notable African American male, pencils, markers, magazines, glue, scissors, and chart paper

Session Objectives

Students Will Be Able To (SWBAT):

- SWBAT: explore and discuss their multiple identities faced by males, specifically African American males with learning and behavior dis/abilities.
- SWBAT: discuss their educational experiences of African American male students identified with learning and behavioral dis/abilities.

Warm-Up

Ask students: If you were getting anxious or bothered, who do you talk to for help?

Display image of a movie star, an athlete, a historical figure.

Ask students to respond to the picture: What words or labels would you use to describe this person (i.e., for Meek Mill., students might use words like woke, rapper, or African American to describe him)?

Ask students to respond in writing to:

What words or labels would you use to describe yourself?

What words might others use to describe you?

What words might others use to describe to you that you would not choose for yourself?

Activity

Introduce the graphic elicitation activity and explain how students view themselves compared to how the world views them but as a superhero. Students will then be asked to draw an image in the large box next to a short caption describing themselves and how others describe them.

On the outside, the world views you through their eyes, if you were a superhero, how would you imagine the world viewing you?

How do you view yourself?

What are some aspects of your identity that you might not present to others, and why do you choose to keep them to yourself?

Discussion of Graphic Elicitation

Why do people sometimes hide their true selves?

Think about a time when you have pretended to be something that you are not or when you have hidden your true feelings. Why did you choose to hide a part of your identity?

Follow-Up

Students will likely need the remaining time to finish their superhero.

Member Check-In

Group summary: let's recap what we shared today.

Figure 6. Session 1.

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Duration   **Resources**
120 minutes   Chart paper
Session Objectives
Students Will Be Able To (SWBAT):
- SWBAT: explore and discuss their multiple identities faced by males, specifically African American males with learning and behavior dis/abilities.
- SWBAT: discuss their educational experiences of African American male students identified with learning and behavioral dis/abilities and their post-high school decisions.

Warm-Up
Ask students: What have you thought about since our last meeting?
Activity
Participant presentation of superhero to group.
Discussion Questions
- What are your superpowers?
- Who are your allies?
- Where do you go to recharge your superpowers?
- Who are your enemies?
- What is your Kryptonite?

Follow-Up
Experiences help us define who we are and who we are not. Identify an experience that influenced your post high school decisions. Describe this experience and then explain the impact it has had on how you answer the question: what will you be doing after you graduate high school?
Member Check-In
Group summary: let's recap what we shared today.

Figure 7. Session 2.

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis (see Figure 8) was an inductive and sequential process that allowed

for what Creswell (1998) described as a "data analysis spiral" (p. 186). Analyzing the

multiple forms of data involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-

through of the data for memoing and emergent ideas, classifying codes into themes,

developing and assessing interpretations, and visually representing findings (Creswell &

Poth, 2017). Due to the various data collection phases, attention was focused on the

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relationship between individual and collective responses after each phase of data

collection (e.g. adaptive survey, focus groups, and graphic elicitations).

Create and organize data files

Make margin notes and form initial codes

Describe the
case and its context

Use categorical
aggregation to establish
themes or patterns

Use categorical aggregation to
establish themes or patterns
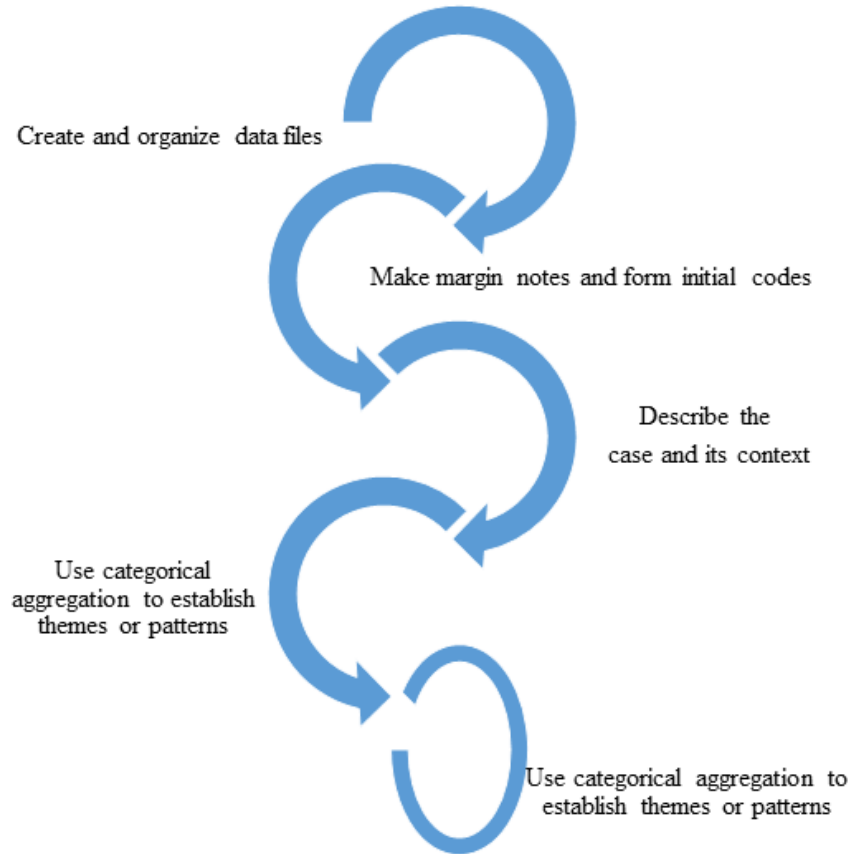
Figure 8. Creswell's Data Analysis Spiral

Coding Process

According to Creswell (2015), "researchers code because text data is dense, and it

takes a long time to go through it to make sense of them" (p. 152). Coding allows the

researcher to index and make connections from the data collected to the research

questions. "Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential

information compiled during a study" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 71). During the coding

process, numerous codes emerged into patterns that formed broad, interpretive themes. Through the use of coding, a cyclical process was used to find themes. The first cycle was In vivo coding, categorizing what was shared verbatim from each participant during the focus group and graphic elicitation. During the second cycle, focused coding was used to integrate and synthesize codes to create meta codes, allowing meaning to emerge from individuals and collectively from each focus group (Saldana, 2013). As a result, subthemes and themes connected to the research question.

Reliability and Validity: Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Data

Validation, credibility, and reliability are key within qualitative research, as they connect the researcher personally to participants. For this reason, a methodological triangulation strategy was utilized to increase confidence in the interpretation of the phenomena (Creswell, 2017; Denzin, 1984). "Triangulation involves the careful reviewing of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct" (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2005, p. 1). As a result of the converging of multiple data collection, the qualitative study was strengthened and led to greater credibility and dependability (Yin, 2014). To begin the triangulation of data, a review of the adapted identity survey results assisted the researcher with the analysis of how students understand their triple identities and consciousness. After the initial results were gathered from the adaptive identity survey, participant responses revealed homogenous patterns. In many cases, students scored similarly across all five sub identity surveys; however, their demographic and familial backgrounds differed. To assist the triangulation, participants' responses were compared and stratified to highlight

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variations of participant responses that may surface within the prescribed focus group interviews. This analysis was followed by reviewing the transcription of participants' discussion during the small group sessions and triangulated with each of the eight participant survey responses. Finally, the participants' illustrations of themselves through a superhero depiction were reviewed for concepts and themes related to identity and consciousness and triangulated with their focus group discussion. After analyzing the data phases independently, they were merged to connect similar patterns by comparing and synthesizing the separate results to triangulate the data collectively. Once patterns emerged, they were clustered into themes to assist with the researcher's understanding of African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities triple consciousness and how that influences post-high school decisions.

Credibility is an assessment of trustworthiness; in this study, several techniques were used to establish trust to assist the researcher with staying neutral given the positionality of her role. These included member check-ins, peer debriefings, and triangulation. Member check-ins helped to improve the accuracy and transferability of the study through respondent validation and feedback. At the conclusion of each small group session, interpretive group member checks were completed with participants to discuss responses via open-ended questions to facilitate feedback before moving to the next phase. Once the small group discussions and graphic elicitations were recorded and reviewed line by line, transcription reports were shared during one on one in person member checks to confirm or disaffirm details and themes captured during the small group discussion. To capture the voices of each participant, the researcher followed up with a final member check phone call to review final edits regarding how

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each participant was reflected in the study. The independent one-on-one and phone meetings provided additional layers of integrity to each participant's commentary.

Another consideration for the trustworthiness of the study is peer debriefing. Before the start of the data collection, a peer who was not involved in the research project but understood the phenomenon under study was asked to join the researcher for each small focus group. The peer debriefer was asked to look impartialities, such as over or underemphasized points, biases or assumptions, or general errors in the data collection. After each small group session, he audited the researcher's memos, audio recordings of the session, and participant's graphic elicitations. During the debriefing sessions, he shared that he noticed the researcher needed to ask more focus questions if participants were vague with responses. The peer debriefer was effective as he offered clear, concise feedback that was relevant and necessary to achieve rich data collection.

Finally, triangulation was used through various forms of data collection, allowing the researcher to cross-reference findings and checkpoints to ensure the data were well-developed, content-rich, and comprehensive (Lincoln & Guba, 1988).

Ethical Concerns

To ensure ethical research, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the approving university to conduct this study. Once IRB initial approval was received, all informed consent from participants in the study was collected. The consent form explained to the potential participants, by the principal investigator or co-investigators that the consent would be read and any and all questions would be answered before and during the study if needed. The participants were also informed that they can withdraw their participation at any time

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without penalty. If they wished to enroll, the participant would sign a three-part consent form consenting to one or more of the various levels of participation in this study. Once the study team obtained consent, they would also sign and date the consent form, and a signed copy would be given to the participant. During the study, periodic checks were given, along with open communication to all study participants throughout the study period.

Given that the study centered on sensitive topics, a resource list of support and an assembled team of school counselors and district supervisors were provided during each small group session. Resource support included: (a) student-generated list of individuals they trusted when they are bothered or anxious to be contacted, (b) a preselected school leader to assist if a student requested to speak with administration, and (c) an approved certified school counselor on-site for additional support. In addition, students were provided with all accommodations noted within their individual education plan.

Subject Cost and Compensation

Students completing the initial survey were entered into a drawing to receive a gift card, and then the eight participants who completed both focus groups and member checks were entered into a drawing to receive a $50 card.

Chapter 4

Research Results

"If they would just ask me. They don't think I can do it."

—Quick Feet, 2020

Du Bois's (1903, p. 2) explanation of double consciousness as "a peculiar sensation" that an individual experiences as they look at themselves through the lens of others. When selecting the appropriate case study methodology that would shape the phenomenon of the participants having a triple consciousness who have multidimensional identities (e.g., African American, male, or having a dis/ability) it was essential to allow this unique layered narrative to emerge through an instrumental case study. This instrumental case provided heavy descriptions and information that allowed the researcher, participants, and readers to acquire a deeper insight and ability to redraw generalizations from the present understanding of Du Bois's double consciousness phenomena (Stake, 2006). The triple consciousness conceptual framework provided a blueprint with the design of the study and analysis of findings.

As a result, this chapter presents the findings for each of the study's guiding research questions:

1. How do African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their multidimensional identity development?

2. What are the particular experiences that influence African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities post-high school decisions?

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Students answered these questions through focus groups, member checks, and graphic elicitations. During the focus groups, students were asked to complete a graphic elicitation that depicted their multidimensional identity through a superhero characterization. Additionally, to assist with the validity and trustworthiness of the study, students were requested to confirm or disconfirm data findings by reviewing transcripts and personal narratives during member checks (Miles et al., 2014).

I begin this chapter by outlining my purposive stratified sampling process, followed by participant profiles and coding analysis. The chapter ends with four major themes that emerged from this study: (a) evolution of the Black masculine consciousness, (b) identified as specific learning dis/abled: kryptonite or superpower, (c) intersections of multiple identities: superheroes unite, and (d) post-high school trajectory. These themes are used in this chapter to organize the findings and share the lived experiences of students who are often overlooked or underseen (Burman, 2018).

Stratified Purposive Sampling Process

This study involved four primary modes of data collection through surveys, focus groups, follow-up member checks, and peer debriefing to unpack how each participant understood their identities. The initial data source was collected via a 145-question adaptive identity survey developed on Qualtrics and electronically disseminated to 32 African American male high school seniors. Survey responses were used to categorize how critical consciousness, racial, Black masculinity, and dis/ability identity serve as the starting point to how participants identify and or understand their triple consciousness. After the first cycle of data analysis, the 32 African American male high school seniors submitted completed surveys and scored homogeneously across the adaptive identity

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survey. As presented in Table 2, stratifications were developed into five strata to find

additional variants among this homogeneous group: participants under the age of 18,

residing in a two-parent household, prospective first generation college student, grade

point average greater than a 2.5, raised in a predominantly urban community, and/or

identified as specific learning dis/abled (Kemper & Teddlie, 2000). To obtain the

stratified purposive samples, participants were then purposefully sampled and subdivided

based on the characteristics outlined by the conceptual framework of triple

consciousness.

Table 2

Characteristics of African American Male High School Seniors

Characteristic	Sample Type		
	Stratified $N = 32$	Purposeful $N = 11$	Purposeful Subdivision $N = 8$
Student age > 17	17	7	5
Two-parent household	21	6	6
Education of father and/or mother > high school	12	4	4
Grade point average > 2.5	19	6	5
Self-identified as dis/abled	11	11	8

As Table 2 illustrates, of the 32 selected African American male high school

seniors through stratified sampling, 17 participants were under the age of 18, 21 lived in a

two-parent household, 12 had a mother and/or father who started or completed a

postsecondary degree, 19 earned 2.6 or greater grade point average, and 12 have been

identified as specific learning dis/abled.

Stratified purposeful sampling yielded 11 participants; seven were under the age of 18, six lived in a two-parent household, four had a mother and/or father who started or completed a postsecondary degree, six earned 2.6 or greater grade point average, and the entire sample ($N = 11$) identified as specific learning dis/abled.

