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Barriers and Support to the Successful Postsecondary Transition of Virgin Islands Males With a Specific Learning Disability

Marissa S. Johnson Rogers
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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Marissa Johnson Rogers

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Walden University
August 2022

Abstract

Barriers and Support to the Successful Postsecondary Transition
of Virgin Islands Males With a Specific Learning Disability

by

Marissa Johnson Rogers

MS, Walden University, 2012

BA, University of the Virgin Islands, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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Abstract

The post high school transition for males with a specific learning disability (SLD) can be challenging. Unemployment among persons with disabilities was markedly higher than those without. There was also mounting evidence that showed that persons with disabilities had difficulties adjusting to post-secondary environments. For male students with disabilities, their post-secondary experience was impacted by the support services received, both at school and within their community. Little was known about the post-secondary experiences of minority males with SLD. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore post-secondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD. Particularly, this study sought to describe the barriers and support to their successful post-secondary transition. The social cognitive career theory was the theoretical framework used in this study. Six Virgin Islands males with SLD, who completed high school between 2010 and 2019, participated in semi-structured interviews. Interpretative phenomenological analytical strategies were used to analyze data from interviews. The results showed an overwhelmingly favorable response to the support received from parents, teachers, and counselors. Results also showed that males with SLD strived to achieve post-secondary education and gainful employment and independence, but they lacked self-advocacy skills that can help them successfully navigate through this transitional period. Results of this study has the potential for positive social change by helping education administrators, the Virgin Islands vocational rehabilitation and other disability services in improving transition services for persons with disabilities by raising awareness among parents advocating and requesting optimal transitional services for their children.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study firstly to my son, Daveion Rogers, who has taught me more, in his 11 years of life, than I will ever teach him in my lifetime. Davey, you were the catalyst of this study, and as I see you overcome more and more obstacles, I know my commitment to the special needs community does not end when I complete this doctoral study. To my daughter, Dylen Rogers, you are brave, vibrant, and beautiful. You inspire me to be a better version of myself, physically and mentally. To my guardian angels: My mom, Lorna Maynard (1951–1984), I only had you for less than a decade, but I have always felt your presence, and I know you are proud of me; and my paternal grandmother, Violet Pennyfeather-Hodge (1931–2019), you taught me to always be humble, to be kind to others, and to never forget where I came from. I love you all!

Finally, special dedication to the entire community of special needs children and adults in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I learned a valuable lesson from one of the participants in this study; you do not have a disability but a special ability. God has blessed us all with talents; we just need the right support to let them shine.

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All glory and honor to Almighty God, who has brought me through this 6-year journey. This journey has endured; two Category 5 hurricanes in a 2-week span, a pandemic, and the loss of my grandmother and my dear aunt. Throughout all that, my faith never wavered; quitting was not an option. Oh Lord I thank you!

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Finally, to the six brave men who made this study possible, thank you for trusting me to tell your story. You are proof that adversities are only temporary; your resilience and determination to succeed are awe inspiring.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

It has been more than a decade since the reauthorization of the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). This reauthorization placed greater emphasis on enhancing postsecondary outcomes of all persons with a disability (Theobald et al., 2018). The transition from high school to a postsecondary education or a job can be difficult for any student. For males in the special education program, this can be even more challenging (Banks, 2014). The overrepresentation of males in special education has been consistent for the past three decades (Othman, 2018). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) showed that 17% of males enrolled in public schools were receiving special education services, compared to females with 9% representation. That is an almost a 2 to 1 ratio. The social stigma that is sometimes placed on special education students, the unwillingness of employers to hire someone with a special need, and the absence of special education instructors or services in college can make the future seem grim for transitioning special education males (Kortering et al., 2010).

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands males with a specific learning disability (SLD). This chapter provides an outline of the study. I provided the background to the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study. Definitions of key terms, along with the assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study are presented.

Background

African American male representation in the public-school special education program has been higher than the representation of White males and their African American female counterparts. This overrepresentation is not new; it has been a continuous phenomenon that has been debated for decades. Some scholars have argued that this overrepresentation is based on race. Shifer et al. (2011) stated that groups that are already socially disadvantaged are disproportionately identified with learning disabilities and thus referred for special education services. They further stated that this disproportional identification can raise concerns about the reliability and validity of labeling a child with a learning disability.

The U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) are not different from the U.S. mainland in the overrepresentation of males in special education. The most recent report of the Virgin Islands State Office of Special Education (SOSE) Parents Satisfaction Survey showed that of all students in the special education program, 72% are males. With the overwhelming majority of the Virgin Islands' population being Black or African American, over 95% of males in the special education program fit into that demographic (University of the Virgin Islands [UVI], 2018a). It cannot be argued that this overrepresentation is attributable to racial discrimination, but socioeconomic attributes can be considered as a contributing factor. The issue of overrepresentation of African American and minority males in special education will be addressed in this study from a socioeconomic perspective. According to the 2014 Virgin Islands Community Survey, the poverty level of the Virgin Islands was 18.9%. The percentage was even higher for

households with children, at a rate of 32% (UVI, 2017a). While the USVI is a minority-majority district, African American males face adversities similar to minorities on the U.S. mainland such as high unemployment, high levels of incarceration, and low enrollment in postsecondary institutions. For Virgin Islands males with disabilities, anticipated postsecondary outcomes might differ from the postsecondary results they experience.

In 2014, the United States celebrated the 60th anniversary of a landmark Supreme Court ruling that changed the landscape of public education, the 1954 decision in *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka*. This law essentially ended segregated education in the United States. This case highlighted the psychological harm that segregation inflicted on African American students. Lawyers in this case, namely Thurgood Marshall, argued that segregation made the education system not only separate but unequal and made African American students feel inferior to their White counterparts (Blanchett, 2007) . This ruling paved the way for future education-related legislation.

After *Brown*, the outreach of education legislation expanded to include the rights of the disabled. For 20 years following this landmark decision, parents of and advocates for disabled children fought on the state and national level, and their voices were eventually heard in the halls of Congress. The 1975 IDEA, previously known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, mandated a free and appropriate public-school education (FAPE) for all eligible children ages 3–21. Eligibility for special education services requires a recommendation from a team of professionals where the student has been identified as having a disability that can unfavorably affect their

academic performance. Recent data from the NCES showed that in the school year 2014–2015, 6.6 million children, or 13% of all public-school children, received special education services. Of that 6.6 million, African Americans had the second highest representation at 15%, with Native Americans leading with 17% (NCES, 2018).

Disabilities under IDEA (2004) fall under 14 clearly defined categories that must be proven to have an adverse effect on a child's ability to learn in order for the child to receive special education services. One such disability is a specific learning disability (SLD). SLD is a disorder that affects a person's ability to effectively speak, write, read, spell, or do mathematical calculations (Allen et al., 2011). Nationally and within the Virgin Islands, SLD has the highest participation rate of students in special education compared to all other disability categories under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). According to Joshi and Bouck (2017), persons with SLD have difficulty transitioning from high school to a productive life. There is a persistent school completion gap between persons with SLD and their general education peers.

IDEA (2004) advocated for inclusive learning for persons with disabilities. Proponents of inclusive learning seek to give students with disabilities access to a general education curriculum with accommodations. However, general education teachers are not as accommodating to these students (Bateman, 2007; Mattson & Roll-Pettersson, 2007). A 2012 study done on USVI educators' perceptions on inclusive learning indicated the apprehension of general education teachers (Habtes et al., 2012).

A transition plan provides a basic structure for preparing individuals with disabilities to live, work, and play in their community as fully and independently as

possible (Swenson, 2017). One of the many challenges facing a successful postsecondary and employment transition outcome is student involvement. Students' involvement in their transition planning promotes self-determination and self-efficacy that can lead to higher rates of graduation from high school (Cavendish & Connor, 2018).

Charleswell's 2016 study of parents' perspective on parental involvement in transition planning for students with learning disabilities provided keen insight into services and support for students with disabilities in the USVI. The study found that successful postsecondary transition for students with learning disabilities in the USVI was hindered due to lack of postsecondary support services and inadequate early transition services for students while they were in high school. The study found that parents of students with learning disabilities felt that their involvement in transition planning had a profound impact on their child achieving their post high school goals. They recognized that the process requires a collaborative approach where all involved are knowledgeable about the needs of the students and develop goals that serve their best interest. The participants also contended that successful post high school outcomes depend greatly on the preparations that students receive while they are in school (Charleswell, 2016). Charleswell recommended that special education personnel explore options of exposing students with learning disabilities to post high school options at an earlier age. She recommended that school and other special education supports allow students to experience opportunities that will enhance their development and give them more autonomy in seeking options that will lead to solidifying their post high school goals before leaving high school.

Charleswell's (2016) recommendations provided an opening for further exploration of pre- and postsecondary transition support for Virgin Islands students with learning disabilities from the persons most impacted by these services. Minority males with disabilities in the Virgin Islands face adversities similar to those on the U.S. mainland: underrepresentation in postsecondary education and employment. This study included only male participants with the intent of adding to the literature on minority males with disabilities and transition outcomes, with a focus on their involvement in and perception of pre- and postsecondary transition services.

Problem Statement

Postsecondary education is vital to achieving economic success and social mobility. Research-based predictors of postschool success have shown that parental involvement, teacher collaboration, parental expectations, career awareness, self-advocacy, and autonomy are essential to all students with or without a disability (Hein & Smerdon, 2013; Rowe et al., 2015). Unemployment among persons with disabilities is considerably higher compared to those without. In 2013, 36% of noninstitutionalized persons with disabilities between the ages of 21 and 64 were employed, with another 10.5% unemployed and actively looking for work (Erickson et al., 2014). With an increased emphasis on college and career readiness for persons with disabilities, academic outcomes have shifted to include special education students in general education or inclusive classrooms. This has been done with a goal of enabling them to gain the necessary skills for postsecondary employment or education (Balfanz, 2009; McConnell et al., 2015).

For the 2016–2017 school year, there were approximately 6.05 million students between the ages of 6 and 21 receiving special education services in the United States and its territories (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The USVI accounted for 1,072 of those students with disabilities, with an overwhelming majority of them being males, at 72%, of which 96% were Black or Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Males, particularly African American males, in special education are not a new phenomenon. Studies over the past four decades have sought to investigate why this persists (Iii et al., 2008; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001; Zhang et al., 2014). African American males are more likely to be placed in special education relative to their Caucasian and African American female counterparts. Special education has been the preferred intervention and curriculum for African American males in many public school systems (Iii et al., 2008). African American males are one and a half times more likely to be labeled as emotionally disturbed than their non-African American counterparts, a label that, in, many cases, leads to placement in special education (Allen, 2010; Oswald et al., 1999).

Learning disabilities under IDEA are varied and include hearing impairment, speech and language impairment, autism, and specific learning disabilities, among others (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). SLD is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological and cognitive processes that are involved in using and understanding language, whether spoken or written (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This disorder may result in an inability to effectively speak, listen, think, read, write, spell, or do arithmetic calculations (NCES, 2018). Nationally, 38% of students who receive special

education services have a SLD, the largest percentage of all disabilities. The percentage is even higher in the USVI, with 55% of all students in special education having a SLD (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD. Particularly, this study sought to describe the barriers to and support for a successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD who had transitioned from high school to postsecondary education or employment and/or independent living. Males in this demographic would have spent at least 80% of their time in general education classes. With the increasing numbers of SLD students placed in special education, inclusive classrooms provide a path for successful postsecondary transition. In addition to documenting their experiences in postsecondary transition, the purpose of the study was to identify how participants described feelings of self-efficacy in the transition process. Transition can only be successful when general education teachers are equipped to meet the needs of a special student (Kargin et al., 2010; Ledoux et al., 2012). Over half of all males with disabilities in the Virgin Islands spent 80% of their time in general education classes during the 2016–2017 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Successful transition may be evident through several indicators such as better jobs, higher wages, postsecondary education, and increased likelihood of independent living (Schaller et al., 2015). In this study, I looked at a sample of six males under this classification who

graduated from high school between 2010 and 2019 and had transitioned to postsecondary activities, to explore their transition experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

SQ1.1. How do Virgin Islands males with SLD experience high school transition services?

2. What are the perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

SQ 2.2. How do Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD describe feelings of self-efficacy?

Theoretical Framework

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) provided a conceptual framework for this qualitative study. SCCT is an extension of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which has been used to examine academic performance and the career development of college students (Lent et al., 1994). This theory was developed in 1994 by Lent et al. SCCT is comprised of three correlated aspects with respect to career development. They include the development of basic academic and career interest, how academic and career choices are made, and how they are attained (Lent et al., 1999). It does this by relying on the fact that people have the capability to steer themselves and maintain social support or social barriers that tend to strengthen or weaken career development (Lent et al., 1994).

Self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals serve as the basic building blocks for SCCT. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to perform particular behaviors or courses of action. Outcome expectations refer to a person's beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors. Personal goals are a person's intention to engage in a particular activity. In SCCT, there are two types of goals, choice goals and performance goals (Lent et al., 1994) Students with disabilities, like any other students, have post high school aspirations. SCCT focuses on their self-efficacy relative to these aspirations and the support or barriers they encounter as they attempt to achieve these goals.

SCCT has been researched extensively to explain career development in multicultural groups because it includes a variety of constructs that are applicable to various groups, including the disabled (Gibbons et al., 2015). This theory frames disability status as an individual variable that influences career development. Disability status then frames all learning experiences and eventually career and college self-efficacy and outcome beliefs (Lent et al., 2014). Persons with disabilities face barriers such as limited access to jobs, minimal career and postsecondary information, and social discrimination that make it more difficult to reach career goals. Due to their unique needs, persons with disabilities need a more tailored and sophisticated approach to college and career development. SCCT provides an extensive understanding of career development with a specific focus on individual self-efficacy and perceived barriers to success (Gibbons et al., 2015). This theory will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This study was a phenomenological qualitative study that highlighted the lived experiences and perspectives of participants. I employed interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyze the data. IPA is an approach to qualitative analysis that focuses on how people make sense of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). From the age of 14, students with disabilities are involved in an individualized education plan (IEP) and transition planning. However, transition planning tends to score low on the level of satisfaction among parents of children with disabilities (UVI, 2018b). While African American males with disabilities might have aspirations for higher education, a study by Banks (2014) revealed that most participants were encouraged to seek full-time employment after graduation as opposed to going to college. Graduates might not be aware of disability services offered at the postsecondary level or might not partake in them for fear of being ridiculed by their peers (Banks, 2014).

The results of this study will provide an understanding of the barriers to and support for postsecondary transition of Virgin Islands males with a SLD. The open-ended research and interview questions allowed for the collection of more explicit and detailed data. The results can be used for decision making toward improved collaboration and additional services for persons with disabilities in the Virgin Islands. The local State Office of Special Education can benefit from the results of this study when seeking additional federal aid to support the needs of students with disabilities. Teachers and school administrators can use the results of this study to implement and improve transition services offered to students. Parents can benefit from this study by using it as a

tool to advocate for their disabled child to ensure that appropriate initiatives are developed for postsecondary success.

Definition of Terms

The terms in the research questions as defined theoretically and operationally:

Career decision self-efficacy: A person's assurance in their ability to engage in career decision-making tasks (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

Employment: Paid work at or above the minimum wage for an average of 20 hours or more per week since graduating from high school. This includes serving in the military or working in a family-based business (Gill, 2016).

Inclusion in general education: A student with a specific learning disability included in the general education classroom alongside peers without disabilities at least 80% of the day while receiving special education services.

Individualized education plan (IEP): As mandated by IDEA (2004), each child receiving special education services must have an IEP. This serves as a guide for the delivery of special education and support services for students with disabilities (Price-Ellingstad et al., 2000).

Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA, 2004): The first law that granted FAPE to all public-school children 3 to 21 years old. Local schools are required to evaluate and assess the needs of students with disabilities and design IEPs to meet their unique needs (IDEA, n.d.-a).

Postschool outcomes: Efforts to seek employment or enrollment in postsecondary education after graduating from high school (Bouck & Park, 2018).

Postsecondary education: Enrollment in a full- or part-time institution of higher learning since leaving high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Self-efficacy: A person's belief about their ability to perform particular behaviors or courses of action (Lent et al., 1994a).

Specific learning disability (SLD): A disorder in one or more psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (IDEA, 2018b).

Transition: Movement from high school to employment or postsecondary education (Swenson, 2017).

Transition program: Planned procedure that includes instruction and services that help students with disabilities to successfully complete high school and move on to employment and independent living (Test & Cease-Cook, 2012).

Vocational education courses: Coursework designed to teach students skills needed for choosing and preparing for a career, as well as skills and work habits that lead to success in future schooling and work (Test & Cease-Cook, 2012).

Assumptions

In conducting this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Because SLD is comprised of a variety of learning disabilities, the disability level of participants might vary from mild to severe.
2. Students with a specific learning disability are capable of attending institutes of higher learning and being gainfully employed.

3. Transition services administered in school are expected to adequately prepare participants for postsecondary prospects.
4. Governmental agencies and community organizations can improve postsecondary employment and educational opportunities for persons with disabilities.
5. Participants would share authentic and honest experiences related to barriers and supports to their postsecondary transition.
6. My approach to limit personal bias as the researcher in this study would be effective in preparing me to adequately make meaning that was based solely on the participants' testimonies.

Scope

Study participants consisted of six minority males who graduated from a public high school in the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix school districts of the USVI. All participants received special education services during the last 4 years of high school. All participants spent at least 80% of their time in general education classrooms with accommodations.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were present in the study:

1. Participants in this study were required to have been diagnosed with a SLD as defined by IDEA (2004). This study did not include persons with other disabilities.

2. Participants were from two separate school districts in the USVI. While a single Commissioner of Education headed both districts, transition services and practices might have been different.
3. This study required that participants had graduated between 2010 and 2019. This requirement was a delimitation because transition services and opportunities might have varied during that period.