All of the eight selected participants consented to the study and were subdivided from the purposeful sample. Within this sample, eight have been identified as specific learning dis/abled, half of the sample had a mother and/or father who started or completed a postsecondary degree, five were under the age of 18, and five earned 2.6 or greater grade point average.

Overview of Survey Results

Of the stratified purposive sample ($N = 11$), eight completed at least 90% of the survey. Within this sample, only one participant ranked in the bottom quartile across all survey questions. Finally, eight of the 11 participants expressed that they wanted to be a part of the study to share their stories and consented to take part in the study. These attributes stood out from other participants in terms of the breadth of their responses, the eagerness to share their narrative, and the transparency displayed from the initial data collection point. Selected student responses are presented in Figures 9-12. To maintain the privacy of all participants, pseudonyms associated with each student's superhero are used.

Adaptive Identity Survey

The Adaptive Identity Survey is a 145-question identity survey of four validated identity surveys (Masculinity Inventory Scale [MIS], the Critical Consciousness Scale

[CCS], Cross-Racial Identity Scale [CRIS], and the Dis/ability Identity Development Scale [DIDS]) inclusive of participant demographic questions.

Masculinity Inventory Scale

Figure 9 presents how the eight selected students responded to the first set of questions outlined by the MIS 50-item inventory on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Students were measured on how Black young men view themselves related to stereotypical roles and masculinity (Mincey et al., 2014). The subscales of the MIS consist of three themes: (a) masculinity/manhood: views of mainstream society on what a man or Black man should be, (b) perceived barriers and challenges to becoming men, and (c) parental influences; social networks; role models; and support, including influence of fathers, mothers, and friends, on male development. The mean of each subscale is calculated to determine which scales have a higher mean. A higher mean score is associated with a higher endorsement of that type of masculinity. Although students responded similarly to one another, 75% of the subscales had mean scores at or above 3.0 (neither agree nor disagree). In contrast, no subscales had a mean score below 1.0 (strongly disagree). Subscale responses to parental influences, social networks, role models, and support had the highest agreement with a mean of 3.69, suggesting students agree and make sense of their Black masculine identity development from varying influences outside of their educational spaces and media. Responses to the subscale perceived barriers and challenges to becoming men had the lowest agreement with a mean of 3.05, suggesting that students do not associate their Black masculinity development with barriers or challenges.

Masculinity Inventory
Scale (MIS) for Black Men
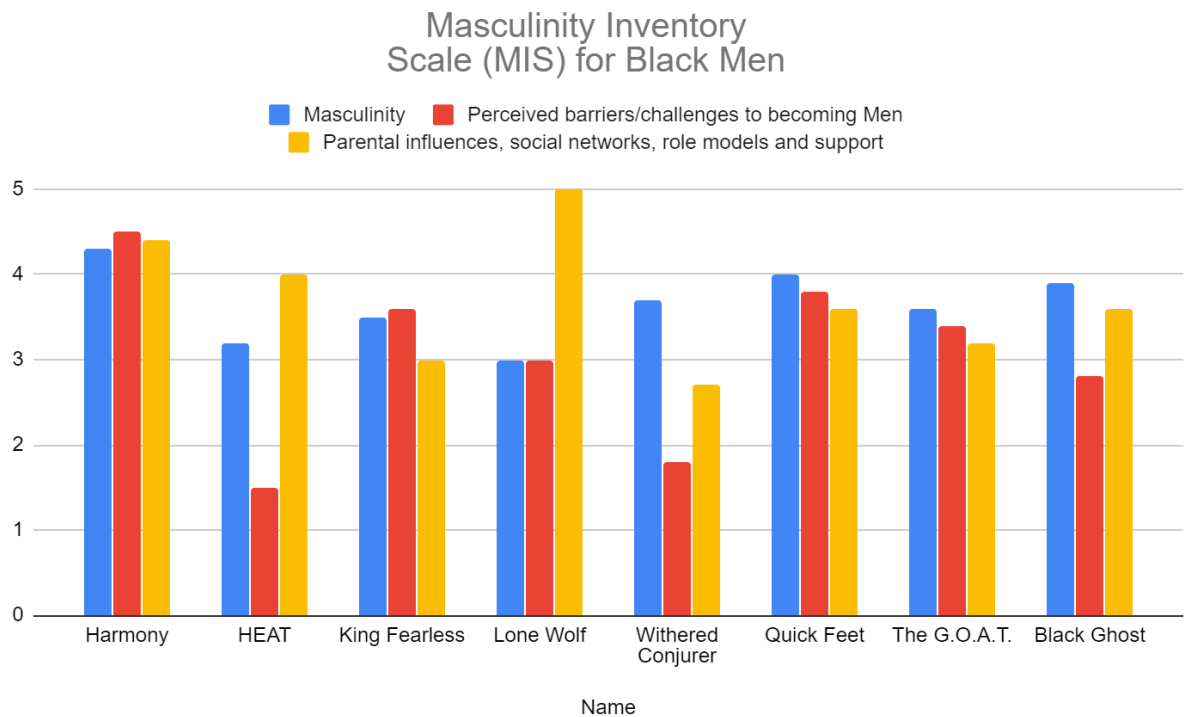
Figure 9. Masculinity Inventory Scale

Critical Consciousness Scale

Figure 10 presents how the participants responded to the second set of questions

outlined by the CCS 22-item inventory. Scores on Likert-scale items range from 1

(strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly disagree) and measure marginalized students' capacity

to critically analyze their social and political conditions, endorsement of societal equality,

and action to change perceived inequities (Diemer et al., 2017). The scale is comprised of

three subscales: (a) critical reflection—perceived inequality: critical analysis of

socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered constraints on educational and occupational

opportunity; (b) critical reflection—egalitarianism: endorsement of societal equality, or

all groups of people treated as equals within society; and (c) critical action—

sociopolitical participation: social and political activities to change perceived inequalities.

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CCS was developed intentionally for youth and adult populations to understand and use their consciousness as an antidote to oppressive structures. High scores indicate a high degree of critical reflection or critical action on the subscale in question. Responses to all three subscales were low in positive agreement from the eight participants. Responses to the critical action subscale had a mean score of 10.75 out of a possible mean of 54, suggesting that participants are not actively engaged with prioritizing their sociopolitical voices. The participants scored the highest within the critical reflection subscale, with a mean score of 26.9 out of a possible mean score of 48, ironically suggesting that students are aware of societal inequalities and oppressive systems despite earlier responses associating Black masculinity to perceived barriers and challenges.
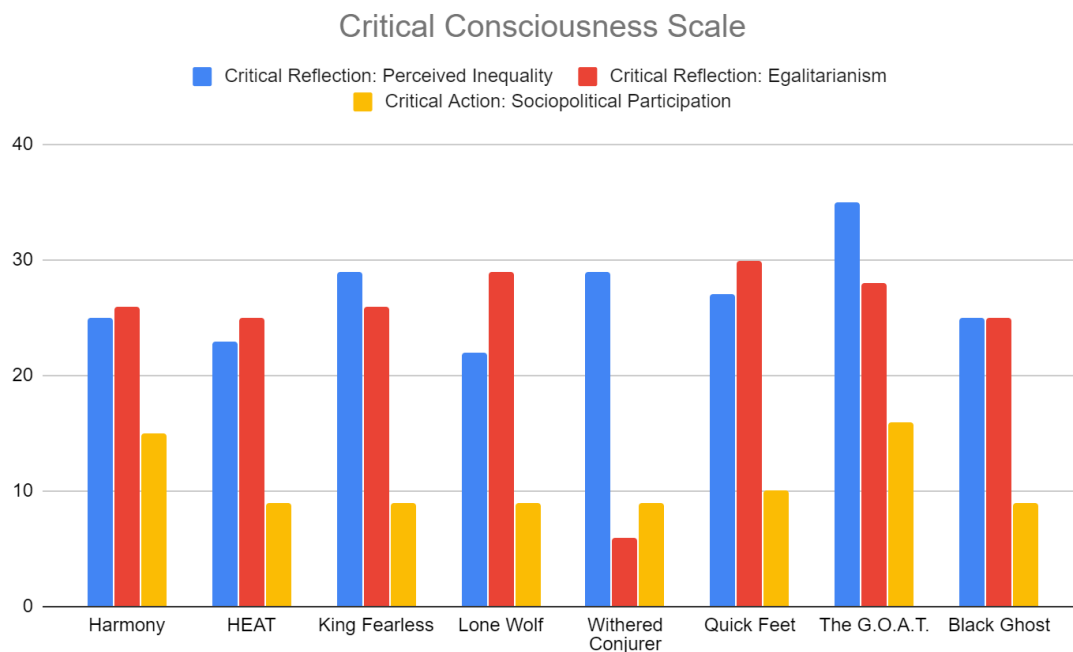
Figure 10. Critical Consciousness Scale

Cross-Racial Identity Scale

Figure 11 illustrates how the participants responded to the third set of questions outlined by the Cross-Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), a 40-item instrument with items measured on a Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Worrell et al., 2001). The subscales of the CRIS assess six racial identity attitudes, including (a) pro-American (PA), (b) pre-encounter miseducation (PM), (c) pre-encounter self-hatred (PSH), (d) immersion-emersion anti-White (IEAW), (e) internalization Afrocentricity (IA), and (f) internalization multiculturalists inclusive (IMCI). Each participant received a mean score on each of the subscales.

The participants' responses were homogenous; however, subscales' mean scores ranged as low as 1 to as high as 8 out of a possible mean score of 7. Responses to the IEAW subscale, one that refers to an individual having negative views of European Americans, had a mean score of 2.2. However, scores on the IMCI subscale had the highest mean score of agreement with 4.88, suggesting that students navigated their realities as pro-Black but are willing to engage with other cultures.

Cross-Racial Identity Scale
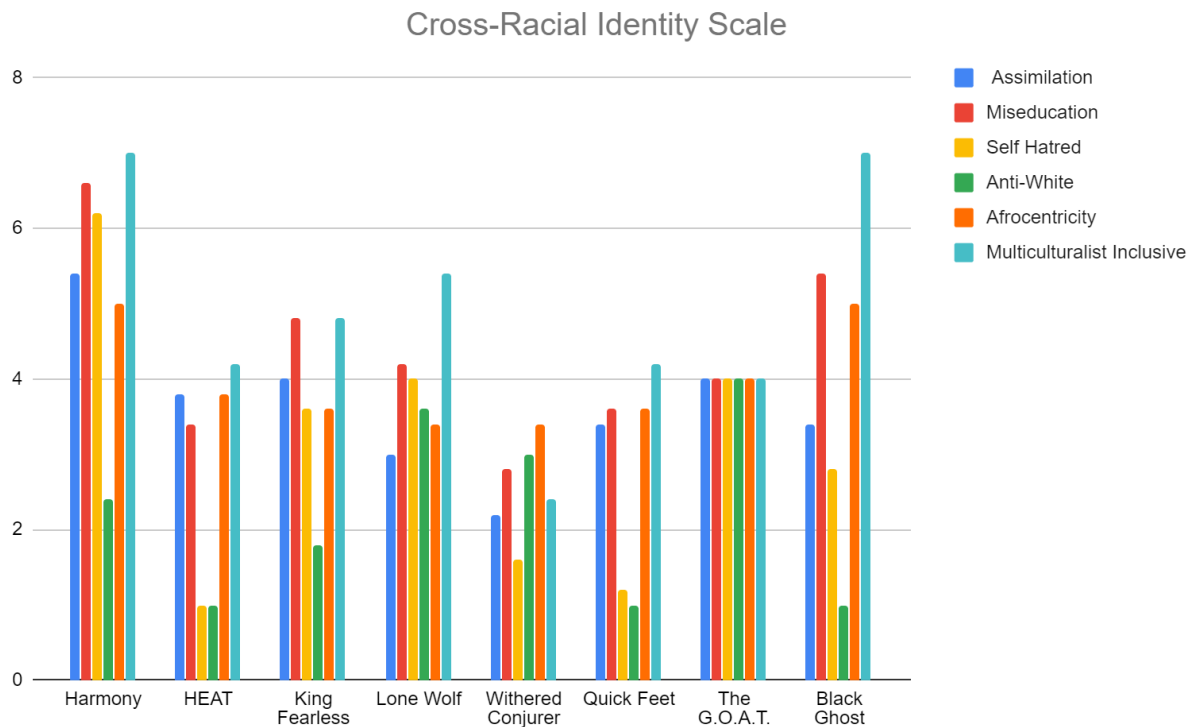
Figure 11. Cross-Racial Identity Scale

Dis/ability Identity Development Scale

Figure 12 depicts how the participants responded to the fourth and final set of questions outlined by Dis/ability Identity Development Scale (DIDS), a 33-item inventory that measures dis/ability identity on a Likert-type scale, with scores ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me; Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017). The scale categories identity through four statuses: (a) acceptance: person accepts and owns dis/ability, including aspects of frustration via internal and emotional, (b) relationship: person meets others like themselves, (c) adoption: adopts and feels a strong connection to the dis/ability community, and (d) engagement: recognizes others who may be in other statuses and becomes a role model to those within the dis/ability community. Once scores are tallied, scores should be interpreted by understanding higher scores for each subscale

indicate greater agreement with the corresponding dis/ability identity status. Lower scores for each subscale indicate less agreement with the corresponding dis/ability identity status.

Results from this final scale produced a high number of low agreement responses under DIDS. By responding with a mean score of 3.1 out of a possible score of 10, participants demonstrated that sharing their hidden dis/ability with others was not something they engaged in. Participants responded the highest to the adoption subscale, with a mean score of 14.6 out of a possible score of 50, interestingly, suggesting they are aware of the oppressive systems present for those identified as dis/abled.