Limitations

The limitations present in this study were as follows:

1. The study was conducted in a U.S. territory that is outside of the continental United States. While the territory follows the mandates of IDEA (2004), resources might limit opportunities for persons with disabilities.
2. The study represented the lived experiences of males with a SLD post high school at the time of the study. Their experience might change due to added resources that might provide better employment and higher learning opportunities.
3. Data for this study were collected during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Virgin Islands Territory was under a “stay at home” restriction for approximately 3 months. This made it difficult to recruit participants through partnership organizations because employees of these organizations were working remotely.

4. The sample aim of this study was to have an even number of participants from both school districts, but due to recruiting difficulties, only one participant from the St. Croix school district was successfully recruited.

Significance of the Study

If males with learning disabilities do not have the cognitive or social skills to overcome obstacles, they may not be able to live productive and independent adult lives. The main aim of this study was to gain insight into the obstacles and opportunities available to Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD. While a 2016 study addressed transition for Virgin Islands students with disabilities, it addressed this topic from the perspective of the parents and their involvement in the postsecondary transition of their children (Charleswell, 2016). This study left a gap in the literature that needed to be explored.

As mandated in the 1997 IDEA amendments, from the age of 14, all special education students are required to participate in annual IEP meetings. All students in public school who receive special education services must have an IEP. An IEP is the framework for a quality education for students with disabilities. It provides an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (from the age of 14) to work together to improve educational results and experiences for children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Decisions related to education and transition for students with disabilities should be based on the students' preferences and interests (Test et al., 2004). While students are in school,

they are entitled to services based on IDEA and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA).

Findings from this study were compared with similar studies done outside the Virgin Islands. The USVI are unique in that although USVI constitute a U.S. possession, the USVI is greatly influenced by Afro-Caribbean culture. Inhabitants come from islands in the Caribbean in addition to the United States, the Middle East, and Asia (Roopnarine, 2010). With an unemployment rate that is more than double that of the U.S. mainland at 9.9%, and rising crime rates with males being the predominant offenders, males in general in the Virgin Islands face tough obstacles (Virgin Islands Department of Labor, 2018). On par with national statistics, among males in the Virgin Islands, enrollment in college and university is low, with 25% of UVI's students being male UVI, 2018b).

This study is of importance to the local Virgin Islands and national communities of stakeholders. With the unique demography of the Virgin Islands, this study adds to the literature on a rarely studied American culture. The findings of this study provide a firsthand look at the challenges and opportunities of transitioning males with a disability. The goal is to recommend strategies that will be effective for ensuring a successful transition for males with SLD and possibly other disabilities.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the phenomenon of the overrepresentation of African American males in special education and their underrepresentation in the labor force and institutes of higher learning. The chapter also introduced the unique demographics of the USVI and what differentiates the USVI from the U.S. mainland. Definition of terms,

assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were also addressed. The chapter presented arguments for the use of a qualitative phenomenological approach and the significance of this study.

Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth background to this study by examining the literature related to special education laws, SLD diagnosis, transition planning, self-efficacy, and barriers and supports for post high school transitioning males. In Chapter 3, I looked at the research design, justification for using a phenomenological approach, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. In Chapter 4 I reported the results of the study and highlighted the dominant and emergent themes. I concluded with Chapter 5 that discussed the findings and made recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I take an in-depth view of the literature surrounding postsecondary transition outcomes of males with a SLD. I employ a conceptual framework through which I seek to address and support the findings of this study on Virgin Islands males with SLD and their lived experiences post high school. With the IDEA (2004) placing greater emphasis on the enhancement of postsecondary outcomes of all persons with disabilities, I sought to highlight the challenges, opportunities, and supports experienced by members of this vulnerable population. An account of their lived experience is important in ascertaining their involvement, motivation, self-determination, as well as external barriers and supports in their postsecondary transition.

The literature review addressed the background of the theoretical framework and its relevance to this study. The literature review also attempts to increase the understanding of legislation relative to the education of persons with disabilities by providing in depth background information on IDEA (2004).

Literature Search Strategy

I sought peer-reviewed articles in this study from Walden University's Thoreau library database and other sources such as EBSCO's Academic Search Premier, Sage Publications, and Google Scholar. Keywords used individually or combined included *specific learning disability, learning disability, transition outcomes, transition planning, special education, African American males, postsecondary transition, Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, social cognitive career theory, self-efficacy, inclusive classrooms, higher education, vocational rehabilitation, predictors of postsecondary*

success, and *supports*. The literature search using these keywords yielded over 150 articles and studies that addressed critical issues related to this study.

Theoretical Framework

Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT is a blueprint for understanding aspirational goals as they relate to career and vocational interests and the behaviors behind them. Although it is a relatively new theory and has been anchored in Bandura's social cognitive theory, it has been applied to many areas of research. Its application has been used to address issues of motivations, outcome expectations, academic persistence, and career choice, among others, with diverse demographics (Brown & Lent, 2017). With self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals as its core elements, SCCT is an effective tool in predicting career and educational pursuits (Lent et al., 2000).

Early studies using SCCT looked at the role that self-efficacy and outcome expectations play in the development of career choice, work performance, and vocational interest. When Lent et al. introduced this theory in 1994, their main focus was to extend social cognitive theory to career development. Their goal was to integrate career theories by consolidating explanations for career choice and development. They believed that this effort would benefit the field of psychology by combining conceptually aligned constructs such as self-efficacy and self-concept, fully explaining common career theories' outcomes such as satisfaction and stability, and explaining the relationship between diverse constructs such as self-efficacy, needs, interests, and abilities (Lent et al., 1994). Lent and Brown (1996) further solidified the framework of SCCT by presenting an overview of the social cognitive approach to career development. They

dissected three career-related aspects of the social cognitive framework (vocational interests, occupational choice, and career-related performance), addressed in their earlier 1994 study, and focused on the interaction of social cognitive variables of self-efficacy and goals in guiding career development (Lent & Brown, 1996).

Lent et al. laid the groundwork for further studies using SCCT. Hackett and Byars (1996) addressed the issue of career development of racial and ethnic minorities, specifically minority women, an issue that, at the time, did not have a comprehensive model. The authors reviewed studies on African American women's career development to illustrate how social cognitive themes, such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations, influence the academic and career choices of African American women. They stated that although empirical studies had applied social cognitive theory to people of color, few had addressed the gender and ethnic influences on career self-efficacy (Hackett & Byars, 1996). The authors chose African American women because of the "double jeopardy" of racism and sexism that they face. The literature on career development in minority women was further extended by Flores and O'Brien (2002), whose study addressed the career choices of Mexican American adolescent females. Their study addressed the underrepresentation of Mexican American females in all levels of education and their overrepresentation in low-paying jobs that are traditionally occupied by women. They sought to determine the influence that social cognitive and contextual variables had on career aspirations, career choice prestige, and traditionality in Mexican American adolescent women (Flores & O'Brien, 2002).

Lent et al returned in 2000 with a study that addressed the contextual supports and barriers to career choice. They used SCCT to go beyond the cognitive-person variables (outcomes expectations, self-efficacy, and goals) and incorporated external environmental variables such as social, cultural, and economic variables to explain the interplay of these variables in the career choice process (Lent et al., 2000). The team of Lent et al. continued to build on the literature of SCCT in the first decade of the 21st century. They collaborated with other researchers to show the applicability of SCCT to areas such as counseling (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Lent, 2005), predicting interest and choice in computing disciplines by college students (Lent et al., 2008) and job satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2008).

The team of Lent and Brown continued to expand the SCCT and in 2013 introduced another dimension to the once four-modeled theory. The SCCT model consisted of four overlapping segmental models aimed at understanding educational and career interests development, performance and persistence, choice-making, and well-being (Lent & Brown, 2013). The authors posited that SCCT can be used to address varying aspects of career behavior, such as how people manage tasks and cope with the obstacles faced in career development, entry, change, and adjustment without regard to their academic or career field (Lent & Brown, 2013). This seemingly became a catalyst to a plethora of studies using SCCT. A quick search of studies using SCCT between 2013 and 2019 in the Walden library yielded approximately 1,200 articles. Studies using SCCT went beyond the American demographic to areas such as Peru (Ramos-Diaz et al., 2018), Indonesia (Prawitasari, 2018) and Columbia (Casas & Blanco-Blanco, 2017). The studies

addressed a myriad of issues of career and educational aspirations among demographics based on their gender/gender identity, race/ethnicity, and educational interest. What was lacking were studies showing the applicability of SCCT to vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities.

Postsecondary education and career outcomes of persons with disabilities are not new phenomena. The representation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education and employment is significantly lower than that of persons without a disability (Nolan & Gleeson, 2017; Prince et al., 2018; Showers & Kinsman, 2017). With the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), many have led the charge in addressing this issue. Thoma et al. (2011) reviewed literature on postsecondary education programs for persons with learning disabilities. Their review found that the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 played a significant role in improving postsecondary services offered to students with disabilities. They also pointed out that there was limited literature that addressed the experiences of students participating in these programs. They recommended that further efforts be made to measure outcomes by finding a systematic way of comparison (Thoma et al., 2011). Oertle and O'Leary (2017) addressed the gap in the employment rate of persons with disabilities by reviewing 20 studies in which researchers looked at postsecondary transition outcomes through the lens of transition preparation, planning, and career development. Their review also found that the recently enacted WIOA (2014) played a pivotal role in promoting employment for persons with disabilities (Oertle & O'Leary, 2017). This act has mandated that all local Vocational Rehabilitation offices

operate with the basic assumption of employability of all clients and incorporate, in their transition planning, career development rather than job placement (WIOA, 2014).

While there have been numerous studies that have addressed transition of persons with disabilities, few have used SCCT as their theoretical framework. Ochs and Roessler's (2004) exploratory study of SCCT's constructs showed that it could provide theoretical guidelines for developing career assessment tools and interventions for persons with disabilities. Their study found both significant and moderate correlation between SCCT's constructs, which is similar to results found in previous studies on undergraduate, general, and special education high school students and middle school students (Ochs & Roessler, 2004).

Singleton (2016) did an extensive quantitative study of the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities in the Mississippi school system from the SCCT perspective. Her study was inclusive in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and type of disability, which were used as predictor variables to determine whether participants were engaged in paid work, whether they participated in vocational education, and the number of goals they completed in a transition program (Singleton, 2016). Results of the study showed a significant relationship between the predictor variables and transition predictors, which included inclusion in general education, paid work experiences, number of transition goals completed in a transition program, participation in vocational education courses, and participation in a work study program. The study also found that participants had high to moderate self-efficacy beliefs, with career self-efficacy having a significant impact on employment and postsecondary education (Singleton, 2016). The researcher

recommended that future researchers collect data from other geographic regions in the United States. This will enable researchers to make comparisons of outcomes between school districts in a state or between schools that have met or failed to meet expectations. These recommendations were the impetus for this study.

The Evolution of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act

The United States, like many developed countries, offers free and mandatory public education. While public education in the United States is viewed as a birthright, there is a common misconception that public education is guaranteed by the federal constitution. The 10th Amendment to the Constitution implies that education is the responsibility of state governments (Yell et al., 1998). Rhode Island and Massachusetts were the first states to pass compulsory education laws in 1840 and 1852, respectively. By 1918, all states had enacted similar laws. Although these laws were in place, children with disabilities were often excluded from public schools (Yell et al., 1998).

IDEA is arguably the gold standard when it comes to FAPE for persons with disabilities. IDEA evolved from the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, which, at the time, was the first legislative action that recognized and enforced the right of the disabled to a free and fair education (Burke & Sandman, 2015). Prior to 1975, education and support services for persons with disabilities in public schools were nonexistent to limited. Students with disabilities were often shunned and hidden from society, in asylums, confined to their homes, or in private schools with specialized teachers (Sawyer, 2015). Private residential facilities were often run by charitable organizations and provided services to mentally disabled persons that included

self-care skills and vocational training. These facilities operated on a premise that with proper training, individuals can be cured of mental handicaps. This led to increased enrollment, and throughout the 1800s, residential facilities flourished in many states. Increased enrollment led to overcrowding, and children who were deemed incurable were returned home (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Throughout the 19th century, the needs of special education children were met predominantly in private institutions. Publicly funded institutes for the disabled appeared in the mid-1800s with schools for the hearing impaired in Kentucky and Ohio. In 1852, Pennsylvania developed a school called the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children at Germantown. By today's standards, these children would have been identified as being intellectually disabled, having a specific learning disability, or being emotionally disturbed (Myhill, 2011). Congress created the National College for Deaf and Dumb in Washington, DC in 1864, which was a grammar school for deaf and blind children. In 1986, it was renamed Gallaudet University and now only caters to students who are deaf and hard of hearing. These early private institutions were exclusively residential, thus requiring students to be away from their families (Myhill, 2011).

As the population of students with disabilities grew and became more diversified, so did the schools to cater to those with specific disabilities. The early half of the 20th century saw separate schools being established for blind, deaf, and severely intellectually disabled persons. Students who were considered "slow learners" or mildly disabled were taught in regular classrooms. These "slow learners" were subsequently placed in separate classes where they could receive individualized instruction. This practice proved ideal as

students were being taught by teachers who were trained to teach students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). Classes soon became overcrowded and failed to deliver satisfactory services to students due to limited resources, inadequate curriculum, and poorly trained teachers. Students were sometimes labeled with a disability when they did not have one or incorrectly labeled with one disability when they in fact had another one (Turnbull, 1999). Noticing their children's failure to thrive despite receiving services, parents began to voice their concerns. Their advocacy brought to the forefront in society a need for humane educational resources for children with disabilities. This need took several decades to be fulfilled.

The first major federal legislative effort to improve public elementary and secondary education came about in the mid-20th century. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed by Congress in 1958 after a perceived threat by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik. This act provided grants to improve the teaching of math and science in earlier grades. The NDEA opened the door for federal involvement in elementary and secondary education. Four days after the passage of NDEA, President Dwight Eisenhower signed a small act, Public Law 85-926, that provided financial support to colleges and universities for training educational administrators in teaching mentally challenged children. The act was further expanded in 1963 by Congress to include training teachers and researchers in a wider range of disabilities. Seven years later, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was passed and was hailed as the first major federal initiative that subsidized direct services to special populations in public elementary and secondary schools. Today, ESEA remains a primary

vehicle for federal support of public schools. Neither NDEA nor ESEA, at the time of their inception, made provisions for the education of children with disabilities (Martin et al., 1996).

A 1966 amendment to ESEA established the first federal grant program that caters to the education of children with disabilities in public schools. Public Law 89-313 stipulated that children in state-supported and operated schools “for the handicapped” could qualify for entitlement purposes and be awarded special Title I funds to “the handicapped” (Martin et al., 1996). The following year, another amendment to the act included Title VI, which provided funding for grants for students with disabilities. Under this act, Public Law 89-750 established the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH), which was charged with administering all Office of Education programs for children with disabilities. Title VI was replaced by The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1970, which laid the foundation for further legislative efforts for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998).

Activists in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s fought for changes in society that would allow equal rights and opportunities for minorities, particularly African Americans. This led to litigation and changes in legislation. A major victory for the Civil Rights Movement was the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The *Brown* decision had a profound impact on the educational and societal rights of minorities as well as educational law and procedures, most notably ending segregation in schools. The impact of *Brown* reached beyond the rights of minorities and, although it took time, *Brown* set the precedent for extensive changes in

schools' policies and approaches to children with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). The 14th Amendment to the Constitution granting equal protection under the law solidified the victory for *Brown* and further underscored the rights of all citizens, regardless of color (Turnbull, 1999).

Parents of children with disabilities and their advocates cited the *Brown* ruling in their claim that students with disabilities have the same rights as students without disabilities. There were two key elements to their argument. The first element refers to the fact that there was an unacceptable level of differential treatment for children with disabilities and some students with disabilities were not allowed to pursue education but all students without disabilities were. These two inconsistencies gave rise to a series of litigations that challenged or sought reparations for similar inequities (Yell et al., 1998). For almost two decades since *Brown*, the federal government made numerous attempts to improve education for persons with disabilities. Many states passed legislation supporting the education of children with disabilities in the early 1970s but the programs varied from state to state (Yell et al., 1998). As a result, many disabled children were deprived of special education services.

Two landmark cases became the catalyst for change in how children with disabilities are educated in the United States. They were *Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PARC)* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (1972). PARC sued the state of Pennsylvania for not providing free access to public education to intellectually disabled (retarded) children. The plaintiffs argued that enacting a systematic education program for disabled children

would produce learning. They further argued that the definition of education goes beyond the academic realm that education should be viewed as a continuous method by which individuals learn to manage and function in their environment (Wright, 2005). The case was settled with provisions made for parental involvement in educational placement decisions and a mechanism for resolving disputes. The ruling also provided that children with disabilities should be educated with children without disabilities and should only be educated separately if the severity of their disability is such that education in a regular setting would not provide a satisfactory outcome (Wright, 2005).

Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia was a class action lawsuit filed by parents and guardians of seven District of Columbia children against the district's Board of Education, Department of Human Resources and the mayor. They were sued for their failure to provide all children with a free public education and training to the plaintiffs and other "exceptional" children, members of their class, and excluding, suspending, expelling, reassigning and transferring of "exceptional" children from regular public-school classes without affording them due process of law. The school district's defense was that it was costly to educate children with disabilities. The court ruled that the plaintiffs were to be provided with a free publicly supported education. The defendants had to provide a list of all students who were denied or excluded from services and to identify students not previously known by the plaintiffs. The decision in this ruling not only applied to disabled children in one category but to all disabled children in the district (Wright, 2005).