Figure 12. Dis/ability Identity Development Scale

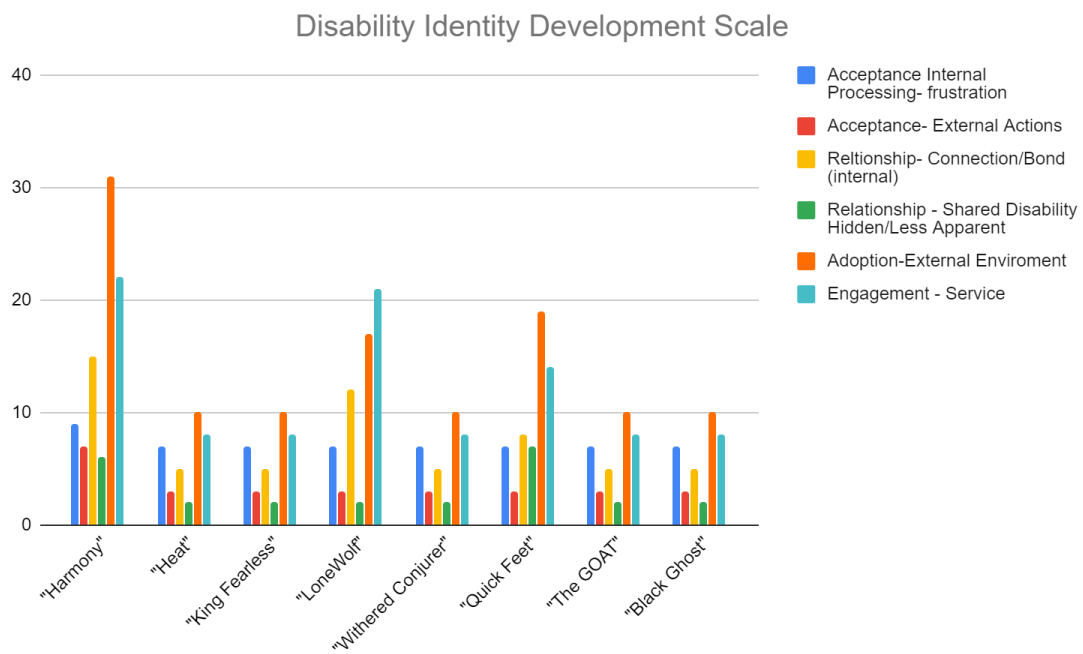After the stratified purposive sample was drawn, the second data source led to the small group interviews of participants with the intent to identify, explore, and understand

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how participants understood their triple consciousness and applied it to a superhero graphic elicitation of themselves. Participants were examined for how they understood critical consciousness, racial, Black masculinity, and dis/ability identity. Within the confines of this study, students with dis/abilities have identified as having a specific learning dis/ability.

Participant Profiles

Stake's (2005) instrumental case study method allows for the selected case to serve as an instrument to look at the phenomenon of triple consciousness and how post-high school decisions influences are made by students living with multiple consciousnesses. The study represents a snapshot of how eight African American male high school seniors identified with specific learning dis/abilities understand and make sense of their multidimensional identities and their post-high school decisions told from their intersectional perspective. Each participant's transcript and graphic elicitation has been assessed and narrated separately before any merging of themes was completed. As such, the following section introduces each participant individually through the lens of their superhero and provide an overview of how the participant understands his triple consciousness experiences and identities, along with his post-high school decisions. Throughout each profile, barriers faced, academic influences, and other factors that contributed to their post-high school decisions are presented. Those areas provided some of the most critical insight into understanding the triple consciousness experience and are highlighted for each participant and then merged to assist with understanding the phenomena of triple consciousness and post-high school decisions.

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King Fearless

King Fearless is a local superhero who is draped in the color red to stand out among the other heroes. This hero lives by the motto "just face your fears, even if your heart drops, just take it and run!" Commonly associated with being behind the camera to tell the stories of others but not often asked to tell his own, King Fearless finds his strength from his powerful father and brother but only shares his flaw of being by himself with his inner circle. Once you enter his circle you will quickly learn that his archenemies are negative people who instigate problems for those he loves.

King Fearless's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the masculinity subscales, King Fearless scored within the mid-range on all three scales, indicating that he has some opinions and experiences of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a Black man, and can identify who has influenced his male development. The Critical Consciousness scale placed King Fearless within the midrange for perceiving inequality, with a slightly higher sense of egalitarianism, and a low score on socio political participation, indicating that while he does perceive some levels of inequality, while holding similar beliefs about egalitarianism and doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored the highest on the self-hatred scale, and lowest on the anti-white, indicating that he is in a space of having negative feelings and self-loathing due to his ethnicity and accepts the practice of and perception white mainstream culture. Finally, King Fearless scored in the lowest range on all scales within the Dis/ability Identity Development scale, indicating that he has not accepted and or adopted a positive identity around his dis/ability.

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King Fearless's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. King Fearless is a high school senior who self identifies as an African American male with a learning dis/ability who is tall, thin, and embodied in a chocolate hue complexion. When discussing who has shaped his Black masculinity, he attributes his father, older brother, and close friend. He further shares that his dad always reminds him to "show love" with a handshake or hug when he is in the company of other African American males. King Fearless adds that all three men have contributed to his strength since he was a young boy, and without them, he would not be as strong as he is today. King Fearless gives examples of these three role models as hard-working, never giving up, and providers who work long hours for their families. Often feeling like his mother is not aware or has the know-how to help him as he navigates his path to becoming a stronger man, he gives his mother credit with making him aware of his surroundings as a Black male. She reminds him that he cannot wear hoodies or "gangsta clothing" when he is out in the neighborhood and should be mindful of his company. He shared that his mom always thinks that he could be making better choices and that he has by choosing a better friend group. King Fearless has a group of friends he looks up to and shares that they encourage each other to do better. In line with his mother's belief, he decided to apply for a job on the "White side" town. He mimicked the area and felt like he needed to mask himself to get a job. Given his efforts, he was turned away at the door without being allowed to ask for an application. King Fearless felt like this denial was due to his lack of assimilating and his race and skin tone. Although this situation was discouraging, it was not a new narrative to his experiences as an African American male identified as dis/abled.

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Constructions of Dis/ability. When asked about his identification as dis/abled, he shared that he believes that he has a dis/ability because of experiences in small classrooms. Furthering this sentiment, he shared that when placed in small classrooms, students are not as intelligent as those in larger classrooms because they do not learn new things and are not challenged. King Fearless is currently enrolled in college preparatory classes with a larger population of students for his senior year and feels that he would be willing to help other students if they needed it because the larger setting is helping him grow. He shared how he once felt "broken" and promised himself he would no longer be in small classrooms and would work hard to get out. King Fearless was emphatic by stating that school could not teach him everything and that he had to learn on his own that if he puts his mind to it, he could learn like his peers in larger settings. He further shared that he has been told by teachers that he was not as smart as others. "In a smaller setting, they don't teach a lot, they keep teaching you one thing until you learn it and then they move on." Now that he is in college preparatory classes, he feels like he learns something new every day.

Post-High School Decisions. King Fearless wants to go to college and major in film and graphic design to be a director to tell his own story. King Fearless says that he admires Meek Mills and J. Cole for being proud of their "Blackness" and telling their story. Admittedly, because of the high price tag of the university, King Fearless has not spoken to anyone in school about taking these next steps in applying to a private institution that will accept him and allow him to major in film. Rather, he has spoken to his school counselor about attending community college and transferring to a university after two years. He said he could remember the stories that his parents would share about

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their struggle, and he wants more. Despite no one in his academic journey talking to him about his dreams after high school, he shared that if someone would have made the attempt to ask, he would tell them. Instead, he said:

> I am just a kid with a camera, I have more of a story than you think. I share my feelings with those close to me and if someone is interested, I could be open to sharing, but no one ever asked.

When asked how, through the eyes of his personal superhero, he feels others view him, King Fearless shared that his name is King Fearless because he shows people that he is not afraid by just doing it and staying away from the negative opinions of others, but secretly fears of being alone with no one on his side.

Heat

Heat's mission is to burn negativity by using his positivity for those he protects. His powers include accountability and telling the truth but teeter on the dark side as his flaw causes him to bend his own truth, which weakens him. As a result of his heat, this superhero wears the color red as it energizes and motivates others to take action. If you look closely, you will see a snake that he keeps to remind him of his archenemies that at times can be fake and cunning.

Heat's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the Masculinity subscales, Heat scored the highest with his agreeance with identifying and crediting parental influences, social networks, role models and support with his development of manhood, while scoring mid-range with his understanding of what it means to be a man, and the lowest with perceived barriers and challenges of being a Black man. His scores indicated that he understands that becoming a man occurs with development, but was unaware of

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challenges and barriers present to men who self-identify as Black or African American. The Critical Consciousness scale showed that Heat has a high sense of egalitarianism and a fair understanding of perceiving coupled with his lowest score within the subscale socio political participation. Heat's scores indicate that while he does perceive some levels of inequality, he is very aware of egalitarianism and doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored the lowest on the self-hatred and anti-white subscale and within the midrange for the remainder of the scales, indicating that he is in a space of having positive feelings related to his identity and does not have an accept or deny the practices and perceptions of white mainstream culture. As the diagnostic concluded, Heat scored in the lowest range on all scales within the Dis/ability Identity Development scale, indicating that he has not adopted a positive identity around his dis/ability.

Heat's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. Heat is a male, high school senior identified with a specific learning dis/ability, who is of biracial ethnicity from Puerto Rican and African American descent with a tall, thin frame embodied in a caramel hue complexion. When asked about his layer of identities, particularly being an African American male, he was quiet compared to his peers but chimed into the conversation by adding "African American males are stereotyped as being bad, but I think I am a role model and a positive person who likes to help people." He was brief when sharing about his black masculinity but was candid when discussing his thoughts related to being identified with a dis/ability.

Construction of Dis/Ability. He has been in special education classes since the first grade. He indicated that being in special education classes works for him, and he just

learns differently. "Special education classes are easy, but it is not always fun being the same class all day." Recalling that he has been bullied and called "dumb" by others, Heat said, "that is why I stay away from negativity because it makes me feel down." As the interview continued, the subject of post-high school goals entered the discussion. Heat shared that prior to attending his current school, he attended a state-affiliated private school during his sophomore and junior years that focused on teaching students functional skills on how to be more independent in their home, school, and community. When asked about his parents' influence, Heat shared that they "argue a lot" and he works with his mentor and older siblings to assist him when making life decisions. He meets with his mentor for 5 hours each week and stated that he does not talk that much to her but if asked about his goals, he will share with her during their time together.

Post-High School Decisions. He stated that he needs to complete his goal list in order, and he must find a job and then get his driver's license before thinking about anything after high school. He shared that he has time to think about next steps, citing college or entering the Job Corps as options. He wondered if he shared that he had a dis/ability, he may be limiting himself. But for now, he wants to look at one thing at a time, and getting a driver's license is important, adding that he advocated for himself to be enrolled in a driver's education course next semester. When asked if any school personnel have assisted him with his post-high school goals, he shared that some teachers and school counselors have been helpful, but he has depended on his mentor for guidance. "She just wants me to be better!" As Heat continued to share, he explained that he feels that people look at him and see a positive person, but he is cautious because the more time someone spends with him, they change their perception and see him as

someone negative. He admitted through his superhero graphic elicitation that his flaw is that he is trusting and vulnerable and exclaimed, "I hate fake people and liars, liars bring negativity." Explaining further why he named his superhero version of himself Heat, he said "Heat burns the negative and raises the fire up with the positive." Heat commented that he got to a point where he was tired of hiding his feelings and decided to confront people but found himself getting into fights. He added now that he is older, he is being taught to be more accountable and to not surround himself with negativity.

Lone Wolf

Lone Wolf is a superhero who enjoys challenges on his own. Lone Wolf indicated his all-black attire with a yellow X across his chest represents justice to help those in need. He finds his strength from his girlfriend, family, and friends. Without them, he would lose his powers to complete tasks and not have the courage to push through barriers. Lone Wolf's superpower is speed; he does nothing slow, but everything is completed with precision. But, beware, Lone Wolf's archenemies are the "Hidden People" who do not reveal their alliance with Lone Wolf outside of the kingdom and only partner with him when no one is watching.

Lone Wolf's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the Masculinity subscales, Lone Wolf scored within the mid-range on two of the three scales, while scoring the highest with identifying that his male development was attributed to the influence of his parents, social media, role models, and other support. His scores indicated that he has some opinions and experiences of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a Black man, but confidently agreed that his parents and other support systems were influential with his development as a Black male. The Critical

Consciousness scale placed Lone Wolf within the midrange for perceiving inequality, while having the highest scores with his sense of egalitarianism, and a low score on socio political participation, indicating that while he does perceive some levels of inequality, while holding similar beliefs about egalitarianism and doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored midrange across all subscales, except for his highest score agreeance was within the Multiculturalist Inclusive subscale, indicating that he values his ethnicity but has an appreciation for culture outside of his own race. To conclude the diagnostic, Lone Wolf completed the Dis/ability Identity Development scale and scored within the midrange for his internal acceptance, connection with being identified as disable, and engaging with community projects that support individuals identified as disabled. While scoring the lowest within the subscales of external actions, shared dis/ability, and external environment. His scores indicated, that he has not accepted or denied not accepted a positive identity around his dis/ability and is firm with not sharing externally being identified as disabled.

Lone Wolf's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. Lone Wolf is a male, African American high school senior identified with a specific learning dis/ability. He has a short, slim stature, embodied in a caramel hue complexion. As his peers discussed their identity as a Black male, he was reserved and reluctant to share. When directly asked his thoughts about his identity, he spoke in a soft tone and shared that he does not separate his identities and does not feel like he is treated differently because of one or any of his self-identities as an African American male identified with a specific learning dis/ability. He was adamant by stating

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that he describes himself friendly and looks beyond the "cover of people." The conversation continued with us discussing what motivates and supports him. Lone Wolf shared that he is supported by his girlfriend, family, and friends. When asked why he named his girlfriend first, he said that along with his brother, she encourages him to keep going until he cannot go anymore. He later added that this can be seen by his brother trying to help him by "making things right" and taking him out of state to visit his uncle in Ohio last summer with the possibility of moving there permanently. Lone Wolf shared this would be a great opportunity for him and his girlfriend to get away and make a new start alone.

Construction of Dis/ability. Lone Wolf added that no one in school encourages him outside of his friends. When asked who his friends are, he shared one other person outside of his girlfriend and said, "I enjoy doing things alone." As he shared this, he pointed to a large sleeve-like tattoo that reads "Lone Wolf" across his arm. He expressed that being a Lone Wolf means that he enjoys being by himself, as this allows him to get things done quickly with precision. He has tried having friends, but it has not worked, so it is better that he is alone. Affirming this choice, he said he is vulnerable and often gets hurt when he shares his true feelings with his so-called friends. They have turned their back on him in school and look for his friendship when they are home. Therefore, when working with others, he does not feel as productive; however, his girlfriend does not know that he feels his best when by himself. He also admitted that despite the tattoo being large, his teachers never inquired what it meant. He wished they did so that knew how he learned best. Because his teachers had not asked him directly, he said he just goes with the flow and does not think it is worth it to share what works best for him when

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learning. He shared that people do not know he has a dis/ability and does not share that information with anyone. Shrugging his shoulders, he stated that his special education classes are below his grade level and he has been doing the same work for the last three years. He went on to say even his parents "do not think he should be in 'those classes.'"

Post-High School Decisions. After Lone Wolf shared his thoughts regarding being identified with a dis/ability, he was asked to share his thoughts related to post-graduation decisions. "I am not sure. My girlfriend's mom is helping me, and I am not sure if I want to go to college or work, but I am leaving New Jersey." Lone Wolf seemed most comfortable when talking about his superhero in the third person and ended our conversation by stating that his archenemies are people who do not show their true selves and are not honest with him or themselves.

Harmony

Harmony draws his positive energy and power from the skin that he is in, as he is adorned in light blue and yellow. Legend has it that his blue costume represents peace, as Harmony hates confrontation. Realizing at a young age he needed to make decisions on his own with some guidance from his mother, Harmony is steadfast in protecting himself from those who may see his vulnerability and take advantage of his niceness. When faced with negative energy and toxic people, Harmony weakens when he helps people with bad intentions who ultimately suck his positive energy.

Harmony's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the Masculinity subscales, Harmony was consistent and agreed and or strongly agreed across all three subscales, indicating that he has a strong awareness and experiences of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a Black man, and identifies that his Black masculinity has been

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influenced by his parents, social media, and other support systems. The Critical Consciousness scale placed Harmony within the high range of agreeance for perceiving inequality and sense of egalitarianism, and a lower score on socio political participation, indicating that while he does perceive of inequalities and egalitarianism, he doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored midrange within the assimilation, miseducation, and self-hatred subscale. While his highest score was within the multiculturalist inclusive subscale, with his lowest score placing within the anti-white subscale. Harmony's scores indicated that he has accepted some negative stereotypes of African Americans, he does look to white culture to define his ethnicity and appreciate cultures outside of his own. Finally, Harmony scored in the lowest range on all scales within the Dis/ability Identity Development scale, except for scoring within the midrange within the subscale of adoption and external engagement, indicating that he has not accepted and or adopted a positive identity around his dis/ability, but is willing to help others who have been identified as disabled.

Harmony's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. Harmony is a male, African American male high school senior identified with a specific learning dis/ability. He is of medium stature and embodied in a caramel hue complexion. When asked about his identity, he said that upon the first impression, people think he is identified as a female because he is gay, but he was born a male, and that is how he identifies. He added that although the media often put African American males in boxes (e.g., sports and entertainment), "we are all

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different." He believes that African American males of different complexions are treated differently based on their skin tone. He stated:

> If you are 'dark White' they get some privileges like White people and some privileges of being Black. Because I am lighter skinned, I feel like I have been given passes' from law enforcement. Police officers have positive and negative thoughts of African American males. If I am on the White side of town, I would be more aware of my Blackness.

Harmony recognized that he has been privileged in some situations because of skin tone and chooses not to share his thoughts with peers because he thinks they may take his perspective the wrong way. He thinks he does not have other privileges because others assume his gender based on his appearance (e.g., mannerisms, various hair colors, tone of voice), but he believes "words do not define me, I am living my best life!" He credits his mother for teaching him to love himself despite what others say: "My parents guided me when I was younger and understood me, but I taught myself how to handle myself, I paid attention to my surroundings. Because I am Black, I have to do things differently." He expanded on this comment, sharing his belief that he has to change his image to not be what the media have portrayed him to be. "The world will love you and hate you. You will always have haters. My family and friends love me, and that is all that matters."

Construction of Dis/Ability. When asked how he connects with the identity of dis/ability, Harmony shared that he likes "my special education classes, they were easy, but I did not like being in the same class all day. Half of me says 'am I really stupid?' But the other half says 'I really like this class.'" Disclosing that "I started to doubt myself

once I moved into college prep classes, asking myself can I do this?" He paused as if he was reflecting on his doubt and said "I never felt broken as some people said, but less than a person." He ended this portion of the discussion by sharing that he chose to share with some people that he was in special education courses, while others found out on their own. Either way, it did not bother him that they knew he has identified with a dis/ability. When asked to describe himself as it related to his superhero graphic elicitation, he shared that he likes peace and cannot stand toxic people. If faced with negativity, he chooses to turn his depression or anger into creativity. This creativity is encouraged within his cosmetology classes. Harmony is enrolled in a certified vocational cosmetology class where he says "I slay hair!"

Post-High School Decisions. Harmony shared that he would like to pursue a degree in fashion after attending a 2-year community college. "My mom said to get the two years out the way to save money, then I can attend the college I want." Harmony was hesitant, appearing as if the 2-year option was not his first choice. Throughout his conversation, Harmony seemed to trust the guidance of his parents, particularly his mother and her guidance into who he is, and will follow her direction.

Withered Conjurer

Withered Conjurer emerged after his middle school years when he was introduced to spiritualism. After completing his training, he was given a third eye, a black costume which he calls his vessel, complemented with a single wing and partial cape. Unlike other superheroes, the Withered Conjurer is driven by his intellect to have the autonomy to select any power at any time to get what he wants. He uses anything that contains information, resources, mentors, and tools to leverage his powers to the best of his ability

to achieve. Believing that he was born with intelligence and strengths, he is careful to not engage with negative people in society. In spite of knowing this, he feels a strong duty to tell others that you can recharge just by self-motivation during tough times.

Withered Conjurer's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the Masculinity subscales, Withered Conjurer scored within the midrange when assessed on his agreement with having influential factors impacting his development of an African American male, followed by his lowest score within the subscale of what it means to be a Black males, and the highest score fell within the subscale of what it generally means to be a man. His scores indicated that he has minimal opinions and experiences of what it means to be a Black man and attributes some credit to influential variables to his development of his manhood, but somewhat disagrees that his parents and other support systems are influential with his development as a Black male. The Critical Consciousness scale placed Withered Conjurer within the midrange for perceiving inequality, while having the lowest scores with his sense of egalitarianism and sociopolitical participation. His scores indicate that he does perceive some levels of inequality, but does not hold the same belief of equality for all people, and doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored midrange across the subscales of anti-white and afrocentricity, and his lowest scores were across the remaining subscales, indicating that he values his ethnicity and rejects aspects of white culture. This rejection is exhibited in his low scores within the pre-encounter stage that measures how an individual accepts Black stereotypes of oneself. To conclude the diagnostic, Withered Conjurer completed the Dis/ability Identity Development scale and disagreed with all subscales, except for his midrange

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scores within the subscale of internal acceptance of his dis/ability identification. His scores indicated, that he has not accepted or denied a positive identity around his dis/ability and is firm with not sharing externally being identified as disabled.

Withered Conjurer Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. Withered Conjurer is a male high school male senior identified with a specific learning dis/ability. He is of biracial ethnicity from Romanian and African American descent. He has a tall, medium frame embodied in a tanned vanilla hue complexion. When asked about his Black masculinity, he shared that he identifies as a Black male solely based on his skin color. He added that society has shaped stereotypes on how African American males should be and act. An example that he shares is "dapping someone up." "Society has told us that this is how we should greet each other. My dad never taught me this." Withered Conjurer shared that African Americans are put into groups. Some are rich, poor, smart, drug dealers, or even knowledgeable.

When presented with a picture of an African American who is well known in pop culture, Withered Conjurer shared that he was unfamiliar with the individual. He shared that although he was unfamiliar with the individual, he looked as if he overcame drug addiction and came from a poor upbringing. He attributed his assumptions to the belief that "most people who are wealthy have overcome something, from poor neighborhoods and are faced with drug addiction, I know this because I researched this because I want to be rich." His body language looks like he is worried and that he was accused of something in his past. Withered Conjurer shared that he does not look at people's skin tone to make assumptions of them but instead considers how they carry themselves and what they look like (e.g., their clothes and mannerisms). He stated that he understands

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that the media have played a part on how some may think that a lot of Black males come from the hood and tend to have a negative influence but felt that "White people are going to look at us differently so we should not fall into what the media thinks we should be in society." When asked if he had been treated differently from others because he identifies as an African American male, he shared that he is a "rare mix" and most people do not think he is Black. Therefore, he does not put much thought into being identified as an African American male but has to define his own experience.

Withered Conjurer explained that he continues to learn about himself and that it would be an injustice to put labels or identification of what the world says he should be because he is still learning. He gave himself credit for his development, sharing that his parents attempt to guide him, but they are not where he is as it relates to consciousness, and they do not understand him. Rather he seeks wisdom and mentorship from various people found through his own research. He said:

> Mom and Dad try to influence me, but when I share my wisdom, they do not know how to help me. I barely talk to Dad and my mom tries to talk to me, but I prefer to be isolated from my immediate family when learning who I am.

Construction of Dis/Ability. Withered Conjurer explained that although he identified as dis/abled, it is because he has self-sabotaged himself to be placed in special education settings:

> I am considered to have a dis/ability because I don't put the same effort in my classes if I did I would not have this label. I am choosing to have them identify me, I learn at a slow rate because sometimes I just don't like it. They don't know

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me, it is their presumption and part of their system based only on what I show them.

He added that he is not challenged in his special education classes and homework is not given to assist with learning more about the subject. "If I was truly interested in going to college, I would expect homework, but I am not going, so homework is not necessary." Withered Conjurer shared that school nor have his parents taught him about his consciousness and that he self-taught from people he has researched.

Post-High School Decisions. "My parents wanted me to go to college, but I don't know about that, I want to be different and go into mail marketing. So I researched things I can do because college is not for me." Initially, his parents were against him not considering college, but Withered Conjurer was adamant that he could be successful without college, as he met several people online who have been successful without earning a college degree. At the conclusion of the discussion, Withered Conjurer shared that looking at himself from the outside as his superhero, he uses any information to understand and achieve his goals as tools for leverage to best of his ability. He said allowing himself to be around people who are like-minded to help his growth is important because "society can knock you down with negativity, it is important to have people encourage you along the way."

The GOAT

The GOAT is self-described as a "funny, helpful, and extremely chill" superhero who uses his power of helping others to rule his land. If you are lucky, you might catch a sighting of the GOAT in a blue-colored costume, as this is his favorite color. Unfortunately, seeing this superhero may be rare because the GOAT's archenemy is

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waking up to fight daily villains found in school. When faced with villains in school, reading is his flaw and weakens him not to fight another day.

The GOAT's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the Masculinity subscales, The GOAT was consistent within the midrange of agreeance across all three subscales, indicating that he has some awareness and experiences of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a Black man, and identifies that his Black masculinity has been influenced by his parents, social media, and other support systems. The Critical Consciousness scale placed The GOAT within the midrange of agreeance for perceiving inequality and his sense of egalitarianism with a lower score on socio political participation, indicating that while he does perceive inequalities and egalitarianism, but he does not engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored midrange across all subscales, indicating that he has accepted some negative stereotypes of African Americans, somewhat agrees with white culture to define his ethnicity, and acknowledges cultures outside of his own. Finally, The GOAT scored in the lowest range on all scales within the Dis/ability Identity Development scale, indicating that he has not accepted and or adopted a positive identity around his dis/ability.

The GOAT's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. The GOAT is a male, biracial African American Latino high school senior who has been identified with a specific learning dis/ability. He is of tall, slim stature, embodied in a tanned vanilla hue complexion. The GOAT honestly admitted that he is normally quiet, chill, stays to himself and rarely has a lot to say. However, when asked to explain his Black masculinity, he shared that his father has taught him to

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be a man and that he has watched Black males treated differently from their White counterparts on social media. He also agreed with the group when they shared that African American males can be successful but are faced with barriers.

Construction of Dis/Ability. The GOAT shared that one of his barriers is that he learns differently. He shared that he does not like the label or being identified as dis/abled but instead explained: "I just learn differently." He stated that he struggles with longer words and that he often gets help from his classmates and teachers when in school and only asked for help at home when he was younger. He recalled knowing that he had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as early as elementary school but was adamant with stating "I am not slow, my reading is just not the best."

Post-High School Decisions. As he thought about his post-secondary plans, he shared that his older sister is currently enrolled in college, and he has had several conversations with his mom, dad, and school counselor about his future. His school counselor has tried to get him to consider community college, but he expressed that school is not his thing, and not even developing a trade is an option. The GOAT's parents have encouraged and agreed with him to work after high school. He was very clear that he will wait until graduates to work because being a student is his current job. Finally, Isaac shared that his superhero graphic elicitation is named The GOAT because he is there for anyone that needs him when they need him.

Black Ghost

Black Ghost chooses to wear all black for his people while having a shining star in the center of his chest. This superhero is a devoted believer of staying peaceful because when he is at peace, he can use his power of being invisible. When met with negativity or

around wrong crowds and people, he uses his power to become invisible. As Black Ghost reaches maturity, he is learning that he must believe in himself because if he does not, overthinking becomes his flaw. If Black Ghost lets his alter ego have its way, he will not believe in himself. Then Black Ghost becomes his own archenemy.