The rulings in the *PARC* and *Mills* cases drew congressional attention and an investigation was launched at the request of Congress. The investigation found that millions of children with disabilities were not receiving an appropriate education. In 1975, the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) estimated that of the approximately 8 million children with disabilities in the United States, 1.75 million of them were not receiving any service from the public school system and 2.5 million were not receiving FAPE (Rowe, 2004). This led the federal government to enact legislation that would standardize programs for children with disabilities.

Congress enacted Public Law 94-142 in 1975, which was also known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Their intent was that all children with disabilities would “have a right to education, and to establish a process by which State and local educational agencies may be held accountable for providing educational services for all handicapped children” (Wright, 2005, pg. 16). The law’s initial focus was to ensure that children with disabilities had access to education and due process of law. A series of procedural safeguards was also included in the law to protect the rights of parents and children.

The special education law has been amended and renamed several times since 1975. On December 3, 2004, the act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The reauthorization of IDEA placed more focus on accountability and improved outcomes in transitioning beyond high school (Wright, 2005). The IDEA of 2004 has two primary purposes. The first purpose is to provide an education that is uniquely designed for a child’s needs during their academic career and

beyond. The Act stresses the importance of preparing special education children for further education, employment and independent living. The second purpose is to protect the rights of the children with disabilities and their parents (Swenson, 2017). While IDEA has made landmark strides in ensuring free public education for children with disabilities, the issue of disproportionality in the racial/ethnic and gender makeup of the special education population soon became a controversial issue.

Special Education and Minority Males

In 1975, Congress reported that poor African American children were over-represented in special education. Since then, numerous studies have not only affirmed that finding but also sought to find the reason for such disproportionality. The literature on the disproportional representation of African American students in special education is extensive (Artiles et al., 2010; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Oswald et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2014). To accurately determine disproportionality one must examine the extent to which a group is under or over-represented in a category relative to the proportion of the overall school population (Oswald et al., 1999). To evaluate disproportionality in special education, one must examine the percentage of minority and English language learners (ELL) proficiency groups served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) to the percentage with which the particular group is represented in the overall population of school-age students.

During the school year 2013-14, states and territories reported that of the 6,109,314 public school students served under IDEA 2,972,720 were minorities compared to 3,136,594 White students (CRDC, 2017). According to the Civil Data

Collection for 2013-14, racial and ethnic minority school aged children with disabilities were apportioned as follows: American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.4%; Asian, 2.4%; Hispanic or Latino of any race, 23.0%; Black or African American, 18.5%; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 0.3% and two or more races, 3%. White (non-Hispanic) made up 51.3% of students being serviced under IDEA. Table 1 data shows that compared to the overall school population, minority representation, specifically Black or African American, students with disabilities are disproportionately high. The underlying position is that the proportion of a racial or ethnic group in a program or category should be proportionate to that racial or ethnic group in the general population (Zhang et al., 2014). Table 2 data shows the racial and ethnic breakdown of the public school population in the Virgin Islands depicting the total school population versus the disabled population of students. Due to the overwhelming majority of the population being Black or Hispanic, the argument of overrepresentation in special education will not fit. Studying this phenomenon in a setting that is predominantly African American removes the issue of racial discrimination as a barrier to a successful post high school transition and puts a greater focus on other underlying variables that can affect it.

Table 1

Public School Enrollment by Race, Disabled Versus Total School Population in the United States (in Percentage), 2013–2014

Race	Disabled	Total school population
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.4%	1.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.4%	5.3%
Hispanic or Latino	23.0%	25.4%
Black/African American	18.5%	15.6%
White (non-Hispanic)	51.3%	49.9%

Note. Data from NCES (2019).

Table 2

Public School Enrollment by Race, Disabled Versus Total School Population in the U.S. Virgin Islands (in Percentage), 2013–2014

Race	Disabled	Total school population
American Indian/Alaska Native	0%	0.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%	0.1%
Hispanic or Latino	20.28%	19.5%
Black/African American	75.18%	78.0%
White (non-Hispanic)	2.85%	1.5%
Two or more races	1.42%	0.7%

Note. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2017).

Overrepresentation of minorities in special education has consequences that can be long lasting to the student. A child can be labeled as disabled when they are not. They will be treated as if they are disabled and placed in special education, this placement can last throughout their school career. Overrepresentation can also cause harm to minority students by denying them access to a general education curriculum due to inappropriate labeling and misclassification (Allen, 2010; Artiles et al., 2010; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). Minorities, specifically African American males, have perpetually overrepresented in special education. Numerous studies over the past four decades have sought to address the root cause of this problem (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2006; Allen, 2010; Blanchett, 2007; Brown, 2019; Dunn, 1968; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Iii et al., 2008; Patton, 1998; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001; Wright et al., 2016). Dunn's (1968) study, at the time, was groundbreaking coming off the heels of the *Brown* verdict and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Dunn used statistics from the U.S. Office of Education to show that 80% of the students with mental retardation were minorities and of low socioeconomic status. This casted doubt about the benefits of special education to disadvantaged students of any race or ethnicity. Dunn argued that homogenous grouping tends to work to the disadvantage of slow learners and the underprivileged. His argument for inclusive learning was underscored when he cited the ruling of Judge J. Skelly Wright's decision to abolish the track system in the District of Columbia. The track system was a practice of separating children and grouping them according to their academic abilities. The Judge contended that they discriminated against the racially

and/or economically disadvantaged and therefore were in violation of the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States (Dunn, 1968).

While Dunn brought to light minority overrepresentation in special education and sparked a conversation on inclusive learning, three decades after his groundbreaking work, the conversation continued with a renewed focus on minority males (Artiles et al., 2010; Patton, 1998; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). Statistics have consistently shown males outnumbering females in special education by a 2 to 1 ratio. For the school year 2014-2015 among students 6 to 21 years old receiving special education services in public school under IDEA, 17% were males compared to 9% females (NCES, 2018). Males were also disproportionately represented in all disability categories, except Specific Learning Disability. There is a notable achievement gap between Black Males and Black Females in both special education and general education. The cause of this gap is because males are assigned to lower academic level courses, have a higher suspension rate and are more likely to be placed in special education classes (Brown, 2019).

Black males have a plight unlike their female counterpart and any other race. They continue to be less educated resulting in lower postsecondary school enrollment than their female counterparts. This leads to lower socioeconomic status and many of them enter the penal system. They are the highest percentage of inmates in the criminal justice system in the United States. Upon leaving prison, they have difficulty in finding jobs, enhancing their education, finding housing, and receiving public assistance. Black males are more likely to be charged as an adult for typical public infractions (Alexander, 2010; Brown, 2019). Two Black psychiatrists concluded that Black males face a more

difficult environment than their female counterparts primarily due to limited political power and their parents inability to improve opportunities for them (Cobbs & Grier, 1968). For Black males in special education, they face adversities that have a long-lasting effect on their educational, social and economic footprint in society.

Today, a significant number of African American males are overrepresented in disability categories such as emotional disturbance, specific learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. Added to this adversity, is the fact that they are also disproportionately subjected to segregated learning settings than their peers with disabilities in any other racial or ethnic group (Balfanz et al., 2014; Losen et al., Martinez, 2015; Wright et al., 2016). Balfanz et al. (2014) analyzed U.S. Department of Education data from 2009-2010 from 6,000 school districts and found that 36% of African American males with disabilities are often suspended for less serious offenses. Another study found that African American boys face disciplinary actions such as suspension and expulsion at a disproportionately high rate at an early age (Barbarin, 2013). These actions, combined with how African American males are misunderstood socially and culturally, result in injudicious school practices that are disadvantageous to African American males (Wright et al., 2015).

The problem of overrepresentation of African American males in special education has continued unabated and has led to low graduation rates, lowered employment, and postsecondary outcomes (Blanchett, 2007; Losen et al., 2015; NCES, 2018). The pervasiveness of this issue has gained national attention and the U.S. Department of Education and Justice released recommendations to school districts on

how to develop policies and practices that eliminate excessive racial disparities, identified as a discipline gap, that result in severe and inclusionary disciplinary practices in favor of positive behavioral supports (Losen et al., 2015). The erroneous placement of African American males in segregated classrooms has led to the exponential growth in special education, this growth began in the 1960s and is still prevalent today (Osgood, 2008; Toldson et al., 2015).

Several researchers have taken on the charge of closing the achievement and discipline gap among African American males. They contend that one gap is interdependent on the other. Ford and Moore (2013) proposed an “equity-based, culturally sensitive” approach to teaching. Their goal was to close the achievement gap while improving the achievement of gifted, high-achieving and high potential African American males (Ford et al., 2013). Other researchers such as Toldson et al, (2015) identified student disengagement as a factor in disciplinary referrals in grades 8 to 10. Student disengagement refers to their lack of academic involvement due to their feeling of hopelessness, depression, toxic stress and reaction to traumatic events. The researchers recommended providing African American male students with counseling, recreational therapy, and appropriate academic intervention for reading difficulties. This approach will require teachers to carefully monitor the disciplinary referral process as a whole (Toldson et al., 2015).

It has been argued that teacher effectiveness is germane in changing the outcomes of all children, especially those in special education (Gregory et al., 2015). While this can be effective, changing the current trend of outcomes for African American males with

disabilities would require developing the capacity for all teachers to effectively address the academic and social needs of their students regardless of their differences. Therefore, students that are taught by culturally responsive and skilled special educators who understand the socio-political and socio-historical context of special education, will not suffer from social isolation and low self-esteem (Wright et al., 2016).

There is a growing trend of minority students being the numerical majority of public-school population in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education between 2000 and 2015, the percentage of White students enrolled in elementary and secondary public schools fell from 61 to 49 percent. While the percentage of Black students decreased from 17% to 15%, there was a marked increase in Hispanic enrollment from 16 to 26 percent for that same period (NCES, 2019). This trend is evidence that there is a need for culturally sensitive teachers and administrators in our public schools. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, the minority-majority dynamic is not a trend but the norm, due to the racial and ethnic makeup of the territory. While most of the teaching body is local and are of Black or African American descent, a growing number of teachers, especially special education teachers from the Philippines are being employed to fill the gap in special education teacher shortages (Gilbert, 2015). Cultural differences among teacher, students and their families have been touted as a major reason for over-referrals and thus overrepresentation of minority males in special education (Allen, 2010; Ford, 2013.; Gregory et al., 2015; Wright, 2009; Wright et al., 2016). The minority-majority dynamic of the Virgin Islands is comparable to urban cities such as Atlanta, Los Angeles and Chicago where minority students are the majority (Ford, 2012).

The US Virgin Islands is predominantly African American, yet the issue of overrepresentation in special education is important to this study. The population of the US Virgin Islands has been steadily decreasing since the 2010 census from 106,852 in 2010 to an estimated 100,768 in 2015 (Michael et al., 2019). Virgin Islanders tend to migrate to the US mainland for better job and educational opportunities. The impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 saw more Virgin Islanders fleeing to the mainland due to loss of jobs, housing, health and education services. While there is no official count of the population post hurricanes, the department of education saw a 20% drop in enrollment in public schools during the 2017-2018 school year (Michael et al., 2019). Families either moved to the mainland or sent their children to relatives on the mainland to continue their education due to nine public schools in the territory being determined condemned as a result of the storms. General and special education services were also impacted because teachers and education services providers also migrated to the US.

While the scope of this study is limited to males with a SLD who have graduated from public high schools within the Virgin Islands districts, migration to the US mainland presents an added challenge to their postsecondary outcome. It has been previously noted but worth underscoring that the effects inclusion in and services provided by special education has a lasting impact on the student that goes beyond their academic career. African American males without disabilities both in the US Virgin Islands and the United States already face adversities of high unemployment, lower wages, high incarceration and low enrollment in postsecondary institutes of higher learning. The added challenge of

having a disability presents even more barriers to attaining a successful post high school outcome.

Specific Learning Disability

SLD is defined by IDEA (2004) as

a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

(IDEA, n.d.-b, para. 1)

The terms specific learning disability (SLD) and learning disability (LD) have been used interchangeably. SLD is not exactly synonymous with LD but someone with SLD can expect to meet the criteria for a learning disability and have the legal status of a federally recognized disability to qualify for accommodations and services in school (APA, 2018). In 2013, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5* (DSM-5) broadened the definition of learning disability (LD) to specific learning disorder (SLD).

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), 5 to 15 percent of school-age children struggle with a learning disability. It is estimated that 80% of them have a reading disorder, specifically dyslexia, while one third of them have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). If not recognized or managed, learning disorders can be problematic throughout a person's life beyond having lower academic

achievement (APA, 2018). In school year 2015-16, the percentage of school-age students (3-21 years old) receiving special education services in all public schools was 13%.

Among students receiving special education services, 34% had a specific learning disability, the highest participatory rate of all disability categories under IDEA (NCES, 2018).

Research has shown that youths with SLD have difficulty in transitioning from high school to productive adult life. There is a persistent school completion gap between youths with SLD and the general education peers (Kortering et al., 2010). Post school outcomes for youths with SLD shows limited postsecondary enrollment. While access to suitable employment sets the stage for anyone to be a productive adult, it can be an uphill battle for someone with SLD (Joshi & Bouck, 2017). Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study – 2 (2011) showed that of young adults with disabilities, 60 percent were reported to have continued on to postsecondary education within 8 years of leaving high school compared to 67 percent of the general population of the same age. When broken down by disability category, 66.8% of young adults with a learning disability were enrolled in a postsecondary institution at some point within 8 years post high school (Newman et al., 2011). Sixty percent of young adults with disability were engaged in paid work within eight years post high school compared to 66% of the general population according to the NLTS-2 (2011). By disability, the data showed that 94.9% of young adults with a learning disability were employed at some point since leaving high school and 67.3% were employed at the time the data was collected (Newman et al., 2011).

Specific Learning Disability and Response to Intervention

The identification of SLD has been a difficult and evolving process. IDEA has provided a framework of requirements but with little practical guidance on how to identify children with SLD. Since the inception of federal legislation related to the education of children with disabilities, there has been great variability in the methods used to identify children with SLD (Reschly et al., 2003). Between 1977 and the early 2000s legislation mandated that SLD identification be based on a severe discrepancy (SD) between intellectual ability and academic performance. The reauthorization of IDEA (2004) revised the methods used and incorporated the use of a Response to Intervention (RTI) or a Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses method (PSW). This method seeks to identify underlying cognitive processing deficits that are directly linked to SLD. The method assumes that an individual with SLD has certain cognitive processing deficits that are linked to their learning difficulties and therefore relevant to education planning (Hale et al., 2006; Phipps & Beaujean, 2016). The Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses method The SD method still remains a permitted method for SLD identification under IDEA. The rationale for using RTI stems from educators' dissatisfaction with the use of the IQ–achievement discrepancy model and the general use of standardized, norm-referenced tests that measure intelligence as well as underlying cognitive processes (Hughes & Dexter, 2008). The models, at the time, were criticized for; over-identification of students with LD, reliability (too many false positives and too few true negatives), validity of identification rates across settings and the overrepresentation of minorities in special education (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Hughes &

Dexter, 2008). School systems were given the charge to provide students with disabilities with a research-based intervention. Their performance must be closely monitored with respect to the selected interventions (Heinemann et al., 2017).

RTI was a way to answer the needs of educators. Its foundation is rooted in the prevention of science and evidence-based practice. It incorporates special and general education through the use of three target areas:

- effective curriculum that provides opportunity for the majority of students to progress at the expected rate
- universal screening for early identification of at-risk students so that these students may be provided additional, focused, intensive instruction while their progress is monitored
- intensive interventions to aid students with learning difficulty (Coleman et al., 2009)

RTI uses a multi-tiered system that has several models. This system is touted to be a continuum of support ranging from universal support for all children to the most specialized instruction for those who need it. The most popular in educational instruction is the three-tiered system. Tier 1 is known as the preventative tier where all students receive general instructions and general screening. This tier is used for instructional intervention in core areas such as math, reading and/or behavior and for more targeted intervention that general education teachers might take on in general education classrooms. This tier typically addresses the needs of 80% of the students (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008; Berkeley et al., 2009). Tier 2 is often referred to as secondary

intervention where students who are at risk are served with more intensive, research-based intervention with close progress monitoring in addition to the services received in tier 1. Tier 2 involves approximately 15% of the student population (Berkeley et al., 2009; Heinemann et al., 2017). Tier 3 is the tertiary intervention tier and it is the most intensive of all tiers. It serves about 5% of the student population and involves high-intensity and longer individualized instruction and frequent monitoring of progress. Some models consider this tier a post special education tier (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008; Heinemann et al., 2017).

The U.S. Virgin Islands first introduced RTI into its public-school system during the 2015-2016 academic year. A 2017 survey of parents' satisfaction with the special education services in public schools asked parents and guardians about their level of satisfaction with RTI. Fifty-four percent of respondents stated that their child was part of the RTI program. Of the parents who admitted that their children were engaged in some aspect of the RTI, 17% stated that this was to improve reading skills, 4% said it was for math skills, and 80% indicated that it was for help in both reading and math skills. Almost 9 out of every 10 parents confirmed that the school-wide intervention program had a positive impact on their children's reading and math skills (UVI, 2018b). Due to the fact that RTI is fairly new to the territory there is a possibility that participants in this study may not have been serviced by it.

Specific Learning Disability and Inclusive Learning

IDEA (2004) supports equitable access to educational opportunities for all children with disabilities. It has stipulated the inclusion of special education students in

general education classes. This practice of inclusive learning is aimed at giving students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum with some accommodations. Accommodations are varied depending on the needs of the student with SLD and can be used for student testing, classroom instruction or both (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006). At the secondary level, accommodations are key to the success of students with SLD. Without it, they tend to fail classes at a higher rate than students without disabilities (Bateman, 2007).

Many organizations endorsed the philosophy of inclusion. The National Association for State Boards of Education (NASBE) was among the first to strongly endorse the "full inclusion" of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. In their 1992 report entitled "Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools" they called on states to revise the teacher-licensure and certification rules so that teachers can be adequately prepared to teach children with and without disabilities. The report also recommended training programs to assist special education and general education teachers collaborate in the classroom (Habtes et al., 2012; NASBE, 1992).