Black Ghost's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the Masculinity subscales, Black Ghost was consistent and agreed and or strongly agreed across two of the three subscales, indicating that he has a strong awareness and experiences of what it means to be a man and identifies that his Black masculinity has been influenced by his parents, social media, and other support systems. However, his lowest score indicated that he somewhat agreed with perceiving challenges and barriers as a Black male. The Critical Consciousness scale placed Black Ghost within the midrange of agreeance for perceiving inequality and sense of egalitarianism, and a lower score on socio political participation, indicating that while he does perceive of inequalities and egalitarianism, but doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored midrange within the assimilation, miseducation, and self-hatred subscale. While his highest score was within the multiculturalist inclusive subscale, with his lowest score placing within the anti-white subscale. Black Ghost's scores indicated that he has accepted some negative stereotypes of African Americans, he does look to white culture to define his ethnicity and appreciate cultures outside of his own. Finally, Black Ghost scored in the lowest range on all scales within the Dis/ability Identity Development scale, except for scoring within the midrange within the subscale of acceptance and internal processing, indicating that he has somewhat accepted and or

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adopted a positive identity around his dis/ability, but is not willing to share his dis/ability identification with others externally.

Black Ghost's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. Black Ghost is a male African American male high school senior identified with a specific learning dis/ability. His is of a medium muscular build, embodied in a chocolate hue complexion. When asked about his Black masculinity development, Black Ghost credits his uncle and older brother as being influential after his father passed away. "My uncle and brother always check on me and make sure I'm good." He credited them for giving him what he needed to learn to be a man. Black Ghost also shared that he felt like African American males are treated differently, but if he kept a smile on his face and was good in sports, White people would like him. Black Ghost shared that before attending his current school, he went to a predominantly White school where he learned this perspective. He thinks that helped him fit in, and without that perspective, people may have looked at him weirdly. Black Ghost described himself as Black male who is helpful, truthful, and a leader who learns differently.

Construction of Dis/ability. "I don't think I have a dis/ability and I am not ashamed; I just learn differently. I am proud of who I am!" He goes on to give an example of using his accommodations during his SATs. He felt trapped and unlike his friends because he was in a room by himself. He said his peers sometimes look at him differently and comment that he's slow. He continued by saying, "sometimes it takes me longer but not with every subject. I have one of the hardest teachers for English this year and I need extra help!" After the comment, he looked me in the eyes and said:

I am not interested in British literature, but if it were about Meek Mills, that would interest me. I just don't get anything that she teaches, I get she's trying to prepare for college, but she expects us just to know it without explaining what she wants.

Post-High School Decisions. Black Ghost further shared through his superhero graphic elicitation that he overthinks and he should just believe in himself to achieve his goals. His superpower is being invisible because that helps him stay away from the negative aspects of life. The superpower of blending in gives him the ability to focus on his goals and not hang around the wrong crowd. Finally, Black Ghost shared that he is enrolled in cosmetology to learn the trade of barbering. "I thought this would be a good way to earn money before I go to college." Black Ghost shared that he wants to attend a 4-year college and play football and that an administrator, several teachers, school counselors, and coaches have shown support to help him. But he is trying to increase his GPA that is low because of situations that occurred earlier in his high school journey with home life. He seemed optimistic and eager for his next steps.

Quick Feet

A mutant, Quick Feet possesses cheetah-like speed and reflexes that allow him to speed up over time with motivation. If you blink, you will miss his black and neon blue costume that some say represents his happy personality. Quick Feet runs from those who do not believe in him because of his small stature. If captured by negative naysayers, he slowly loses his speed. Never wanting all the pressure on his shoulders, he looks to the track for his power to gain motivation for his power of speed.

Quick Feet's Superhero Identity Diagnostic Scan. On the masculinity subscales, Quick feet scored within the high range on all three scales, indicating that he is within strong agreement of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a Black man, and can identify who has influenced his male development. The Critical Consciousness scale placed Quick Feet within the midrange for perceiving inequality, with a slightly higher sense of egalitarianism, and a low score on socio political participation, indicating that he does perceive some levels of inequality, he holds similar beliefs about egalitarianism and doesn't engage in action to change those things he perceives as unfair. In terms of his racial identity, he scored the highest on the multiculturalist inclusive subscale, and lowest on the anti-white, indicating that he has accepted some negative stereotypes of African Americans, he does look to white culture to define his ethnicity, and appreciate cultures outside of his own. Finally, Quick Feet scored in the lowest range on all scales within the Dis/ability Identity Development scale, except for scoring within the midrange within the subscale of acceptance and internal processing, indicating that he has somewhat accepted and or adopted a positive identity around his dis/ability, but is not willing to share his dis/ability identification with others externally.

Quick Feet's Superhero Backstory.

Black Masculinity. Quick Feet is a male, African American male high school senior who has been identified with a specific learning dis/ability. He is of short, muscular stature and is embodied in a chocolate hue. When asked about the development of his Black masculinity, Quick Feet credited his dad for shaping how he grew into a young man. "My parents expect a lot from me, and my dad always wants me to look after

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my sister." He often feels the pressure to stand out as an athlete and to perform and admitted he feels pressure to do well in class despite being identified with a dis/ability.

Construction of Dis/ability. Quick Feet shared that he should not have been placed in a special education classroom after missing a benchmark assignment by points as a freshman. "My teacher told me that I missed my benchmark by a couple of points and that's why I am in special education classes." He added that he has told some of his peers that he is in special education classes but is not always met with compassion and called dumb. He added that he is not being challenged in classes or given the opportunity to be prepared for college. "The teacher gives us the work and even shows the answer and some kids still don't know what the answer is. I am not challenged in my classes." Quick Feet spoke in an indifferent tone and stated that his school should have seen his potential and not have placed him in a special education class because of his poor performance during his freshman year college preparatory class.

Post-High School Decisions. When asked about what he would like to do after high school, Quick Feet beamed with pride when discussing his success on the track and aspirations to compete at the collegiate level. "People think because I am small they can beat me," but he calls himself Quick Feet because over time, he speeds up and motivation helps him. He recalls a teacher from his junior year who assisted him by motivating and encouraging him to do well. He shared that this is the type of teacher that he needs to do well and not be a barrier, as some of his teachers in the past have been. Quick Feet continued by stating that his parents and track coach know that he wants to go to college, but he has not told them that he feels unprepared because he has not had challenging classes. He said:

My dad knows that I want to go but I don't think my mom is too worried about

me going to college. He wants me to run and go to a D1 or D2 school but they

don't want me because of GPA.

Quick Feet further explained that during his freshman year he was switched out of

his college preparatory classes for English and is ineligible to apply to a traditional 4-year

institution. He said that no one is helping him with other options and admitted he needs to

share his desires with school personnel to assist him with finding more choices for after

graduation. At the end of our discussion, Quick Feet was asked, "What is one thing that

you would ask your superhero?" He responded:

> Quick Feet, why would you want to put all your dedication into a sport
>
> that you might not be able to compete in the future? It's because this is
>
> what I am good at, and I can make money doing something I like. But I
>
> am also smart, but because they don't see that there is more to me, running
>
> is my only option. If someone would talk to me, they would see that I can
>
> do both.

Coding Analysis

The major themes emerged from a two-pronged manual coding process of using

In vivo deductive and inductive coding of participant responses. The deductive form of

analysis utilized In vivo coding as students were prompted to respond to the prescribed

research questions, which allowed them to restate predetermined words in their

responses. The In vivo inductive coding captured the candid discussion of the semi-

structured focus group interviews, graphic elicitations, and member checks. The use of In

vivo allowed the coding process to be aligned closely to the participants' worldview

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while honoring their lived experiences (Saldaña, 2016). Results from In vivo coding were used to analyze responses specific to each of the participants' perspectives of their triple consciousness and post-high school decisions. Responses were gathered from four small group interviews, graphic elicitations, and member checks with participants who self-identify as African American male high school seniors who have been identified as specific learning dis/abled (Miles et al., 2013; Saldaña, 2015). The interviews and graphic elicitations were analyzed in cases of four participants, allowing time for analysis before moving on to additional participants. Each set of cases was coded and then analyzed for categories and themes. The two-part initial coding process allowed for a richer examination of the data, as the purpose of this instrumental case study was to examine the lived experiences of individuals who identify with having triple consciousness and its impact on their post-high school decisions.

Following this process, participant responses were recoded using inductive pattern coding which resulted in prominent keywords and phrases that were linked to identify themes and subthemes across the triple consciousness framework. Table 3 is a compressed list of keywords and phrases from the focus group interviews, graphic elicitations, and member checks guided by the study's research.

Table 3

Keywords and Phrases

Participant	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Graphic Elicitation
King Fearless	"Act different, people don't really know me, can't be walking around in like black hoodies. I have to wear like, more brighter colors when it's like night outside."	"I want to do better than my parents."	Afraid to be alone, support system is important
HEAT	"You can't see that I learn different, I might get treated differently."	"She just wants me to be better, one thing at a time."	Change negative to positive
Lone Wolf	"Don't judge me, I don't belong in those classes, make things right for me."	"He wants to show me something different, I want to get away."	"Teachers don't know who I am, if they asked I would tell them."
Harmony	"I have to be better because I'm Black, dark-White, privilege, my mom encourages me to be proud of you I am, my mom said ..."	"I want to go away, but my mom said to make it easy on myself."	"Negative people make me weak, peaceful."
Withered Conjurer	"I don't have a dis/ability, the system does not really know me, some people just pick on you for fun, I am a rare mix."	"College is not for me; homework is for people going to college. I cannot wait to graduate to work."	"I can do anything I put my mind to, I am very aware."
The GOAT	"I am Black man, I just learn different, I am quiet and take it in."	"School is not my thing, I want to make money. My sister went to college."	"Helpful, I am there if someone needs me."
Black Ghost	"They started pointing and looking at us, White teachers like athletes, I need to be happy."	"I want to go college. They believe in me."	Invisible, not in crowd

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Table 3 (continued)

Participant	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Graphic Elicitation
Quick Feet	"I have a lot of responsibilities. I am not challenged."	"If they would just ask me. They don't think I can do it."	Fast, underestimated, listen to me, fast not slow

Understanding the Major Themes of a Superhero's Triple Consciousness

The themes that emerged during the data analysis process provided insight into the triple consciousness of eight African American male high school seniors who have been identified as learning dis/abled. Through each case, themes emerged to provide a basis for understanding how multiple consciousnesses (e.g., race, gender, ability) may impact post-high school decisions. These themes were then analyzed within and across cases as a representation of collective insights gathered from individual perspectives during small group interviews, graphic elicitations, and member checks. These insights were then mapped within the triple consciousness conceptual framework, DisCrit, and methodological approaches to focus the case across major emergent themes and subthemes (Table 4).

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Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

Theme One	Theme Two	Theme Three	Theme Four
Evolution of the Black Masculine Consciousness	Identified as Learning Dis/abled: Kryptonite or Superpower	Intersections of Multiple Identities: Superheroes Unite	Where Are the Superheroes Going? *"If you ask me, I would tell you."*
Subtheme	**Subtheme**		
"They treat us different."	"There is nothing wrong with me."		
"Dark-White."	"I just learn differently."		

Evolution of the Black Masculine Consciousness

Race and gender are intertwined for African American males as they develop their consciousness and experience a dual reality. For seven of the eight young men, their Black masculinity and understanding of how to navigate being Black and male were developed and inspired by a village that includes mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, mentors, and friends. These select cases provided an insight into the development of how the participants understand themselves within two worlds. For many of the participants, this was the first time they have shared how they understood their development as African American males and how they are perceived by the world. Despite each participant understanding the terms African American and Black as describing adjectives of their ethnicity, they chose to use the words interchangeably during our interviews. What was revealing during our time together was how the selected participants were proud to be considered African American and male as it related to their ethnicity, gender,

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and embodiment, in contrast to one participant only connecting to his Black masculinity through the color of his darker hues of melanin and distancing himself away from the dominant narrative told through media.

Participants were unfamiliar with the academic term of Black masculinity development but spoke intimately about their role models and who have helped develop them into the young men who sat before me for our small group. As African American males, they have been told that they must be aware of their surroundings while simultaneously understanding how their body and gender impact the world as they know it. While the Withered Conjurer shared that he did not see himself as Black male outside of their darker melanin complexion, the remaining seven participants took pride in being Black and male along with the traditions passed down to them. King Fearless shared that he comes from a two-parent household where his father and siblings have shown him examples of being strong Black men who are providers and protectors. Yet, as a young Black male, he is reminded that being himself is not good enough and he must be aware and change his demeanor or appearance not to be judged. He said "I have to act White." To provide a tangible example, King Fearless shared that his mother has told him numerous times "'you better watch it! You can't go out acting like a gangster.' Like I can't be walking around in like black hoodies. I have to wear like brighter colors when it's like night outside." He explained that he hates that his mom has to constantly remind him that he should be careful because he will be judged based on his ethnicity, skin, and gender, adding that he felt that if his skin tone was lighter his experiences may be different. "I don't like it. But like at the same time, you know, it does happen to me so I don't worry about it." King Fearless shared that he was profiled by the local authorities in

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his neighborhood while helping a friend move from one side of town to another. In that incident and others, he felt he was judged based on his Black skin and gender and promised to be "respectful and act White" when in those areas so that he would not be judged.

"They Treat Us Different"

Withered Conjurer, a superhero raised within a two-parent household, similar to three of his peers, shared that he does not take any advice from his Black male father, stating:

My dad does not know anything. Not that he's dumb, but he does not have as much wisdom as me. He gives bad advice; we don't talk about things like that. I seek out people who can help me in my experience.

When asked if his father modeled to him how to greet, show love, or "dap" other Black Males when entering a room or space, Withered Conjurer exclaimed, "what's that?" Withered Conjurer emphatically expressed that expressions or behaviors such as "dapping" someone are a stereotype or thing that society says you have to do to be Black. Withered Conjurer expressed that he does not feel judged by society or compelled to act to change because he identifies as African American and male to do things. Withered Conjurer continued:

I feel like I'm too rare of a kind to really know what society has judged me on. The thing is, in our society, people say don't judge. Don't judge others. I'm like but yeah tell my subconscious that because everyone is judging even by just plain view. We don't have to like consciously think, oh what is this person doing and what does he look like and whatnot. If we just get a

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glimpse, we automatically have a framework, a script in our head and it determines our actions.

Unlike Withered Conjurer, Black Ghost is an individual who was jointly raised by his mother, uncle, and brother who states "I am proud to be a Black man but I do think people treat us differently and judge us, this is why I stay happy." Reflecting on an experience when he was younger and attending a predominantly White school district sharing:

> I went to an elementary school with only two Black kids. It was me and
> this other Black kid. But since I know how to dance and I always kept a
> smile, everybody ended up liking me. I feel like they would have not liked
> me and thought I was weird or I would have felt like they would be scared
> or something like that of me.

He continued this sentiment to his present-day and used his past experiences to validate why he chooses to be an athlete. "White principals and vice principals love Black athletes. We bring attention, crowds, and scouts that make the school look good." Black Ghost recounted his experiences and showed a level of approval when touting that he is well-loved by his White administrators.

Participants' perceptions of their dual identities of race and gender were developed by their lived experiences and tied to family and community. While each participant had a unique home life and family dynamic, they engaged in conversation with their peers, interested in learning more about how the other experienced becoming a man embodied in Black skin. What was significant about this theme is that all participants were aware of the dominant narrative placed

upon them and showed a common understanding of how they understood Black masculinity through the eyes of others.

"Dark-White"

When analyzing the participants' responses concerning their understanding of Black embodiment, several participants alluded to being judged based upon their skin complexion, but only one participant explicitly explained his understanding of his Black consciousness by coining the term "dark white." He explained that if you were African American and of a lighter skin tone, you were given more privileges and are considered to be "dark White." "They sit like on a higher pedal-stool than us. You have White people that sit all the way up here and then you have the Dark-Whites and then there's us. We're all the way at the bottom."

As the topic of Black embodiment was interwoven within our discussion of being judged, another participant shared that he identified as an African American male but was shocked to see Withered Conjurer in the group because he was much lighter. In essence, this participant would be considered "dark-White" by Harmony. Withered Conjurer emphatically said "Nobody ever thinks I am Black. No one in this school thinks that I am!" He went further to say that being treated as a non-African American male is normal, and that statements such as "he's not Black" did not bother him, despite his self-identifying as an African American male. However, what I found interesting was despite Withered Conjurer's contrasting opinions of what the Black male experience was, his peers allowed him to take much of the lead of the discussion and often acquiesced when he made dominant narrative comments related to Black males such as "when I look at him [Meek Mills], he looks like he came from a poor neighborhood and overcome

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addiction, I know this to be true because people in poor neighborhoods more than likely do drugs."

Withered Conjurer was very liberated in his discussion and often not challenged while his darker hued peers were reluctant and looking for approval to share their thoughts. It became clear throughout our discussion that Withered Conjurer disassociated with aligning himself with how the world viewed the Black-bodied male experience and often bothered his peers when compared as such.

Identified as Learning Dis/abled: Kryptonite or Superpower

Guided by the triple consciousness conceptual framework and the tenets of DisCrit, I provided a space for participants to describe their identity as it relates to how the world sees them within their educational setting. Participants revealed within their dialogue how they understood being identified as learning dis/abled as it intersects with their Black masculinity. All eight of the selected participants noted that they were identified as learning dis/abled and individually stated that they felt like that this was an inaccurate description of how they identify themselves. Rather they all agreed that they would like their teachers to know that nothing is wrong with their ability, and they just learn differently. Participants shared that they have received special education support since their freshman year in high school and recalled critical incidents when they felt less than their peers at some point during their academic journey.

"There is nothing wrong with me." The participants of this study have shared their views concerning being challenged academically, misidentified, and feelings of isolation, while using terms like dumb, slow, isolated, broken, and less than to describe their feelings and how others perceive their ability knowing that they receive special

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services. King Fearless, Lone Wolf, and Quick Feet simultaneously shared that they were misidentified as learning dis/abled but rationalized their identification differently. King Fearless shared that he had to earn his way out of the smaller classroom setting to prove that he should be with his non-identified peers, while Quick Feet felt like he was never given the opportunity to show his potential. Lone Wolf stated that he feels that he and both his parents feel that his classes are not giving him what he needs to develop as a student, and he should no longer be identified as learning dis/abled and should be taken out of small classes. All three young men shared that they described this identity as a hidden layer that was only shared with their most trusted circle and only disclosed in safe places. These participants reluctantly owned this identifier and looked to be released from its kryptonite, unlike how they clung to their identities of being a Black male where they found pride and strength. King Fearless explained:

> I only connect with this piece of my identity if it's brought up or if I am made fun of, but its fine, I did not choose myself to be in these classes, this is how I was born. But I put my mind to it and now I am out of those classes.

"I just learn differently." Harmony, Heat, The GOAT and Black Ghost share a similar belief that "I just learn differently," but each participant pauses and questions why an identifier is needed to describe how they learn. Isaac argued:

> I don't say I have a dis/ability, I just learn differently than others, and my reading isn't the best. When I was younger I remember getting an IEP. I know I am not slow, I just learn different. I mean I can read, but bigger words give me trouble. I don't know why, but this is one of my flaws.

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Finally, Withered Conjurer shares that the system is flawed, and if he wanted to be unidentified as learning dis/abled, the power is held in his hands. He expounded by stating:

> I don't care that I have been identified as learning dis/abled, because my
> level of learning depends on if I'm passionate about doing it. For example,
> my level of learning in math is nothing to my level of learning on
> spiritualism and philosophies and all of the psychological levels of
> consciousness that we go through. Being in special ed is just an
> identification that you can learn your way out of, anything is possible.
> There are some people who have autism who manage to no longer be in
> special ed. classes. This just shows you that if you put your mind towards
> something that you like, you can do it.

Intersections of Multiple Identities: Superheroes Unite

DisCrit provides a central lens to assist with addressing the initial research question: How do African American male students identified with specific learning dis/abilities understand and make sense of their multidimensional identity development? To assist with answering this question, participants were asked to complete a superhero graphic elicitation to stimulate discussion around how they view their multiple identities. As they developed their superhero, each participant presented and explained who they were to the group. This additional data collection mode provided an opportunity for students to illustrate and express any or all of their multiple identities and consciousness through a superhero character. Each graphic elicitation evoked a variety of responses that

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were categorized and themed according to how students understood themselves related to participants' superpower, costume, archenemies, and flaws.

Among the participants of this case study, negativity was at the core of their narratives when asked about their enemies in relation to their superhero graphic elicitation. By sharing this consistent awareness of negativity, participants were conscious of how they are possibly perceived by others. This awareness has caused them to create superpowers to counter what they identify as oppressive structures within their lived experiences. In their own way, all eight of the young men shared how they tap into themselves through their identified superpower to make things right when they felt othered. It was interesting to see each participant develop his own character and narration of themselves. During the activity the students were challenged to look within themselves while simultaneously looking through an outside lens. Some struggled as they admitted that this was hard to be reflective and look at themselves through various layers, while others welcomed the discussion and looked for new ways to discuss their identities.

Where Are the Superheroes Going?

"If You Ask Me, I Would Tell You"

For the second research question, the major theme of post-high school trajectory was addressed by participants' varied experiences of how they arrived at their post-high school choices. There was an overwhelming consensus by participants that they were given opportunities to discuss the next steps after high school intermittently. King Fearless, Harmony, Black Ghost, and Quick Feet were offered community college; Withered Conjurer and The GOAT were guided toward the workforce; and Heat and Lone Wolf have not decided at all. No matter how they were instructed, no one had a

plan in place or support to assist with the next steps. What was evident during the discussion was that when asked what they would like to do after high school, the majority ($N = 5$) lit up with excitement to share their hopes and aspirations. As their faces illuminated, they quickly dimmed when asked "did you tell your school counselor this?" or "does your English teacher know that you want to go to college?" The resounding responses and demeanors from the participants were sentiments of "if they only asked me, I would have told them."

During the focus group, King Fearless, Harmony, and Quick Feet shared they want to attend a 4-year college, but as of mid-year, they had not had an intentional conversation related to their post-high school decisions with school personnel. Rather, King Fearless and Harmony had been offered community college as their option from the school counselor, and Quick Feet had only shared his 4-year collegiate dreams with his dad. King Fearless was firm in stating:

> I can go to a 4-year college. I don't need help from school because I was in those classes, everything wasn't taught to me. They did not talk to me about college; between home and me putting my mind to it, I will figure it out. If I work hard, I can achieve it!

Quick Feet added, "I wish I had more challenging classes, it's just too late." Yet Withered Conjurer added adamantly:

> School is not set up to teach you everything. School and my parents don't know a better way outside of college. If you are passionate about doing something, do it! They don't know how to talk to me to help me after high school. When I decided I

wasn't going to college, I had to convince my parents, but after told them my plan
they were like, okay!

As the discussion continued, Black Ghost indicated that his experience with
deciding what to do after high school was different from his peers. Black Ghost recalled:

A lot of people are in my corner: my school counselor, my vice principal,
some teachers, and my coaches. But colleges don't see that. They don't ask
me why my grades look the way they do; they just see where I am now.
They need to know how hard I worked and that I am trying, and if they
gave me a chance I can do it!

As the participants responded, it became clear that their post-high school
decisions were as intersected as their identities. Students' lived experiences, influences,
and perceptions of ability played critical roles in each participant's post-high school
trajectory. As students listened to their peers, they began to recognize their own critical
consciousness on various levels when faced with making their own decisions regarding
their post-high school choices.

Summary

This chapter presented four major themes by centering the lived experiences of
eight African American male high school seniors identified with specific learning
dis/abilities through the conceptual framework of triple consciousness. By using DisCrit
and methodological strategies to acknowledge the voices of these selected participants,
member checks were completed to determine the accuracy of the findings with each
participant. As transcripts and superhero narratives were individually shared, all
participants were engaged with the findings and stated that they were in agreeance with

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how their narrative was told within the study. King Fearless, Harmony, Withered Conjurer, and Quick Feet asked to volunteer for future studies and were disappointed the small groups ended.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Future Consideration, and Conclusion

Until superheroes learn how to use their power …

—Alexander, 2020

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their triple consciousness and what particular experiences influence their post-high school decisions using an instrumental case study (Stake, 2006). The study investigated the multidimensional lived experiences of eight African American male high school seniors who have been identified as having specific learning dis/abilities. The goal of the study was to redraw generalizations of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness when applied to students who live with multidimensional identities that are interdependent of race and ability (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The conceptual framework of triple consciousness was used to guide the study and recognize the varied lived experiences, influences, and self-awareness of an individual with multidimensional identities. To understand participants' multidimensional identities and consciousness, DisCrit was the chosen lens to narrate how historical constructs and legal impacts of racism and ableism coexist for students within educational settings empowered by Whiteness and privilege. By using the core tenets of DisCrit, participants' voices were acknowledged and connected to tell their lived experiences that are often overlooked and unheard. As a result, the findings redrew the generalizations of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness as a new perspective of awareness and critical consciousness for students with multidimensional identities. The research questions that guided this study were:

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1. How do African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities understand their multidimensional identity development?

2. What are the particular experiences that influence African American male students identified as having specific learning dis/abilities post-high school decisions?

The study found: (a) that a dominant, deficit-based narrative; an emerging critical consciousness; family; and community mentorship are contributing factors to how African American male high school students identified as specific learning dis/abled understand and make sense of their intersected identities and (b) that African American male high school seniors identified as learning dis/abled are directly influenced by how they understand their multidimensional identity and critical consciousness when making post-high school decisions.

To assist with the discussion of the current qualitative instrumental case study, the chapter has been outlined into four main sections: positionality, interpretations of the findings, implications, and recommendations. The first section provides a brief summary of how my positionality informed the interpretations of the findings and implications section of the chapter. The interpretations of the findings section provide a review of each of the two questions along with the emergent themes and relevant literature to highlight similarities and dissimilarities from current understandings. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for practice and future research regarding the significance and place of this research within the P-20 education context.