The general education teacher administers the majority of secondary classroom accommodations in public schools. These teachers, while competent in the content area, may not be adequately trained in special education. While special education teachers are available to define accommodations, they are not present in the classroom to see their implementation. General education teachers have numerous responsibilities in the classroom and must serve a, sometimes diverse, student body. Thus, their implementation of accommodations to special education students might fall short (Bateman, 2007;

Mattson & Roll-Pettersson, 2007). In their 2009 article, Mumford and Potter Chandler stated that general education teachers must prepare to meet the challenge of inclusion. In order to respond to the challenge, they must

- avoid using stereotypes and biases
- maintain a positive attitude
- use IEP goals and objectives in collaboration with special education personnel
- implement the use of peer tutoring, and standard adaptations and modifications
- establish routines
- foster social acceptance of students with disabilities by their peers without disabilities (Mumford & Chandler, 2009)

For the 2016-2017 school year in the U.S. Virgin Islands, 56% of males and 59% of females between the ages of 6 and 21 in special education, spent more than 80% of their time in regular classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The public-school system in the U.S. Virgin Islands is divided into two school districts, the St. Thomas/St. John district and the St. Croix district. Both districts are governed by one Commissioner of Education but have separate superintendents. As a result of this separation practices, policies and protocols might differ per district. Habtes et al. (2012) surveyed 575 teaching and administrative staff in all public schools in the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix school districts in the U.S. Virgin Islands to gain insight on their perception of inclusion. Participants included general education teachers, special education teachers, principals, counselors, school psychologists and paraprofessionals. They were given a

nineteen-item questionnaire that was divided into four parts; Attitudes and Belief, Services and Physical Accommodations, and School Support (Habtes et al., 2012).

The Habtes et al. (2012) study found that the majority of educators in each profession agreed that students with disabilities are supportively included in school and district assessments and modifications are made when needed. The majority of educators also agreed that instruction is individualized for all students whether or not they are disabled, and resources are provided for each child to explore individual interest in the school environment. They overwhelmingly agreed that they encourage students with disabilities to partake in co-curricular and extracurricular activities in school (Habtes et al., 2012). In response to the statement: “The regular teacher believes that students with disabilities can succeed (successfully participate) in the regular education setting” responses were evenly split in terms of agreement (41%) and disagreement (41%). The authors found this response puzzling because there have been many awareness workshops that have been conducted in the Virgin Islands for public school teachers and other educational personnel. Respondents should know that inclusion is the law and should have a higher response in the affirmative. When asked if school personnel are prepared, through professional development and other training, to teach students with disabilities in a regular setting 57.5% of respondents disagreed (Habtes et al., 2012).

Additional results of the Habtes et al. (2012) study showed that the practice of segregating students by ability in the Virgin Islands public schools is not only endorsed by the administration but is also accepted by the students. When teachers were asked to respond to the statement: "Students in the general education setting are prepared to accept

students with disabilities" the response was very alarming with 41.5% do not think that non-disabled students are prepared to be in the same classroom with children with disabilities. Questions related to support were answered by the school principals (n = 10). The principals overwhelmingly agreed that general and special education teachers integrate their efforts and resources to work as a team, children with disabilities are given as much of the school curriculum as they can master, and modifications are made when needed and, they make parents of students with disabilities feel like they are a part of the school community. Habtes et al. (2012) found that what principals disagreed on with a 60 percent rate was the statement that said, "We individualize the instructional program for all the children whether or not they are disabled and provide the resources that each child needs to explore individual interests in the school environment" (para, 29). The results of the survey also revealed that 65% of Special Education teachers are committed to collaborative practices that will be required to help students with disabilities succeed (Habtes et al., 2012).

The findings of the Habtes et. al (2012) study are very important to this study as it is one of few empirical studies, conducted in the U.S. Virgin Islands, that addressed inclusion for special education students. This current study is seeking to gain insight on the postsecondary experience of Virgin Islands males with SLD who were receiving inclusive instruction. Since the Habtes et. al study was conducted seven years ago, results of this current study might underscore, dispel or add to its findings.

Individualized Education Plan and Transition Planning

An IEP is a requirement under IDEA (2004) for any student with a disability being serviced under the special education program. It is a roadmap for special education services that involves input from the parent/guardian, educators and - from the age of fourteen - the student. It has been the cornerstone of special education's needs identification, goal setting, service and setting definition, and student assessment (Wagner et al., 2012). The main goal of all stakeholders involved in the IEP process is educational success for the student. IDEA (2004) mandates that transition assessment and planning be a central focus in IEP planning for students in secondary schools (Rehfeldt et al., 2012). The law states that successful transition plans should highlight student's strengths, needs, preferences, and should be incorporated into their IEP (Landmark & Zhang, 2012; Rehfeldt et al., 2012).

The successful development of an IEP and transition plan relies on appropriate and psychometrically sound planning and assessment. Halpern (1994) stated that quality transition planning should be a derivative of a reliable age-appropriate transition assessment. It should consist of: (a) student involvement and empowerment (eventually enhancing self-determination through the planning process), (b) student self-evaluation; (c) student identification of postschool transition goals consistent with self-evaluation outcomes, and (d) student selection of appropriate school- and community based educational experiences matched with IEP goals and self-evaluation results (Halpern, 1994). Students with disabilities and their parents are to be directly involved in all phases of the educational decision-making process. Recent research with national longitudinal

data on parent and youth participation in IEP and transition plan meetings suggests that most high school students and their parents do attend IEP meetings (83% and 87%, respectively) but that considerably fewer youth and their parents attend transition plan meetings (68% and 76%, respectively) (Wagner et al., 2012).

Parental Involvement in Transition Planning

IDEA (2004) has made it clear that parents are to be considered equal partners in the IEP process. Increased parental involvement has shown to result in higher attendance and graduation rates for students with disabilities (Landmark & Zhang, 2012). However, research demonstrates that parents continue to report challenges to their effective participation in IEP meetings. These challenges include lack of opportunity to provide input, communication challenges, and a lack of a strengths-based approach by the school in educational planning (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Charleswell (2016) conducted a qualitative study in the U.S. Virgin Islands on parents' perspectives on parental involvement and post high school opportunities for students with learning disabilities. Ten parents of young adults with a learning disability who graduated from the public-school system in the Virgin Islands were interviewed. The goal of the study was to determine how parental involvement in transition and post high school outcomes planning impacted post high school opportunities for students with learning disabilities. The study found that while parents were actively involved in the development of their child's transition plan, school personnel were not completely committed to promoting school-parent partnerships that contribute to greater success for students with learning disabilities after graduation. (Charleswell, 2016).

Student Involvement in Transition Planning

Research has shown that successful IEP transition planning involves having students as active participants so that they can meaningfully contribute to IEP meetings (Wagner et al., 2012). Student involvement in transition planning has been linked to higher levels of goal attainment and higher graduation rates (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). Studies have indicated that there is a lack of student involvement in IEP meetings (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Chandroo et al., 2018). Participation in transition planning gives students an opportunity to learn and demonstrate self-determination skills, self-efficacy skills, to show that they have the ability to potentially be independent, make choices, act on them, experience the results, and then make new choices (Agran & Hughes, 2008) . Research suggests that students are increasingly attending IEP and transition planning meetings but without direct instruction regarding meeting purposes and procedures, they participate relatively little (Test et al., 2004). The value of this increase in attendance by students is that they too are recognized as equal partners in the planning process (Cavendish & Connor, 2018).

Without students' active involvement in their postsecondary transition planning, students are at a great disadvantage. Promoting self-determination is key in teaching them to play an active role in their IEP and transition planning meetings (Agran & Hughes, 2008). Wehmeyer (1998) defined self-determination as a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enables a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. He further stated that in order for people to be self-determined, they must understand their strengths and limitations and view themselves as individuals

who have the ability to assume adult roles (Wehmeyer, 1998). Research has shown that the use of self-determination skills by students with intellectual and other disabilities is positively related to their desirable learning and transition outcomes (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) measured the self-determination of students with learning and intellectual disabilities before their exiting high school and reported that students with higher levels of self-determination have higher employment rates. However, without the effective promotion of self-determination during the IEP and transition process, students with disabilities, especially males, will have a difficult path to a successful postsecondary life.

The findings of Charleswell's (2016) study on parents' perspective on parental involvement in transition planning in the U.S. Virgin Islands showed that the lack of resources, supports and a limited job market affected the postsecondary goals of students with learning disabilities. The study also found that failure to adequately prepare students, while in high school and insufficient exposure to early transition planning had an impact on the successful postsecondary transition for students with learning disabilities (Charleswell, 2016). The main goal of this current study is to gain insight on the impact high school transition services had on Virgin Islands males with SLD in their pursuit of postsecondary education or employment.

Nonacademic Behaviors and Postsecondary Success

Schools are tasked to design programs that promote a successful transition to postsecondary employment or education for all students. Even if a student has an IEP and is learning and progressing academically, lessons taught in the classroom might not be

adequate to serve their postsecondary needs for education, employment or independent living skills (Gothberg et al., 2015). The Institute for Education Services identified six types of transition outcomes; behavioral, social, communicative, functional, occupational and basic academic skills. Basic academic skills are measurable skills such as math, reading, and spelling and are often included in IEP assessments to measure academic outcomes. McConnell et. al (2013) argued that IEP team members can use the same logic to assess the behavioral, social, communicative, functional and occupational outcomes that tend to be nonacademic behaviors. They posit that these outcomes can be incorporated in a student's annual transition goals (McConnell et al., 2013). Juan (2008) was one of few researchers who identified research-based nonacademic student behaviors and experiences that are associated with improved postsecondary education and employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Her study's literature review identified 41 behaviors and experiences of high school students with disabilities that contributed or should contribute to their involvement in postsecondary education or employment (Juan, 2008). The 41 behaviors were grouped into 12 domains; desires, strengths, disability awareness, use of support systems, social skills, making positive choices, goals, limits, persistence, coping skills, proactive involvement and transition education involvement. While each domain of Juan's study included specific student behaviors, construct definitions were not developed (McConnell et al., 2013).

McConnell et. al (2013) used Juan's framework along with the work of Test, Mazzotti, et al (2009) to develop construct definitions of nonacademic student behaviors and experiences associated with postsecondary education and employment and then form

a list of specific teachable skills derived from research (Test et al., 2009). The researchers initially looked at 83 studies but 35 studies met their inclusion criteria. Their analysis of these studies resulted in 10 constructs and exemplar behaviors associated with positive postsecondary outcomes of students with mild to moderate disabilities. The constructs are: knowledge of strengths and limitations, actions related to strengths and limitations, disability awareness, employment, goal setting and attainment, persistence, proactive involvement, self-advocacy, supports and utilization of resources (McConnell et al., 2013). The researchers stated that while special education law requires transition assessments be used to facilitate the identification of transition goals, no transition assessment uses test items that are verified by research relative to the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities. They argued that special educators should write annual transition goals using behaviors that, when learned, will increase students' chances of postsecondary employment and education but no transition assessment of that kind currently exists (McConnell et al., 2013).

Nonacademic constructs are germane to this study as participants will be questioned about their awareness of their disability as well as how invested they were in their postsecondary transition success. Constructs such as self-advocacy, strengths and limitations, goal setting and attainment and utilization of resources will add value to the Social Cognitive Career Theory conceptual framework used in this study.

Barriers and Support to Postsecondary Transition

While legislative mandates put forth by the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) has enhanced access to postsecondary education and employment for persons with

disabilities, their employment and postsecondary graduation rates remain significantly lower than their peers without a disability (Banks, 2014). In 2018, the employment-population ratio – the proportion of the population that is employed – was 19.1% of persons with a disability compared to 65.9% of those without (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The unemployment rate for persons with a disability in 2018 was 8.0%, which was more than twice of those without at 3.7%. The unemployment rate by gender for persons with disabilities was almost equal with males at 7.9% and females at 8.1%. African Americans had the highest unemployment rate among all races and ethnicities with a rate of 11.2% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

There is mounting evidence showing that persons with disabilities have had difficulties in transitioning to postsecondary environments. The failure of students to actively participate in transition planning has resulted in them having limited self-advocacy skills, being unaware of their rights, responsibilities, and lack of access to adequate evaluation documentation of their disability after they have entered a postsecondary institution (Allen et al., 2011; Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Trainor, 2005; Walker & Test, 2011). Associations between these factors do not fully explain the academic underrepresentation and academic underperformance of African Americans with disabilities in institutes of higher learning. Trainor (2005) conducted a qualitative study on European American, African American and Hispanic high school students' perception of postsecondary transition planning. Results of the study showed that African American and Hispanic students were excluded from completing statewide exams and instead enrolled in vocational programs more frequently than their European American

counterparts. The data showed that these students were assigned to vocational tracks despite expressing a desire to attend college (Trainor, 2005). Pellegrino, Sermons and Shaver conducted a similar study in 2011. Their study found evidence to show that K-12 personnel may be college-able minorities to college preparation in diploma tracks due their disability rather than an actual academic ability (Pellegrino et al., 2011).

The postsecondary academic experience of African Americans, particularly males, with a disability can be a difficult one. Durodoye, et al. (2004) reported that many African American students with disabilities do not report their disability or seek appropriate evaluation to receive accommodations until they have failed classes. This is due to their fear of being negatively labeled as being academically inept (Durodoye et al., 2004). The researchers suggested that faculty members' attitudes toward race and disability might hinder a student from seeking accommodations. This might lead to them being stigmatized thus not being able to reach their fullest potential. Researchers have asserted that the intersection of race and disability may have harmful psychological consequences for postsecondary African Americans with disabilities. These consequences may negatively affect the students' academic self-worth, level of motivation, academic achievement, peer relations as well as interactions with faculty members (Durodoye et al., 2004; Pellegrino et al., 2011; Walker & Test, 2011).

Banks and Gibson (2016) stated that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUS) are often absent from the conversation on career readiness for African American males with disabilities. They referred to them as "hidden gems" that are committed to their important mission of educating African American and other

nontraditional students, and an increasing number of European-American students that are seeking education in a culturally diverse environment (Banks & Gibson, 2016). In their qualitative study of African American males with disabilities in HBCUs Banks and Gibson (2016) found several significant themes that provided insight on how postsecondary African American students with a range of difficulties perceive their transition to college and attendance at a HBCU. The themes formed four broad categories: 1) familial influence; 2) supportive faculty; 3) campus belonging and 4) unique role of culturally responsive disability services (Banks & Gibson, 2016).

UVI is the only HBCU in the Caribbean. It is a relatively small university of approximately 2,191 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students (UVI, 2017b). The student body is predominantly African American at 70% and the ratio of female to male students is 2:1. The university does provide disability services that includes personal counseling, academic counseling, advocacy with faculty and staff and instructional and testing accommodation among others. Students with disabilities are encouraged to self-disclose their disabilities to the disability representative in the student affairs department. Their information is kept confidential and, with the approval of the student, their instructors will be formally notified if accommodations are needed (UVI, 2018c).

Transitioning to post high school employment can be just as challenging as transitioning to postsecondary education, for a person with a disability. An analysis of data from the NLTS-2 showed that 38% of students with cognitive, emotional, sensory, physical and learning disabilities were competitively employed six years after leaving high school (Sima et al., 2015). Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies are required

under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to coordinate with education officials to help facilitate students with disabilities' transition from in-school service to post-school service (Poppen et al., 2017). Educators and VR counselors can develop customized plans for post-school employment and provide services that can support a successful transition to the labor market. The reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014 has strengthened the connection between education and rehabilitation systems by requiring that state VR services spend at least 15% of their federal funds to deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) to all eligible students with disabilities while they are in school. PETS include; job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on postsecondary education options, workplace readiness and instruction in self-advocacy (WIOA, 2014).

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, three community rehabilitation facilities exist to provide transition services for special education students to help facilitate their adjustment from school to work. There are two operational facilities, one in the district of St. Thomas/St. John and one in St. Croix with one in the developmental stages in St. John (Virgin Islands Department of Human Services, 2016). The Virgin Islands Workforce Investment Board (VIWIB) is a team comprised of representatives from the Virgin Islands' Departments of Labor, Education and Human Services. In its 2016 Unified State Plan of the Virgin Islands for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (VIWIB) of 2014\, the board included, as one of its strategic plans, an interagency agreement to provide consulting and technical assistance to education agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities including

vocational rehabilitation services (VIWIB, 2016). The report highlighted a Joint Interagency Agreement for Secondary Transition Services, which was designed to improve cooperative and collaborative efforts between the Virgin Islands Department of Education, as the State Educational Agency, through the State Office of Special Education and the Department of Human Services, through the Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services. The agreement is slated to ensure that each student with a disability in the territory who needs special education and/or vocational rehabilitation services is promptly identified and the appropriate transition services are made available (VIWIB, 2016).

The goal of the agreement is to ensure that all eligible students with disabilities, upon exiting high school, are prepared to go directly into employment and or postsecondary training programs, and independent living. In achieving this goal, the agencies agreed to

Implement practices in secondary school programs that include pre-employment transition services, that will prepare eligible students with disabilities for competitive and, where appropriate, supported employment; integrated recreation and leisure activities; college or postsecondary training, and personal management skills that allow for the greatest level of independence in social, recreational, residential and employment settings; Ensure that all eligible students with disabilities and their parents/guardians are provided the necessary tools and resources to be actively engaged in planning their high school experiences and future post high school goals; Coordinate activities among all involved segments

of the community toward the purposes stated in this Agreement. (VIWIB, 2016 p. 87)

The report did state that, at the time of publication, the Interagency Agreement was pending final approval. The current study will include at least one interview question related services promised in this agreement to determine if the agreement was finalized and implemented.

Successful postsecondary transition for African American males with a learning disability is a collaborative effort that includes school, family and the community. According to Bryan and Henry (2012), school-family-community partnerships are collaborative initiatives among educators, family members and community members with representatives from community-based organizations such as non-profit organizations, universities, religious organizations, mental health and social service agencies. These work in tandem to build strength and resilience in students with disabilities to enhance their personal, academic, personal, social and college-career opportunities (Bryan & Henry, 2012). These collaborative efforts help to increase educational equity and access to postsecondary opportunities for students with disabilities (Booth et al., 2016). When African American males with learning disabilities are denied access to competitive employment or educational requirements that will increase their social capital, they are stymied in their upward mobility within workforce and educational spaces. Therefore, providing information and access to opportunities is necessary to increase social capital – interpersonal relationships, sense of identity, cooperation and reciprocity - of African American males with learning disabilities as well as their employment rates. Having

limited postsecondary education adversely affects their efforts to be gainfully employed, advance in their career and have an overall enjoyable quality of life (Banks, 2014).

Chapter Summary

There is extensive literature on factors affecting postsecondary transitioning of persons with disabilities. This literature review discussed the history of special education in the United States and the plight of minority males with a specific learning disability as they transition from high school. This demographic has a trifecta of odds against them being race, gender and disability, which makes them a particularly vulnerable population. The research in this literature has demonstrated that minority males with SLD have a difficult time making the transition from high school to productive adulthood, further widening the achievement gap between persons with and without disabilities (Kortering et al., 2010). The use of the SCCT perspective adds a contemporary approach to understand the longstanding phenomenon of minority males in special education. The SCCT, as a theory, is relatively new and its applicability to persons with disabilities has been minimal (Singleton, 2016). SCCT focuses on the individual's self-efficacy, self-advocacy, self-determination, and their effect on academic persistence and career choice while considering external factors such as social, cultural and economics that might have an impact on them (Lent et al., 2000).

The added element of inclusive learning in this study was to determine whether the exposure to a predominantly general education environment made learning and transition easier for minority males with SLD. The findings of the Habtes et. al (2012) showed that more needs to be done in the U.S. Virgin Islands to ensure that educators are

more receptive and accommodating to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The findings and recommendation of the Charleswell (2016) study showed that more needs to be done by the schools and community to help usher in a more positive post-school results for students with learning disabilities.

The U.S. Virgin Islands, as a US Territory, adheres to US Constitution and many of the federal laws. The US Department of Education regulates special education in the Virgin Islands and as such, IDEA (2004) and other laws related to special education must be followed. The minority- majority racial and ethnic make-up of the Virgin Islands makes this current study unique yet its findings can be applicable to areas on the US mainland that are predominantly populated with minorities. While there have been few empirical studies done in the Virgin Islands relative to special education, the two studies highlighted in this literature review (Charleswell, 2016 and Habtes et. al 2012) proves that there is a need for additional literature in this area. With African American males without disabilities already facing adversities that have significant impact on their way of life, those with disabilities have an even more arduous journey. This literature review has shown that although special education has come a long way to address the needs of all persons with disabilities, more needs to be done. While legislation provides mandates that must be adhered to, ensuring postsecondary success for minority males with a learning disability requires a holistic approach that incorporates the support from family, the community and the school along with the individual's own desire to succeed.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD. In particular, I sought to describe the barriers to and support for a successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD who had transitioned from high school to postsecondary education or employment and/or independent living. In addition to documenting such individuals' experiences in postsecondary transition, the purpose of the study was to identify how participants described feelings of self-efficacy in the transition process. This chapter includes information on the methodology and research design for this study. This chapter also includes information on participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and storage. The rationale for using qualitative research design is also discussed, along with the validity of the research and its limitations. The chapter concludes with the ethical concerns of the study.

Research Questions

The focus of this study was to gain insight on the barriers and supports to the successful postsecondary transition of males in the Virgin Islands who had a SLD. These males were predominantly educated in a general education or inclusive classroom. The research questions developed for this study were geared toward determining how school transition services as well as the participants' disability had affected their pursuit of employment or postsecondary education. The main premise of this study was how inclusive education, transitioning, and posttransitioning supports for males with SLD can positively impact their adult lives.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

SQ1.1. How do Virgin Islands males with SLD experience high school transition services?

2. What are the perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

SQ 2.2. How do Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD describe feelings of self-efficacy?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research involves the attempt to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect how people understand and put meaning to their own experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Qualitative research is conducted because a problem or issue needs to be explored. The exploration is necessary because of the need to study a group or population, identify measurable variables, or give voice to those who have been silenced (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative research allows for the exploration of a problem rather than relying on predetermined information from the literature or results from other research studies (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is best suited for studying a previously undescribed phenomenon. Although there is literature related to the lived experience of minority males with SLD who have transitioned from high school, there is limited research on those who were in general education classes.

Phenomenological Research Approach

Goulding (2005) described phenomenology as a research method as well as a philosophy that has been largely attributed to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology has been used in organizational and consumer research in order to gain an understanding of complex issues that may not be immediately implicit in surface responses (Goulding, 2005). In the field of psychological research, phenomenological research methods tend to focus on an individual's lived experiences of a phenomenon. It is not necessary for the phenomenon to be bounded by space and time, though a phenomenon can be a specific event (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purpose of phenomenological research is to identify a phenomenon through how individuals in the situation perceive it in a way that makes it distinguishable from others (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The phenomenon is often explored through data collection, which occurs predominantly via interviews (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

IPA is a methodological framework of phenomenological research that has become increasingly popular in European and American psychology. Researchers using IPA seek to find out how individuals make sense of their experiences. People are actively engaged in interpreting the events, people, and objects in their lives. In order to fully examine this process, IPA draws upon the essential principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

In order to understand individuals' lived experiences, phenomenological studies employ a process called *bracketing*. Bracketing is often referred to as phenomenological reduction, wherein researchers bracket, or set aside, their personal assumptions and let

the phenomenon speak for itself (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Hermeneutics is the second theoretical orientation of IPA, and it stems from a Greek word that means “to make clear” or “to interpret.” Hermeneutics indicates that a researcher needs to understand the mindset of a person and the languages that mediate their experience of the world in order to translate their message (Freeman, 2008). The IPA researcher attempts to understand what it is like to “walk in the shoes” of the participant and, through a series of interpretive activities, provides a comprehensive meaning by translating it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The third theoretical orientation of IPA is idiography. This refers to an in-depth analysis of single cases and evaluating the individual perspectives of study participants, in their unique context. The basic premise of idiography is explore every individual case before producing any general statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA was an appropriate methodological framework for this study because it recognizes that there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon. It does this by synthesizing ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics, resulting in a method that is descriptive because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher plays an active role. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Karagiozis, 2018). Therefore, the data are collected through a human instrument rather than questionnaires, inventories, and machines. It has been argued that successful qualitative studies depend on the

interpersonal skills of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). In this study, I was the listener, data collector, transcriber, and data analyst. My goal was to tell the stories of participants as they “made their way into the world” post high school and present the information collected in way that would be relevant and understandable. One potential bias that I identified was the fact that I have a son who receives services from the local Department of Special Education. My son is currently in fifth grade and spends over 80% of his time in a general education classroom. He is on the autism spectrum; therefore, he is not receiving special education services for a SLD. I put aside any conclusions or theories that I might have accumulated since my son had been in the special education program. I was attentive in my data collection and objective in my findings and recommendations.

One limitation worth noting in qualitative research is social desirability bias. Social desirability bias occurs when people tend to present themselves in a positive manner to others (Neeley & Cronley, 2004). This can take the form of overreporting behaviors and opinions that are deemed socially acceptable and underreporting those that are not socially desirable. In this study, I employed strategies that helped reduce social desirability bias. One strategy was to ensure that questions were properly worded. Questions were worded in such a way that the participants understood that there were no right or wrong answers. Another strategy was to limit the full details of the purpose of the survey until the time of the interview. Disclosing the full details of the purpose of the interview in advance would have given the participants time to formulate responses that they felt might be more socially acceptable (Latkin et al., 2016).

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

This study focused on the lived experiences of Virgin Islands males with SLD after they transitioned from high school. The sample represented six participants who met this criterion. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary. With IPA, the main goal is to give a full appreciation to each of the participants' accounts. As a result, samples in IPA studies are generally small, which enables the researcher to provide a very detailed case-by-case analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The aim was to have a fairly homogenous sample that would allow for analysis of psychological similarities and differences within the group. Purposeful sampling fit this criterion because it allows the researcher to find a defined group for which the research problem is relevant and has personal significance. The distinct homogeneity of the group depends on the degree of similarity or variation of the group that can be confined in the analysis of the phenomenon and the ease or difficulty of contacting participants relative to the uniqueness of the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

In order to be considered for this study, participants had to meet the following criteria:

- male graduate from a public high school in the St. Thomas/St. John or St. Croix school district during the period 2010–2019 with a high school diploma or certificate of completion
- spent at least 80% of their time in general education classes during the last 4 years of high school

- was receiving special education services for a SLD during the last 4 years of their high school enrollment
- currently employed full time or part time or actively seeking employment
- currently enrolled in a college, university, trade, or vocational school
- currently unemployed and not enrolled in any institute of higher learning

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants for this study was done primarily through the use of flyers (Appendix A) that briefly detailed the nature of the study and the criteria that participants needed to meet in order to be included in the study. The flyers were strategically posted in areas that potential participants would more likely frequent. Areas included the St. Thomas and St. Croix campuses of UVI, Vocational Rehabilitation Center at the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Rafeal O. Wheatley Skills Center. The flyer was also posted online on a Facebook group page that relayed announcements to the public and in local newspapers on all three islands for 1 month. Despite the various avenues that I used to post the flyer, I experienced difficulty with recruiting participants. I managed to gain my first two potential participants through referrals caseworkers at the Vocational Rehabilitation Office. Both potential participants consented to the interview via email. I conducted the first and all subsequent interviews via Zoom. The second participant who consented kept rescheduling the meeting time due to his busy schedule, and after I tried to make contact with him, he did not return my calls, so I decided to no longer pursue him. The second successful interview was obtained through a parent of the participant, who saw the flyer posted on the UVI campus.

Interviews with the third and fourth participants were obtained from referrals from Vocational Rehabilitation. After several months of not having successfully recruited additional participants, I was referred to the special education resource teacher at one of the local high schools. She was able to refer four potential participants to me, of which two resulted in successful interviews. My final participant was referred to me by my neighbor who used to work with special education students and was still in contact with one of her past students. All participants were screened in order to establish their qualifications to participate, as stated in this study. Participants were emailed the gift card immediately after completing the interview.

Instrumentation

One of the primary concerns in IPA research is to produce detailed first-person accounts of the phenomena being studied. Semistructured interviews were the ideal instrument to collect data for this study because they allow the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue in real time (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I created a semistructured interview guide based on the theoretical framework of this study (Appendix B). Semistructured interviews are in-depth and provide flexibility and space; in the event that unexpected issues arise, the researcher can investigate further with more questions. Interviews were conducted electronically as was always the plan, given that some persons from the Virgin Islands tend to migrate to the mainland United States after leaving high school. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent social distancing measures made electronic interviewing my only option. The preferred electronic interview application was Zoom for Business. Zoom for Business provides video

conferencing across several devices so that participants can use their smartphones, laptops, or tablets to participate in an interview. Zoom for Business also provides end-to-end encryption and password protection for all meetings. Meetings can be recorded and saved on a local or cloud drive with password protection (Zoom, 2019). These added levels of security made this software application an ideal instrument for collecting and securing data in this study.

Data Collection

Data collection in phenomenological research places the researcher in a relatively active role (Creswell, 2007). This role must be devoid of any personal biases and preconceptions of the phenomenon being studied. Researchers have to build rapport with participants in order to gain their trust. They have to master their interviewing skills by being able to ask open-ended questions free of any hidden presumptions. They also have to be active listeners, which involves listening attentively; trying to understand what is being said; discussing meaning when things seem unclear, ambiguous, or abstract; and creating appropriate questions that help in exploring what is being said (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Field Test

Field testing is crucial in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to test questions while practicing their interviewing skills. In general, field testing is a useful procedure, in preparation for a full-scale study, regardless of the research design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Field tests can help to strengthen interview protocols and highlight any flaws or limitations in the interview design. They allow the researcher to

make modifications to the design before data collection takes place (Aliff et al., 2017). Field tests provide the researcher with an opportunity to assess the length of each interview and identify possible concerns with participant fatigue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Field testing for this study was conducted with the help of four colleagues of mine. These colleagues had experience in conducting interviews, formulating quantitative and qualitative questionnaires, and recording, analyzing, and reporting quantitative and qualitative data. Each colleague was interviewed face to face and via Zoom for Business in order to compare both interview media for their effectiveness. Two colleagues were administered questions related to a participant who was working, and the other two were administered questions related to participants who were in postsecondary educational institutes. Colleagues provided an overall analysis of the questions and how they interpreted them. I used their analysis to make notes of ways I could ask and elaborate on some of the questions.

Data Analysis

Analyzing qualitative data can be complex and time consuming. The IPA framework in data analysis provides a set of flexible guidelines that can be adapted by the researcher according to their research objectives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The IPA guidelines for qualitative data analysis are not “set in stone,” but it is advised that the researcher should be flexible and creative in their thinking.

The fluidity and flexibility of qualitative data analysis are dependent on the researcher and the context of the study. Although there is flexibility in the process,

certain steps should be followed. The first step requires the immediate processing and recording of data. The researcher should take notes about time and date details, observations that stand out to them, highlights from their interaction with participants, and any other pertinent observations. This aids in the accuracy of recording data because the information is still fresh in the mind of the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The second step involves the immediate review and analysis of the data collected. This involves mentally reviewing pieces of data as soon as they are collected, looking for themes and patterns that were exhibited. It is important to develop themes and patterns early in the process because they keep the researcher focused on them as they appear in subsequent data that are collected (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Data reduction is the third step in the qualitative data analysis. This step does not happen in isolation but occurs, naturally, during steps one and two. This process involves reducing and transforming raw data which will enable the researcher to focus on meaningful data that can be understood in the context of the research questions (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The fourth step is the core of qualitative data analysis; identifying meaningful patterns and themes. This process is done in two ways, content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis involves coding the data for certain words or content, identifying their patterns, and interpreting their meanings. Thematic analysis involves grouping the data into themes that will help answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After themes and patterns have been identified, the fifth step involves assembling, compressing, and organizing the data into a display that allows the researcher to draw a conclusion. This display can be graphical, tabular or textual (Pietkiewicz &

Smith, 2014). The sixth and final step involves drawing and verifying conclusions. To successfully draw verifiable conclusions, the researcher must; step back and interpret what all of their findings mean, determine how their findings answer the research questions and draw implications from their findings (Smith & Osborn, 2015). To verify the conclusions, the researcher will have to revisit the data multiple times to confirm the conclusion they have drawn.

For this study, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Explanatory notes were written, along with the transcripts, which included information such as the atmosphere and setting of the interview. Interviews were chronicled with notes of observations and reflections about each interview and any other thoughts and comments that were of significance. Significant statements from each interview were then grouped into larger groups of information and transformed into emerging themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Once themes have emerged, all six interviews were evaluated to make connections. They were grouped according to their conceptual similarities and each cluster was provided with a descriptive label or textual description (Creswell, 2007). Some themes were eliminated if they had a weak evidential base or if they did not fit well with the emerging structure. In lieu of the traditional pen and paper method, I used the “Review” function in Microsoft Word to write comments in the margin of the transcripts. This will provide an electronic, time-stamped account of my notes and comments of each interview. A narrative account of the study was then written up. Each theme identified was written in more detail and accompanied with excerpts from the interviews and

followed with analytic comments. Therefore, the narrative account included both the participants' account of their experience, in their own words, and my interpretive observation. The narrative account will then be concluded with a discussion section that relates the emerged themes to the existing literature (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Like quantitative research, qualitative research aims to find answers to questions of “who, when, where, how, and why” but with a perspective to build or refute an existing theory. Qualitative Research achieves this by using non-numerical information and their phenomenological interpretation, which is fundamentally tied in with human emotions and perspectives (Leung, 2015). Validity and Reliability in quantitative research are the litmus tests that ensures trustworthiness and consistency of the study. Validity in qualitative research refers to the appropriateness of the process, tools and data (Gall et al., 2003; Leung, 2015). To establish validity, a formal research study framework must be developed. This framework should include an overview of the study, research questions, data collection procedures and specification of the design structure ensures that pertinent information is collected (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research trustworthiness is discussed in terms of the transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study's instrumentation and results (Golafshani, 2003).

Credibility

Credibility is having confidence in the truth of the findings (Amankwaa, 2016). Ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the researchers ability to consider all the

complexities of their research study while dealing with patterns that may be difficult to explain (Miles et al., 2014). Credibility is directly related to the research design, instruments, and data of the study. Lincoln and Gruba (1985) identified a series of techniques that can be used to establish credibility in qualitative research they are: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checking, and referential adequacy. Evidence should also be of iterative questioning of the data collected and, if necessary, returning to examine it several times (Connelly, 2016). To ensure credibility in my study, I incorporated peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation. Participants were allowed to review transcripts of their interview for accuracy (Shenton, 2004). I also briefed my committee chair throughout the process on my findings to elicit feedback. Triangulation in this study was achieved through a thorough examination of responses of each interview to look for consistency in responses. Triangulation is a way to mitigate bias through the use of different sources of data (Fusch et al., 2018). Triangulation involves looking at different perspectives or examining a claim for various vantage points (Patton, 1999).