Positionality

As noted in Chapter 1, I identify as an African American woman with multidimensional identities and am a mother of children who are similar to the participants selected for the study. Often, I discuss the impact of double consciousness and embodiment with my sons, realizing that this may not be common practice for the students within the study. When approaching this instrumental case study, I assumed students would have some developing racial or critical consciousness, given that the colloquialism of being woke is used commonly in pop culture. This assumption was met within the broad stroke of selected students for the focus group. Through focus group discussions and the development of graphic elicitations, students revealed they never directly were asked to discuss their understanding of their multidimensional identities or consciousness by the school personnel but had emerging levels of triple consciousness and desired to share their narratives to help other students like themselves. To that point, Annamma and Morrison (2018) argued that once the multiple marginalized student understands the systems of interlocking oppressions, they become aware of the possible disruptions and seek to dismantle their prescribed outcomes. Therefore, my interpretation and impressions of these conversations are woven throughout this chapter as outlined by the triple consciousness conceptual framework through the lens of the seven tenets of DisCrit. Rather than discussing participants' triple consciousness through the prescribed DisCrit tenets, I have reordered the seven tenets to narrate how the interdependence of race and ability have impacted the present lived experiences of students that led to efforts of resistance within raced and abled oppressive systems for African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities (Figure 13). Tenets one, five, and six

examined the historical constructs and legal impacts of how racism and ableism were interdependently used to create a new form of segregation that further empowered Whiteness and privilege. Tenets two, three, and four connect the voices of participants to tell their lived experiences firsthand from a strength rather than the dominant deficit lens. Lastly, tenet seven shapes tools of resistance and provides cause for future studies to aid in reversing 40 years of disproportionality within special education.
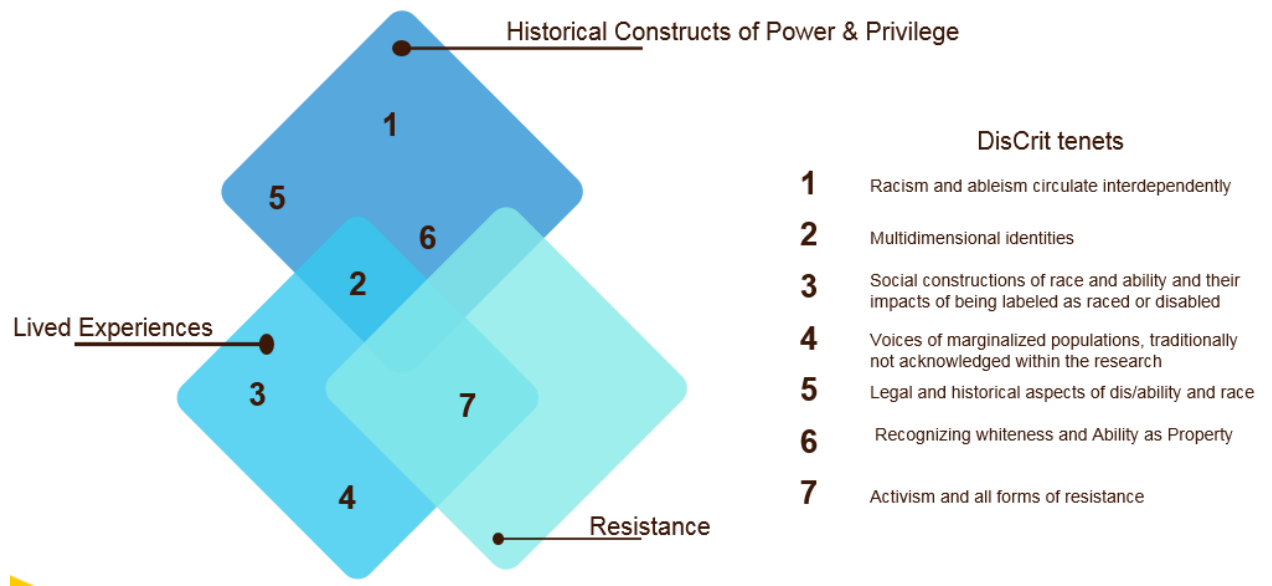

Figure 13. Dis/ability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education

Interpretations of the Findings

Four comprehensive 120-minute focus group interviews, eight graphic elicitations, two member checks per participant, transcript reviews, peer debriefer feedback, and reflective memoing served as data collection sources. Through these multimodal data collection points, the triple consciousness conceptual framework and the

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tenets of DisCrit guided the analysis of the research findings. When patterns of keywords and phrases emerged, they were organized to answer the guiding research questions to assist with the interpretation of redrawing the generalization of the phenomena of double consciousness as it intersects with multidimensional identities and the post-high school decision-making process.

Research question one asked, "how do African American male students identified as specific learning dis/abled understand their multidimensional identity development?"

Historical Constructs of Power and Privilege

The connections between race and gender experienced by the selected participants are present examples of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness concept. However, Du Bois's (1903) example does not speak specifically to the African American male identified as learning dis/abled and their awareness of race, gender, and ability within their educational experience. African American students have been disproportionately identified based upon presumed academic and psychological deficiencies (Annamma et al., 2012; Banks, 2017) Du Bois may have viewed the development of awareness for these multidimensional, self-identified students as experiencing a triple consciousness. Specifically, African American males have been set outside the western norms by their race and gender, then resegregated by ability (Ferri & Connor, 2006). This disproportionate identification has afforded them to experience education differently from their dual identified peers. Banks (2017) supports this notion by stating that students who experience being raced, gendered, and identified as less intelligent are impacted by dominant narratives related to race and gender along with the social constructs of ability that privilege able-bodied students. DisCrit extends this understanding of triple

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consciousness by explaining how racism and ableism impact students who have been raced, gendered, and identified as learning dis/abled. Annamma et al. (2012) argue:

> We believe that students of color who have been labeled with dis/abilities live in the same complex world where they do not fit neatly into any one category. However, for students of color, the label of dis/ability situates them in unique positions where they are considered "less than" white peers with or without dis/ability labels, as well as their non-dis/abled peers of color. In brief, their embodiment and positioning reveal ways in which racism and ableism inform and rely upon each other in interdependent ways. (p. 5)

Regarding how the eight selected African American males understood themselves related to their awareness of being identified as learning dis/abled, they displayed a range of feelings. Participants shared accounts of persistence, tolerance, self-sabotage, limited intellect, isolation, and self-doubt. On their educational journey, participants have felt empowered (abled) and weakened (dis/abled) by the identifier of learning dis/abled. Despite having varying thoughts of being identified as learning dis/abled, they were unanimous with stating they learn differently from others and should not be labeled with an identifier of being dis/abled. Historically, African American males have had to invalidate stereotypes of educational inequities in comparison to their White counterparts. Feelings of being ill-equipped educationally bring the student back to the feeling of being othered. For the multidimensional student whose identity is interdependent on race and ability, they are an outsider of their inter and intra groups related to racial and gender identity. Participants distanced themselves from the identifier and admitted they have

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suppressed their frustrations of how they are viewed academically. Several participants have never spoken to school personnel nor were asked to discuss specifically being identified as learning dis/abled. When provided the opportunity during the small group to critically examine and discuss their understanding and awareness regarding the dis/ability identifier, they were open and candid. Participants equated their small classroom setting and location to their ability and not as a benefit or resource. They added that instructional techniques used in these settings were inconsistent with their non-dis/abled peers, and they were aware they were not given equitable opportunities for academic growth. Other participants stated that they were solely identified because of a legal document and assessments but were content with the support that was given as prescribed.

Lived Experiences

The participants' shared lived experiences of being raced, gendered, and viewed as a problem by society that have left them normalized to rationalizing spaces of exclusion and mistreatment by society. During the group discussions, participants expressed this was the first time they were asked to examine their Black masculinity and how it was associated with their learning experiences through multiple lenses. Participants generally found it familiar to account for lessons learned from their families and communities related to racial and gender identity connected to consciousness. Discussions included stories regarding how they navigate the world in their Black bodies, how they exhibit Black masculinity, and how to dispel the misrepresentation of Black male stereotypes found within the media. Despite each participant being on various levels of racial consciousness, their accounts influenced how they began to make meaning of their racial identity, consciousness, and at times behavior. As a result, these experiential

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and influential lessons taught them to filter or mask their Black masculinity to evade any historic or present negative aspects associated with their identities. When paralleled to Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness concept, the filter or mask worn by these students may have been described as the veil experience. The veil is having "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 215). This akin veil experience prevented participants from seeing themselves. They became blurred, unseen, and in some situations unheard by a dominant narrative that views African American males through stereotypes founded in racial bias. Du Bois (1969) further explained that an individual may see outside, within, or beyond the veil. All participants, at some point, discussed that they viewed African American males through a dominant deficit lens but saw themselves through an outside-the-veil deficit narrative that has been groomed by role models at an early age. Said differently, as participants were developing from children to young men, they were being taught to compare and assimilate to the accepted western norms of the White male. For some participants, the normalizing outside-the-veil process has contributed to their negative views and distance of being an African American male. Others have a surface within-the-veil awareness as it connects to being a Black male but have selected to deny their Black masculinity when encountering society.

As the majority of the participants candidly shared their experiences of being African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities, Withered Conjurer contrastingly never engaged in conversations related to his racial identity or consciousness as they relate to his Black masculinity. These nonexistent conversations resulted in him exhibiting racial dissonance and impacted how he communicated his

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understanding of dueling identities within one world with his peers. Dissimilar to his peers' experiences, Withered Conjurer denied any cultural or historical connections to being Black or African American outside of his skin tone, sharing that holding on or being proud of a racial identity only attributes to the dominant stereotypes that society portrays of African American males. Adding to his sentiment, he said "most people think I have the intelligence of a White person in a Black body. African Americans buy into the cultures that society has set for them, and it's a cycle that I will not be a part of." As discussions continued regarding Black masculinity, embodiment emerged after participants began to speak about how lighter-skinned African Americans are perceived and treated with an unspoken privilege. King Fearless and Harmony shared incidences of differential treatment from authorities as a result of their complexion. King Fearless stated that after following all the officer's requests he was detained in a police vehicle while his lighter-skinned friend who was belligerent was let go.

In contrast, Harmony shared that he was given preferential treatment compared to his darker-skinned friend during an encounter with law enforcement. Both boys agreed that this was not unnormal, while Withered Conjurer argued that incidences were not related to their Black masculinity and that Harmony's treatment may have been due to his attire or mannerisms. Despite the participants' contrasting views on their Black masculinity, they were challenged to critically dispel oppressive outside views of their multidimensional identities. What became evident of the participant responses during the small group interviews was that they began to understand their veil experience and the gift of seeing both perspectives, and the potential for participants to see beyond the veil. Once participants understand their power of having a triple consciousness, or as Du Bois

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(1903) explained, their second sight of double consciousness, they will see themselves beyond the veil, not as a threat but an asset who can coexist in a world that may not see them as such. According to Du Bois (1903), it takes time for adolescents to realize the veil exists and begin to see within and outside of the veil as they become aware and conscious that they are not the problem or stereotyped African American male they must evade. Annamma and Morrison (2018) and Rabaka (2010) add to Du Bois's (1969) concept and state that for an individual's second sight to develop beyond the veil, students must be given opportunities to share their voices and gain a desire to dismantle false narratives of their identity as defined by the status quo. These critical conversations challenged participants to acknowledge inequalities and led to their desire to walk beyond the veil as they understand their specific privileges and gift of second sight. Second sight is metaphoric for understanding dual perspectives that allow them to value themselves while they simultaneously see how the world views them as they navigate within their educational settings.

Resistance

As framed by the triple consciousness conceptual framework and narrated by DisCrit tenet seven, it is important to view the selected participants as individuals who have to constantly negotiate their identities against hegemonic norms (e.g., middle class, white males, abled-bodied) that marginalize them daily. Within each participant's description of their graphic elicitation, the study revealed when students are given the opportunity to critically question dominant deficit narratives, they are capable of engaging in discussion, specifically regarding their multidimensional identities. The graphic elicitation created a space for students to unpack their identities as they saw

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themselves unveiled. They were invisible, fearless, the greatest of all time, positive, peaceful, motivated to conquer the world, invincible, and found strength from within to keep going. When participants presented their superheroes, they were intrigued by other participants' strengths, weaknesses, archenemies, and superpowers. Critical questioning and increased awareness became apparent as students began to engage in student-led discussion on how multidimensional identities show up in different settings and how they are navigated. Consistent with the superhero Black Lightning, each student is navigating with a secret identity such as Jefferson Pierce, Clark Kent, or Bruce Wayne, filtering themselves to be accepted by society. Singer (2002) affirms this point by adding that split or double identities are central to every superhero, similarly to how Du Bois (1903) explains the veiled experience is central and present for African American males. Just like a superhero, African American males identified with specific learning dis/abilities will be faced with circumstances that will challenge them to reveal their true identities as superheroes. This study provided a structured space for the participants to begin this journey beyond the veil. During the final member check, participants shared their perspectives of how the world viewed them compared to how they viewed themselves (see Table 5).

Table 5

Secret Versus Superhero Identity

Participant	Secret Identity Outside the Veil	Superhero Within the Veil
King Fearless	Stupid silly Reserved "Ghetto" but knows how to switch it up to act White	Outspoken Opinionated Proud to be an African American male Critical thinker Adventurous
Lone Wolf	Strange Content Unbothered Unmotivated	Independent Outgoing Smart Goal-chaser Motivated
Heat	Weird Not Smart Talkative	Motivated Attentive Positive
Harmony	Shy Gay Nice Serious Not capable	Masculine Strong Determined Smart Loving
Withered Conjurer	Intelligent "for a Black male" Argumentative Annoying	Inquisitive Researcher Passionate Resourceful
The GOAT	Shy Quiet Not interested in school Silent worker Dis/abled Slow	Dependable Abled Observant Enjoys being creative Worker
Black Ghost	Jock Entertaining Funny Dumb	Focused Reflective and prefers to be unseen Persistent College-bound

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Table 5 (continued)

Participant	Secret Identity Outside the Veil	Superhero Within the Veil
Quick Feet	Incapable	Capable
	Short	Responsible
	Jock	Smart
	Funny-looking	Big heart

Triple Consciousness and Post-High School Decisions

For years, race, gender, and ability have been debated as they relate to upward mobility and have impacted how students make their post-high school decisions. A recent study stated that African American males are more likely to have lower mobility rates and attend college at lower rates than their White peers (Chetty et al., 2018). Goodman et al. (2015) states that individuals who have multidimensional identities interdependent of race and ability have an increased poverty rate. In 2015, nearly 40% of African Americans with dis/abilities lived in poverty, compared to the 24% non-Hispanic White counterparts. One of the contributing factors is the lack of exposure African American males may have to post-high school options, such as access to higher education opportunities (Chetty et al., 2018). African American males have been limited with envisioning themselves in postsecondary settings. Specifically for the African American male identified with a dis/ability, this dream seems unattainable as they often have poor postsecondary transition planning, stigmas of intellectual deficits, and inconsistent and or nonexistent college readiness preparation (Abbott & Martinez, 2018).

For these eight African American males identified as learning dis/abled, discussing their post-high school decisions was limited to surface conversations with their parents, mentors, and school personnel. Quick Feet explained that his teachers were

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unaware of his desire to attend a 4-year institution and have not made any efforts to discuss the next steps to obtaining any higher education opportunities. King Fearless and Harmony echoed Quick Feet's statement and added they have discussed the next steps of attending a 2-year institution but felt that if they shared their true intentions of wanting to attend a 4-year institution, they would not be supported by school personnel. Black Ghost stated that as an athlete he has had conversations about postsecondary options but has implemented few plans or received any concrete resources of assistance. The remaining participants stated they are seriously thinking of joining the workforce "because school was not their thing." However, none of the remaining students considering the workforce was enrolled in any of the vocational trades offered by their high school. Participants' conversations frequently surrounded the reflections of what others saw for them as post-high school trajectories and had never had to consider how they saw their within-the-veil selves after high school. They shared this was the first time they were asked where they saw themselves after high school and why. As alluded to from the previous research question's findings, participants have veiled their multidimensional identities, which has significantly influenced their post-high school decision-making process. From an early age, students have been taught that higher education or strong vocational skills set them apart from others. However, students who navigate multidimensional identities that are interdependent upon race and ability have additional obstacles to hurdle toward attaining those dreams. During the focus group, all students shared post-high school decisions, yet what was consistent was that none of the participants has been honest if asked what they would like to do after high school. Rather they have cloaked themselves with societal expectations, which influenced their post-high school decisions. As the discussion

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concluded, participants contemplated if their outside-the-veiled identity or their within-the-veiled identity made their post-high school decision as it currently stood.