Transferability

Transferability is analogous with external validity or generalizability and requires that qualitative research is contextually bound. Qualitative research's goal is not to generalize findings to other people or settings but to develop descriptive, contextual statements. Qualitative researchers focus on the participant's story without implying that it is everyone's story. Therefore, transferability provides a way where qualitative studies can be applicable to broader contexts while still maintaining their contextual richness

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers achieve this by providing a detailed description of the context, persons studied, location and by being transparent about the analysis process (Connelly, 2016). To ensure transferability, this study used thick, rich descriptions to convey the findings, biases were clarified and the description of the analysis was detailed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data. Dependability in qualitative studies is achieved when studies are consistent and stable over time and over conditions of the study and can be repeated (Amankwaa, 2016). Dependability means that the researcher has valid plan for how the data will be collected and the data are consistent with the plan, therefore answering the research question(s) (Miles et al., 2014). In order to effectively address dependability, the processes within the study should be reported in detail to ensure replicability if another researcher decides to conduct a similar study (Shenton, 2004). Another way to establish dependability is through inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is done by having a researcher who was not involved in the study, examine the process and the product of it. This process will evaluate the accuracy of the findings and whether or not the interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data (Amankwaa, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, I used an audit trail to ensure dependability. An audit trail in this study will involve documentation of data collected during each interview. The interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed then a comparison was made of both to ensure authenticity of the data collected. The respondent

verification process will allow respondents to review transcripts of their interviews to ensure that none of their responses were omitted or misrepresented.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the degree of neutrality or consistency of a study's findings. Confirmability is equivalent to objectivity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). Effective confirmability methods include the maintenance of an audit trail of analysis and journaling (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The researcher should keep detailed notes of all their decisions and analyses as the study progresses (Connelly, 2016). An audit trail chronicles the entire process of the study from start to the development and reporting of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings must be based on the participant's words and narratives and not the researcher's bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, I incorporated the aforementioned strategies such as audit trail and journaling. I also remained objective throughout the research process and not project any bias or predispositions that will affect my objectivity.

Ethical Procedures

Empirical research is a moral and ethical practice that should be concerned with ensuring the participants in its study are not harmed as a result of the research being done. Researchers are expected to obtain informed consent from all participants directly involved in the study. This standard adheres to a larger issue of respect to the participants so that they are not pressured into participation or have access to relevant information prior to their consent (Halai, 2006). IRB approval for this study #07-31-20-0277796 was obtained with an initial expiration date of July 31, 2021. After having difficulties with

recruiting participants, a Change in Procedures form was submitted to amend one criterion for participation in the study. Originally participants had to have graduated from high school between 2012 and 2017. After encountering potential participants who graduated out of that range, my request to change the time period to 2010 to 2019 was approved by IRB in June of 2021. I subsequently requested an extension in July of 2021 because I had not reached the desired number of participants. The extension was approved with a new expiration date of July 15, 2022.

Participants contacted me after being referred by either a case worker from Vocational Rehabilitation, a former special education counselor or a former teacher. Prior to data collection they were informed about the nature of the study and were sent the consent form via email. The consent form not only included the purpose of the study but also the potential risks associated with its participation. The informed consent also included the participant's right to refuse to participate in any parts of the study or withdraw from the study at any time. To affirm their participation, potential participants had to reply to my email with the statement "I consent." After giving their consent a time was scheduled and a Zoom link was either emailed or texted to them.

Efforts were made to ensure the anonymity of all participants. The raw data collected was assigned a unique file name that included a numerical value pertaining to the date the interview was recorded. The file name did not include the name of the participants. Each recording was saved in a password protected cloud folder on my Google Drive account. Participants were assured that their names will not be published to protect their privacy.

Additional data collection materials for this study included transcripts of each completed interview, interview notes and a code book. All of the aforementioned materials are stored in an electronic format in a password protected cloud account and also backed up on a password protected flash drive. Creswell (2014) addressed the importance of storing and protecting the data collected. Now that data collection for this study is complete, the data and supporting materials will be stored for five years and will then be discarded per APA regulations.

Summary

This chapter provided justification for the use of a qualitative phenomenological research design. The incorporation of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework enabled me to delve into how participants make meaning of their lived experiences. The United State Virgin Islands provided the setting for this study which included six male high school graduates that received special education services, while in public school, for a specific learning disability. Included in this chapter was the participant selection criteria, sampling strategy, data collection, data analysis and the role of the researcher. Chapter 4 will illustrate the results of this phenomenological study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore postsecondary transition experiences and perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands males with a SLD from a qualitative perspective. This chapter presents a comprehensive view of this study using IPA, a description of the sample participants who provided responses, the research design used to collect the data, an overall summary of the results, and detailed analysis of the findings structured by the research questions. This chapter also includes strategies used to ensure the credibility of the study. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary of the findings of this study.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

SQ1.1. How do Virgin Islands males with SLD experience high school transition services?

2. What are the perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

SQ 2.2. How do Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD describe feelings of self-efficacy?

Setting

This study focused on a specific demographic of males who graduated from public high schools in the USVI and were receiving special education services for a specific learning disability up until the time they graduated. Initially, one of the criteria

for selection stipulated that participants had to have graduated high school within the USVI Territory between 2012 and 2017. After having difficulty with recruitment, I requested a revision to IRB to expand the graduation period from 2010 to 2019. I sent out copies of my flyer to a local Facebook group, the Virgin Islands Vocational Rehabilitation Office, Disability Rights of the Virgin Islands, the State Office of Special Education, and three local newspapers. I also used snowball sampling, and I was successful in getting half of my participants through referrals from special education teachers and counselors.

Participants consented to the study via email or text. All the participants, with the exception of one, were living in the Virgin Islands at the time of the interview. One participant was living in Canada at the time of the interview but graduated from a public school in the Virgin Islands. Participants completed the interview via live video or audio-conferencing using Zoom. The call was recorded for each participant. All participants were asked the same questions as per the interview guide; in some cases, the verbiage for the question might have been different from the interview guide if the participant did not understand the question.

Demographics

The six males who participated in this study were of African American descent and between the ages of 20 and 30. The participants met the criteria of being a male graduate of a public high school in the USVI; having graduated between 2010 and 2019; having received special education services during their last 4 years of high school for a SLD; and having been in general education classes for at least 80% of their time while in

high school. The participants were at various stages in their lives post high school, whether employed, unemployed, attending a postsecondary educational institute, or working while attending a college or university.

Table 3

Description of the Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	School district attended	Employed	Attending or graduated from a university or trade school
P1	20	St. Croix	X	
P2	26	St. Thomas	X	
P3	23	St. Thomas	X	X
P4	30	St. Thomas	X	X
P5	29	St. Thomas	X	
P6	25	St. Thomas	X	

Data Collection

IRB approved this study on July 31, 2020. An extension was requested because I was having problems finding participants. The extension was approved for another year. I initially proposed 10 participants for the study, but I had difficulty with recruiting. The pandemic also made it problematic for me to partner with agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities because they were closed with no alternative contact information and their employees were working remotely. Another contributing factor to my difficulty in recruiting participants was the reluctance of males to speak about having

a disability. Studies have shown that African American males often resist disability labels, especially if their disability is invisible (Banks & Gibson, 2016; Banks & Hughes, 2013). My recruitment efforts were met with more persons declining to be interviewed than those who accepted. In my conversations with persons who assisted with referring potential participants who declined to be interviewed, the predominant response was that they did not want to talk about having a disability, especially because they were now out of high school. I had one participant who was referred to me by vocational rehabilitation; he initiated the first telephone call and subsequently agreed to the consent form via email, but after several attempts to schedule an interview, he stopped responding to my calls and texts.

I settled on six participants after speaking with my chair and second committee member. The mode of data collection for this study had always been virtual due to the possibility that participants might not still be living in the Virgin Islands. The COVID-19 pandemic proved that virtual interviews were the only option. I conducted interviews between December 2020 and October 2021. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. An audio and video file of each interview was saved in a cloud storage on my Zoom account. Prior to the interview, participants were informed that their identity would be kept confidential and that the interview will be recorded. During each interview, I kept notes and used them as a reflective journal to memorialize nuances, ideas, and meanings. After each interview, I informed each participant that I would email them a transcript of the interview and I might contact them for follow-up questions or clarifications. I also informed them of how they could access their gift card.

Each interview was transcribed using REV, an online transcription service, and was subsequently saved on a flash drive and backed up on my Google Drive cloud account. I reviewed each audio recording along with the transcripts and made several edits to the text. I anticipated that there would be edits made to the transcripts due to the distinct Virgin Islands accent of participants. After each transcript was edited, I emailed participants and instructed them to review and email me any corrections. I did not receive any corrections.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the research data was done using the IPA approach. This approach includes phenomenology and double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2012). Phenomenology was used to analyze how participants viewed their postsecondary transition experience. Double hermeneutic is essentially the researcher trying to make sense of the participant's sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2012). After all edits of the transcripts were completed, I used the interview guide as the first tool in my analysis. I copied the responses of all six participants under each question on the interview guide. Each participant's responses were color coded to differentiate them. I then used the "Review" feature in MS Word to add comments to each question and subsequently coded the responses. I reviewed the notes at least three times to ensure that the codes were substantial in addressing the research questions. I made note of similarities and differences with participants' responses to each question.

I created a codebook from the responses and notes copied to the interview guide and reviewed it to make sure that each code was relevant to each participant making sense of

their lived experience. I then grouped codes according to their similarities and relevance to the research questions. I then extracted themes based on the similarities. I listened to each recording one more time while reading its transcript. I reviewed the codes and edited them to make them more focused and reflective of the research questions. I grouped the codes according to their similarities. I then extracted themes from the codes. I evaluated each theme to ensure that it encompassed the meaning of the data collected. After further revision and editing, five dominant themes emerged: postsecondary aspirations; parental/familial support; teachers, counselors, and community support; challenges; and motivation. Table 4 contains a description of each theme along with excerpts of statements that reflect the name of the themes and the participants whose responses mirror the themes.

Table 4*Dominant Themes*

Dominant themes	Transcript excerpts	Participants
1. Postsecondary aspirations	<p>My next step would have just been to go into some of the other art schools in Florida.</p> <p>I was always going to go to the university.</p> <p>At first it was like I had like marine biology but then I switched lanes.</p>	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6
2. Parental/familial support	<p>Like my aunt, um, my aunt did her best</p> <p>I would say, like my mom, my sister, my father, my brothers</p> <p>And my parents taught me that from let's say, age 14, you know, go out there and make a way</p>	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
3. Teachers, counselors, and community support	<p>They would take time with me each, each teacher, once they know like the type of person I am, they will take time with me.</p> <p>Yeah, it was mostly like my music teachers and stuff.</p> <p>The ones that were helping me the whole time was Voc-Rehab.</p>	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6
4. Challenges	<p>I didn't apply myself much at UVI. I didn't apply myself much in my academics class</p> <p>So I want to say it was just hard trying to like find work. And when you did find work, it was like something like you didn't really care to work at.</p> <p>I was struggling at UVI as well, where I was doing computer science, but you know, math is not my strongest forte.</p> <p>I messed up last semester. I failed everything last semester.</p>	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
5. Motivation	<p>Well, working, working up money to eventually go to art school when this pandemic is over</p> <p>Just getting a college degree, is measure of succeeding.</p> <p>I would say with it just probably gave me more of a motivation to just work, to get ahead in life.</p>	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Like quantitative research, the aim of qualitative research is to find answers to questions of “who, when, where, how and why,” but with a perspective to build or refute an existing theory. Qualitative researchers achieve this by using nonnumerical information and their phenomenological interpretation, which is fundamentally tied in with human emotions and perspectives (Leung, 2015). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are aspects of establishing the validity of research (Gall et al., 2003). To ensure credibility, I emailed completed transcripts to all participants and asked them to review and make necessary corrections. None of the participants returned their transcripts for correction.

Transferability

Transferability is analogous with external validity or generalizability and requires that qualitative research is contextually bound. Qualitative research’s goal is not to generalize findings to other people or settings but to develop descriptive, contextual statements. I established transferability in this study by providing detailed descriptions of the context, the participants, and the location. I included rich descriptions to convey the findings and was transparent about any bias. As a result, my data will be relevant in similar situations, thus allowing researchers to repeat this study using every characteristic of this study.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data. Dependability in qualitative studies is achieved when studies are consistent and stable over time and over conditions of the study and can be repeated (Amankwaa, 2016). For this study, I incorporated an audit trail to ensure dependability. The audit trail involved documentation of data collected during each interview. The interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed, then a comparison was made of the recording and transcription to ensure the authenticity of the data collected. The respondent verification process allowed respondents to review transcripts of their interviews to ensure that none of their responses were omitted or misrepresented.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the degree of neutrality or consistency of a study's findings. Confirmability is analogous to objectivity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). I established confirmability by chronicling thoughts in a reflexive journal. I kept notes of all my decisions as the study progressed. I also ensured that the findings were based on the participants' narratives and words and not my bias. I remained objective throughout the research process and did not project any bias or predispositions that would affect my objectivity.

Results

The focus of this study was gaining insight on the barriers and supports to the successful postsecondary transition of males in the Virgin Islands who had a SLD. These males would have been predominantly educated in a general education or inclusive

classroom. Six African American males shared their lived experiences as they navigated through life after high school. Their description of their lived experiences richly contributed to addressing the research questions in this study. Table 5 illustrates the five dominant emerging themes, the accompanying research questions, and examples of relevant participants' responses.

Table 5*Research Questions, Dominant Themes, and Sample Participants' Responses*

Research question	Themes	Sample participant responses
RQ1: What are the postsecondary transition experiences of Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?	Postsecondary aspirations	<p>P1: Well, right now I'm doing online computer classes.</p> <p>P4: In 2019 I got my Bachelor of Arts in Information Systems.</p> <p>P3: I briefly attended UVI to major in music but I dropped out.</p> <p>P2: I am currently attending UVI majoring in biology.</p>
	Parental/familial support	<p>P1: My mother was neither here nor there, but she usually just try and help, when I ask.</p> <p>P2: My mother and me, I grew up, I grew up in the university.</p> <p>P3: I would say my aunt was most influential.</p> <p>P4: Um, my mom and my sisters had the most influence.</p> <p>P5: Okay. So your parents did provide some sort of guidance in terms of hey maybe we should do this. Maybe we should go to trade school or maybe we should work a bit and that kind of stuff. Yes.</p> <p>P6: Oh, okay. So you, you learned about cars from your dad. He was influential in your learning about cars and, um, wanting to work with cars? Yes.</p>
	Teachers, counselors, and community support	<p>P1: The ones that were helping me was Voc-Rehab.</p> <p>P2: Well, I've done a lot of programs recommended by my teachers, counselors, mother, university, everyone. I've done a lot of programs and I think they've helped me in my development as a human.</p> <p>P3: Yeah, it was mostly like my music teachers and stuff. They will always like, look out for me and stuff like that. It's mostly my music teacher, cause like I would, I would stick to, to the right energies and what's for me and what, what I can do and what in my role of life and stuff like that. So, yeah, they always helped me out, especially like over the years.</p> <p>P4: I would like to mention some people, uh, first off I would see Ms. Ms. [name redacted] of Upward Bound. She was like a den mother to all of us. And, you know, she, she, she would be soft and hard on us at the same time. And she would always believe</p>

Research question	Themes	Sample participant responses
		<p>in us no matter what we do. Um, next I'll have to say Ms. [name redacted], the high school counselor, cause if it weren't for her to like, you know, push that, that, that plan. I probably, I probably wouldn't have been more struggling in academics as, as you know, especially with my, my weak points.</p>
		<p>P6: And they [teachers and counselors] said to me, have respect for the job, um, be smart about it</p>
	Challenges	<p>P1: Mathematics and basically anything with numbers. I mean, chemistry was my, my trickiest one because it had science, but the numbers always messed me up. Being an introvert gives you a smaller circle of friends, only challenges is reaching out your comfort zone to interact with others.</p> <p>P2: Um, my challenges was math and geometry. I needed, I needed, I had tutoring after school for geometry. Following directions was a big challenge in the professional workspace. I messed up last semester. I failed everything last semester.</p> <p>P3: I would say I would just have more challenges just deciding, um, what it is I want to do. You understand? Like, okay, I was working and then I said, uh, I'm not making I wasn't. I told someone, I wasn't making enough money working here. And they told me like, what, you're making a hundred dollars a week. You can work for me and in the studio and like a music studio. And you can make like a hundred dollars a day selling, like DVDs and like music and stuff, and still work in your music and stuff. So me being young and stupid, I'm like, okay, sure. So I quit my job and I did that. And, um, at a time it was like going to school at the time. Um, no, this was after I quit. I quit my job. Cause I quit school. Then I went back to work. Cause I, I quit school. I quit work to like focus on school and stuff like that.</p> <p>P4: My weakness would be overthinking. I overthink a lot because like, if I think of one thing and then it's like the, the more, I think the more I feel like, like I can't do it. I was struggling at UVI. It took me 10 years to get my degree.</p> <p>P5: Um, some of my weaknesses was just having that, just that I needed that extra time to like, get my work completed. I want to say transitioning from school to out in the real world, it was a little bit hard because you know, every place that you applied for, it was either they're not hiring or if they are hiring you're overqualified and I don't know how you can be overqualified for a job. But what I was applying for was positions where you just needed a high school diploma and it was like, you're either overqualified for the job or they wasn't hiring right now or they already chose someone. So I want to say it was just</p>

Research question	Themes	Sample participant responses
		hard trying to like find work. And when you did find work, it was like something like you didn't really care to work at. P6: Sometimes I does be a lil slow.
RQ2: What are the perceptions of barriers and support in successful art school postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?	Motivation	<p>P1: Well, working, working up money to eventually go to when this pandemic is over. I currently live with my mother, but I'm working towards working, living on my own.</p> <p>P2: Yeah. I'm going to finish (UVI) because I came too far. And I would say that I've changed for the better, like, I would say that, like, I would say that like, I've changed dramatically in a positive way.</p> <p>P3: Yeah. I'm living independently. Yeah. Definitely living independently, been living independently since I moved out my mom's spot. I don't see it as a disability. I see it as a special ability Um, we all need help. Mental help, spiritual help, physical help, financial help, whatever, you know, so that's what I, that's what I try and do is teach or all these types of stuff in, hence hence my name, my artist's name [name redacted] is the whole thing of like me teaching others and all these types of stuff.</p> <p>P4: It made me realize that there's nothing wrong with me. Like in like everybody have a, uh, issue in their life, you know, and the only way he could deal with it is that you could combat it yourself and learn how to live with it. So for my issue, I just learn how to live with it. I just, the steps I take, I just make sure to gather everything I learned and hopefully, you know, I could become somebody's role model someday. More humble. Yeah. You, you live and learn everyday. You, it just makes you more humble and just be grateful for what you got. And for the life you have through all the struggles you've been through from a child growing up to adults, you know? So it made me be more humble than this. Like, you know, don't worry about what people get, the, whatever, you just worry about yourself and you're going to be alright.</p> <p>P5: Um, I'm a school monitor. Also I run my own business right now. I do, um, a cleaning service, a trucking company. I am very determined, I, I try to go out there and find the best way I can make something happen for me.</p> <p>P6: I want to do better and better. I want to change my ways. I want to be able to know what I'm doing first. I changed your life. I learned to never give up</p>

Postsecondary Aspirations

Five out of the six participants expressed that they had aspirations of pursuing postsecondary educational and training opportunities. Of the five, three enrolled at UVI immediately after graduating high school, P2, P3, and P4. P1 had hope of attending UVI but opted to work and take computer courses online. He also has plans to attend an art school in Florida in the near future. P6 attended a local trade school and obtained a certificate in carpentry. P2 is currently enrolled at UVI. He has been enrolled since 2016 and has changed majors from Marine Biology to Biology. He stated that he has been struggling to pass his classes, but he is determined to graduate in 2022. P3 briefly attended UVI and was majoring in music but dropped out after failing his general education courses. P4 graduated in 2019 with a Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems. He expressed,

At first it was like I had like Marine biology of sea animals. But then I switched lanes where I, okay let me see if I could do something with computers, because at the age of seven I used to be around computers just to explore. And from then, you know, I was doing, I was struggling at UVI as well, where I was doing computer science, but you know, math is not my strongest forte. Yeah. It kind of broke me down from since ninth grade, you know, and after, you know, like a few run-ins with academic probation and stuff, I took my time and did other things and you know, where I decided, you know, two years from now and I say we in 2012 or late 2013, I say, you know what, I want to switch to somewhere where,

you know, I could understand and be more comfortable in. So that's where information system came in.