Implications

The findings of this study provide the P-20 educational pipeline with invaluable insight into understanding how students who have multidimensional identities that are interdependent upon race and ability to understand themselves and their post-high school decisions. The study highlights how students develop their consciousness and begin to become critical of the oppressive systems they encounter. An analysis of the experiences and graphic elicitations of the participants provide educators and practitioners with an awareness of social, emotional, and academic variables that impede upon some of our most vulnerable students inside and outside of the classroom. The participants shared that dialogue related to their multiple identities led to them unpacking their consciousness beyond the veil.

Du Bois (1903) left us the foundational concept of double consciousness to create an awareness of an individual's consciousness, educators and practitioners may use his work to create spaces of opportunity and access that are centered upon a student's identity and consciousness. By using Du Bois's double consciousness concept to understand the multiple worlds of students' experiences, educators and practitioners may extend their understanding and use the triple consciousness framework to inform lesson planning, programming as a guide for student development, and transition planning. Lesson planning, programming, and transition planning take into consideration factors that influence individuals internally as well as externally and recognize the student's unique narratives and psychological perspective. Waitoller and King Thorius, (2016)

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confirm this assertion and argue the need for educators to cross pollinate culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) and universal design for learning (Cast, 2012) for students when developing inclusive spaces for students. Culturally sustaining pedagogy provides educators with strategies that address the multidimensional identities of students by integrating the rich cultures brought to classrooms while being critically reflexive of students intersectional identities (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) Universal design for learning outlines learning activities that eliminates barriers for students identified as dis/abled (Cast, 2012).

In the following sections, recommendations (as outlined in Figure 14) are provided to assist classroom teachers and or practitioners, district administrators, and families with action steps to activate the power that lies within students who have multidimensional identities that are interdependent upon race and ability, specifically African American male students identified as having dis/abilities.

Teaching Superheroes to Use Their Power

- Connect with the superheroes: develop and create constant and open communication with students. Through this communication, discuss preferred learning styles, areas of strengths and growth from the students' perspective. Distribute surveys, questionnaires, and open class discussion to gather insight. To assist with understanding students' multidimensional identities, explain and provide examples of racial and masculine identity questions like the following to connect with students prior to developing lessons and programming:
  - Name Black men that you know and are familiar with and what do they exhibit and display as a Black male?

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- Why did you share these examples?

- Do you feel that way about yourself?

- How do you identify (e.g., African American, Afro-LatinX, Biracial, Male, dis/abled, and or LGBTQ+)?

- What does that mean to you to be _____?

- Provide me with example(s) of how you think the world views you and how you view yourself.

- Activating the power from within: students' voices are abled or dis/abled within classrooms. Classrooms are the epicenter of the development of how students learn to use their voice. By involving students in conversations that directly impact their lives is the foundation to engaging students with building the skills to confidently speak on their own behalf for their interest. As educators we must listen to students and allow them to tell their own story and narrative. To assist with activating student voice, use the following strategies:

  - Teach students how to use their voice by creating spaces for students to lead projects that are aligned with their skills, interests, and preferred learning styles (e.g., develop a model project outline for students to modify to their preference).

  - Engage students with assignments that matter to them and their multidimensional identities. Offer real-world learning that highlight issues (inside and outside of the classroom) that matter to them (e.g., students may be asked to write and illustrate their own race story via a storyboard, snapchat, faux Instagram post).

- To assist students with activating their student voice, it is important to be consistent throughout instructional practices to normalize instruction around the students' voice. Within the classroom structure, it should turn from sage on the stage to guide on the side. Educators should shift from traditional instructional practices that are solely led by the teacher, to encouraging students to use their voice and create spaces for students to practice using their voice as a power that is heard and valued throughout the lesson.

- Planning with the superhero in mind: when planning programming or transition planning, create a space where student voice is centered. Centering spaces of student voice are more than participation within a program of service or a transition meeting, rather seek to privilege student ideas and contributions from their multidimensional identities and how they view themselves beyond high school. Once students' voices are centered, position students to lead their programming and or transition meeting by preparing them with questions like:
  - What do you aspire to do after high school?
  - Ask what do you think they need to do to acquire their goals and dreams?
  - Have you visited any colleges, trades, or post high school options?
  - What classes are you in enrolled in now?
  - Ask students to discuss stories or examples of what they think they should be doing after high school and what they would like to do and why?
  - What stories do you have to share of former students who pursued post-secondary options and trades?

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Superhero Training 101

When school district administrators take intentional measures to address how educators and practitioners use their understanding to develop and implement evidence-based practices to support students with multidimensional identities that are interdependent upon race and ability, minoritized student voices are valued. Researchers Annamma et al. (2018) have called on educators to explore and interweave the theory of DisCrit to expose and dismantle entrenched inequities in education. Educators may use the tenets of DisCrit along with the redrawn generalizations of double consciousness to create and implement intersectional and inclusive commitments for their minoritized students who have identities that are interdependent upon race and ability. Using DisCrit to critically develop and implement intersectional curricula for in-service teachers to understand the impacts of race and ability within their classrooms is key when supporting educators for inclusive educational environments. Tenet seven calls on educators to refuse to accept deficit notions regarding people of color identified as dis/abled, rather seeking to understand the learning and behavior of students who are multi-marginalized within context. By engaging in intellectual activism, educators may begin to refute traditional ways of educating students identified by race and ability and document ways how they may resist the processes and practices of oppression within the educational pipeline (Annamma, 2015; Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

Banks and Gibson (2016) point to the need for a systematic analysis of P-12 school-based variables that influence students identified with dis/abilities access and transitional post-high school pathways. Studies of administrators' and teachers' perceptions related to the overrepresentation of students of color in special education

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have revealed educators and administration were uncomfortable discussing and understanding the intersections of race and achievement. Administrators and educators commonly used the referral process as they believed that special education was the appropriate resource to support students who are not achieving and not understood by the district educational benchmarks (Galindo & Newton, 2017; Skiba et al., 2006). To assist school districts additional focus and development of the following should occur:

- Building the power: use the DisCrit framework described within the study to critically and professionally develop administrators and in-service teachers to understand the intersections of ableism and racism within their current schools and classrooms (e.g., DisCrit-based curricula and DisCrit-focused professional learning communities).

Connecting the Dots for the Superhero

Although IDEA and its assurances are intended for the P-12 educational pipeline, there are direct implications and impacts to postsecondary settings. When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it set higher expectations of student outcomes similar to the No Child Left Behind Act. IDEA now includes strategies to help students transition from high school to postsecondary education and work by requiring school districts to develop postsecondary transition plans with identified students as early as 16 years old. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Special Education Programs amended the IDEA to ensure that states comply with IDEA through Results Driven Accountability for students identified as needing special education services. Under Results Driven Accountability, states are required to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan that identifies gaps and put in place evidence-based practices for students. Certain indicators

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of these improvement plans are related to the transition strategies and post-school outcomes for students. To ensure that IDEA is effectively in place to support post-high school trajectories, it is critical for P-12 educators to understand and privilege the multidimensional identities and voices of the student and consider the following:

- Superhero resources: school personnel should develop and maintain relationships with the student and their key supporters guided by the triple consciousness framework described within the study to gain genuine insight prior to developing the transition plan. By building meaningful and consistent relationships with students, transition planning will be intentional and personalized while aligning goals with college readiness and technical education standards.

- The superhero road map: partner with post high school resources (universities, colleges, and trade schools) to connect students with post-high school resources that may include including transition academic advising, ADA workshops, and career options (e.g., invite post-high school partners to a bi-annual college or career fair or conference focused following pre-transitional meetings).

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Figure 14. Until Superheroes Learn to Use Their Power

Raising a Superhero

Students' voices are shaped by their family and community. The findings within the study highlighted that students attributed their identity to informal and formal learned experiences, which have framed how they view themselves, educational settings, and the world around them. These results suggest that the family and community are a multidimensional student's first teacher. To assist with activating the power within their superhero, families and or communities should consider the following:

- Afford opportunities of agency for your superhero: provide appropriate choices for when a decision related to their multidimensional identity is required. When outlining the decisions, share with the student the pros and cons of each choice. These opportunities recognize that the student has control of decisions that directly impact them as they will be accountable for the result.

- Encourage dialogue that empowers your superhero's voice: require your student to attend all meetings (inside and outside of educational settings) related to them with a designated time for them to use their voice. Prior to the meeting have a dialogue with the student about their strengths and areas of growth they would like to develop (e.g., assist the student with writing a list of their goals and objectives they would like to share during the meeting. Once the meeting concludes, create a space for your student to reflect and outline their to-do list of action).

- Acknowledge your superhero and their voice: when your student achieves success, focus on the action and their "how" and "why" (e.g., how did you achieve your desired success? Why did you want to achieve this goal and how can

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this help you with future goals?). If your student is met with a challenge, again focus on the action and allow the student to "talk" you through their "how" and "why" (e.g., I can see that this is upsetting, share with me through your eyes what happened? Why do you think this happened? What can be done differently?).

Recommendations for Research

Researchers should focus on exploring the experiences of students who live with multidimensional identities that are interdependent of race and ability (Annamma & Morrison, 2018) within various educational settings and racial demographics (e.g., predominately and white suburban; low socio –economic and rural; predominately African-African, high socio-economic, and urban; predominately Latinx and urban). The present study examined eight high school African American seniors identified as having a specific learning dis/ability who attended a high school located within the North East of the United States with a predominately population who self-identities as LatinX and Asian. Research comparing how multidimensional identities that are interdependent of race and ability (Annamma & Morrison, 2018) develop their identity and consciousness would shed light on how students become aware of their consciousness and their impact on post high school decisions.

Additionally, future research should examine the impacts of racial embodiment and how it intersects with multidimensional identities that are interdependent of race and ability (Annamma & Morrison, 2018) and their post high school decisions. African American male students identified as having dis/abilities eluded to having varying experiences and use of their student voice as it connected with their racial embodiment.

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This addition additional insight will assist with understanding another layer of the previously outlined triple consciousness.

Limitations

The goal of the study was to redraw generalizations of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness when applied to students who live with multidimensional identities that are interdependent of race and ability (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness concept provided context within the triple consciousness framework to understand how participants understood and made sense of Black masculinity and identified as dis/abled through the eyes of others and themselves. During the focus groups, participants were challenged to understand the materiality of race and how it impacts Black masculinity. The participants of this study revealed they have never discussed openly how certain bodies are ascribed to power and privilege. However, as we began to discuss racial embodiment, they were engaged and willing to consider a different perspective of how they viewed themselves rather than how others have viewed them. There was an obvious interest in discussing racial embodiment from the participants, but the time frame of the focus group did not allow for deeper examination. Given that this study collected and examined rich data, racial embodiment was not the only limitation. To extend the study, future research should include multiple sites inclusive of private and homeschool settings, a larger sample size, and consideration of additional variants of multidimensional identities (e.g., sexuality, multi-race, low incidence dis/abilities, and females).

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Conclusion

Although the study used the experiences of eight African American male high school seniors identified as specific learning dis/abled as instruments to redraw generalizations of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness, these young men grew one step closer to understanding how to use their superpowers. As each participant narrated their experiences, I was afforded the opportunity to see a superhero begin to awaken. At the conclusion of the study, the participants glowed with pride when hearing their final superhero story. They heard triumph and not defeat, success and not failure, and from those moments, they were challenged to continue to write their multidimensional stories from the voice of strength. Once a superhero learns who they are and how to use the gift of their multidimensional identities, they will be unstoppable!

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Masculinity Inventory Scale (MIS) for Black Men	Masculinity/Manhood 1. A man is able to control his emotions and does not cry 2. A man supports himself completely Perceived Barriers or Challenges to Becoming Men 3. I have to prove stereotypes against Black men wrong 4. The road to success is easier for White men than Black men Parental Influences, Social Networks, Role Models, and Support 5. My father has instilled in me the characteristics of a man
Critical Consciousness Scale	Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality 6. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism 7. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation 8. Participated in a discussion about a social or political issue
Cross-Racial Identity (CRIS)	Pro-American identity (PA) 9.I am not so much a member of a racial group, as I am an American Pre-Encounter Miseducation (PM), which focuses on negative stereotypes relating to African Americans. 10. African -Americans place more emphasis on having a good time than on hard work Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred (PSH), which indicates a self-hating and anti-Black identity 11. Privately, I sometimes have negative feelings about being Black Immersion-Emersion Anti-White (IEAW), describing distrust of Whites and an anti-White attitude 12. I have a strong feeling of hatred and disdain for all White people Internalization Afrocentricity (IA), which reflects a pro-Black or African-centered attitude 13. I see and think about things from an Afrocentric perspective Internalization multiculturalists inclusive (IMCI), which describes a collective acceptance of the Black race as well as other cultural groups

	14. As a multiculturalist, I am connected to many groups [Hispanic, Asian Americans, Whites, Jews, gay men, lesbians, etc. ...]
Dis/ability Identity Development Scale (DIDS)	Acceptance 15. My family treats me differently because of my dis/ability. Relationship 16. If I meet someone who discloses they have MY hidden dis/ability, I engage with them (i.e., smile, wave, say hello). Adoption 17. I am proud to identify as a person with a dis/ability. Engagement 18. I am a mentor to other people with dis/abilities.

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