It took him 10 years to complete this degree and he also stated that he struggled to pass his courses. P5 did not have any immediate plans to pursue any postsecondary education or training. He stated: "Uh. I didn't really have no hopes. I was just going with the flow."

While participants in this study were eager to pursue their postsecondary goals, they were met with obstacles that hindered their progress. Those that pursued postsecondary education were not ready for the demands of a baccalaureate degree and the range of courses required to achieve it. They had to transition from a high school environment where, as students with a learning disability, their education and support were federally mandated, to a university setting, where they would have to self-report their disability and request accommodations. The university environment does not have special education faculty and there is no IEP in college that roadmaps their learning path. Of the three participants that attending a university one dropped out, one is still attending but struggling to maintain an acceptable GPA and one graduated in 2019.

Parental/Familial Support

All six participants conveyed that their parents or legal guardian provided the most support during and after high school and were most influential in their postsecondary decisions. All participants also stated that their parents or legal guardian were involved in their transition planning and IEP meetings. The mother was the predominant parental influence among participants. P5 credits his mother for teaching him the value of hard work from a young age. He stated,

,

Um, well from young, I was brought up to, you know, work, to go on work. Um, find something just to go and make a few dollars here or there. And my parents taught me that from let's say, age 14, you know, go out there and make a way weekly. Um, I went, my mother used to work Pueblo I used to go every weekend with her to Pueblo at age 14 and to make a little bit of money, to buy something in the week or have money during in school whatever. So from there I always be a person to just go out to work.

P2 credits his aunt for being there for him despite her busy life. He expressed,

Yeah, she gave me so much support. Like my aunt, um, my aunt did her best, you know, especially single lady, um, taken care of two kids and still like looking after other people and stuff like that. Um, she was involved in like first responders and stuff like that. She was involved in that. So I would always go out on like different calls and stuff. That's what they're basically called and stuff like that. Like the different emergency, um, calls and stuff that she did accidents and stuff like that. Um, the different training that she does frequently and stuff like that. So I learned from her, her learning experiences and how like dedicated, she was especially like going to school, doing something that she didn't, I mean, going to school, doing something that she wanted to do, she got it, but it wasn't like really her strong point.

Parents and guardians were the main source of support and advocacy for all participants in this study. All expressed that their parents were actively involved in their transition planning during high school and were very influential in their postsecondary

decision making. Two of the participants stated that their mothers were the ones that encouraged them to attend UVI and assisted them in advocating for accommodations. Parents also provided assistance in their job pursuits by helping with their job search and assisting with filling out job applications.

Teachers, Counselors, and Community Support

All participants stated that they were satisfied with their high school experience. P6 said his proudest and most memorable experience was representing the Virgin Islands in Special Olympics. Extracurricular activities for participants included art club, music club, marine science club and sports. All participants said that they felt that their special needs were being met while they were in the general education classroom. P2 stated,

Yeah, I feel like, I felt like I was getting all the attention I needed. Oh, too much to touch in here and there, but I felt like I was getting attention. I needed, if I asked for help, they would help me out. I would get like certain special, um, certain people to like assist me in class and stuff like that. Certain extended time on work and like projects and stuff like that. Yeah, it was, it was great. It was great.

All participants stated that school counselors encouraged them to be successful and suggested resources that will help them. Two participants spoke about Upward Bound now called University Bound, which is a college preparatory program carried out by UVI. Their involvement in this program was initiated by their mothers who had a close affiliation with UVI. Others took advantage of programs offered during high school such as work-study programs through the Department of Labor. Vocational

Rehabilitation provided postsecondary support with their job search and postsecondary education. On University Bound P4 expressed,

I would like to mention some people, uh, first off I would say Ms.[name redacted] of Upward Bound. She was like a den mother to all of us. And, you know, she, she, she would be soft and hard on us at the same time. And she would always believe in us no matter what we do. Um, next week I'll have Ms. [name redacted], the high school, cause my time, if it weren't for her to like, you know, push that, that, that plan. I probably, I probably wouldn't have been more struggling in academics as, as you know, especially with my, my weak points.

On support from his teachers and counselors, P4 stated,

They would take time with me each, each teacher, once they know like the type of person I am, they will take time with me. And, you know, just in case if I have a question, cause I do ask a lot of questions, they will help to the best of abilities. Oh yeah. I have one more person. I had Mr. [name redacted] for science. He also helped me through quite a few in high school with most of these classes to where he took his time. And if anything, like, you know, he'll tell me to stay back in class and then just like helped me with, um, to know what's going to be next in class or whatnot.

P3 commended his teachers and counselors for being there for him despite facing adversities. On explaining how teachers and counselors helped him develop his strengths and overcome his challenges he stated,

By just showing up every day. And I mean, when, I mean, by just showing up every day and doing their job, being okay with everything that they're dealing with on their own personal issues, issues with work as well, with the cuts and stuff like that, the funding and these types of stuff, and like the poor, um, structures in the school, not enough funding in school and like these types of stuff. So like for them to even show up and that type of stuff, and like for us to even see that, like that's sort of the strength I fed off of.

P3, who currently lives in Canada, also spoke about the support he has gotten from the Canadian government due to his disability. He expressed,

I went to CMHA. CMHA is Canadian mental health association. So it's basically a place you can get like mental health and these types of stuff. They can help you get off of drugs. If you're on drugs, they can help you do with? depression. They can help you. If you're pregnant, if you don't got no clothes, they can help you with housing. They actually helped me with this house in place right now. Thank God. They helped me get squeezed in. So, um, yeah, like they helped me. Like they're really helpful and stuff. So like, but they put me on like a waiting list, you understand? And then I got in trouble with my ex-girlfriend and then they're like, okay. Um, he's actually like a patient with us type vibe. And they're like, yeah, we're working with you with like getting you back on track back on your feet and these types of stuff. And they've been like extensively helping me out with all these different types of stuff. So I'm really thankful with that.

Participants overwhelmingly lauded the support they got from teachers and counselors. They felt that their teachers and counselors were attentive to their needs and provided the accommodations necessary for their academic success. Participants gave examples of teachers not only giving time extra time to complete their work, as stipulated by their IEP but also making themselves available after school to review work the participant may not have understood. Counselors also played a pivotal role in advocating for resources for them and keeping their parents abreast of their activities. The participants that took advantage of Vocational Rehabilitation support services have maintain their relationship with them even after being employed or completing their postsecondary education. P4 has graduated from UVI and is employed but still maintains contact with his caseworker at Vocational Rehabilitation. The same goes for P3, who no longer lives in the United States, but still has a relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation.

Challenges

Participants' challenges were mostly academic and related to their disability such as having problems with math, focusing, and organizing work. Other challenges centered on their interpersonal relationships. P1 expressed, "Being an introvert gives you a smaller circle of friends, only challenge is reaching out your comfort zone to interact with others."

P3 spoke about challenges he has had with his mental health that has affected his job and personal relationships. He stated, "I'm going to like, um, like anger management

courses and stuff like that. And behavior therapy courses and stuff like that. And, um, and like different other stuff too.”

Participants faced academic challenges during high school and college. They stated that the support they received from teachers and counselors enabled them to overcome their academic challenges during high school. The collegiate environment proved to be very challenging for the three participants that attended UVI. Two of them did self-disclose their disability and sought accommodations. Despite the accommodations, they struggled to maintain a satisfactory GPA and were, often times, on academic probation. P4 completed his degree after being enrolled at UVI for 10 years. P2 has been attending UVI since 2016 and is hoping to graduate by 2023. The participant that did not request accommodations eventually dropped out after less than one year. He stated that while he loved the classes that were related to his major, he was not prepared for the general education courses.

The interpersonal challenges faced by P1 and P3 are not unique. Social skills deficits have become a definitive characteristic of persons with SLD. Social deficit involves the ways a person views themselves, how they are viewed by others as socially competent, how effective they are in social interactions and how they behave in social situations (Kavale & Mostert, 2004). P1 spoke about being an introvert and having a small circle of friends. P3 spoke about his mental health challenges, specifically anger management.

Motivation

Participants are more aware of their disability now that they are adults. They try to not let it overpower them. Participants predominantly feel that their disability has had an average to positive impact on their lives. On how his disability has impacted his life P2 stated,

Um, if anything, if anything, it's helped me more than kids that don't have disabilities. God gave me good parents. So like, so like the parents I have are like, know how to handle it and know how to, they know how to use. They know how to talk to me and they know what I need, and what's good for me. And what's not, and if I didn't have a parent structure. I don't think I would gotten this far. I mean, I think I would've gotten this far, but it would have been varied.

P3 had an interesting take on his disability. He said,

I don't see it as a disability. I see it as a special ability, as I say, it goes on how youth benefit myself and others, because I understand that there's others out there like me, excuse me, sorry. Um, we all need help. Mental help, spiritual help, physical help, financial help, whatever, you know, so that's what I, that's what I try and do is teach or all these types of stuff in.

One his perception of his disability, P4 stated,

It made me realize that there's nothing wrong with me. Like in like everybody have a, uh, issue in their life, you know, and the only way he could deal with it is that you could combat it yourself and learn how to live with it. So for my issue, I just learn how to live with it.

P5 has stated that their disability has made them a more visual learner. He made the following analogy:

If you're, let's say you're giving me a floor plan to design something and you just talk it, like, you just talk the floor, plan out. I might not grasp it right away. But if you draw out that floor plan, like how you want this item to be designed, I will be able to catch it right away and be like, okay, I understand where you're coming from. And I can say, well, okay, well, you have a little floor right here as if you was talking about, I wouldn't know what floor you might have.

All participants are determined to succeed in life. They all stated that they are more driven and independent. P5 is self-motivated and although he did not take advantage of postsecondary resources suggested by his teachers and counselors, his path has led him to working as a school monitor as well as owning his own businesses. P4 stated that since graduating from high school he has become wiser and more humbled. When asked what steps he has taken to ensure that he succeeds in life, he stated, "I just, the steps I take, I just make sure to gather everything I learned and hopefully, you know, I could become somebody's role model someday." P2 is living independently, and the other 5 participants are working towards living on their own.

Participants in this study displayed maturity, resilience, and innate awareness of their disability. They are determined to not let their disability define them and are grateful for the support and lessons learned during and after high school. They defined what success is to them. P1 love of art has motivated him to work hard and save to attend art school. P2's love for the sea has made him more determined to finish his degree in

biology and start a boat charter business. P3's love for music has motivated him to spread positivity and acceptance in the songs that he writes. P4 endured 10 years pursuing a degree in Information Systems and had many jobs along the way that did not utilize his computer skills. He sometimes worked two jobs, yet none capitalized or paid him for his degree. Through determination and support from his family and community, he recently got a full-time job in the IT field. He recently contacted by email to share the news and was happy that he finally has a full-time job with benefits. P5's motivation came from his parents and the importance of hard work they have instilled in him. His self-determination enabled him to not only have a full-time job, without the use of disability support services, but he is also starting his own businesses. P6's dream of becoming a mechanic stemmed from his father and their shared love of cars. He is also working to save enough money for vocational school. He wants to pursue a certificate in auto mechanics.

Secondary Findings

Two additional findings emerged from the data set: Nondisclosure of disability to employers and participation in non-core curriculum classes during high school (Table 6). These themes were less saturated than the major themes described, but they contained valuable and meaningful information.

Table 6*Emergent Subthemes*

Secondary themes	Participant(s)	Related to research question(s)
Nondisclosure of disability to employers	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6	2
Participation in noncore curriculum classes	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6	1

Nondisclosure of Disability to Employers

Five of the six participants stated that they have never disclosed their disability to an employer even if the question is asked on a job application. Therefore, they have never asked for accommodations at work but instead seek jobs where their disability will not be as evident. P3 has disclosed his disability to his employer because of the benefits offered by the Canadian government to employees with disabilities. He stated,

They have. Yeah, basically, uh, uh, the accommodation they've made adequate very honestly for me, very, um, in terms of my own schedule. In terms of if I need days off in terms of not only that, but like the, the Canadian government implies that or like made it like a lot to make sure, like you get like these type of help or these type of things, like, or time off from work. If you have like, um, a mental breakdown or something like that, I haven't like took a medical break or anything like that, but there is like medical breaks and stuff like that. There is like paid sick leave. There is like, um, there's a lot of benefits for Canadians and stuff like that.

When asked if they feel that the pay that they are getting in their current job is equitable to their experience and knowledge, all participants said yes. P6 elaborated and

provided their current pay rate which is \$8 per hour. I had to inform him that he was in fact being illegally underpaid because the current minimum wage in the Virgin Islands is \$10.50 per hour.

Participation in NonCore Curriculum Classes

Five of the participants had interest in classes or programs that are not deemed part of the core curriculum; Math, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies while in high school. P1 had an interest in art and was part of an art club in high school. P2 and P4 had interest in Marine Biology and were part of the Marine Biology Club while in high school. They both spoke highly of the teacher that organized the Marine Biology Club as he inspired them to pursue Marine Biology on an undergraduate level. Although they both change their major from Marine Science after starting UVI, at least one of them has aspirations to pursue a career working on boats. P3 has a love for music and was influenced greatly by his high school music teacher. He went on and attempted to major in music at UVI but dropped out. He now lives in Canada and is trying to use his love for music to help others like him. P6 was into sports, specifically track and field and was proud of to represent the Virgin Islands in the Special Olympics. His athletic talent enabled him to travel “all over the world” he stated.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the barriers and support Virgin Islands males experienced as they transitioned from high school to work or higher education. The participants described their lived experiences by providing in depth data that addressed the research questions. The analysis of the data revealed five dominant

themes: (a) postsecondary aspirations; (b) parental/familial support; (c) teachers, counselors, and community support; (d) challenges; and (e) motivation.

The first research question of this study was: What are postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD? All participants had postsecondary plans. Most of them wanted to pursue higher education or vocational training. All participants have been employed at some point after graduating high school.

The second research question of this study was: What are the perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD? All participants credited the positive support they got from their families, teachers, counselors and the community. Many of them believed that the teachers and counselors were attentive to their needs during their time in high school. Most of them took advantage of the resources recommended for them that would aid in their transition such as Vocational Rehabilitation, University Bound and My Brother's Workshop. All participants stated that they have a will to succeed in life and are making strides to be independent.

This chapter presented the data collection and analysis from a snowball sample of six Virgin Islands male high school graduates with a Specific Learning Disability who have transitioned from high school. The interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 will also cover the implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight on the barriers and support experienced by male graduates from the Virgin Islands with SLD during and after their transition from high school. IPA was the qualitative tool that I used to gather and analyze the data in this study. My goal was to provide an understanding of the lived experiences of African American males in the Virgin Islands with a learning disability and to add to the current literature on postsecondary transition of persons with disabilities. Barriers to and support for the successful transition of males with a SLD constituted the phenomenon studied. As such, a qualitative approach was the ideal research design to gather rich, descriptive data from six participants that were then analyzed and interpreted using IPA analytical principles. Moreover, results of this study are expected to aid educators, administrators, community organizations, and other stakeholders that are committed to the promotion of positive postsecondary transition outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Previous research has shown that students' involvement in their transition planning promotes self-efficacy and self-determination leading to higher high school graduation rates (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). Within the Virgin Islands and nationally, persons with SLD have the highest participation rate in special education compared to the 13 other disabilities under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Students with SLD typically have a difficult time transitioning from high school to a productive life compared to their general education peers (Joshi & Bouck, 2017). With the unique

demographic of the USVI being minority-majority, it was inevitable that the participants in this study would be African American or Hispanic.

The findings of Charleswell's 2016 study of parents' perspectives on parental involvement in transition planning for students with a learning disability in the Virgin Islands showed a contrast to the findings of this study. Charleswell's study revealed that parents reported that their child's success was hindered due to lack of postsecondary support services and inadequate early transition services for students while they were in high school. The findings of this study showed a common theme of support from teachers, counselors, and the community that was favorably endorsed by the majority of participants. One finding that both studies had in common was the profound impact that parents' support had on the postsecondary outcomes of their child. A detailed interpretation of the findings will be discussed in this chapter.

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings in this study confirmed and extended empirical knowledge of the postsecondary transition outcomes of minority males with disabilities and their self-efficacy. Specifically, I sought to discover the barriers and support to these individuals' successful transition. Parents, teachers, counselors, community resources, and self were all important contributing factors to the participants' successful postsecondary transition. It is important to note that none of these factors were rated on their level of importance. The themes that evolved from this study are supported by findings in existing literature.

Postsecondary Aspirations

Postsecondary aspirations were a major theme in this study. Participants had definitive goals as they transitioned from high school. The majority of them aspired to attend college or a vocational school. This finding is not surprising because nationally, postsecondary education is the primary goal of 80% of students identified as having a learning disability (Newman et al., 2011a). Despite this development, students with disabilities struggle more than their neurotypical peers when it comes to college access and retention. Only 18% of students with disabilities enrolled in 2-year colleges and 7.6% enrolled in 4-year colleges graduate (Newman et al., 2011a). Of the six participants in this study, only one has graduated from a 4-year college, and one has completed a certificate at a vocational school. Persons with disabilities also struggle more than their peers with remedial classes, mainly mathematics. Students with disabilities typically take more or have to repeat more remedial courses than their nondisabled peers, which lengthens the time and cost to complete a college degree (Chen, 2016). Three of the six participants in this study spoke about their struggles with mathematics remedial courses. P3 dropped out of UVI due to his inability to pass remedial and general education courses. P2 had been enrolled at UVI since 2016 and also spoke about his repeated attempts to pass math remedial classes. P4 did graduate after attending UVI for 10 years; he too struggled to pass math remedial classes.

Parental/Familial Support

All participants in this study reported that their parents or caregivers were supportive of them during their transition from high school and were inspirational in their

postsecondary decisions. Results of a 2015 study conducted by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) showed that one of three commonalities among learning disabled persons who were thriving post high school was having a supportive home life. Participants in that study described a supportive home life as having parents and guardians who made them feel that they would be successful, as well as having parents and guardians who understood their learning disability and were able to help them with their disability (NCLD, 2015).

Studies have highlighted the important role that parental involvement plays in the transition of children with a learning disability from high school to postsecondary education or employment. Parents who have high expectations for their learning disabled child will influence their attitude towards school, provide emotional and financial support, and advocate for them at school (Fullarton & Duquette, 2015; Wagner et al., 2005). For students whose plans are directed towards employment, parents who are advocates provide support, advocacy, and intentional career planning. They also allow their children to make decisions and learn from their mistakes (Wagner et al., 2005). This was quite evident in the case of P5, whose parents instilled in him, from an early age, the importance of hard work and allowed him to work from the age of 14.

Parents can also influence their learning disabled children to pursue a postsecondary education, especially if they pursued a higher education themselves and imparted that value to their children. Parents will facilitate this process by filling out applications, planning an educational program, and taking campus tours with their child (Newman et al., 2011). In the cases of P3 and P4, their mothers were university graduates

and had assisted them with filling out applications and advocated for them to be part of UVI's University Bound college preparatory program while they were in high school.

Teachers, Counselors, and Community Support

Participants in this study unanimously expressed the favorable support they got from their teachers and counselors as they transitioned from high school. Community support in the form of support services for persons with disabilities also received favorable recognition from the majority of the participants. Participants praised teachers and counselors for the attention they received from them and for their patience, especially considering that they were being educated in inclusive classrooms with nondisabled students. They credited the teachers for giving them extra time and the counselors for recommending resources in the community that would help them with employment and postsecondary opportunities as they transitioned from high school. NCLD's (2015) study revealed that supportive educators who understand the needs of a learning-disabled student is a key factor in such students' postsecondary success.

Agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation and programs such as University Bound played important roles in the transition of participants in this study. Vocational Rehabilitation is under the auspices of the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services and caters to persons with disabilities who need job placement and postsecondary assistance. It is a product of the WIOA of 2014. This law seeks to maximize job opportunities for persons with and without disabilities. The law requires that state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies set aside 15% of their funding to provide pre-employment transition services to high school students with disabilities to assist them in

making the transition to postsecondary education and employment (NCLD, 2015). Three of the participants in this study were currently clients of Vocational Rehabilitation. The remaining three stated that they were referred to the agency but opted to not seek their services.

University Bound was formerly a federally funded program called Upward Bound that was part of UVI. University Bound provides tutoring and college preparatory services to students from ninth through 12th grade. It caters to students of all abilities and is designed to generate the skills and motivation that lead to academic success for individuals in high school and beyond.

Studies have reported the important role of school-to-work transition programs facilitated by teachers, counselors, and disability support programs for meeting the postsecondary employment needs of persons with disabilities (Banks, 2014). Research also points to the importance of connecting students with disabilities to vocational education and related work experience during the high school years (Alsaman & Lee, 2017). The literature on the role of educators and their influence on students with SLD who want to pursue postsecondary education is less developed than for employment (Fullarton & Duquette, 2015). This reduced attention by researchers may be attributed to the proportion of students with learning disabilities whose transition goal is to further their studies. Only about one third of students with learning disabilities enroll in postsecondary programs, and only 19.5% graduate within 5 years of high school (Wagner et al., 2005). Factors contributing to low postsecondary graduation rates among students with learning disabilities include inadequate academic preparation, a poor fit between the

strengths of the student and the demands of the program, lack of services at the institution, less-than-supportive faculty and administration, and personal situations (Kurth & Mellard, 2020; Lipka et al., 2020).

The three participants who pursued postsecondary education experienced many of the aforementioned attributes that contributed to their struggle to complete their postsecondary education. All three faced academic challenges due to the poor fit of their strengths with the demands of the program. P2 dropped out due to inadequate academic preparation specifically pertaining to the required general education courses. Both P3 and P4 took longer than 5 years to complete their degrees. At the time of this publication, only P4 has graduated.

Challenges

Persons with disabilities are faced with challenges from various avenues. The participants in this study experienced challenges while in high school as well as in their postsecondary lives. During high school, participants stated that their challenges were mostly academic, but they were grateful for the assistance they got from their teachers, counselors, and parents. The challenges they faced in their postsecondary life stemmed from their disability and their perception of it. The three participants who pursued a university education experienced academic challenges that caused them to fail courses. One participant dropped out, one is still in college, and one has graduated.

Two of the participants requested accommodations while in college, and one did not. The stigma of having a disability and other factors might deter undergraduate students with disabilities from accessing key resources while in college. One fourth of

students with a SLD disclose to their college that they have a disability (Newman et al., 2011b). Studies of disclosure rates indicated varying reasons why students who were identified with a SLD during high school failed to disclose their condition during college and thus did not request accommodations (Newman et al., 2016). These reasons include wanting to establish an identity that is devoid of their disability; shame or fear of being called lazy or unintelligent, or of getting an unfair advantage due to the accommodations they receive; underestimating how important accommodations are to their academic success; being uninformed about disability services offered by their college and how to access them; and having a transition plan that does not specify their needed postsecondary academic accommodations and supports (Newman et al., 2016).

On the topic of disclosure and accommodations, a theme emerged that spoke to the failure of the majority of participants to disclose their disability to their employers. This was a relative challenge to their postsecondary success. All participants in this study had been employed at some point since they transitioned from high school. Five out of the six stated that they have never disclosed their disability to their employers, even when it was asked about on an application form. The protection that the school environment provided does not extend to the workplace for a person with a disability. The employment environment represents a social system that does not have extensive knowledge of the challenges of having a disability. Negative perceptions, misinformation, and insensitivity can be significant deterrents to persons with disabilities disclosing their disability and requesting accommodations from their employers (Madaus et al., 2008). According to a National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 report, 84% of

persons with disabilities, 2 years postsecondary school, had not disclosed their disability to their employer (Newman et al., 2011b).

Motivation

Postsecondary success for persons with disabilities does not exclusively depend on external factors. Their success is also determined by internal resilience factors such as self-awareness, self-advocacy skills, and their self-efficacy (Gregg, 2014). One characteristic of resilience is having a positive temperament. Participants in this study had a positive outlook on their lives despite their disability. They were motivated to succeed and were focused on living independently. Their stated active involvement in their transition planning was evidence of their desire to be successful in life. According to NCLD's Student Voice Survey, one of the success factors among youths with a learning disability is having a strong sense of self-confidence and taking the first step in reaching out to peers and adults (NCLD, 2015). Participants in this study stated that their disability had varying positive effects on them, such as making them humble and wise, giving them a desire to be a role model for others with their condition, and using music and art to teach others about disability and mental health.

Music, art, and other extracurricular activities during high school also emerged as a theme in this study. Participants engaged in music, art, marine science club, and sports while attending high school. Active participation in extracurricular activities in school is one of the factors for postsecondary success for students with disabilities, according to the NCLD's Student Voice Survey. Participation in these activities builds self-

confidence, makes meaningful connections, and fosters a sense of belonging to the community (NCLD, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study indicated that support for persons with disabilities during and after high school is imperative. Support in this instance is all encompassing of parents, educators, community organizations, employers, and higher education administrators. With these supports present, persons with disabilities can build self-confidence and self-advocacy, thus enhancing their self-efficacy skills. While the results of this study have various implications, there are also limitations. One such limitation is that the participants in this study represent a small segment of males with SLD who graduated from high school. Qualitative research, specifically IPA, allows for a minimal number of participants because the primary concern of IPA is having a detailed account of the individual experience (Smith et al., 2012). As such, readers of this study should be aware that the six participants in this study were from a small territory outside of the continental United States that only had two school districts.

Another limitation to this study is that participants were limited to a small population of males with SLD who graduated during a 10-year period in a small U.S. territory. There exist a greater number of students with a learning disability, both male and female, who did not graduate during this time period.

The intent of this study was to interview 10 participants, but recruitment efforts were met with several potential participants declining to be interviewed. The COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to get in contact with partnership organizations; therefore,

snowball sampling was the only option. This study should be repeated with more participants across both school districts.

Recommendations

Successful postsecondary outcomes for males with SLD is possible when schools, families, and the community work together to determine the best support possible and develop goals that are attainable and practical. Males with SLD must also be taught self-advocacy which gives them a strong sense of self-awareness and self-worth. Developing school and community based programs that provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to develop their self-advocacy skills, and give them confidence to use them, will have a greater impact on their social and emotional wellbeing, as well as their academic success and career readiness (NCLD, 2015).

This study provided opportunities for future research based on the findings and the analysis of the research questions. In keeping the focus on males with a SLD in the US Virgin Islands, a quantitative study can be done on the postsecondary outcomes of this demographic. The National Longitudinal Transition Study provides quantitative data on the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities. The Virgin Islands is represented in this data and a meaningful analysis can provide insight on the outcomes of a larger sample of males in the Virgin Islands with a SLD.

One key finding in this study is the endorsement by all participants of the support they received from teachers and counselors. A qualitative study of teachers and counselors that are involved in the postsecondary transition of students with learning disabilities would add to the literature on the transition outcomes of persons with learning

disabilities. Existing data on transition relative to the Virgin Islands addressed the parental perspective of their involvement in transition planning for their child with a learning disability, Charleswell (2016), and this study that addressed transition outcomes from the student's perspective.

Another recommendation for future research is a qualitative study of female high school graduates from the Virgin Islands with a SLD and their transition outcomes. Comparison can be made to this study to find out if there are differences in the lived experiences of both genders and the support they have gotten during and after high school.

A final recommendation for future research is a qualitative study on the issue of disclosing disability in postsecondary activities. While students disclose their disability during elementary and high school, they tend to not disclose in the working environment. The emergence of this theme in this study is worth further investigation.

Implications

The findings of this study provided an insight on the barriers and support males with a SLD in the Virgin Islands experienced as they transitioned from high school to work or postsecondary education. The findings can effect social change within the Virgin Islands community relative to the services and supports provided to persons with disabilities. The results have implications for educators and administrators involved in the transition planning process of students with learning disabilities. Educators must ensure that students are an integral part of their transition planning, and they are empowered to advocate for themselves during and after their transition. Participants in this study

overwhelmingly failed to disclose their disability to their employers. Educators, specifically special education personnel and parents can foster a culture of acceptance. This gives the students an opportunity to explore and understand how they learn and lays the groundwork to develop their self-advocacy skills in a safe and supportive environment.

The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) was the conceptual framework employed in this study. Developed in 1994 by Lent, Brown and Hackett, it is an extension of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which has been used to examine academic performance and the career development of college students. SCCT focuses on a person's self-efficacy relative to postsecondary aspirations and the support or barriers they encounter as they attempt to achieve these goals. Participants in this study displayed varying levels of self-efficacy. Their almost unanimous desire to seek postsecondary education and training is evident of one of SCCT's basic building blocks, goals. In SCCT there are two types of goals, choice goals and performance goals (Lent et al., 1994). With only one participant (P5) opting to not pursue postsecondary education and training but instead entered the workforce, his self-efficacy was not indifferent to those that chose to go to college or trade school. His goal stemmed from the influence and support he got from his parents having instilled in him the importance of working hard and allowing him to assist his mother when she worked at a grocery store from age 14. He went on to enter the workforce without seeking support from Vocational Rehabilitation or any local agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities. His actions are relative to another basic building block of SCCT, outcomes expectations. Outcome expectations

refers to a person's beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors. P5 was taught that hard manual work, from an early age, breeds success. This led him to be self-motivated to not only be employed but also become a business owner.

Conclusion

Students with a specific learning disability face unique challenges when entering the workforce or seek postsecondary education. African American males with and without disabilities both in the US Virgin Islands and the United States face adversities of high unemployment, lower wages, and low enrollment in postsecondary institutes of higher learning. A successful navigation of postsecondary experience for Virgin Islands males with a SLD requires knowledge of their own disability and needs, a supportive home life, support from educators, as well as knowledge and access to what resources may be available in the community.

What this study showed is that while Virgin Islands males with SLD lauded the support they received from caregivers and educators, there is still more work to be done. Participants in this study displayed motivational traits in their desire to pursue postsecondary education or employment but they lacked self-advocacy skills. Parents, schools and the community can help shape students' self-image is by emphasizing their strengths instead of just focusing on their weaknesses. Helping students believe in themselves may be as important as making them aware of available resources and how to access them.

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Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

Demographics

Age:

Race:

Year of high school graduation:

School district attended:

Currently employed?:

Currently pursuing postsecondary education?:

1. What are postsecondary transition experiences among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

- How did you decide your next step after high school?
- Who was the most influential in you making that decision?
- What challenges or conflicts have you faced as you transitioned from high school to work or postsecondary education?
- Have you sought any type of employment or academically related disability services such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Disability Rights of the Virgin Islands or any postsecondary disability services offered by colleges and universities?
- Were any accommodations made for you at work or in your postsecondary education and do you think that they were adequate?
- If you are currently employed, do you feel that your salary is equitable to your knowledge and experience?

SQ1.1. How do Virgin Islands males with SLD experienced high school transition services?

- Tell me about your high school experience.
- How has having a disability impacted your life?
- With the exception of classes, what other activities were you involved in at school and outside of school?

- Being in a general education class with a disability, did you feel that your special needs were being met?
- How involved were you in your transition planning in your last 4 years in high school?
- When you first got involved in your transition planning, what did you hope to do after you finished high school?
- What did the teachers and counselors at school tell you about being successful at work or college? Did they suggest any resources or programs that can help you in learning to be successful at work or college?

2. What are the perceptions of barriers and support in successful postsecondary transition among Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD?

- Who was most helpful in your transition to work or school?
- What are your strengths and challenges? How did your teachers and counselors help you develop those strengths and overcome your challenges?
- How would you describe the support you got from teachers and counselors as it relates to transitioning from high school?
- What are your strengths and challenges? How did your teachers and counselors help you develop those strengths and overcome your challenges?
- What did you learn from your parents/guardians about post high school opportunities including school and work? How did their efforts and support affect your school or work opportunities after high school?

SQ 2.2. How do Virgin Islands male high school graduates with SLD describe feelings of self-efficacy?

- What is your perception of your disability?
- How has having a disability impacted your life?
- How determined are you to succeed in life and what steps have you taken to ensure that you do succeed?
- Since graduating high school, how have you changed as a person?

Appendix B: Flyer to Participate

Seeking males that have graduated public high schools in both St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix school districts who have been identified as having a Specific Learning Disability.

- ✓ Are you a VI male high school graduate with a Specific Learning Disability?
- ✓ Did you spend the majority of your time (at least 80%) in general education classes?
- ✓ Did you graduate with a high school diploma or certificate of completion between 2012 and 2017?
- ✓ Are you currently employed, seeking employment, attending college or receiving vocational training?
- ✓ Are you willing to talk about your experience with transitioning from high school to work or postsecondary education? Examples, participation in IEP meetings, participation in transition planning, experience seeking a job and experience pursuing postsecondary education or training, motivation to succeed and live independently.

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a research study. This study will seek to understand the experience of Virgin Islands males, with a learning disability as they transitioned from high school to employment or postsecondary education.

Interviews will be recorded and your identity will be kept anonymous.

All participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact: