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Aiyeesha L. Hill
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LOST IN TRANSITION: A QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE STUDY ON THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF BIPOC INDIVIDUALS WITH HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM
TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE

by

Aiyeesha L. Hill, Ed.D.

A DISSERTATION

submitted to Lynn University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

2024

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Ross College of Education

Lynn University

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LYNN UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

By

Chair, Dissertation in Practice Committee

Date

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External Member, Dissertation in Practice Committee

Date

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ABSTRACT

AIYEESHA L. HILL: Lost in transition: A qualitative study on the lived experiences of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) individuals with high-functioning autism transitioning to college.

Transitioning to college can prove overwhelming for BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism (HF ASD) from low-income families (Accardo et al., 2019; Elias & White, 2018; Lambe et al., 2019). This qualitative study addressed the challenges these families faced or will face, fears and concerns about going to college, and the level of support received from high schools and postsecondary institutions, while determining if race and economic status have a bearing on access to information about transition planning. The methodology used for this study was a narrative design to gain insight into the lived experiences of this marginalized group and give voice to these families. There were ten participants interviewed in total, both in person and virtually. Five of the participants ranged in age from 18 to 21, BIPOC with HF HSD. The other five participants were the parents/caregivers of these individuals. These participants were asked questions to highlight their experiences and understand their views of race and economic status regarding acquiring college and college transition information and resources. Results of this study revealed first, the individuals with HF ASD had some fear about going to college, felt supported by their parents, and did not see race as an issue in a broader aspect but instead viewed it as a personal experience to which all voiced, they did not see race as an issue. Few of these participants had fears about going to college. However, the parent/caregiver participants felt unsupported by the high schools, believed race and economic status influence access to information, and suggested what educators

can do to improve the dissemination of information and resources. The study included a subsidiary called "The Talk" to gain insight into whether these families had the conversation with their children to prepare them for possible encounters with law enforcement as autistic young males of color. In sum, this marginalized group will require additional and intentional assistance from educators to transition to college successfully.

Order Number: _____

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EXPERIENCES OF BIPOC INDIVIDUALS WITH HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM
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Aiyeesha L. Hill, Ed.D.

Lynn University

2024, by Aiyeesha Hill

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Thank you to my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors for supporting me throughout this remarkable journey. Your support has given me the strength to achieve this goal. Thank you to the Dissertation Committee for taking the time to provide valuable feedback and guidance. It is very much appreciated.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Jarred and Jaylen. As your mother, I hope I have set the example that no matter what happens in your life, never give up on your goals. To my sister, we couldn't be more different. But one thing is certain, we are stronger together. Thank you for being a co-parent and a best friend. To my father, who always believed in me and saw my potential to achieve great things. I know you are proud of me, as you tell me daily. As I look back, I thank God for your long speeches about being able to achieve my goals. Love you Pop! To my mother, Mommy, I miss you so much and wish you were here. I wish I could hold you and tell you how much I love you just one last time. I hope you are proud of the woman I have become because of you.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

Background

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) stated that in 2023, one in 36 children were diagnosed with autism (Maenner et al., 2023). Critical findings suggested by the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (ADDM) explain there were no significant differences in prevalence rates among racial and ethnic groups. These findings were based on a study surveilling eleven states. Moreover, in 8-year-old children, they found a higher rate in prevalence among Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics to be 30% higher in 2020 compared to their White counterparts. In 2018, the prevalence of autism in White children was 14.6% higher than in Black and Hispanic (Maenner et al., 2023). However, increased access to healthcare for low-income families may contribute to this increase. According to the 2023 Community Report progress continues to be made in resolving the racial disparities in identifying children on the spectrum (Maenner et al., 2023).

While the racial disparities are closing as it pertains to the identification of autism, there is still the issue of misdiagnosis or lack of diagnosis for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) individuals with high-functioning autism (HF ASD) living in low socio-economic communities (Morgan et al., 2022). J. Howard et al. (2020) explain that sociodemographic characteristics do impact racial disparities regarding individuals on the spectrum or who have intellectual disabilities. To add, “specifically, while ASD has been identified in all races and levels of socioeconomic status (SES), individuals from certain racial/ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be diagnosed with ASD, and if diagnosed, diagnosed at older ages” (J. Howard et al., 2020, p. 307). Even late diagnosis delays

academic progress for BIPOC individuals with HF ASD. Furthermore, late diagnosis causes a delayed response to receiving intervention services assuming this marginalized group has equitable access to health and educational support services (Morgan et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding disparities in prevalence rates is vital to understanding their correlation to academic achievement. Delayed diagnosis or misdiagnosis can lead to inadequate Individual Education Plan (IEP) assessments, causing increased academic struggles for these students.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established in 2004 to ensure all students with disabilities receive equal access to quality education. Its purpose is to deter discriminatory practices by educational institutions and provide access to resources outside the public education system. In addition, the statute encourages increasing parent involvement and collaboration with educators. Accordingly, IDEA explains that the number of minority students in special education is rising (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2019). Interestingly, IDEA acknowledges the apparent decrease in minority teachers and personnel from colleges and universities. In addition, IDEA 2004 emphasizes the importance of successful transition, “as the graduation rates for children with disabilities continue to climb, providing effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment or education is an important measure of accountability for children with disabilities” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2019).

IDEA, Section 1471 (b) (4), highlights the need to assist parents/caregivers in communicating and collaborating effectively with educators and personnel responsible

for providing transition services for their children (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2019b).

Further, IDEA, Sec. 300.43, defines transition services as a comprehensive set of activities designed for students with disabilities to transition from high school to post-primary education activities. This includes the transition to postsecondary education, vocational education, employment, independent living, and community participation, providing a robust support system that should reassure parents/caregivers and educators alike (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Every year from 2010 to 2018, the rates of enrollment in college for Blacks and Hispanics have been less than the student enrollment rates of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

The racial disparities in college enrollment are troubling. What is more concerning is that the disparity is even more significant regarding students with disabilities. In the school year 2020-2021, the prevalence of racial disparities in the rates of high school students with disabilities who were served under IDEA showed White students at 79%, Blacks at 72%, Hispanics at 74%, Asians at 76%, and Pacific Islanders at 72% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024c.).

In SY 2019-2020, there were significant racial disparities among the high school students served under IDEA who graduated with a standard high school diploma; Whites made up approximately 155,000, compared to roughly 62,000 Blacks and 84,000 Hispanics. In addition, of the 325,000 students who received a high school diploma served under IDEA, approximately 30,000 were students with autism (*National Center*

for Education Statistics (NCES) home page, part of the U.S. Department of Education
2024).

The disparity between racial groups and abled and disabled students is smaller and encouraging but continues to emphasize the systemic educational inequalities. In SY 2019-20, the percentage of undergraduate BIPOC individuals with disabilities, according to NCES, was 13.9% Asians, 18% Blacks, and 21.3% Hispanics compared to their White counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-b). However,

To have a Black, Brown, and disabled body in the United States is to be connected to a history saturated in oppressive and discriminatory treatment. The socio-historical relationship between race and disability perpetuates inequalities that impact Black and Brown disabled people and thus lead to overrepresentation in disability categories associated with more restrictive environments. (Morgan et al., 2022, p. 4)

The College Autism Network (2024) asserts that one in 225 new college students report they have autism. One reason for this discrepancy is the reluctance to report their diagnosis for fear of being disparaged. Another reason is that many BIPOC students were never diagnosed or misdiagnosed when they were younger. Lastly, students reluctant to report their disability to the college want to attempt to do everything independently (College Autism Network, 2024).

BIPOC HF ASD individuals and their families from low socioeconomic communities find college a costly endeavor. The added expense of college contributes to the daily stressors these families are burdened by due to their low socioeconomic status. Poverty and low academic success are tied together, and consistent underachievement

leads to failing scores on standardized tests, making college acceptance more difficult and unattainable (Kim et al., 2021). Students with disabilities from low-income families experience poor academic performance and poor post-primary education success..

According to Kim et al. (2021), based on

findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2), young adults with disabilities are less likely to enroll in postsecondary school since leaving high school compared to their same-age peers without disabilities (54.9% vs. 62.1%); and young adults with disabilities who do not complete high school were less likely to be employed than those with disabilities who complete high school (52% vs. 73%). (Kim et al., 2021, p. 51)

Additionally, these families may lack access to information on how to obtain that support. Aylward et al. (2021) explain that discrimination, economic status, and education contribute to the disparities in equal access to equitable care for non-White individuals with ASD.

While high schools within low-SES communities encourage all students to seek college degrees, BIPOC students with HF ASD experience fears of what will happen to them once they reach the age when they must transition from K-12 to adulthood. They are more likely to live with their parents/caregivers after high school into adulthood (Eilenberg et al., 2019). More troubling is the loss of services once these students graduate high school. Parents/caregivers of children under an Individualized Education Program (IEP) through IDEA rely on the services they receive through the student's K-12 experience and protections through federal regulations (C. Anderson & Butt, 2018). Once these students graduate high school, school-based services and support services come to

an end as these students transition into adulthood (Eilenberg et al., 2019). Young adults with autism still rely on their parents/caregivers and show little interest in pursuing higher education or employment immediately after high school (C. Anderson & Butt, 2018). Moreover, fewer African American students with disabilities endorse full-time work as a transition goal than White students (Kim et al., 2021).

According to C. Anderson and Butt (2018), “nearly 40% receive no services in the first two years after high school, and such disparities are worse for non-White students and those of lower socioeconomic status” (p. 3912). Moreover, individuals with intellectual disabilities work for significantly lower wages and are less likely to live independently (C. Anderson & Butt, 2018). Sociodemographic aspects do play a role in influencing access to services.

Students with ASD struggle with new surroundings during their first year because of the sudden disruption in their lives, like leaving their family, lack of intellect and aptitude, and struggle to understand syllabi and make friends (Alverson et al., 2015). High school students with autism fear the unknown because going to college is a new experience. BIPOC students with autism fear exclusion or mistreatment because of their race and disability.

There are gaps in the literature on the impact of inadequate pre-transition planning for BIPOC high school students with autism. This marginalized group of students that attend high schools in low-income communities may not be privy to viable information and support when transitioning from high school to college, which is a result of a lack of parent-teacher problem solving, “unfortunately, many teachers assume that a family’s disadvantaged economic status and their racial/cultural background indicate their lack of

ability to be involved in their children’s education, when in fact other circumstances impede their involvement” (Azad et al., 2018, p. 278). Finding a solution to bridge the gap and increase inclusivity is essential in helping these students achieve transition and academic success.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to recognize the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with HF ASD and their families as they transition to college and to identify the inequalities and disparities in receiving services after high school. Due to racial/ethnic and SES disparities, “Hispanic and African American young adults on the autism spectrum were less likely to enroll in postsecondary education compared to their White peers on the autism spectrum” (Eilenberg et al., 2019, p. 31). However, schools in these low-socioeconomic communities lack the resources as suggested in a study of the North Carolina school system, which found that high-poverty schools received inadequate and unequal resources and opportunities (Oakes et al., 2021).

The researcher aimed to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC HF ASD individuals and their families. The researcher hoped to determine the discrepancies in accessibility to transition support services, and to answer the following questions: Are high schools providing enough support to assist families in helping their child transition to college? Have these families had to do everything on their own? Have they received guidance from anyone, or have they been completely abandoned?

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism, and their families, as they transition or have transitioned to postsecondary institutions?

Significance of the Study

Parent involvement is crucial to a student's academic success (Farley et al., 2022). Parents/caregivers must attend information sessions with a question-and-answer session to make better decisions that benefit their children (Eilenberg et al., 2019). Parents need the help of educators to make these life-altering decisions with their autistic child. High schools must do more than send informational flyers on current community transition programs with contact information.

BIPOC students in low socioeconomic communities are generally not easily persuaded to participate in college readiness programs (Eilenberg et al., 2019). Further, the BIPOC HF ASD student is not simply graduating high school, but they are transiting into adulthood which is a challenging endeavor. Individuals with ASD find comfort in structured schedules and familiarities. Struggle with changes in routines or environments can impair academic success in college (Elias & White, 2018).

Graduating high school is a significant life-changing event. It is the end of one journey and the beginning of another. Individuals with HF ASD often struggle with this transition to adulthood, leaving families frustrated and stressed as they help their child transition into adulthood (Codd & Hewitt, 2020). Students with ASD struggle during their first year of college and experience isolation and anxiety (Petcu et al., 2021). Still, college is a viable solution for them. BIPOC families of individuals with HF ASD need

more than informational emails sent to them. Not surprisingly, the potentially cumbersome college application process is often discouraging for these BIPOC families. Consequently, what are the high schools doing to inform and guide these families about existing autism-specific transition program services provided by postsecondary institutions?

Rationale

Constructivism and Social Constructivism

The rationale of this study is to provide BIPOC parents/caregivers and students support as they consider life after high school. Therefore, parents/caregivers can make more informed decisions when sending their children to a college or university. This study investigated what is needed to provide parents/caregivers with ways to navigate the rigorous and intimidating onboarding process into college. High schools and postsecondary institutions must collaborate to establish effective transition programs (Alverson et al., 2015). The study focused on the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning ASD and their families as they transition to college.

The researcher's objective was to identify the gaps in resources for the families directly affected by educators' lack of sufficient attention to this area. BIPOC families of students with autism, especially from low-SES communities, need additional information and resources to navigate the intimidating onboarding process to college through practices like information sharing (Algood & Davis, 2022). The researcher's expectation in this study is to identify the gap and establish a solution to assist parents/caregivers and students.

This rationale is based on a constructivist and social constructivist approach to the qualitative narrative research design. In researching this theory, the researcher has learned there is, in fact, not one specific definition of constructivism but rather several interpretations or understandings of constructivism. Two of the more notable ones are Jean Piaget (1929) and Lev Vygotsky (1962). The premise of constructivism centralizes the notion that knowledge is a process that develops through the learner's interactions with existing knowledge and their environment (Kouicem & Kelkoul, 2016).

Kaliampos (2021) explains that constructivism theory is overlooked regarding racial/ethnic students with special needs, including intellectual disabilities, behavioral disorders, and autism. Unfortunately, teachers lack support in the classrooms to promote proper inclusion practices regardless of the benefit to the students, "nevertheless, while constructivism extensively refers to the role of culture and determines to a large extent the curriculum development in Western countries, it does not seem to be able to play a prominent role in inclusive education for students with disabilities and non-mainstream racial/ethnic backgrounds" (Kaliampos, 2021, p. 97)

Jean Piaget's social constructivist theory (1929) centers on the idea that cognitive development stems from knowledge and understanding of the world developed by the collective (Paria, 2017). People learn from adapting to their physical and social environments (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022). Individuals with ASD are no exception. While socialization and collaboration are a struggle for these students who generally find comfort in solitude, engagement in college student life and academic activities with professors, academic advisors, and peers will advance social and cognitive skills, better preparing them for adulthood (Elias & White, 2018). Still, "as opportunities for

interaction are considered experiences for learning in the social constructivist theory, the sociocultural context of children with ASD could influence how well an environment supports their social and cognitive development” (Jamero, 2019, p. 162).

Theoretical Framework

The researcher’s theoretical framework is centered around two theories. The first is critical race theory (CRT), which focuses on the systemic inequalities that exist within our American systems, such as healthcare and education (Crewe, 2021). CRT analyzes how racism has affected or continues to affect families of color in this country. For example, “educators use CRT approaches to help understand hierarchy in schools, tracking, school discipline, and rules the education context” (Hines, 2014, p. 288). The researcher applies CRT to analyze the reasoning behind BIPOC individuals with HF ASD from low-income families transitioning to college. The researcher demonstrated that the racial inequalities within our healthcare, education, and social work systems factor into the racial disparities that exist in college enrollment for this marginalized group.

The second theory the researcher used is Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) to explain how the intersectionality of race and autism contributes to the oppression of BIPOC individuals with HF ASD, causing substantially more hurdles for them to consider college as a viable option than that of their White counterparts. Love and Beneke (2021), explain that bias is the consequence of systemic racism and ableism. They add, “the use of White cultural norms, values, and practices to identify and ‘normalize’ children with dis/abilities (that is, bring them closer to what is considered normal, or typical, development) reflects an intersection of racism and ableism (Love &

Beneke, 2021, p. 32). An understanding of DisCrit can help improve inclusion at the postsecondary level.

Assumptions

The assumption is that BIPOC individuals with HF ASD are less likely to transition successfully to college due to the influences of cultural behavior, racial disparities, and low SES. In addition, lack of social skills, ability to adapt to a new environment and schedule, and fear of exclusion may cause disruptions in their learning, causing delays in their academic progress.

Limitations

The researcher anticipates a few limitations for this study. First, the researcher's personal bias may influence the study. The researcher is a member of the BIPOC community with a teenage son with ASD. Second, the participants may only partially disclose all their experiences, which may affect the study's outcome.

Definitions of Terms

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): “a common, highly heritable, and heterogeneous neurodevelopmental disorder that has underlying cognitive features and commonly co-occurs with other conditions” (Lord et al., 2020, p. 2).

BIPOC: Black Indigenous People of Color (Merriam-Webster, 2022)

High-Functioning (HF): an unofficial term used to establish individuals with autism who can read, write, communicate to other individuals, and handle basic living tasks (A. Howard, 2021).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An individualized document for a student with special needs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Onboarding: The process of applying to a postsecondary institution and registering for classes for the first semester.

Transition: The progression of a high school student becoming a college student.

Chapter-II: Literature Review

Introduction

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) stated that in school year (SY) 2018-19, among children between the ages of 6-21 who were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004, only 14.8% of Blacks, 24% Hispanics, and 5.9% Asians with autism were served under IDEA. In contrast, 49.9% of Whites were served under IDEA (Kkushiyama, 2024). These disparities are alarming and may contribute to the disparities that exist regarding BIPOC individuals transitioning to a postsecondary institution after graduating high school.

ASD students are less likely to prepare for college, resulting in low participation and high economic costs for the students and families (Petcu et al., 2021). BIPOC individuals with autism from low-income families experience racial inequalities and disparities because of their race, disability, and economic status (Eilenberg et al., 2019). In this literature review, the researcher reviewed the challenges BIPOC autistic young adults and their families experience. First, the researcher examined the rates of increasing prevalence of autism diagnoses across the country and noted that disparity gaps in diagnosis are closing between Whites and non-Whites. The researcher then reviewed the literature on racial and ethnic disparities and the issue of misdiagnosis for BIPOC individuals with autism and their families within the healthcare and educational system. Thirdly, the researcher examined studies investigating the weaknesses and strengths of the Vocational Rehabilitation Service Program, which aims to help individuals with disabilities find gainful employment or enroll in college (Rehabilitation Services Administration, n.d.).

Assuming BIPOC HF ASD young adults transitioning to college were categorized and placed accordingly while they were in K-12, understanding that race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status play a role in the successful transition to college is crucial in developing comprehensive transition programs. The researcher reviews how socioeconomic status impacts access to healthcare and education. The researcher also addresses the cruciality of parent-teacher collaboration and how race/ethnicity has affected outcomes in this area. Further, this literature review addresses the ASD student experience with college transition and emphasizes the benefits of postsecondary institutions establishing comprehensive transition programs. Lastly, the theoretical framework of this literature review is Critical Race Theory (CRT). The researcher uses CRT to explain reasons for the racial inequities and disparities that leave many BIPOC HS ASD individuals lost after graduating high school.

Rising Prevalence Rates

The prevalence rate of autism in non-Whites continues to climb, closing the gap between them and their White counterparts. Cardinal et al. (2020) found autism rates increased in school-aged children over a six-state sample by over 684%. In addition, autism classifications and eligibility criteria for educational programs have changed over time causing, researchers to be concerned about the increase in autism identification (Cardinal et al., 2020). Regardless of the concern, researchers agreed prevalence rates are on the rise and an emphasis should be placed on the cause.

Nevison and Zahorodny (2019) focused their study on increasing autism prevalence rates amongst Black and Hispanic populations. In some states, rates of prevalence amongst these groups have surpassed White populations. Researchers

carefully reviewed 18 years of IDEA data from specific time frames, ages, and state demographics. They also reviewed the ADDM Network report and examined the autism rates in five participating states, looking at birth years between 2002 and 2013 and age groups 3-to-5-year-olds and 8-year-olds. The data showed instances where White prevalence plateaued, and non-White rates increased in some states. Nevison and Zahorodny (2019) alluded to the role the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) played in the increasing rates because it now provides access to healthcare for BIPOC families with low socioeconomic status. Researchers predicted that in the ADDM Network report, there will be an increase in the prevalence rates across all races and ethnicities throughout the United States.

The average diagnosis of BIPOC individuals with autism is 2 to 3 years later than their White counterparts (Nevison & Zahorodny, 2019). Late diagnosis in children results in delayed intervention can then affect their educational experience and disrupt their transition experience to college. Consequently, this delay also contributes to the disparity gap between White students with HF ASD and BIPOC with HF ASD attending a postsecondary institution after high school. According to Nevison and Zahorodny (2019), prevalence rates amongst Black populations caught up to White prevalence rates around 2008. Hispanic prevalence surpassed White prevalence rates in states like California in the birth year 2010 (Nevison & Zahorodny, 2019).

Blaxill et al. (2021) affirmed that the prevalence rates have increased over the past 30 years, impacting national costs and family costs over a lifetime. They reviewed long-term prevalence rates and historical trends to develop a comprehensive cost analysis

model. In addition, researchers developed a cost model to illustrate future cost projections through 2060. Blaxill et al. (2021) argued that

accurate economic estimates of the societal cost of disease are essential for sound law and policymaking. Autism cost assessments are especially important because the costs of autism are larger than for other disorders (e.g., cancer, stroke, and heart disease) and because autism strikes in childhood and affects the entire lifespan. (p. 2649)

Blaxill et al. (2021) demonstrate that understanding the impact of rising prevalence rates on societal and family costs is crucial in establishing public policy to alleviate the strained resources in the healthcare and educational domains. Rising prevalence rates burden the U.S. economy and must be carefully evaluated to make changes that positively affect families and the country.

The Plague of Disparity and Misdiagnosis

For decades racial inequalities and disparities have existed in all American systems (Crewe, 2021). Disparities in treating autism in BIPOC children have resulted in later identification and misdiagnosis at higher rates (Morgan et al., 2022). The relevance in investigating the cause of disparities and misdiagnosis within the BIPOC communities is to find a remedy beneficial to this marginalized group. Golson et al. (2021) focused on autism identification disparities among males, females, race, and ethnicity. They examined the barriers that contributed to the misdiagnosis and underdiagnosis, which resulted in the misappropriation of school resources. Some of the obstacles identified were cultural and socioeconomic. Diagnosis among Black and Hispanic/Latinx children was identified much later than White children; thus, despite the substantial increase in

overall autism identification, its prevalence is not equally distributed across cultural or demographic variables. Black, Hispanic, and Indian/Alaskan native children have previously been much less likely to be identified as having Autism than White non-Hispanic children (Cardinal et al., 2020).

Correspondingly, BIPOC children are less likely to receive intervention services promptly due to delayed diagnosis and misdiagnosis. Black and Latinx children are also more likely to be misdiagnosed and receive an intellectual disability diagnosis at a much higher rate than their White counterparts (Golson et al., 2021). Likewise, Hispanic/Latin children are under-identified more than Black and White peers. Golson et al. (2021) disclosed that other similar studies found that Black children were diagnosed with conduct disorder, whereas White children were diagnosed with Autism. This finding exemplifies what CRT attempts to expose because it sheds light on the racial inequalities within our American education system (Crewe, 2021).

Golson et al. (2021) explained that cultural behavior also significantly impacts misdiagnosis. In the Golson et al. (2021) study, which involved vignettes of fake students, over 300 school psychologists participated. The goal was to determine how the psychologists would classify the students. Some survey themes included the study of classroom behavior problems, social communication and interaction, executive dysfunction, and considerations of student culture. This study examined the role of implicit bias in identifying autism in BIPOC students and identified the need for cultural training of school psychologists to amplify services for BIPOC autistic students. This study provided a sound footing for identifying the racial/ethnic inequalities within the

education system for students with special needs. Implicit biases can alter a student's academic trajectory if not cured by proper training and change in public policy.

Unfortunately, the healthcare system continues to employ practices that exhibit racial disparities, leading to inadequate services for the underserved. Bilaver et al. (2021) emphasize racial/ethnic disparities in access to Medicaid, outpatient, and school-based services to BIPOC children with autism. In addition, they demonstrated that the language barrier caused challenges in access to services for Latinx communities. The country's Medicaid program is the largest payer of services for families of children with ASD with low income. The study focused on nine services used by children with ASD, and participants were selected through data from Medicaid claims. Findings suggested that most children were enrolled in Medicaid because of their disability through a waiver program (Bilaver et al., 2021). There were substantial racial/ethnic disparities in receiving Medicaid services for children with ASD. BIPOC children with ASD received fewer outpatient services than their White counterparts. However, researchers found that Blacks and Asians received more school-based services than their White peers.

Bilaver et al. (2021) investigated the discrepancies in Medicaid outpatient services and school-based services to BIPOC children with Autism in low-income families. The researchers explain that understanding the driving force behind these disparities is essential to implementing public policies that promote inclusivity and equity. Not surprisingly, overall findings uncovered racial and ethnic disparities in how autistic services were provided in the Medicaid program.

The results of this study also surprisingly showed no racial/ethnic disparities in the distribution of school-based services for BIPOC children with Autism. However, the

study also found that fewer BIPOC children with ASD received outpatient services than their White peers. These findings represent the effects of systemic racism, which is an underlying argument in CRT. Furthermore, the authors emphasize the impact of structural racism by elaborating that structural racism refers to “the totality of ways in which societies foster racial discrimination through mutually reinforcing systems of housing, education, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, health care, and criminal justice” (Bailey et al., 2017, p. 1453). As a result, Medicaid case management is plagued with discriminatory practices, causing underserved BIPOC individuals with autism to suffer the consequences. The researchers of this study emphasized the importance of school-based services for children with ASD because they can help eliminate disparities in outpatient services (Bilaver et al., 2021).

Eilenberg et al. (2019) systematically reviewed existing literature to examine aspects of transition like education, employment, family well-being, and social participation. The study assessed the rigor of analyses of race, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status. The authors made recommendations on the subsequent actions for research to continue to address disparities in the transition to adulthood. They found that most studies conducted on this topic suggested significant racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities. The results of this study disclosed that racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status disparities were prevalent in the transition to adulthood for students with autism. Cultural factors also created barriers for our BIPOC students with autism to transition to adulthood successfully. Eilenberg et al. (2019) examined hundreds of articles on this topic and found that many of the studies found disparities did exist; however, they also acknowledged that the studies conducted were not nationally distributed.

Researchers found that Black and Hispanic populations were less likely to participate in mainstream classes and college readiness activities and take standardized tests to meet graduation requirements than their White peers (Eilenberg et al., 2019). However, statutes on testing and exempting students with disabilities vary from state to state, depending on circumstances and conditions. The lack of participation by BIPOC students with HF ASD is a problem that needs to be addressed. What is causing this? Where are the high-school Brace Advisors, Guidance Counselors, and ESE teachers to encourage them to attend the college readiness events? There exists a disconnect between this marginalized group of students, parents/caregivers, and educators. Once ASD students graduate high school, services provided under IDEA are abruptly ended, often leaving parents/caregivers and students lost and without guidance (Eilenberg et al., 2019).

Therefore, ensuring a successful transition requires a comprehensive and strategic follow-up plan to ensure continued success. Further, high schools must emphasize to parents/caregivers the value of establishing a transition plan for their child. The researchers clarify that “transition planning is a multifaceted process that encompassing postsecondary education, employment, living arrangements, health services, and social activities” (Eilenberg et al., 2019, p. 2).

Benefits of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides federal funds to the states under federal regulation 34 CFR Part 361, which employs the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, whose purpose is to provide services to people with disabilities (Rehabilitation Services Administration, n.d.). Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services provide individuals with disabilities the skills to obtain employment or enroll in technical or

public postsecondary institutions. VR can be a viable option for BIPOC HF ASD individuals transitioning to adulthood and can help them identify a career pathway which will encourage them to consider college and earn a degree. However, young adults with autism are less likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution than young adults with other disabilities (Rast et al., 2019). VR has provided individuals with disabilities a pathway to achieve independence and acquire work skills necessary for employment. Roux et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of VR services for transition-age youth (TAY) with ASD transitioning to adulthood. The VR program is intended to help students and young adults find gainful employment or enroll in college. In addition, they employ transition programs that help teach job and independent living skills to encourage a successful transition to adulthood. However, students may not be aware of the postsecondary education (PSE) training services provided by VR (Rast et al., 2019).

Youth with disabilities have a lower employment rate due to their education level (Roux et al., 2020). VR staff works with employers to create jobs tailored to students with ASD (Roux et al., 2020). Black students with ASD receiving Social Security Income (SSI) and Social Security disability income were less likely to receive appropriate V.R. services (Roux et al., 2020). Researchers revealed that studies over the past years showed that TAY-ASD with substantial on-the-job support/placement were more likely to obtain employment at the end of their time at VR (Roux et al., 2020). In addition, Roux et al. (2020) discovered that the more key VR services provided to TAY-ASD students, the more likely they were to be successful in finding employment. Incorporating VR services into transition planning is vital in preparing BIPOC HF ASD students for transition into adulthood. Critical VR services can assist in educating their families on the possibility of

enrolling in college. VR can be instrumental in connecting TAY-ASD individuals to PSE opportunities to maximize employment outcomes (Rast et al., 2019). Roux et al. (2020) recommended that parents/caregivers ensure adequate services are provided and not lessened or misappropriated. They must ensure their child's needs are met so the VR case manager can adequately match the student with the necessary skills to find suitable employment and college opportunities. Overall, researchers of the Roux et al. (2020) study found that job-related VR services for students with disabilities have been successful in helping them attain employment.

VR services play a critical role in helping students with disabilities transition successfully. Policymakers continue to demand more funding for the VR system as VR services help minimize poor employment outcomes for transition-aged youth (TAY) with special needs. VR must improve its collaboration efforts and work with high schools and postsecondary institutions to help them transition to adulthood and find employment. All the same, VR must ensure appropriate services are administered to meet the needs of transition-aged adults with autism. Kaya et al. (2018) studied the relationship between specific VR services and the needs of youth with autism. Over 3200 participants with autism participated in the study. The age ranged from 18 to 25, and these participants were eligible and received one VR service. The three most provided services were assessment, counseling and guidance, and job placement. Approximately 55% gained employment. Researchers also found gender, race, and education level to be significant factors in employment outcomes.

This study's findings revealed the positive correlation between TAY with autism, higher education, and obtaining competitive employment. These individuals were more

marketable and more likely to be high-functioning and have improved job skills (Kaya et al., 2018). Findings also suggested that VR struggled to match clients with services, leading to poor employment outcomes. However, researchers agree that education is critical to finding competitive employment. “Therefore, it is important to involve families in the transition process to understand parents/caregivers’ perspectives and, if needed, provide education and training opportunities for TAY with autism and their families” (Kaya et al., 2018, p. 871). A comprehensive transition plan should be tailored to the student’s career interests and should include the benefits of enrolling in college after high school.

The Impact of Socioeconomic Status

Unfortunately, being BIPOC, poor, and having a disability means being alienated and forgotten. BIPOC, low-SES populations with disabilities experience social exclusion from healthcare, education, and employment (Pinilla-Roncancio & Alkire, 2020). These individuals struggle daily to provide necessities like the financial ability to provide food, housing, utilities, clothing, healthcare, and education. For this marginalized group, these essentials do not come as easily as it does for many of us. Furthermore, expenses that accrue because of their disability can be costly. “People with disabilities and their families face additional direct costs (e.g., for medical treatment), indirect costs (e.g., for informal care), and opportunity costs (e.g., access to employment), which increase their vulnerability to becoming poor or chronically poor” (Pinilla-Roncancio & Alkire, 2020, p. 206). Rothwell et al. (2019) examined the economic impact raising a child with a neurodisability (ND) has on families. The study examined the risk of poverty due to raising a child with an ND over a specific time and estimated trajectories of poverty.

Neurodisability disorders were identified as disorders like autism, intellectual disability, and learning disability.

Rothwell et al. (2019) divulged the economic hardship associated with having a child with a neurodisability. Researchers concluded families experienced economic challenges and that these families had a 10% higher rate of experiencing economic hardships than families who did not have a child with a neurological disability (Rothwell et al., 2019). As a result, they concluded significant socioeconomic disparities before the ND child was born and remained poor while raising the child, “simply put, families that would eventually have a child diagnosed with an ND were more likely to be poor and in economic hardship, which is consistent with the national statistics from the US Census” (Rothwell et al., 2019, p. 1281). Rothwell et al. (2019) reinforced the researcher’s argument that BIPOC HF ASD individuals with families with low-socioeconomic status make delayed decisions when deciding to send their HF ASD child to college. The thought of going to college is an expense deemed out of reach for families that live a life of poverty. Consequently, they are hesitant to send their child to college, perhaps ignorant of eligibility for educational funding. Previous studies suggested individuals with autism who fail to get a college degree or find suitable employment continue to experience economic hardships. Unfortunately, this leads to a continued cycle of poverty.

Navigation through the American healthcare system can be challenging for racial/ethnic families with ASD children of low SES. Black and Hispanic populations are less likely to receive appropriate healthcare services than White populations. Smith et al. (2020) investigated challenges faced by racial/ethnic and low-income families with children with ASD and acquiring access to health care. As previously mentioned, studies

found that Blacks and Hispanics were diagnosed later than their White counterparts (Nevison & Zahorodny, 2019). Smith et al. (2020) conducted a systemic review demonstrating Black and Hispanic families' struggles when acquiring quality healthcare and treatments for their children with ASD. Hispanic families struggled to receive services due to language barriers. Black and Hispanic families were less likely to use specialty services like occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. Likewise, Smith et al. (2020) found that Asians were less likely to use these services than non-Whites. Disparities in access to services existed between families with lower SES as they were less likely to use specialty services than those with higher SES. The intersectionality between low-income and specialty services demonstrates the direct relationship between socioeconomic status and access to healthcare. Individuals with ASD or having a child with ASD experience barriers to acquiring services and resources essential to establishing a quality of life. "Those barriers negatively affect the living standards of people with disabilities and their families and the type of life that this group can enjoy" (Pinilla-Roncancio & Alkire, 2020, p. 206). Smith et al. (2020) suggested that children with ASD from low-income families were less likely to receive specialty care because parents/caregivers found receiving referrals challenging. Moreover, the study found that the parents' level of education is a factor in the receipt of specialty care (Smith et al., 2020).

Parental Challenges

Parents/caregivers experience emotional, mental, and financial stresses associated with caring for their child with special needs. Rothwell et al. (2019) found that parents/caregivers who were younger, and single, exhibited poor health. Low-income

BIPOC families with ASD children experience these stresses with little understanding from other family members and the community where they reside. Stress can have a negative impact on both the parent and child (Pearson et al., 2021). Black families reported feeling unwelcome in social support groups, unaware of resources for autistic children, and felt ignored when addressing concerns about developmental delays they saw in their children with healthcare representatives (Pearson et al., 2021). Iadarola et al. (2017) explored the experiences of underrepresented families who were likely to experience disparities in services and caregiver stress. The study involved focus groups that included caregivers of children with ASD. Researchers explained that clinical trials tend to pull participants from a population who are White and educated and have more access to resources. Thus, the trials may tend to over-generalize the experience and contain findings that do not represent everyone and result in excluding the Black and Latino experiences. Participants of the Iadarola et al. (2017) study included 17 parents/caregivers who were the primary caregivers and self-identified as having a racial/ethnic background. More than half of the participants lived below the poverty line. The researchers focused on four themes: interference with relationships due to being a primary caregiver, misconceptions of ASD, misconceptions of race and ethnicity, and access to services. The study discovered that parents/caregivers experienced stress because of interference in family life as the primary caregiver of an ASD child because it changes family dynamics. For example, more attention is given to the child with ASD than the siblings or spouse. This type of dynamic can create unwanted tension within the family. Researchers also learned that doctors and teachers ignored parents/caregivers when discussing their concerns. There is a lack of studies on racial/ethnic

parents/caregivers reporting concerns about their child's development (Donohue et al., 2017). Delayed reporting can impact a young adult with high-functioning autism and their aspirations to transition to college. Donohue et al. (2017) explained that race/ethnicity may be relevant when reporting concerns. "Moreover, when faced with similar symptom presentations in children with ASD, parents/caregivers from distinct cultural backgrounds may emphasize different symptoms depending on the cultural importance of a particular delayed skill" (Donohue et al., 2017, p. 101). Delays in reporting contribute to obstacles as ASD children transition to adulthood. In addition, participants in the study by Iadarola et al. (2017) believed race and ethnicity play a role in acceptance and knowledge of diagnosis. The researchers explained, "Black caregivers described people in their community as generally uninformed and unreceptive to ASD, while cultural influences of acceptance were more inconsistently reported within the Latino community" (Iadarola et al., 2017, p. 26).

Iadarola et al. (2017) also observed parents/caregivers felt they did not receive pertinent information or education on ASD from doctors or local community organizations because of their race and ethnicity. This finding tugs at the core of CRT, emphasizing the impact of systemic racial inequalities, "prejudice within the general local community was seen as related to racial and ethnic disparities, as well as language barriers" (Iadarola et al., 2017, p. 26). Some parents/caregivers voiced negative interactions with healthcare providers and experienced extreme stress once they were finally in the system and eligible to receive benefits. Moreover, they were wary about the quality of service provided.

Lastly, Iadarola et al. (2017) expounded on the health impact caused by the stress of parental self-sacrifice in caring for a child with special needs. Moreover, parents/caregivers use caution when accessing support services for fear of privacy violations. Non-White participants also claim they received less information than their White counterparts, which suggests a positive correlation to the current disparities regarding BIPOC HF ASD students transitioning to college. Lack of information has detrimental effects on the successful transition to college for this excluded group.

BIPOC parents/caregivers of children with ASD also struggle to work collaboratively with educators when it comes to handling the academic struggles of their children. Azad et al. (2018) examined the components associated with problem-solving regarding parent-teacher interactions concerning children with autism. The study included 39 parents/caregivers and 18 teachers from thirteen schools. The demographic makeup of this study consisted of 56% Black, 23% White, and 13% Hispanic. Level of education was also observed: 59% of parents/caregivers reported less than a college degree. In this study, researchers defined practical problem-solving components like information sharing about student performance and family environment that can contribute to its success (Azad et al., 2018). They also disclosed that parents/caregivers were displeased at meetings because they felt the desired goals for their child were being ignored. Moreover, parent/teacher matching, like when Hispanic parents/caregivers meet with Hispanic teachers, can be beneficial in helping the parents/caregivers understand the demands of the school system (Azad et al., 2018). The findings of this study illustrated that primary behavioral components of problem-solving included mutual concern as to why behavioral issues are occurring regarding their autistic child. In addition, a mutual

concern will lead to implementing interventions at home and in school. Secondly, Azad et al. (2018) found that income may have played a role regarding primary behavioral components in improving problem-solving abilities and teacher-parent interactions.

Azad et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of the parent-teacher relationship in achieving academic success for children with ASD. The study helped to understand the BIPOC parent experience regarding communicating concerns and goals with teachers. Azad et al. (2018) are correct in putting the spotlight on how race/ethnicity and income status play a role in the parent/teacher dynamic. Furthermore, “for families from traditionally under-served communities, the underlying values, interaction patterns, and power differentials found in school systems may create barriers to effective communication” (Azad et al., 2018, p. 278). What is more disconcerting is that low-income families can face insecurities when addressing the school with concerns, creating barriers when communicating with teachers (Azad et al., 2018). Even worse are the assumptions made by teachers who are supposed to assist in addressing these concerns. As Azad et al. (2018) asserted, “Unfortunately, many teachers assume that a family’s disadvantaged economic status and their racial/ cultural background indicate their lack of ability to be involved in their children’s education, when in fact other circumstances impede their involvement” (p. 278).

College Transition and the Autistic Student Experience

Transitioning from high school to college is challenging for students without disabilities. There are more deadlines to meet, more schoolwork, and more expectations to be independent. Young adults with autism want the same thing as their non-disabled counterparts: to gain independence, succeed in college, and get employed. Nevertheless,

transitioning for them is more difficult as their disability may hinder their transition experience. Transition-aged youth (TAY) with autism are less likely to enroll in college (Vincent, 2019). However, postsecondary institutions have experienced a surge in the number of autistic students attending college, forcing colleges and universities to look carefully at their onboarding processes within their Disability Services departments (Kuder & Accardo, 2017). Lambe et al. (2019) revealed that autistic students struggled with social interaction. While students found structured social transactions easier to deal with than unstructured ones, many participants avoided social interactions altogether. According to Kuder and Accardo (2017), difficulties with social interactions can interfere with academic success. Bolourian et al. (2018) asserted that students with neurological disorders like autism had substantial social deficits and repetitive behaviors at the core of their condition, leading to social and academic challenges. Lambe et al. (2019) also explained that while participants felt supported by their family members while preparing to attend college, they relied on their family pre-college for prompting, which was now limited because of living on campus. Although this study revealed pertinent information on the lived experiences of autistic students going to college, it did not demonstrate whether race and socioeconomic status had any impact. However, the data acquired from this study can allow educators to design more flexible transition programs that can address the individual needs of the ASD student (Lambe et al., 2019). The researchers recommended mentorship programs as an effective strategy for providing support that will generate positive outcomes. Moreover, they suggested preparing the student to transition from family support to independent living requires developing daily living skills:

Preparing for a shift from family/teacher support may be aided by practical skills development such as cooking meals, budgeting, and time-management, combined with a gradual reduction of the scaffolding provided by others to support such activities. This may increase student's confidence about some of the demands of university transition. (Lambe et al., 2019, p. 1539)

The researchers in this study affirmed that universities needed improvement in the design of their transition programs. They need to make more of an effort to customize the program to meet the individual student's needs and can adjust according to their student life cycle (Lambe et al., 2019).

Bolourian et al. (2018) compared the findings of single-university research to that of a multi-year and multi-university study. Many of the multi-university research conclusions aligned with the single-university study. For example, studies regarding attaining college equity through access found that students were less enthusiastic about support services like academic coaching, priority registration, tutoring, and mentorship (Accardo et al., 2019). However, the findings differed in student perception of summer transition programs. Bolourian et al. (2018) found that academic support was crucial for students with autism to achieve college success. The problem with this study is that almost 90% of the participants were White males. The study lacked diversity, an explicit limitation, and thus emphasized the foundational meaning of CRT regarding college access for BIPOC HF ASD students.

While all students experience challenges transitioning from high school to college, ASD students struggle with the social, emotional, and academic factors of college life. Researchers explained that challenges like motivation and forming

relationships make continuing postsecondary education problematic. Bolourian et al. (2018) explained that ASD students who continue their education have difficulty sustaining motivation and forming social and academic relationships with their academic advisors. They also struggle with course workload and finding study groups. On the other hand,

for students who planned to enter the workforce after college, worries during the preemptive job search included how to network, write a resume, navigate public transportation, schedule time, develop interview skills, work with a supervisor, stay focused, and secure employment disability supports and resources.

(Bolourian et al., 2018, p. 3337)

Regardless of their route, students with ASD struggle in both the education and employment domains and require support services to help them achieve their desired goals. The interviews in this study revealed that students struggled with making friends, joining student clubs and organizations, communicating with professors, and admitting that their condition impacts their academic performance. The researcher agrees with Bolourian et al. (2018) recommendations that colleges and universities must improve support services for ASD students. This includes providing additional support services for career goals and daily living activities.

Accardo et al. (2019) focused on the need for colleges and universities to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of young adults with autism entering postsecondary education. Accardo et al. (2019) reviewed studies that revealed the need for transition programs to meet the needs of ASD students and the lack of said programs caused their families to have reservations about sending them to college in the first place. This was a

large study incorporating four universities over a multi-year period. The study aimed to contribute to gaps in research studies in this area to improve communications between universities and autistic students. In addition, the study aimed to improve college access and equity for this group. Findings included that students revealed aspirations to attend STEM programs came from influences from home and the community. They were also advised of the importance of employment and that college was vital to achieving that goal. Students also report a lack of understanding of their disability from university faculty and staff. They also felt there was a lack of accommodations to meet their needs, like getting extra time to take exams. Participants of this study recommended improved response time from faculty and staff when stressful circumstances occur.

Preparing ASD students for college life is essential for academic success, leading to successful employment outcomes. Postsecondary institutions need to be mindful of the needs of these students and provide support in every aspect of their college career.

Given the potential additional complexity of challenges faced by autistic students, it is essential for university stakeholders and transition services to be aware of the potential needs of autistic students, to facilitate preparation for university life, and to provide informational, practical, and emotional support during the transitional process. (Lei et al., 2018, p. 2398)

Constructivism: The Tale of Two Views

The conceptual theory for this study is constructivism because it proposes that individuals learn through experience and environment. Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016) examined the differences in constructivist theory between Jean Piaget (1929) and Lev Vygotsky (1962). Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016) demonstrated that knowledge is acquired

through both social and cognitive processes. Thus, individuals construct their interpretations as they navigate through life. The author expounded, "constructivism, therefore, recognizes that knowledge is actively produced by learners in response to interactions with their existing knowledge and environment" Jean Piaget, the founder of constructivism (1929), studied the intellectual growth of children Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016). Piaget's primary focus was how we acquire and develop knowledge, using intelligence as the core foundation of his theory. Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016) clarified that Piaget believed individuals organize thoughts and then adapt to their environment. Vygotsky's (1962) theory was based on the concept that cognitive development stemmed from social interaction. Additionally, Vygotsky described "everyday concepts" and "scientific concepts" as crucial in the learner's ability to construct knowledge. According to Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016) for Vygotsky, language and culture are essential in the learning process. Finally, the author reveals implications for the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky in education. For example, teachers should stimulate creativity and individual thought. Based on Piaget's theory, teachers should let students construct their knowledge through materials provided by the teacher.

Applying Piaget's constructivist theory to an individual with HS ASD, understanding how an autistic individual learns is essential. Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016) rationalizes that based on Piaget's theory, using problem-based learning and cognitive strategies are effective strategies for teachers. Moreover, teaching strategies should be founded on the learner's mental level. However, for students with autism, these strategies may prove more difficult for teachers to employ.

Kouicem and Kelkoul (2016) recommends teaching strategies using Piaget's theory, “the basic teaching techniques that the teachers may focus on and that are associated with Piaget’s theory for different educational settings may cover the following: problem-based learning, discovery learning, cognitive strategies, and project-based learning” (Kouicem & Kelkoul, 2016, p. 70). Would Kouicem and Kelkoul apply these same recommendations to students with autism and intellectual disabilities? On the other hand, Vygotsky’s theory centralized on social interaction, which is key to cognitive development. The principle of peer-to-peer exchange is a core theme in Vygotsky’s theory. However, students with autism struggle with social skills. Still, peer-to-peer modeling can influence the development of social skills, which in turn proves beneficial as our BIPOC individuals with HF ASD transition to college.

Critical Race Theory

One of the theoretical frameworks for this study is critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), which examines racial inequalities and disparities within our healthcare and educational systems. BIPOC young adults with HF ASD from low-income communities appear to slip through the cracks once they leave high school. They lose the support services provided under K-12 and are left to fend for themselves, leaving both students and families lost. Race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status do impact access to college.

Algood and Davis (2022) examined the relationship between Black families raising children with disabilities and quality of life. The researchers tied critical race theory (CRT) to their study. Algood and Davis (2022) explained that understanding CRT is vital to understanding Black families’ family quality of life (FQOL). Many of the

families were unemployed, and they also found that having coping resources impacted FQOL. CRT examines racial inequalities, dominance, and disadvantages stemming from years of discrimination, segregation, and inequality (Algood & Davis, 2022). The researchers studied the impact racial inequity and racial discrimination have on the quality of life of Black families who have children with special needs. In addition,

The impact of inequality and the actual life experiences of minorities impacted by the staunch effects of racism and an unequal distribution of power and privilege through the course of the nation's inception into the present are inner workings of CRT that continue to raise scholastic focus. (Algood & Davis, 2022, p. 104)

There is no question that racial inequities exist in our healthcare and educational systems. Nevertheless, families of BIPOC individuals with HF ASD might feel excluded and isolated because of their race and have a child with a disability. Algood and Davis (2022) highlighted the connection between poverty and disability, and the lack of employment, education, and healthcare contribute to this exclusion and isolation. Furthermore, “African American families raising children with disabilities raises the concern of intersectionalities, or double disadvantages when disability-related inequities are added to racial inequality” (Algood & Davis, 2022, p. 105).

BIPOC families with HF ASD young adult children have financial concerns that impact their decisions about college. The researchers sampled 123 Black families, which revealed that more families were unemployed than those employed. Unemployed families do not consider college a viable option for their HF ASD young adults. Therefore, understanding the importance of information sharing is key to helping these families consider a college education for their children. Federal and state funding like Medicaid,

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy (TANF), and Social Security Disability are entitlements; there is also entitlement funding like federal and state grants and scholarships for education that can provide these students with a free college education.

Crewe (2021) addressed the relevance of critical race theory. Crewe debunked claims that CRT is divisive and demonstrated that attacks against this theory are erroneous. She argued that racism still exists within our society, so CRT is necessary to understand systemic racism that continues to plague our country. Systemic racism is the reason that considerable disparities exist within the college enrollment domain regarding BIPOC HF ASD individuals seeking college as an option. Accordingly, the CRT premise has now expanded to communities such as LGBTQ, Hispanics, and women. Moreover, CRT proposes to analyze the harmful systems that have mistreated marginalized groups through White supremacy and privilege (Crewe, 2021).

Crewe (2021) explained that progress does not erase history and focused on the need to understand CRT as it applies to social work. Crewe described the underlying meaning of CRT and argued that the purpose of CRT is to remove racial inequalities within American systems. Furthermore, “it exposes the role that racism has in society and provides context for addressing changes to structural inequalities that are deep-seated in society” (Crewe, 2021, p. 417). These systemic racial inequalities contribute to the underrepresentation of BIPOC HF autistic young adults attending college. Systemic inequalities create obstacles for this marginalized group through occurrences like delayed diagnosis or misdiagnosis, and overrepresentation in public school special education

programs. Individuals from low-income families end up in a continued cycle of poverty because of a lack of access to information and opportunity.

Majors (2019) observed college readiness programs within the higher educational system employing CRT to understand the fundamental cause of racial disparities within the American educational system. Majors (2019) asserted that higher education was initially established to promote capitalism and individualism to maintain White wealth. When Blacks were freed from enslavement and later allowed to attend college, they were discouraged from doing so. According to Majors (2019), Black and Hispanic youth are more likely to attend high-poverty schools and White youth are more likely to attend lower-poverty schools. In addition, standardized tests were initially designed to favor Whites and excluded non-Whites.

The acknowledgment of racial inequities existing within the higher education system only affirms the reality that there is a disconnect between BIPOC HF ASD youth in low socioeconomic communities and college administrators. Majors (2019) asserted

Although Black and Hispanic youth in the U.S. now have the constitutional freedom to apply to any college or university to be considered for admission, the fairness of the college preparation process is contested given that the standards for college readiness are set by the achievements of their White affluent peers who disproportionately attend schools with an abundance of resources. (p. 186)

High schools in low-income communities struggle to provide them with the necessary resources to prepare their students for college. Consequently, BIPOC HF ASD students in low-SES communities remain at a disadvantage, which is why the researcher of the

current study emphasizes the need for comprehensive transition programs to be the conduit for college access.

Disability Critical Race Theory

The second theory the researcher addresses is DisCrit which examines the intersectionality of race/racism and ability/ableism. Love and Beneke (2021) focused on how DisCrit can help dismantle the impact racism and ableism have in our education system. They discussed the injustices that exist for children of color and how the idea of “normalcy” is founded upon White culture and ideologies thereby excluding children of color with disabilities. The impact of this exclusion leads to restrictive educational lessons and benefits. They explained,

Young children of color, including those from additional marginalized backgrounds (e.g., children experiencing poverty, multilingual children), have an increased likelihood of being labeled as requiring remediation and intervention because developmental assessments and accepted milestones that teachers base referrals on largely reflect predominantly White, middle-class ways of thinking, learning, and behaving. (Love & Beneke, 2021, p. 33)

In addition, the researcher explained that individual biases can obscure history and policy, which influences institutions and labels children of color with disabilities who also live in poverty as “at risk.”

In education, minorities are overrepresented in the special education domain. Yoon (2019) asserts that in education, the conceptualization of race and disability are inseparable. Yoon (2019) uses DisCrit to explain “the need for richer problematizing beyond over-representation of students of color in special education and segregated

educational settings. DisCrit is concerned with the dehumanization of students of color with disabilities where racism and ableism have been co-constructed” (p. 422).

Overrepresentation in special education in the education system can call into question whether schools are correctly placing children accordingly. Therefore, it is essential to understand the relationship between race and educational disability (Fish, 2019).

Conclusion

High schools and postsecondary institutions must develop a direct pipeline for BIPOC HF ASD individuals from low-income communities to college once they leave high school. The families of these individuals require improved access to information to help their children experience college, earn degrees, and become productive citizens of their community. Using CRT as the theoretical framework catalyzes analyzing the racial inequities and disparities in our healthcare and educational systems. Otherwise, these students will continue to struggle to navigate through life. The researcher agrees with studies that addressed the autistic transition experience regarding the need for improved collaboration efforts with students, parents/caregivers, educators, vocational rehabilitation services, and local community organizations. All these components are essential in assisting these students in transitioning successfully.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

According to the *Digest for Educational Statistics*, out of the 15.9 million registered in 2020, 8.5 million White students enrolled as undergraduates in postsecondary institutions, while only approximately two million Blacks and 3.3 million Hispanics enrolled that same year (NCES, n.d.).

The racial disparities in college enrollments are troubling. What is more concerning is that the distinction is even more significant regarding students with disabilities. The lack of reporting disabilities like autism in BIPOC communities is part of the problem: “Disparities in the diagnosis and treatment of autism in children in the BIPOC communities has resulted in later identification and higher misdiagnosis rates” (Morgan et al., 2022, p. 1). This disparity is discouraging and only emphasizes the systemic healthcare and educational inequalities.

When attending college, students with ASD experience challenges and struggles within the first few years (Elias & White, 2018). They struggle with new surroundings during their first year because of the sudden disruption in their lives, like leaving their family, lacking intellect and aptitude, and struggling to understand syllabi and make friends (Alverson et al., 2015). High school students with autism fear the unknown, as going to college will be a new experience (Accardo et al., 2019). BIPOC students with autism face exclusion or mistreatment because of their race and disability and fall victim to systemic inequalities because of centuries of oppression (Aylward et al., 2021). Thus far, there is an overwhelming consensus in the literature highlighting the disparities in

race, ethnicity, and SES in services provided to BIPOC students with autism (Eilenberg et al., 2019). This marginalized group of students who attend high schools in low-income communities may not be privy to viable information and support when transitioning from high school to college. Therefore, finding a solution to bridge the gap and increase inclusivity is essential in helping these students achieve academic success. According to the CDC, teens and young adults with autism experienced high unemployment rates and a low desire to engage in anything after high school (CDC, 2024). This study aims to understand the experiences of BIPOC families to identify the inequality and disparity in pre-transition planning regarding high schools in low-socioeconomic communities where BIPOC students make up much of their student population.

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with HF ASD transitioning to college. The researcher's goal was to tell the stories of the lived experiences of BIPOC HF ASD students and their families to demonstrate the importance of transition planning at the high school level in low-SES communities where BIPOC students comprise most of the student population. Families of BIPOC students with autism may require more assistance from educators to receive valuable information on all available resources, including preparing for college. Furthermore, high-poverty high schools should be provided additional resources to establish a viable pre-transition program to prepare students for college.

Significance of the Study

To address the gap between White and BIPOC students when attending college, high schools must do more than send informational flyers with contact information on

current community transition programs. Parents/caregivers must attend information sessions with a question-and-answer session to make better decisions that benefit their children, which will alleviate any fears or misconceptions about sending their autistic child to college. The rationale of this study is to demonstrate the need to provide parents/caregivers and students support as they consider life after high school so that parents/caregivers can make informed decisions when sending their children to a college or university. This study unveiled the essential strategies necessary to support parents/caregivers in navigating the challenging and daunting onboarding process for college. High schools and postsecondary institutions must work collaboratively to establish effective transition programs. This study focused on the lived experiences of BIPOC students with HF ASD and their parents/caregivers as they navigate or have navigated through the onboarding college enrollment process.

Research Design

This study is a qualitative narrative research design. In narrative research, “the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is ‘the study of the ways humans experience the world’” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The researcher chose this design to understand the experiences of BIPOC families of children with autism as they make or have made their transition to college or adulthood. These stories helped the researcher identify common themes in their stories or their lived experiences. Once the themes in the narratives were identified and assessed by the researcher, recommendations from the researcher and

parents/caregivers were taken to improve the transition process for this marginalized group.

The rationale was based on a constructivist and social constructivist approach to the qualitative narrative research design. Although there are several theoretical perspectives on constructivism, it is centered on behavioral and cognitive ideals (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Moreover, social constructivism focuses on lived experiences: “Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 46).

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism and their families as they transition or have transitioned to college?

Hypothesis

If BIPOC students with autism participate in a pre-transition plan while still in high school, they will be better prepared to transition to college, resulting in an increase in college enrollment for this group. This hypothesis is an inductive research approach because it observed the specific issue or observation and required gathering the data to come up with a general conclusion.

Description of Population

This study focused on BIPOC communities with low-socioeconomic status. All BIPOC students selected were high-functioning autistic. Parents/caregivers were interviewed because they play a crucial role in the success of the student's transition. This research required two layers of consent. The sample size was ten participants: five individuals with HF ASD and five parents/caregivers.

The researcher used criterion sampling because of the specific inclusion criteria, including participants between 18 and 24. A total of ten interviews were conducted. This consisted of five interviews with young Black men with HF ASD ranging in age from 18 to 24. In addition, the researcher interviewed the parents/caregivers of each of these individuals. Parents/caregivers' marital status included single, divorced, widowed, or married. The median household income was less than \$49,000. This salary range was selected to identify families who might be eligible for state benefits such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid. The rationale behind this sampling approach is to prioritize support services for this marginalized group, ensuring they have greater access to comprehensive assistance during their transition to college.

Context/Setting of the Study

The researcher contacted Dynamic Outcomes for Exceptional Students (DOES), College Autism Network (CAN), and the Center for Independent Living (CIL) for this study. The researcher joined social media support groups Autism Warrior Moms, Autism & Special Needs Parent Support Group Teens with Autism, Autism Parents/caregivers Support Group, Florida Autism Parents/caregivers Support Group, Autism Women of Color, and Autism Support for Hispanics, FL. The researcher's flyer was posted in one social group's chat by the Administrator, but unfortunately, no responses were received. The College Autism Network (CAN) also distributed the researcher's flyer to their membership but received no responses. However, they did not assist in providing participants from their organizations. Consequently, the researcher resorted to a method known as "snowball sampling."

Gatekeeper

The researcher received approval for the study from her Institutional Review Board (Appendix D) and then identified the administrators of the organizations and social media groups to seek permission to interview their members. Dynamic Outcomes for Exceptional Students (DOES), College Autism Network (CAN), and Center for Independent Living (CIL) granted permission to solicit interviews from their members. The researcher sent messages to social media support groups Autism Warrior Moms and Autism Special Needs Parent Support Group, Teens with Autism, Florida Autism Parents/Caregivers Support Group, Autism Women of Color, and Autism Support for Hispanics, FL; however, only one group permitted the researcher to solicit participants on their page. The researcher used a qualitative method called “snowball sampling” to gain participants.

Instrumentation

The researcher conducted ten interviews. Three of the interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom and recorded. The remaining interviews were conducted face-to-face. The in-person interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The recordings were then uploaded onto a hard drive into a password-protected folder. Furthermore, the researcher also serves as an instrument because their primary role involves collecting data from the interviews provided.

Data Sources

The researcher gathered data from the interviews. Based on the participants' perspectives, the researcher pulled the needed data from the stories told. As a result, the researcher may receive skewed results, as the interviewee may withhold information or

provide misinformation. Also, the researcher's presence and biases may interfere with data sources. Language barriers can create difficulty in pulling data from the interviews.

Data Collection and Methods

All participants signed two informed consent forms (Appendix B). One consent form was to acknowledge the safety measures taken to protect their identities. The second consent form was an acknowledgment of the understanding of the initial consent form. Four participants received the consent forms via email, which were printed, signed, and returned via email. For those participants who were interviewed in person, they received a hard copy and were asked to sign before the interview. Appointments were scheduled according to the participants' availability. Before the interviews began, the researcher carefully explained to the participants that their real identities would not be disclosed and would be protected by password protection stored on a hard drive for no more than six months after the date of graduation. For the interviews that were conducted via Zoom, verbal permission was granted by the participants to record the session. To ensure the capture of verbal responses, the researcher used a digital recorder. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using the "transcript" function in Microsoft Word. Recordings and transcriptions were carefully reviewed, and transcriptions were cleaned to ensure the accuracy of the data. The researcher did not encounter any technical issues. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that the interviewer memorize the questions to avoid appearing to read the questions. The researcher stored the data from the transcriptions on a password-protected thumb drive, which only she could access.

Analysis Procedures

The researcher's analysis procedures consisted of thoroughly listening to and transcribing interviews. Second, after carefully reading each interview, the researcher extracted all relevant data from the transcriptions. ChatGPT was used to assist with the extraction of themes from the transcripts by copying and pasting the cleaned transcript into the application and asking the ChatGPT to extract themes. The data was then organized and categorized using an Excel worksheet to identify commonalities and establish and code themes derived from the transcripts. Once the data was coded, themes were generated to determine whether the research question had been addressed.

Delimitations

This study did not research the lack of training for educators nor draw comparisons between high schools in high-SES communities and those in low-SES communities. The study did not compare the disparities between the services provided in these schools. The researcher did not include White or Asian high-functioning autistic young adults, nor will the researcher interview individuals on the spectrum who require constant supervision. Furthermore, BIPOC individuals with ASD who require constant supervision were not included in the study.

Limitations

The researcher predicted that the limitations of this study would be the number of participants or sample size. However, the researcher recruited five parents/caregivers ($n=5$) and five students with HF-ASD ($n=5$). Parents/caregivers and student participation may be difficult to obtain as individuals with autism need to feel comfortable with opening up to strangers. In addition, the participants may provide answers they want the

researcher to hear rather than be entirely truthful about their experience. Personal bias may also be a limitation as the researcher has a personal connection to the study as the researcher is a mother of a nineteen-year-old, Black Latino male with HF ASD, who is a high school senior.

Validity and Reliability/Trustworthiness

Based on the narrative research design, establishing the validity and reliability of the data retrieved from the interviews is essential to convince the reader of the importance of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained strategies like using elaborate descriptions to convey findings: “When qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting, for example, or offer many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200).

Reliability and trustworthiness are required from the researcher and participants to enrich the study’s validity. The researcher is responsible for validating the information provided in the interviews. This amplifies the integrity of the study. In addition, the researcher's personal bias may influence the study’s direction. Her unique perspective comes from her own experience as a mother of a BIPOC male high school student with high-functioning autism who is actively experiencing transition. The researcher’s lived experiences and commonalities within this experience helped to establish a connection with the participants.

Ethical Principles

The guiding principle for this narrative research design is to protect the participants’ rights. The researcher acknowledged that the participants have lived experiences that may be difficult to discuss. The researcher stored all digital data on a

password-protected file on a flash drive. The flash drive was locked in a drawer in a desk only occupied by the researcher. The data will be kept for at least six months after graduation, and then the researcher will delete all digital data from the flash drive and shred all hard copies of data, including consent forms.

The researcher explained to all participants that their information was solely to solve the problem of inadequate transition planning for BIPOC students with autism in low socioeconomic communities. The researcher ensured the participants were comfortable with the setting so they could fully disclose their experience. The participants understood that their participation was entirely voluntary and confidential. All participants were not given pseudonyms but labeled as “Participant One,” “Participant Two,” and so on. Ethical compliance improves the integrity of the study.

Risks and Benefits

Considering the risks and benefits to participants contributes to the study’s validity and integrity. The main risk to participants in this study was emotional distress. Individuals who participated in the study did not appear to experience anxiety about the interview, which is natural when facing questioning. The researcher was mindful of emotional distress and did not observe elevated emotions during the interview. When emotions were elevated, the researcher showed empathy, pausing the interview to ask the participant if they would like to take a break, resume the discussion at another time, or terminate the interview entirely. Above all, the researcher anticipated that participants would benefit from the study by gaining knowledge of the college onboarding process. The researcher shared information about a college program for neurodivergent students.

Additionally, information was provided about the importance of registering with Vocational Rehabilitation Services and getting assigned a case worker. The researcher also explained her son's participation in virtual career camps, where he received stipends for his involvement. These individuals learned about the financial benefits they are entitled to when applying for financial aid, disability scholarships, and institutional grants.

Summary

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative narrative research design study was to address the needs of BIPOC families of students with high-functioning autism in low socioeconomic communities who are transitioning to college—the methodology of this study aimed to uncover deficiencies in current transition planning programs for this marginalized group. The researcher hopes that these stories will resonate with legislators at the local, state, and federal levels of government. Providing better pre-transition programming for these families will enhance services at postsecondary institutions. Finally, inclusion is vital for a student's successful academic journey through college. However, for BIPOC students with high-functioning autism, achieving inclusion presents a challenge that will require a “hands-on deck” approach to help them overcome.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of five interviews conducted to determine the lived experience of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism and their parents/caregivers as they experience or have experienced transition to college. With rising numbers of students with ASD going to college (Elias & White, 2018), there is concern about whether BIPOC individuals with autism are getting equal access to information about transition planning services. The researcher conducted both virtual and in-person interviews to capture data based on the questions asked at the interview. The in-person interviews were conducted at participants' homes and the virtual interviews were conducted via Zoom. All participants signed the informed consent forms. In these interviews, six themes emerged from the analyses. These include college transition, challenges, parent and school support, financial support and economic status, fears and concerns, race, and access to information.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism and their families as they transition or have transitioned to college?

Background Information

A successful college transition is vital for all students to achieve academic success as they embark on their journey to attaining a college degree. But for students with autism, the journey comes with increased challenges and obstacles in reaching their academic goals, in comparison to their peers, like higher rates of anxiety, depression, and difficulties with socialization (Petcu et al., 2021). Petcu et al. (2021) affirm, "Youth with

ASDs must be provided with services and support that promote positive post-high-school outcomes, including employment and postsecondary education” (p. 1) They assert that “The low college participation and completion rates result in high economic and personal costs for youth with ASDs, their families, and society” (Petcu et al., 2021, p. 1). Petcu et al. (2021) explain that students with autism are more likely to attend a 2-year college program rather than a 4-year college program and that the college completion rates for these students are 39% lower than that of their peers.

This study aimed to address the issue of race, disability status, and economic status, as well as the impact these components have on access to information about college transition. BIPOC individuals with autism struggle to navigate through life because of both their disability and race. According to the CDC’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (ADDM) reports, alarming trends of increased prevalence rates of autism among, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Pacific populations now surpass prevalence rates among their White counterparts (Maenner et al., 2023). Therefore, the researcher asked how are these individuals, with ASD being satisfactorily serviced without the underlying threat of institutional racism and ableism that still exists in this country?

Statement of the Problem

The problem lies in the inadequacy of college transition planning, especially in addressing the impact of race and socioeconomic status on access to information. There is a necessity to evaluate for improvement by both high schools and postsecondary institutions concerning transition planning for BIPOC individuals with HF ASD from low-income families. This marginalized group may experience financial barriers,

including limited access to financial resources to pay for college. Moreover, due to their race and disability, they may experience limited, or a complete lack of, support services tailored to individuals with HF ASD, thus amplifying obstacles and challenges as they begin their academic journey, which can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and isolation. Hence, they become completely disenchanted with the idea of going to college. Lastly, low-income families may experience limited access to resources, such as therapies and assistive technologies that can support them in easing their child's transition to college.

Criteria Met

The researcher's criteria aimed to identify BIPOC individuals with HF ASD from low-SES families. The researcher interviewed parents/caregivers, all mothers ($n = 5$), and their children ($n = 5$). The young adults were Black males aged between 18 and 21 years and diagnosed with HF ASD. The average household income for all participants was less than \$49,000. None of the families received benefits or assistance from the state or federal government. The marital status of the parent/caregiver participants showed that three of them were single, while two of them were married. Saturation was reached after the fourth participant; the researcher began to hear the same information after the third participant but continued interviewing participants four and five. All participants had common answers to the researcher's questions. All participants were given pseudonyms.

Recruitment Process

Participants were initially recruited through "snowball" sampling, a method commonly used in qualitative research. Due to challenges in securing cooperation from selected gatekeepers, the researcher resorted to purposive "snowball sampling" or

“response-driven” sampling. Snowball sampling entails starting with known individuals and expanding the sample by requesting referrals, creating a “snowball effect” (Goodman, 2011, p. 350). This approach is often employed to reach “hard-to-reach” populations (Goodman, 2011, p. 350). The researcher, who is the mother of a nineteen-year-old Black Latino male diagnosed with autism, leveraged her son's network of friends, all similar age and nearing high school graduation. Phone numbers were obtained, and calls were made to parents/caregivers, providing study details and gauging interest in participation. Interviews were scheduled, and consent forms (Appendix B) were provided and signed before or at the interview, with a thorough explanation of identity protection.

Table 1

Demographics of BIPOC individuals with HF ASD (n = 5)

| Participant with HF ASD | Race/Ethnicity | Age | Attending college/Planning on attending college |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----|---|
| Participant One | Black/African American | 19 | Yes |
| Participant Two | Black/African American | 20 | Yes |
| Participant Three | Black/African American | 18 | Unsure |
| Participant Four | Black/Jamaican American | 20 | Yes |
| Participant Five | Black/Haitian American | 19 | Unsure |

Note. N = 5 represents the number of BIPOC Individuals with HF ASD participating in the study.

Table 2 displays the demographics of the parents/caregivers interviewed. This includes marital status, parental role, and household income.

Table 2*Demographics of Parents/Caregivers (N = 5)*

| Parent/Caregiver participants | Marital status | Parent role | Income |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------|
| Parent/Caregiver one | Single | Mother | 33K |
| Parent/Caregiver two | Single | Mother | 35K |
| Parent/Caregiver three | Married | Mother | 48K |
| Parent/Caregiver four | Single | Mother | 45K |
| Parent/Caregiver five | Married | Mother | 35K |

Note. N = 5 refers to the number of parents/caregivers interviewed for the study.

Data Analysis

The themes that emerged from the interviews were as follows:

- Theme 1: Challenges
- Theme 2: Race and Access to Information
- Theme 3: Financial Support and Economic Status
- Theme 4: College Transition and the College Experience
- Theme 5: Fears and Concerns about College
- Theme 6: Parent and School Support

Theme 1: Challenges

In deciphering the interview data, the participants' experiences concerning challenges varied from difficulties with getting information to having no challenges because they had an advocate to ensure their child transitioned accordingly. Parents were faced with challenges due to a lack of knowledge about transition planning and how to prepare their young adult with HF ASD for independent living, establishing employment, and entering college (Sosnowy et al., 2017). Moreover, young adults with autism remain

dependent on their parents while attending college, where independence is heavily promoted (Hillier et al., 2020).

The participants in the parent/caregiver interviews expressed their lived experiences regarding the challenges they faced. Only the parents/caregivers were asked the following questions:

Interview Question. What challenges did you encounter when helping your child transition to college or what challenges do you anticipate your child will experience as they transition to college?

Parent/Caregiver One: Virtual/Zoom: Well, the challenge was I really didn't face a lot of challenges because he really had a lot of great support because they know I don't play at his school. I have an advocate.

In this response, the parent stressed minimal challenges because she hired an advocate for her son for that specific purpose, to ensure that her son got all the services he needed to transition to the technical school. Advocates can play an important role in college transition planning. They assist parents in navigating through the process of onboarding at the selected college or university. Advocates help provide support for the ASD family during this intimidating transition out of high school. Most parents/caregivers automatically become advocates during diagnosis and self-educate themselves as they navigate the healthcare and education systems (Boshoff et al., 2017). “Parents often play the role of advocate for their child and are critical in the decision-making process” (Hillier et al., 2020, p. 91).

Parent/Caregiver Two: Virtual/Zoom: I haven't encountered anything yet. I do know that I do have to prepare myself because we both know college is not free.

Whether it's vocational school, technical school, or college. It doesn't matter. So, I think I'm, you know, my daughter is in college now. So, I'm kind of glad I've already kind of been through the process. So, I think my previous experience has already been, you know, quite helpful for me as a kind of guide.

In this interview, the mother explained that since her daughter had already been in college and gone through the onboarding process of getting enrolled in school. As a result, when it came to her son, who is currently a senior in high school, she would already know what to do, thereby eliminating challenges. Having a child who has already gone through the college admissions process is helpful. However, the onboarding process for a student with a disability may vary from that of a non-disabled student. If a student self-identifies as having ASD and chooses to notify the institution's Accessibility Services department, additional documentation such as the IEP and a psychology evaluation that measures their IQ may be required.

Parent/Caregiver Three: In-person, Participants Home: Well, I think it's the struggle between how he wants his independence really bad, and I've been there. Making him realize or helping him to realize how expensive it is.

This mother is facing a dilemma regarding her 19-year-old son's desires. He is a Black high school senior with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder (HF ASD), and she is concerned about the expected expenses of postsecondary education. Parents and caregivers frequently grapple with ensuring that their child's wants and interests are considered during this transition process while weighing the best course of action. Parental involvement is essential in helping their HF ASD child successfully transition out of high school into adulthood. According to Hillier et al. (2020),

A key trait of parents is that they can be a reliable and effective source of information that their child may not recognize or has difficulty expressing. The inclusion of parental input can help fill in some of the gaps in potential needs that students with ASD may be unable to identify or express themselves. (p. 92)

Parent/Caregiver Four: In-person-Participant's Home: One of the main challenges was just I want to say because he was in a private institution he's dealt with differently and so I found that like there was, you know, I guess in regular high school maybe they automatically send the transcripts and things like that. But I found that was a little bit of an issue from the private high school to college the first year. I also felt like probably I didn't get as much information about the transition. But I didn't feel as supported, I would say. We've always been playing catch-up to some. You know, so it would have been good, I think to just kind of have a better map, a road map of how to move into the next level.

This parent/caregiver expressed disappointment in the private high school's efforts regarding college transition planning, feeling that more could have been done to educate herself and her son on this crucial phase. She perceived a lack of support from the school and consequently felt directionless, uncertain about how to guide her child in the transition to higher education effectively. Alverson et al. (2015) found that students who participated in transition services through their high school identified clear goals for postsecondary school. Thus, transition services benefit both the child and the parent.

Parent/Caregiver Five: In-person-Participant's Home: I guess it's kind of like deciding on what he wants to work on. What he wants to focus on is also like the interest and I want him to know whether he wants to go or not. So, I've been trying to get him

prepared for that like for him being able to take responsibility and initiative and see if he wants to go.

As the researcher sat across from the participant in their dining room, the researcher observed concern on her face as she answered the question. In this response, the parent emphasizes the importance of empowering her son to make his own decisions regarding college attendance. However, despite this emphasis on autonomy, she encounters challenges in adequately preparing him for this transition and motivating him to take ownership of the process. She finds it difficult to instill in him the necessary sense of responsibility and initiative required to pursue higher education.

Theme 2: Race and Access to Information

History makes evident the existence of racism within our American systems (Guo, 2022). As a result, historical and systemic inequities continue to limit access to resources and information creating, disparities between the BIPOC population and their White counterparts. This marginalized group also experiences service disparities that often occur due to unequal treatment influenced by bias and systemic racism within healthcare providers, institutions, and insurance companies (Davis et al., 2022). Hence, Broder-Fingert et al. (2020) emphasized that

any study of racial inequity warrants discussion of racism and racial injustice in the United States, including the long-standing, complex system of oppression and exclusion that allocates and concentrates unfair advantage to White communities and disadvantages to multiracial communities. (p. 2)

Interview Question: Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?

This question was asked to both the student with HF ASD and the parent/caregiver. This question aimed for the researcher to gain insight into the participants' perceptions regarding race and its potential impact on access to information. This question seeks to explore the participants' perspectives on how racial factors may influence their ability to obtain relevant information and resources. Findings suggest some of the individuals with HF ASD answered the question simplistically, leaving the researcher to wonder whether they understood what race was. Other participants with HF ASD were quick to respond to the question and eager to express their opinions.

Responses from individuals with HF ASD:

Uh, I don't know. Honestly, I don't know. It's because I never experienced like throughout my whole life.

I don't think so. It's like it doesn't matter who you are, as long as you do your best.

It doesn't matter who you are, as long as you're doing your best. You can be successful.

In my better opinion, no, not really. Just mostly how you grow up in a way.

No, I don't believe so. In every school that I have come up to this very point, I don't believe race has ever been the issue per se where it's like, oh, this student gets more information than me because of, you know, they are mixed, or they are any different. I don't think that played a role, or a part at all.

I don't know.

The findings from this group of answers suggested that participants tended to approach the issue of race from a personal perspective rather than considering the broader societal context or global implications. In essence, they focused on their individual

experiences with racism or racially motivated preferences, whether encountered within their school environment or elsewhere in their lives. This may be explained by the fact that they have had less opportunity to engage in social interactions. Because they are neurodivergent, it may impair their capacity to identify situations in which they have been the victims of acts taken against them with racial motivations. As a result, based on their individual experiences, these HF ASD participants may not have been exposed to racially motivated behaviors against them.

Parent/Caregiver One: Virtual/Zoom: I will say yes. Because I know the general truth, you know. They know who to play with. They know who's educated; they know the system. They don't tell parents anything because they know they're not going to search for the answer.

This parent implied that the high school knows “who to play with.” The implication here is that the schools assume that families who are less educated will be less likely to advocate for their children. Moreover, according to the participant's experience, high schools are stagnant in encouraging parents to collaborate with teachers and educators regarding their child's transition. Cultural differences, rather than a lack of education, create the difficulty these families find in communicating information about their children. In one study, “parents from different cultural backgrounds found it difficult to advocate for their children due to cultural clashes, such as being uncomfortable about speaking out in public regarding their concerns” (Boshoff et al., 2017, p. 157).

Parent/Caregiver Two: Virtual/Zoom: No. I don't think race plays a part because you know. People from different backgrounds can acquire the same information.

This parent's response indicates that she does not believe race plays a role in access to information. This mother believes that all the information is available; it is just a matter of doing the research yourself. She believes that regardless of race or economic status, the information and resources are accessible and that acquiring them relies on the individual.

Parent/Caregiver Three: In-Person at Participant's Home: Yes. Yeah, because I think it's, it's again, it goes back to being low-income and they just, I don't know if they just figure the kids, they can't afford it. So, they don't worry about it.

According to this parent's experience, high schools might not prioritize supporting students' transitions to college due to financial constraints. While acknowledging the influence of race on access to information, she expressed a sentiment that "they don't worry about it," referring to the high schools. This implication raises concerns about the level of support provided to lower-income students. It is essential for parents not to feel that their child's high school disregards the possibility of students pursuing higher education due to financial challenges.

Parent/Caregiver Four: Virtual/Zoom: I don't want to say race plays a role in my situation. I do believe that systemically race plays a role just because, like I said. You know first. Where can you afford to live? How does that city, you know, assist? How does that county, you know, provide services and so on? I feel like. If you're in certain places, you can get more exposure to assistance, just as an educator, I have just seen more availability of things and it is more advertised, more promoted I feel like. And I feel like race probably is not directly the cause

of that, but indirectly some type of grouping. For me, race and affordability are tied up in those systemic things like where you live, and where your kid is assigned to go to school.

In this parent's/caregiver's response, there is a recognition of systemic racism embedded within the educational system. While the participant may not have directly encountered instances of racism in her son's transition process, she demonstrates an awareness of racial disparities and injustices prevalent within the broader community. This acknowledgment suggests a nuanced understanding of the structural barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including BIPOC individuals with disabilities, within educational contexts. There is little research on the lived experiences of BIPOC HF ASD and the intersectionality of race and disability. As BIPOC HF ASD emerges into adulthood, they are forced to accept that they will encounter challenges because of their race and disability. As Davis et al. (2022) asserted, "importantly, early adulthood is when a young person of color may come to terms with a society that will not fully embrace them (e.g., with fairness and equality) due to their race" (p. 308). This participant's generalization of systemic racism encompasses the harsh reality this marginalized group must face daily.

Parent/Caregiver Five: In-Person, Participant's Home: I believe so. It's the way the world is set up, it's systemic.

This response is another acknowledgment of the systemic racism that exists in the American education system. At the same time, this participant's statement is straightforward due to language barriers. She asserts the existence of the globalization of systemic racism.

Theme 3: Financial Support and Economic Status

Blacks and Hispanics often face significant financial hurdles when pursuing a college education, primarily due to the pervasive wealth disparities in our (Levine & Ritter, 2023). Income inequality exacerbates these racial wealth gaps, which are widening over time.

Meanwhile, the cost of college tuition continues to soar (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024b) further complicating matters for families considering higher education options for their children with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder (HF ASD). Consequently, this predicament perpetuates a cycle of low socioeconomic status, limiting access to well-paying jobs and career opportunities that typically require a college degree.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), for full-time, first-time in college (FTIC) students, the average cost of attendance (COA) for 4-year public institutions' tuition and fees increased by six percent to \$15,600 for students living off campus with family, \$26,000 for students living on campus, and \$26,800 for students living off campus but not with family in the academic year (AY) 2021-22, compared to ten years ago when the average cost was \$9,100 in AY 2010-11. For 2-year public institutions, tuition and fees increased 13%, averaging about \$4,000 in AY 2021-22 compared to \$3,500 in AY 2010-11 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024b).

The researcher exclusively directed inquiries regarding the influence of economic status and access to information to parents/caregivers. The findings revealed that most participants acknowledged the pivotal role of economic status in shaping access to information. This consensus underscores the perception among participants that

socioeconomic factors significantly influence one's ability to obtain essential information, potentially highlighting disparities in access to resources and opportunities such as obtaining information regarding college transition planning.

Interview Question. Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack of resources for transition planning?

Parent/Caregiver One: Virtual/Zoom: Yes, I feel like a lot of parents don't see what the students can do now that there are parents who believe that their child can't do a lot of things. They don't see that their children are capable of doing so much, you know? Parents don't think their children can go to college. Because college is very challenging and it's not just college. They forget this technical program, this certificate program. But when you say college, they're thinking of the university part. They're not thinking about a technical education. So we must change the word college and think about it more.”

This parent's response suggests that lower-income parents fail to see their child's true potential and do not believe college is an option. She implies the word “college” is intimidating because they automatically think of tuition costs and their child's inability to learn at that level. They do not see their child attaining a postsecondary education. Moreover, parents think of a “university” when they hear the word “college” and the implied costs that come with it. However, the participant asserts that other options, such as technical schools, are available to them.

Parent/Caregiver Two: Virtual/Zoom: I don't think it really lacks. Not every parent is really involved, you know, in active, in their child's, you know, life, right I don't think it really lacks. I think it's more of. The upbringing and the

parents, you know, it's a lot of parents that are not really involved and sometimes we have to be accountable. You know, we can't always, you know, just think that the resources and everything is just going to fall in our hands. You know, I mean we have the want, we have to be the advocate. Each one, teach one.

This participant's response indicates that economic status does not contribute to a lack of resources, but rather, it is because of one's upbringing and lack of involvement from one's parents. The researcher observed that in participant responses 1 and 2, the implication exists that many parents are not involved in their child's educational progression. In this response, the parent/caregiver believes it is up to the parent/caregiver to research the information. Furthermore, they assert that information sharing can prove beneficial to other families. Ultimately, the parent/caregiver should be held accountable for participating in their child's transition to college.

Parent/Caregiver Three: In-person: Definitely, and that's what I was saying. I think that I'm not blaming anybody at the high school. I mean, they got some nasty people over there and some of what he's told me about some of them. Security or the teachers or whatever, but. But I also believe it's the fact that it's the area, it's the lower-income area and the schools reflect that. And that only seems to get worse. Yes, you know, it is just things get more and more expensive. But I'm just saying it's just it's sad that the kids, you know, have to go through that.

This participant asserts that economic status significantly affects access to resources. Furthermore, they elaborate on their viewpoint by suggesting that schools located in lower-income areas exhibit negative behaviors, with students bearing the

primary consequences. This observation highlights the pervasive impact of socioeconomic factors on educational environments, as well as the potential disparities in support and opportunities experienced by students in such settings. It emphasizes the need for equitable access to resources and supportive interventions to address the challenges faced by students in lower-income communities. This also includes a lack of teacher effectiveness in high-poverty schools (Isenberg et al., 2021). Consequently, “inequality persists in long-term educational outcomes as well, with high-income students more likely to attend college and obtain college degrees” (Isenberg et al., 2021, p. 234).

Parent/Caregiver Four: In-person: If you can afford it, the culture in your home is different. You know, and I think. There are times when probably I couldn't afford it, and the culture in my house is just to understand, you know, and so I think there are some things that maybe they might even be interested in doing, but they don't bother because they know that, you know, whether we can't afford the time, you know, or we financially can't afford it, so it's not like he's held back.

This participant's response indicates that affordability shapes the values and principles within their family dynamic. They elaborate by explaining that while their children may express interest in certain things, they are aware of the financial limitations and understand that some desires may not be feasible due to budget constraints. However, despite facing financial challenges, the participant emphasizes that their son has been supported in pursuing his aspirations. This insight underscores the resilience and determination exhibited by individuals and families facing economic constraints,

highlighting the importance of resourcefulness and adaptability in navigating financial limitations while striving for personal and academic fulfillment.

Parent/Caregiver Five: In-person: Definitely. Um. I guess. It's our world, the way our world is set up. That's how I feel.

The researcher noted that this parent believes it is evident that economic status significantly influences the availability of resources for transition planning. Saying "It's our world, the way our world is set up" underlines the systemic economic disparities that shape opportunities for individuals from low-income communities. Our American economic system is plagued with unequal wealth and resources, thus, impacting the ability of families and HF ASD individuals to access the necessary tools, information, and guidance to provide adequate support for all individuals regardless of socioeconomic status. The inability to access resources and information is detrimental to these individuals' quality of education. Families from financially depressed communities may struggle to find even free learning resources for their children, as well as have unequal access to online tools and are unaware of the free online programs available to them (Roshan et al., 2014).

Theme 4: College Transition and the College Experience

The participants with HF ASD were presented with questions concerning college. During each interview, these individuals were interviewed before their parents'/caregivers' interviews. The parents/caregivers were present alongside the student during the interview with the HF ASD student. The initial inquiry about college aimed to gauge whether these individuals had considered pursuing higher education.

Interview Question: Do you plan on attending or are you currently in college?

Participant One with HF ASD Response: I am going to college. I'm enrolled. I start in a week. I already have classes picked out. She helps me with financial aid and picks the type of college I am going to. I am going to a technical college.

The first participant appears to be fully engaged in the college enrollment process, with classes already selected and enrollment imminent. This individual's parent/caregiver plays an active role in navigating the financial aid process and selecting an appropriate college, indicating a supportive environment for their transition to higher education.

Participant Two with HF ASD Response: I really don't know. Yeah, my mom told me. She told me about some classes I can take. They have animation classes and every time a college comes to visit us, I tell them what I want to do, but they just don't really know how to help me. It just gets confusing, and they want me to be like a doctor or electrician. I wanna be like in the movies just something like; just like make movies and stuff like that.

The second participant expresses uncertainty and frustration regarding their college plans. While they have some awareness of potential classes and career paths, they feel unsupported and misunderstood by their parents/caregivers and high school educators. They aspire to pursue a career in filmmaking, highlighting a desire for vocational guidance tailored to their interests and abilities.

Participant Three with HF ASD Response: Yes, I'm currently attending American College.

This participant provides a straightforward confirmation of their current attendance at American College, indicating a level of clarity and commitment to their

college education. His parent/caregiver added that he was currently struggling with college-level math and English.

Participant Four with HF ASD Response: I'm not sure yet.

This participant expresses uncertainty about their college plans, indicating a lack of clarity or direction in their educational journey.

Participant Five with HF ASD Response: Yes.

This participant affirms their intention to attend college, but further details are needed to ensure their preparedness and engagement with the college process is maintained. However, this particular participant has a sibling currently attending college so there is an assumption that he will have his sister's guidance as he begins college.

Findings suggested that these responses regarding going to college varied significantly. Two out of the five respondents were attending college, and two responded that they needed clarification about the prospect of going to college after high school. One, a high school senior, responded with a simple "yes." The purpose of asking the question was to assess whether attending postsecondary education was considered an option for these individuals. Additionally, it aimed to gauge the extent of their college preparedness. For those individuals who displayed uncertainty in their responses, this may be due to the lack of tailored support and resources provided by the high school and parent/caregiver resulting, in them ending up lost in transition.

Theme 5: Fears and Concerns About College

In exploring this theme, both parents and their children with HF ASD were questioned about their fears and concerns regarding attending a postsecondary institution. Among the students, two responded without fear, while the others acknowledged feeling

a fear and excitement. Conversely, only one parent expressed a lack of apprehension about their child's college transition, while the remaining four participants articulated various fears and anxieties about this milestone. It is essential to recognize that experiencing apprehension and concerns during significant life transitions is a common human experience, even among neurotypical individuals. However, for transition-aged students on the autism spectrum, these fears and concerns can be intensified. Individuals with autism often seek comfort in structure, routine, and predictability, as noted in the study by Lambe et al. (2019).

Similarly, concerns about social interactions and obtaining sufficient academic support were highlighted in their research. In contrast, for neurotypical students, the transition to college is often viewed as an exciting opportunity, marked by anticipation for what lies ahead and a clear sense of direction. While colleges and universities provide some structure through scheduled courses and syllabi, they also offer opportunities for students to explore various interests through campus clubs, organizations, and student life events. For this inquiry, both the student and parent/caregiver were asked about fears and concerns about going to college.

Interview Question to HF ASD Students. What fears do/did you have about going to college?

Participant One with HF ASD Response: Nervous, it's new. I don't know anyone. But excited too."

Participant Two with HF ASD Response: I have fears, but like I talked about it with my mom, like. It's part of life, so. I just got to go through it.

Participant Three with HF ASD Response: I don't really have any fears about college. I know how to pay for stuff. I know how to take care of myself. I watched the videos about the college. I'm not really afraid of it.

Participant Four with HF ASD Response: I had a fear. Well, I had more fears where it's like if I fail, I would have to pay out of pocket and I want to say I have more fears of failure, fears of failure in an academic sense, and pretty much anything striving or stemming from college. I would be afraid.

Participant Five with HF ASD Response: I don't know. Not sure. She once took me on a tour of a college. Showed me places to hang out, where to eat, and the library. I wasn't really excited about it. Not really interested.

The answers from these BIPOC students with HF ASD varied slightly. Many of the answers acknowledged fear, anxiety, and excitement. All of which are typical reactions to the anticipated transition from high school. One participant with HF ASD alluded to his fearlessness when it comes to going to college and his eagerness to become independent. However, the last response suggested that, although he was given a tour at a postsecondary institution, he expressed a lack of interest in the prospect of attending college.

Interview Question. What fears do/did you have about your child attending college?

Parent/Caregiver One: Virtual/Zoom: I fear a lot. I'm. I'm nervous. I am so nervous because I don't want no one to like, bully him. I don't want him to feel like he doesn't understand. And I want him to make sure that he's asking questions. I don't want him to feel like he can't raise his hand and say, hey, and I told him, to make sure you do.

This response indicates that the parent/caregiver is concerned about how others will treat her son. Over the past several years, the issue of bullying has been brought to the attention of educators and legislators to combat it. Unfortunately, neurodivergent students experience bullying, and as a result, experience depression in their K-12 education (Greenberg, 2018).

Parent/Caregiver Two: Virtual/Zoom: It's a bigger world, you know when it comes to even the campuses itself, you know? If Aiden doesn't know anything or he doesn't know how to get somewhere. He's gonna ask. So other than that, I think he'll do very, very good. He has a sister or twin. That's kind of, kind of showing him the ropes in and out, you know, so and there's no doubt, you know if he needs her, she's going to be right there to help him you know or help assist them so. I don't have too much fear.

This parent's answer reflects confidence in her child's ability to adapt and having had a child who is currently going to college gives this participant a sense of peace as her neurodivergent son begins to transition.

Parent/Caregiver Three: In-person: "Paying out of pocket would be one. If he's not living at home. But that's the thing I need to get over. It's not on him. I think it's wanting him to be successful, you know. This is something with me. I have to work out, but being able to help, being able to do it for him, I can't do that. You know what I mean? And worrying about if you know if he's going to make it."

This answer is indicative of parents'/caregivers' concerns about their children's success in life as they enter adulthood. Are they going to be successful? Can they afford the daily expenses? How much will the parents have to contribute to ensure their child

can sustain their independence? These are typical questions parents/caregivers ask themselves as they assist in navigating their child's transition into adulthood.

Parent/Caregiver Four: In-person: I'm very nervous, I fear that he's an adult now and I can't go everywhere with him, so the unknown is I think you know, just not knowing. Like the accommodations, because I feel like...I don't know if I even prepared him to understand how to advocate for himself in that way. I fear that I've advocated too much, and maybe he didn't get an opportunity to properly learn how to, or even the importance of advocating, or what to advocate for.

This parent/caregiver's answer underlines an interesting point about how parents advocate so much for their neurodivergent child, that they don't enable them to advocate for themselves. Parents/caregivers are riddled with fears about how society will treat their child and how their child will navigate through life as an adult with autism. Furthermore, society's lack of understanding of what autism is only contributes to these parental fears. Boshoff et al. (2017) noted, "Mothers spoke about facing a lack of awareness of autism, apathy, or condemnation, which often left mothers dealing with emotional effects of privacy" (p. 157).

Parent/Caregiver Five: In-person: I want to make sure he finds where he is supposed to be. Just being able to fit it in. I don't think it will be a problem for him. Just the whole college experience, I'm nervous. I know they have to be more independent.

This parent/caregiver acknowledges the need for her child to be more independent, but they fear their child's ability to fit in, navigate in a new environment, and enjoy the college experience.

Subsidiary: “The Talk”

“The Talk” refers to the crucial conversation that Black and Brown families have with their young children to prepare them for potential encounters with law enforcement. This conversation addresses the reality of racial biases. It aims to equip children with strategies to navigate these interactions safely, fostering a cautious awareness of the potential dangers they may face. “‘The Talk’ is a form of racial socialization discourse that many Black parents, unfortunately, feel compelled to participate in despite the discomfort that often accompanies it” (L. A. Anderson et al., 2021, p. 476).

Regardless of whether their children are neurodivergent or neurotypical, Black and Brown families feel compelled to have these discussions. They aim to prepare their children for various scenarios, from routine stops to interactions related to criminal investigations. The urgency and importance of these conversations have heightened in recent years due to the increasing fear of law enforcement among our Black and Brown communities. This fear is exacerbated by several high-profile incidents where neurodivergent Black and Brown individuals with autism have tragically died during encounters with police.

Over the past few years, there were instances where young Black and Brown men, as young as 15, lost their lives in situations that might have been avoided with better understanding and handling by law enforcement. These tragic events have intensified the anxiety among Black and Brown families about the safety of their neurodivergent children, leading to a pervasive sense of fear and mistrust towards law enforcement nationwide.

To understand of whether the parents/caregivers participating in this study have had “The Talk” with their sons, the researcher contacted the participants/caregivers again to inquire whether these conversations were, taking place in their households. The same five parents/caregivers were texted and emailed to gain insight into their approaches. Four of the five participants responded; the fifth participant/caregiver did not respond.

What I have advised if ever stopped or approached by law enforcement is to stay calm don't run resist or obstruct the officers. Don't lie or give false documents. Keep hands up where the officer can see them and inform the officer his name is ***** he has autism.

I haven't had that talk with him.

Hi, so we told him to not run, be respectful, but also make sure they were law enforcement in case they weren't in uniform, like asking for a badge/ID. If he needed to give them my number, he was not good about remembering his address. He does a lot of research and always has, so he is aware and has seen videos on the issues between some, not all, law enforcement and Black men/women.” We discussed in different instances almost weekly, among other issues that plague teens in America at large, and that some people view people differently and stereotyped people, especially young Black males, over the years.

During the lockdown, however, the Black Lives Matter movement opened a new can of worms, and discussions peaked about the hatred, especially with the raid of the Pentagon and the publicized racial tension; we talked about avoiding the "Karens" and discussed police brutality chronologically across the eras in America. I know he is not racist by any means; however, he has been exposed,

and so we came up with strategies for talking and interacting with law enforcement, from tone of voice, placement of hands, order of responses to questions, how to make requests in these situations and to always have proper identification and the tip of his finger for representation.

Theme 6: Parent and School Support

The research clearly shows parent/caregiver and school support are crucial to the success of the transition to college whether the student is neurotypical or neurodivergent. Change is hard regardless of race, gender, or age. During the transition out of high school, these students will experience challenges as they adapt to a new phase in their lives. That is why the involvement of a parent and educator is paramount in this process.

Both parents/caregivers and their young adults with HF ASD were questioned about the support they received. The researcher's goal with this line of questioning was to determine the importance of receiving support on the effectiveness of successful transitioning. By understanding the extent to which support influences a successful transition, the researcher can then determine how support services for transition-aged students with autism can be tailored to ensure a seamless transition for this marginalized group.

Interview Question for Participants with HF ASD. How did or does your parent or caregiver support you during the transition after high school?

Participants with HF ASD Responses:

She helps me with financial aid and picks the type of college I am going to. I am going to a technical college. I am going to McFadden.

Yes.

She helps me out with a lot of stuff. Well, she sometimes gives me some money. Even though I don't know my card number, she doesn't argue with me. She just wanted me to practice more, and she just gave it to me. So, I don't ruin anything. Well, she reassured me that whatever effort that I put out, she would support me and so I ran with that.

Training me to be an adult. Like driving, getting driver's license and like getting my own house.

All of the respondents acknowledged support from their parents from financial assistance to acquiring independent living skills. The support received from their parents encompasses all areas of their lives as they transition to adulthood. Parents/caregivers' support is key for individuals with ASD in acquiring daily living skills such as managing a budget, keeping on schedule with appointments and class schedules, going food shopping, and taking public transportation. Lee et al. (2023), found that parents are exhausted and emotionally overwhelmed. Therefore, there is a recognized need to "transition the parent" along with the student. Only the ASD students were questioned about receiving information about college from their school.

Interview Question. Was your high school helpful in sharing information about college?

Participants with HF ASD Responses:

Don't know. Not sure.

I have to be honest. Not really. It's just they never really talked to us about college until we became seniors. It's just like they don't really tell you about it;

just find the college; where you want to go, and they go before it's too late and It's like they don't even they don't tell us.

There are two different sides that, let's say two sides to a coin. On one side I believe they've mentioned information about a lot of things and on the other side I may not have always been paying attention like that. So, I knew about FEU, FEU. I've toured FEU with the algebra project program in Cardinal Creek. Yes, it's run by three different teachers. But yes, I toured FEU so I knew about the college they mentioned. If you're willing to take things to the next level. So, for example, if you're in certain programs that boost your academic hemisphere, they'll give you opportunities. For example, when I moved to a different school [private school] after Cardinal Creek [public school] I received different emails and mail from different universities or colleges. I think the teachers were more so whenever they talked about college. They more so mentioned it as a way of oh, if you do well in school, whatever college you see fit to seek out, I'm sure you'll get to it. I don't think they mentioned a lot per se about specific colleges you would like to get into like. I don't think I've ever had a conversation where if it wasn't, what college would you like to go to then? It wasn't really heavily spoken about on the topic of college.

It was ok.

Mr. Adams, my teacher talks to us about college.

The responses concerning high school support varied. Answers ranged from some school support to a complete lack of school support. In analyzing these responses, the individual who toured FEU was attending a private school that employed a college

program overseen by three teachers. This is an indication that resources allocated to public and private schools differ significantly, thus influencing the kind of programs schools can offer. Under IDEA (2004) and the Rehabilitation Act (1973), for students with disabilities, transition service requirements must be addressed once they reach 16 years of age (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2024a). While some public schools do provide some information about transition support services for IDEA-eligible students, the question becomes, is it enough?

Summary of Results

The interviews yielded a mix of responses based on the interview questions, highlighting both common concerns and individual experiences among BIPOC HF ASD students and their parents/caregivers. While these students express a desire for independence and the aspiration to attend college, they also harbor fears and uncertainties about the impending change. Many feel their high schools need to adequately prepare them for this transition, emphasizing the need for better support and guidance. However, they find solace and encouragement from their parents/caregivers as they navigate adulthood.

Parents and caregivers also exhibited varying responses, touching on challenges related to race, access to information, financial status, and school support. Some felt unsupported by their child's high school and lacked sufficient guidance on transition planning and available resources. Concerns about systemic racism impacting access to information were raised, reflecting broader societal issues. Additionally, the majority of parent participants expressed fears and concerns about their child's college experience, particularly regarding fitting in and potential bullying.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interviews highlighted the diverse experiences of this marginalized group. These families grapple with challenges they have faced and will face in the future. These challenges include financial constraints and a need for more information and resources. Despite these challenges, parents/caregivers play a pivotal role in the student's successful transition to college.

Chapter V will delve deeper into the researcher's interpretation of the findings, exploring the benefits of pre-transition planning and the necessity for improved dissemination of information by high schools. Furthermore, the role of postsecondary institutions in facilitating successful transitions will be discussed, shedding light on avenues for enhanced support and guidance for HF ASD students and parents/caregivers.

Chapter V: Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of the qualitative study was to give voice to the invisible and shed light on the flaws in the current transition processes for BIPOC transition-aged youth with HF ASD from low-income families. This chapter delves into the interpretation of the findings, how these findings are connected to the literature and theory, and how the findings contribute to the gap in the literature about college transition and students with autism. In addition, this chapter will provide a discussion of recommendations based on the findings and implications. In sum, this study looks to answer the research question.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism and their families as they transition or have transitioned to college?

Previous literature suggests the challenges individuals with autism face as they transition from high school to college. While studies have highlighted these difficulties (Lambe et al., 2019), there is a notable gap in empirical research regarding the intersectionality of race and autism. Qualitative research revealing the lived experiences of the individuals at the crossroads of this intersectionality will help uncover weaknesses in our American systems such, as education, healthcare, and the justice system. According to Cage and Howes (2020), providing an interpretation of the experiences of people with autism can provide invaluable information; however, qualitative research is undervalued. Davis et al. (2022) assert that intersectionality emphasizes the interconnectedness of social identities, highlighting the need to consider how intersecting identities influence outcomes for marginalized groups. Additionally, existing studies on

autism and college transition often lack diversity in their participant populations, with many participants being White males. This raises questions about the transition experiences of students with autism of color from low-income communities.

This study sought to assess the experiences of a marginalized group regarding race, disability status, economic status, access to school services, and how these factors impact their access to information and resources about college transition programs. The literature suggests that systemic racism contributes to inequities in healthcare and education. Adopting critical race theory (CRT) as the study's theoretical framework makes it apparent that systemic racism is also a determinant of the insufficient allocation of services and resources to BIPOC individuals with HF ASD and low-SES transitioning to college. The study aimed to identify areas where this marginalized group requires assistance in the transition process and propose strategies to ensure their successful transition. An analysis of the narratives revealed seven themes: challenges, race and access to information, financial support and economic status, college and college transition, fears and concerns, parent and school support, and parent suggestions.

Interpretation of Findings

Challenges of the Lost

Findings revealed that the challenges experienced by the participants varied. Thus, the study could not provide a general overview of the challenges participants faced or continue to face. Elias and White (2018) found that parents with children with ASD who are transitioning to postsecondary education needed specific services and experienced challenges when teaching self-advocacy to their children. In the current study, one parent/caregiver participant asserted she benefited from having an advocate

assisting her, which is why she experienced minimal challenges. This highlights the benefits of educating parents about employing an advocate and advocating to provide support through the frustrating processes of ensuring their child with autism receives appropriate services.

Another challenge revealed by this qualitative study was balancing a child's desire for independence with the financial realities of college expenses, underscoring the dilemma parents face in meeting their child's aspirations while managing costs. One parent/caregiver participant said, "He wants his independence really bad and I have been there, making him realize how expensive it is." Elias and White (2018) report that adults with autism rarely reach complete independence as they are consistently in need of some support because they struggle with daily living skills.

Another finding uncovered in this theme was parents feeling unsupported and uninformed by the high school regarding college transition planning, indicating a need for more explicit guidance and communication from educational institutions. One parent/caregiver participant reported the lack of receipt of information regarding transition: "I also felt like probably I didn't get as much information about the transition. But I didn't feel as supported, I would say. We've always been playing catch-up to some degree."

In a study by Lee et al. (2023), the researchers found that parents lacked readiness and, as a result, there was an additional need to transition the parent. Moreover, "families transitioning to postsecondary education need to adapt to changing education services, student responsibilities and requirements, and legal protections; however, limited research exists on the first-hand experiences of students and their parents in the process"

(Madaus et al., 2022, p. 3). Furthermore, findings suggested encouraging the child to take responsibility and initiative in decision-making regarding college attendance while struggling to prepare and motivate them for this transition adequately. One parent/caregiver participant iterated, “So, I've been trying to get him prepared for that, like for him being able to take responsibility and initiative and see if he wants to go.” Madaus et al. (2022) asserts the importance of ASD individuals going to college to develop self-efficacy and self-disclosure skills to receive appropriate services from postsecondary institutions.

The Impact of Race on Access to Information and the Lost

The responses regarding the role of race in access to information reveal various perspectives. From the BIPOC individuals with ASD, findings suggested that some participants focus on personal experiences and do not consider broader societal context or systemic issues. One ASD participant explains, “Uh, I don't know. Honestly, I don't know. It's because I never experienced like throughout my whole life.” Looking at race in a broader context for ASD individuals may prove difficult because of their disability.

Responses from parents/caregivers vary, with some acknowledging systemic racism and its impact on access to information. The researcher found that their responses suggested a limited understanding of racism and its implications based on their individualized explanations of what they believe racism to be. Therefore, looking at race and its impact on the educational system, a broader concept may prove difficult to comprehend for these participants with ASD. When asked if race plays a role in access to information, one parent/caregiver believes it is not a question of race because, regardless of background, the same information is available: “I don't think race plays a part because

you know, people from different backgrounds can acquire the same information.” According to this participant, information and resources are available to everyone equally. They believe that regardless of race or economic status, all individuals have the same access to the information and resources they need.

Concerns are raised about schools’ prioritization of supporting transitions for lower-income students and those from marginalized communities. There is recognition of systemic barriers and disparities, including lack of support and resources in certain communities. Annamma et al. (2018) explained that issues of race, such as overrepresentation, academic disparities, and the school-to-prison pipeline, are overlooked by experts in the field of special education. Thus, a lack of research on such issues can halt progress in closing the gap of opportunities for this marginalized group. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework, this study aimed to identify weaknesses in the transition processes for marginalized groups and sought to demonstrate, to some extent, the role that race plays in influencing educational outcomes. Annamma et al. (2018) affirm, “applying CRT to education reveals pervasive inequities despite decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, intended to counter them” (p. 48). Overall, the responses highlight a complex interplay between race, socioeconomic status, and access to information within educational systems, with systemic racism being a significant factor.

Financial and Economic Status

Previous research has consistently highlighted the challenges faced by low-SES families in accessing crucial information concerning education, healthcare, and financial matters. Consequently, this lack of access often translates into difficulties in pursuing

higher education, as obtaining information about earning a college degree becomes a formidable task. Assari (2018) sheds light on how structural racism and differential treatment exacerbate this issue by limiting access to the opportunity structure for minorities, thereby hindering their ability to leverage educational resources to break the cycle of poverty. “As a result, minorities may have more difficulties leveraging their human capital resources, such as education, to escape poverty, compared to the majority groups” (Assari, 2018, p. 1).

Nonetheless, this demographic’s perspectives on financial and economic status exhibit variability. One parent/caregiver participant articulated that within low-income families, the mere mention of “college” evokes apprehension due to concerns about exorbitant tuition fees, which deter them from encouraging their children to pursue higher education. This observation underscores the glaring absence of awareness regarding financial aid programs such as grants, scholarships, and state-funded initiatives.

Another parent/caregiver participant posited that irrespective of economic standing, the necessary information exists, but the pivotal factor lies in the level of parental engagement in accessing it. This insight emphasizes the critical role that parental involvement plays in navigating the complex terrain of educational opportunities. Furthermore, one parent/caregiver participant highlighted the profound influence of economic status on familial culture and decision-making processes, suggesting that those with more significant financial means may cultivate a fundamentally different approach to life’s challenges, including accessing educational opportunities: “If you can afford it, the culture in your home is different.” While the barriers to accessing information about higher education persist for low-SES families, findings reveal a spectrum of viewpoints

within this group regarding the role of financial status, parental involvement, and cultural influences in shaping attitudes toward pursuing college education. Overall, participants in this study generally acknowledge the significant role economic status plays in shaping access to information and resources for transition planning. Specifically, concerns are raised regarding the perceptions of lower-income parents who often view college as unattainable due to financial constraints, underscoring the imperative to broaden their understanding of postsecondary options. Not surprisingly, studies suggest that students with autism from families with high socioeconomic status are more likely to go to college (Alverson et al., 2015). As in other areas, there was a consensus among parent/caregiver participants on the importance of parental involvement and advocacy in navigating the transition process, with some attributing limitations in resources to a lack of parental engagement.

Additionally, the researcher observed the impact of economic disparities on educational environments, highlighting implications for the support and opportunities available to students in lower-income communities. Affordability emerges as a key factor shaping family values and decisions, with participants acknowledging the resilience and determination exhibited by families facing financial challenges.

The Truth About College Transition

Transition from high school to college is difficult, whether neurotypical or neurodivergent. Leaving high school means leaving friends and educators like teachers, brace advisors, and guidance counselors. It is the start of increased responsibility while slowly emerging into adulthood. This experience is both exciting and frightening at the same time. For young adults with autism, navigating through this experience can be

exponentially challenging. Their difficulty with social interaction can add stress to an already overwhelming situation. ASD individuals struggle with relationship building and reading verbal and non-verbal cues, and patterns of thinking can be obsessive or limited (Elias & White, 2018; Geller & Greenberg, 2009).

The responses from participants with HF ASD regarding their college plans showcase a remarkable range of engagement levels and preparedness. Firstly, one participant is actively enrolled in the college enrollment process, with classes selected and enrollment imminent, supported by actively involved parent/caregiver assistance in navigating financial aid and selecting a suitable college. Conversely, another participant voiced uncertainty and frustration towards their college plans, feeling unsupported and misunderstood by parents/caregivers and high school educators, expressing a desire for vocational guidance aligned with their filmmaking interests. Despite these challenges, they continued to strive for their goals. Another participant confirmed their current attendance at American College, demonstrating clarity and commitment to their college education despite encountering struggles in certain subjects.

Meanwhile, a parent/caregiver participant expressed uncertainty about their child's college plans, indicating a lack of clarity or direction in their child's educational journey. Lastly, another participant affirms their intention to attend college without providing further details, suggesting a level of intention but unclear preparedness or engagement with the college process. Overall, the responses vary significantly, emphasizing the importance of tailored support and resources to ensure a successful transition to postsecondary education for individuals with HF ASD.

Fears and Concerns

Both students with HF ASD and the parents/caregivers were asked about fears and concerns about going to college. Students' attitudes towards attending college vary widely. While some expressed a blend of fear and excitement, acknowledging the novelty of the experience alongside the potential for personal growth and independence, others radiated confidence and readiness, citing their eagerness to be independent. However, amidst this spectrum of outlooks, one student vocalized apprehensions about failure and its potential financial repercussions. This individual articulated anxiety regarding academic performance and its looming consequences. They highlighted the multifaceted emotions and concerns accompanying the college transition process, expected during a significant life-changing event. These challenges underscore the need for educators and professionals to provide tailored support and resources to help individuals with HF ASD navigate these transitions.

Findings suggested that parents of neurodivergent transition-aged students expressed concerns about bullying and social interactions in the college setting while also highlighting confidence in their children's adaptability and the support they receive from siblings. Common worries among parents included financial aspects and their children's ability to navigate independence, reflecting broader anxieties about the transition to adulthood for neurodivergent individuals. Parents/caregivers desire their children to be able to fit in forcing them to balance nurturing their independence while encouraging social interaction in the college setting.

In addition to fears and concerns about the anticipated transition to college, there is also the reality that parents/caregivers must have "The Talk" with their BIPOC sons

with HF ASD to prepare them for possible encounters with law enforcement. One response highlighted the importance of continuing to have the conversation frequently:

I started by reminding him about our discussions of racism and remnants of that spilled into the society where Black and brown males are somewhat targeted by others even since of our race as also talked about colorism. We discussed in different instances almost weekly among other issues that plague teens in America at large and that some people view other people differently and stereotype especially young Black males over the years.

Parental and High School Support

The feedback from individuals with HF ASD regarding the support received from parents/caregivers and high schools during the transition to college highlighted several key points. Firstly, parents/caregivers play a pivotal role in providing a wide range of support, including financial assistance, practical guidance, reassurance, and training in independent living skills, underscoring their importance in facilitating their children's growth and development.

However, responses regarding the helpfulness of high schools in sharing information about college varied, with some expressing uncertainty or dissatisfaction with the level of support received. Findings suggested that discrepancies in support levels may stem from differences in resources and programs offered by public and private schools, emphasizing potential disparities in access to transition services for students with disabilities. These responses emphasize the significance of parental support in navigating the transition to college for BIPOC individuals with HF ASD and suggest the need for

more comprehensive and tailored transition services from high schools to ensure successful outcomes for neurodivergent students.

Implications of Findings to Theory

This study employed constructivism as the conceptual framework. Although there are several perspectives on constructivism, the study used two theories that are more applicable to the research question. The first theory was based on Jean Piaget's cognitive constructivism (1929), and the second theory was Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural constructivism (1962). Constructivism encompasses learning as a process, and knowledge is constructed from culture, social interactions, and experiences. These components are then processed and organized to make sense of the learning environment (Kouicem & Kelkoul, 2016). Piaget's theory centered on the idea that learning happens in stages as the individual develops cognitively. "For Piaget, every act an individual makes are cognitively organized, and then adaptation provides the means for change" (Kouicem & KelKoul, 2016, p. 67). Lev Vygotsky's theory proposes that individual cognitive development stems from social interaction and cultural environments. His famous "Zone of Proximal Development" is commonly applied to educational techniques. "Vygotsky doubtlessly made a significant and lasting contribution to how we think about human cognition and intelligence" (Nardo, 2021, p. 336). Constructivism posits that learning is a process where knowledge is constructed from culture, social interactions, and experiences, which are then processed and organized to make sense of the learning environment (Kouicem & Kelkoul, 2016).

Concerning the findings in this study, when asked about race, the participants' perspective was personal rather than based on a broader worldview. BIPOC individuals

with HF HSD reported that they did not think race played a role in access to information, citing limited personal experience on this issue. From Piaget's perspective, these HF ASD participants struggle to process, organize, and adapt to broader issues like race. However, from Vygotsky's perspective, the lack of personal experience with racial issues may hinder their ability to construct and interpret knowledge about the issue.

Conversely, the opinions of parents and caregivers about race and access to information varied. One believed that race did not impact their access to information, asserting that it depends on the individual's initiative to seek answers. Others viewed race as a systemic issue that affects access to information and resources depending on one's background. These varied responses exemplify constructivism, highlighting how environmental and sociocultural interactions influence learning.

Findings regarding fears and concerns also varied. The HF ASD participants demonstrated some fears, which were overshadowed by excitement and eagerness to have independence as they begin to transition or have already transitioned to college. However, the parents/caregivers declared fears and concerns for their children as they begin a new stage in their lives. These parent/caregiver participants realized their child would be in a new environment compared to what they had been accustomed to. They will be in situations where they will have to interact with other people, perhaps on a larger scale, like doing group projects with their peers.

Additionally, these HF ASD students will have to learn how to effectively communicate with their professors, academic advisors, and peers. They will have to learn how to defend themselves without parental guidance while attempting to understand

social cues, both verbal and nonverbal. Most importantly, in connection to constructivism, they will have to learn how to navigate in a world that will not always be receptive to them as BIPOC individuals with HF ASD.

Limitations

The study faced several limitations in exploring the lived experiences of BIPOC HF ASD individuals from low-income families transitioning to college or who have already transitioned. Despite making multiple efforts, the researcher received minimal assistance from gatekeepers. Additionally, the researcher desired more detailed insights from participants on the topic of race but recognized potential barriers such as the education level of parents and the limited speech capabilities of students with HF ASD. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledged a potential personal bias as a mother of a BIPOC HF ASD transition-aged male, which might have influenced her reluctance to push for further elaboration on participants' responses.

Recommendations and Implications of Practice

Parent Suggestions

Improving how educators deliver information and services to facilitate transitioning to college requires input from parents/caregivers. Parental/caregiver feedback is instrumental in customizing services for transition-aged students with special needs. This includes our BIPOC families who live in low-income communities. Insights from this marginalized group may indicate the need for more comprehensive services and resources. The researcher posed questions regarding how educators can improve provisions for sharing information about college and college transition.

Parents/caregivers were asked how educators can help parents/caregivers learn about transition support services:

I think I would like to have the college come to the school. It's a perfect way to have talks and just talk about college and services and the different options available to them.

I think all the teachers in the high school should at least have some knowledge of what it's going to take to get to the next level because I think they know what it is to complete the grade. But to make sure they meet requirements.

I worry a little bit because at college I don't think a lot of kids realize and they don't prep them well. College is not like high school. College is a whole new level, and extremely hard.

Coming to the school and speaking about the college program in advance for me, I needed to know in advance when he was in 9th grade. They (high schools) said they stopped telling 9th graders because it's a waste of time. Make sure they know a little and then revisit. Have meetings about it with parents and revisit it once a year, maybe.

I think it's more about the resources, the connections, you know, any information you can get from the schools, the libraries. Sometimes it's just, you know, word of mouth. When a parent is going through the same thing, you just kind of piggyback off each other too, you know, just share information that we might need to know. That support helps, the parents supporting each other helps because you don't feel like you're alone. Each one, teach one.

Many of these responses from these parents/caregivers suggested the necessity for parent-to-parent support and improved dissemination of information about the kinds of resources available to these students. One participant asserted that high schools are not properly informing the students about the rigorous coursework that college entails. Another participant proposed that high school teachers need training on knowing the prerequisites for college programs. The responses from these participants implied that high schools may be falling short of providing comprehensive resources and information about college and transitioning to a postsecondary institution.

Parents/caregivers with transition-aged youth experience added stress because educators fail to realize that the parent/caregiver is also being transitioned; thus, “families transitioning to postsecondary education need to adapt to changing educational services, student responsibilities and requirements, and legal protections” (Madaus et al., 2022, p. 3). Families need high schools to provide information sessions at the beginning of the student's senior year or earlier. Educators need to be intentional when disseminating information about available resources and programs to this marginalized group. While school districts send email notifications regarding virtual sessions on transition, the parent/caregiver participants in this study were unaware of the district sessions. More than likely, these emails ended up in a spam folder or were easily overlooked. The intentionality of educators is lacking, and these BIPOC families are feeling the brunt of it.

To determine the relevance of the role colleges and universities plan in this process, participants were asked: What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism experience a successful transition to uncover what

parents/caregivers need to help their child transition successfully? Responses revealed the following:

Support system. Even as far as transportation services, maybe that can continue as far as college. That would be helpful for a 'buddy up' program.

I think for students under the spectrum, most of them always respond well to the structure or information or ideas about the structure of certain things and just kind of an introduction like a pre-introduction to this information. You know what I mean so that you can start to set up that mental process. I think it takes longer to connect, you know, it's pragmatic. Why does this make sense? It takes a lot longer to connect and to see why these small things that we do lead to this independent life that you're going to live. I know it might be very difficult, but like just the prep. Just let them know this is what you're going to experience in this meeting.

Tell them what the outcome should be. This is what you're trying to do at the end here. You're going to find a school that you like. Everybody must come up with one place that they like, you know.

I think this is if I understand the question is that those types of places should be getting with the high schools to find out who these kids are and getting information to the parents. I haven't heard anything. So, I also think that all these places have packets of information though, you know, some people would rather look at that just to go through that. I guess their thought is that it falls on the parent, you know. So, they've done their due diligence, they've sent the e-mail, and then nothing else, they don't follow up. 'Well, I didn't hear from this parent,

let me follow up again.’ It goes back to like they just don’t care. You know what I mean?

To make sure his accommodation is fulfilled, you know that his accommodation is in writing, and they’re being held accountable. I had to learn. There’s no help, thank God he was already enrolled with the VR before college. They had to create the 504-plan based on their report, which to me is more accurate than the IEP.

You know, like some of the resources that the kids do have in high school, make sure they still have, you know, availability to some of those resources in college. So, they can slowly transition to it. You know it’s a new beginning. You don’t want everything to just come up as, oh here, take the necessary steps to just guide them through, make it easier.

Participant responses expressed the need for continued support from educators.

The first participant emphasized additional support when it comes to providing transportation and continuing to have a buddy-up program through college. The second response emphasized that students with autism benefit from having structures that colleges should try to reinforce for them. In addition, while they are still in high school, educators should clearly emphasize the expectations and outcomes at their IEP meetings.

This can be beneficial as students transition to adulthood and lead an independent life.

The third response proposes that postsecondary institutions and high schools should collaborate and reach out to students who need their services while ensuring parents are properly informed. Postsecondary institutions must collaborate with high schools to provide information sessions about the significant changes these students are about to experience and offer strategies to achieve a successful college career.

Additionally, this participant alleges that high schools must engage in adequate follow-up practices, asserting that correspondence often ends there if parents respond to emails or initial outreach attempts. While high schools in low-income districts are severely understaffed and under-resourced, the issue of inadequate transition planning can be remedied by scheduling mandatory transition planning sessions that include a level of accountability. Another response emphasizes the necessity for accountability and the lack of support. Lastly, the final response suggests gradually guiding this population to the next stage of their lives. Part of the problem is that educators must communicate a clear timeline of when parents should begin preparing for their children's college transition. This raises important questions: When should these conversations begin, and what level of commitment is required from parents and teachers?

Research Summary

Overall, the purpose of this study was to give voice to these BIPOC families from low-income communities. The BIPOC HF ASD students of this study felt supported by their parents, had mixed feelings about attending college, and demonstrated limitations on expressing issues of race. The parents/caregivers of this group believed there was a lack of support from the high schools and inadequate dissemination of information about transition planning. Regarding race and economic status, parent/caregiver participants believe race is systemic. Although they have not experienced personal instances of racial discrimination against their child, they acknowledge the importance of preparing their child for encounters with law enforcement because of their child's race and disability. Many parents/caregivers recognize that economic status impacts access to information and resources. This highlights the disparities faced by low-income families in securing

adequate support and opportunities for their children. However, there was an outlier perspective amongst the parent/caregiver participants. This participant maintained that race and economic status do not have any impact, asserting all the information is out there. Still, the responsibility for obtaining it relies heavily upon the individual.

Conclusion

This study revealed the significant failure of educators to support this marginalized group during a crucial period in their lives. For BIPOC individuals with HF ASD to successfully transition to college, an "all hands-on deck" approach is essential. This approach will ensure students transition smoothly and persist in their academic journey to obtain their college degree. Thus, these students will be able to become productive citizens in their communities and establish a quality of life they and their families can be proud of. The bottom line is clear: to listen, guide, and support these families every step of the way. In addition, providing individually tailored support for these students to help guide them through the onboarding process. Only through such dedication and comprehensive efforts can we overcome the barriers these students face and help them achieve their full potential. Moreover, providing these students with tailored support toward their postsecondary goals will promote a successful academic journey.

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Appendix A

Chair Agreement & Committee Member Identification

Student Name: Aiyeesha Hill

Cohort: 21 Expected Graduation Date:

08/01/2024

Topic of interest (if applicable):

Chair: Dr. Jennifer Lesh

Member: Dr. Paul Moore

Outside Reader: Dr. Jenny Trocchio

I understand that I must contact my chair at least monthly, to discuss
dissertation progress. Furthermore, I will follow all ethical and
professional expectations as required by Lynn University.

_____ Date _____

_____ Date _____

Student Signature

Chair Signature

_____ Date _____

Member Signature

_____ Date _____

Outside Reader Signature

APPENDIX B

Dissertation Checklist

| <i>STEPS TO COMPLETE</i> | <i>COMPLETE</i> | <i>ANTICIPATED COMPLETION</i> |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| DiP PROPOSAL | | |
| Complete Introduction (Ch. I) EDU 801 | x | |
| Complete Literature Review (Ch. II) EDU 708 | x | |
| Complete Methodology (Ch. III) EDU 704/EDU 706 | x | |
| Write Intro Pages (e.g. Abstract) | x | |
| Submit Initial Proposal to Chair | x | |
| Revise and Resubmit | x | |
| Presentation | x | 05/15/2023 |
| Revise and Resubmit | | |
| PROPOSAL APPROVED | | |
| IRB | | |
| Pass Lynn University Protecting Human Subjects Training | x | |
| Obtain Instruments and Measures | x | |
| Draft Consent and/or Assent Forms | x | |
| Complete Submission Form | x | |
| Obtain Chair Approval & Signature | x | |
| Submit to IRB | 10/23/2023 | 11/06/2023 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------|
| Revise and Resubmit | | |
| IRB APPROVAL | | 11/06/2023 |
| FINAL REPORT | | |
| Collect Data | X | |
| Analyze Data | X | |
| Implementation | X | |
| Evaluation | X | |
| Finalize APA Style | X | |
| Finalize Intro Pages (e.g., Abstract) | X | |
| Complete & Finalize Reference Section | X | |
| Finish Appendices | X | |
| Change First 3 Chapters to Past Tense | X | |
| Submit to Chair | X | |
| Revise and Resubmit | | |
| Final Presentation | | 06/27/2024 |
| Revise and Resubmit | | 07/10/2024 |
| DISSERTATION APPROVED | | |

APPENDIX C

Gatekeeper Approvals

Letter to Gatekeepers:

To whom it may concern:

My name is Aiyeesha Hill, and I am currently a doctoral student at Lynn University. I am writing to speak with a representative from your organization to receive your approval regarding recruiting your members to participate in my research study. The interviews with the participants are strictly confidential, and the information disclosed will be secured.

My research is a study on Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) individuals with high-functioning autism who have already transitioned or are about to transition out of high school to enroll in college. I hope to understand the lived experiences from the student/individual and his/her parents/caregivers' perspectives. I aim to determine what improvements need to be made so that individuals and families can experience an effortless transition to college as these students embark on a new academic journey.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kindest regards,

Aiyeesha Hill, MPA

Lynn University

acandelaria@email.lynn.edu

954-825-5848

Gatekeeper Approval: Dynamic Outcomes for Exceptional Students (DOES)

Andria Pitterson-Powell <apowell@dynamicoutcomes.org>

To:

Aiyeesha Hill

Cc:

Aiyeesha Candelaria <acandelaria@email.lynn.edu>

Mon 7/10/2023 1:33 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Broward College. DO NOT click links or open attachments unless you are expecting the information and recognize the sender.

Aiyeesha,

Congratulations on your accomplishments.

You have our approval to reach out to our members.

All the best. **Andria Pitterson-Powell, MBA,**

BBA, B.S.Ed.

Executive Director

Dynamic Outcomes for Exceptional Students

Phone: 561-801-3209

Email: apowell@dynamicoutcomes.org

www.dynamicoutcomes.org

www.linkedin.com/in/andria-pitterson-powell-b7082b19

Gatekeeper Approval: Center for Independent Living (CIL)

From: Brian Johnson <BJohnson@cilbroward.org>

Sent: Tuesday, November 7, 2023 3:39 PM

To: Aiyeesha Hill <ahill@broward.edu>; Denisse Martinez <dmartinez@cilbroward.org>; Robert Sawyer <rsawyer@cilbroward.org>

Cc: acandelaria@email.lynn.edu

Subject: RE: Participants Need

Good afternoon Aiyeesha,

So great to hear from you. While Denisse no longer works in our youth department, I am certain that Rob, and his other teammates can circulate the information and help find individuals that will be interested in participating in this. Thanks for thinking of us and I am sure Rob will be in touch with any questions that he may have and to send you some participants.

Sincerely,

Brian Johnson, Chief Program Officer



4800 N State Road 7, # F102

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33319

(954) 722-6400 Ext. 130 Direct Call or Text: (954) 547-8771***NEW**

(954) 320-6860 VP VOIP, Sorenson Communications

Fax (954) 735-1958 bjohnson@cilbroward.org - www.cilbroward.org

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, The Center for Independent Living (CIL) will not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities in its services, programs, hiring, or activities. To request an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication or a reasonable accommodation to participate please contact the CIL directly.

Accommodations: will be provided at no cost to the requestor. Requests should be made **(at least)** 72 hours in advance.

NOTICE: The items included with this E-mail (including attachments) are confidential in nature and contains information intended for a specific individual(s) and purpose. Any inappropriate use, distribution or copying is strictly prohibited. If you receive this E-mail in error, please notify the sender and immediately delete the message.

Appendix D

Email to Participants

Sample Email to Participants:

Dear _____:

My name is Aiyeesha Hill and I am currently a doctoral student at Lynn University. I am writing you in hopes of recruiting you as a participant of my research study.

Why you?

My research is a study on BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism who have already transitioned or are about to transition out of high school enrolling in college. I am hoping to understand the lived experiences from both the student/individual and his/her parents/caregivers' perspectives. My goal is to determine what improvements need to be made so that individuals and families like yourselves can experience an effortless transition to college as they embark on a new academic journey.

The interview can be held either in-person, remotely via Zoom or Teams, or phone. This interview is strictly confidential and the information disclosed will be secured. If you are interested in being a participant, a follow-up email will be sent with an informal consent form attached. Once I have received your signed consent, I will reach out to you to schedule an appointment.

If you have any questions feel free to reach out to me at (954) 826-5848 or email me at acandelaria@email.lynn.edu.

I want to truly thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to meet with you soon.

Kindest regards,

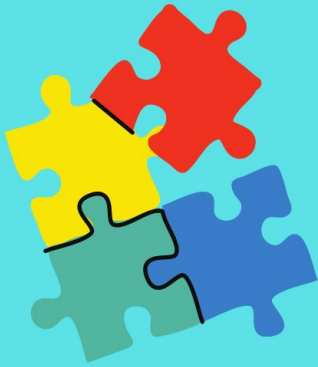
Aiyeesha Hill, MPA

Lynn University

Phone: 954-825-5848

Appendix E

Participants Needed Flyer

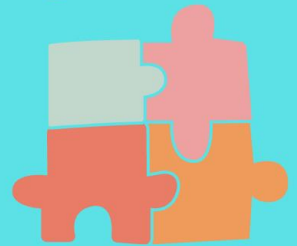


Participants Needed! Please share your story with me.

Doctoral student conducting research on BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism who are transitioning or have transitioned to college:

Eligibility Criteria:

- Male and female, LGBTQIA+
- Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American
- Ages 18-24
- Diagnosed with high-functioning autism
- Parents of students with HF ASD- Single, Separated, Divorced, Widowed, Married
- Median household income 20-49K
- Families who receive state benefits like SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid



For more information email:
Aiyeesha Hill MPA, acandelaria@email.lynn.edu

Appendix F

Informed Consent

Parent/Caregiver Consent

Informed Consent Document I

Note: This document will be provided to participants when they initially volunteer for the study. If requested, it will be provided in Spanish and French or translated into the preferred primary language.

Lynn University

THIS DOCUMENT SHALL ONLY BE USED TO PROVIDE AUTHORIZATION FOR VOLUNTARY CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: Lost in Transition: A Qualitative Narrative Study on the Lived Experiences of BIPOC Individuals with High-functioning Autism Transitioning to College

Project IRB Number:

Lynn University 3601 N. Military Trail Boca Raton, Florida 33431

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANT:

You are being asked to participate in my research study. Please read this form carefully. This form provides you with information about the study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Aiyeesha Hill at acandelaria@email.lynn.edu. You can ask questions before, during, or after participating in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism from low socioeconomic communities transitioning to college.

PROCEDURES: You will be asked to meet with the researcher in-person, remotely, or by phone. The session will be recorded and will take up to one hour. You will be asked to answer 10-15 questions regarding your life experience and asked how you think processes can be improved. You have the freedom to withdraw from the session at any time without penalty.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORT: You or your parent may experience discomfort when you answer questions about yourself and your parent's experience. Please note that your discomfort matters to the researcher. You can pause or back out of the study at any point in the research.

REPORTING OF ILLEGAL ACTIVITY: As a doctoral student of Lynn University, the investigator on this research project, Aiyeesha Hill, is required to report any illegal activity or any activity that violates Title IX to the Title IX coordinator on campus. Please select the statement below to acknowledge the reporting procedure. You will not be eligible for participation in this study unless you acknowledge this statement:

I acknowledge that the investigators on this project must report any illegal activity or Title IX-relevant activity on my social media profile to Lynn's Title IX coordinator.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: This study will allow you to discover what it is like to participate in a research study. The results of this study may benefit society as a whole in the form of increased knowledge of this subject. Furthermore, these questions are stimulating and enjoyable.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS: If you choose to participate in this study, you will automatically be entered into a raffle drawing to receive a \$50 Amazon gift card. Winners of the raffle will be informed upon the conclusion of data collection.

ANONYMITY/CONFIDENTIALITY: Participation in this study is voluntary, and selecting "I consent" and providing your signature at the bottom of this document will imply your informed consent to participate. Your responses to the questions from the interview in this study are confidential. Your names will be removed from your completed questionnaire immediately following the study and placed in a secure location separate from your questionnaire. Only the primary investigator will have access to this information. All are written, recorded, and downloaded. data will be stored on encrypted external hard drives with access restricted to only the primary investigator. When this research is completed, the results will be revealed in a presentation at Lynn University. And all data will be permanently destroyed. No names will be disclosed when the research results are reported to the academic community. Your responses are strictly confidential and will be disclosed only as the law requires.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You can choose whether to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. You may stop participating in this research project at any time. Withdrawing from the study will not affect your entry into the raffle drawing for a \$50 gift card.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS/ACCESS TO CONSENT FORM: Any further questions you have about this study or your participation in it, either now or any time in the future, will be answered by Aiyeesha Hill at (754) 252-8893 at acandelaria@email.lynn.edu. Or, the chair of the dissertation and chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Jennifer Lesh, jlesh@lynn.edu

AUTHORIZATION FOR VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read and understand this consent form. I have been allowed to ask questions, and all my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I have been assured that any future questions that may arise will be answered. I understand that all aspects of this project will be carried out in the strictest of confidence and in a manner in which my rights as a human subject are protected. I have been informed of the risks and benefits. I have been informed in advance as to what my task(s) will be and what procedures will be followed. I voluntarily choose to participate. I know that I can withdraw this consent to participate at any time without penalty or prejudice. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

I have read this consent form and consent to participate in this study.

I DO NOT consent to participate in this study.

First Name (printed clearly):

Last name (Printed Clearly):

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Date of IRB Approval: November 6th, 2023

ASD Participant Informed Consent

Informed Consent Document I

Note: This document will be provided to participants when they initially volunteer for the study.

Lynn University

THIS DOCUMENT SHALL ONLY BE USED TO PROVIDE AUTHORIZATION FOR VOLUNTARY CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: Lost in Transition: A Qualitative Narrative Study on the Lived Experiences of BIPOC Individuals with High-functioning Autism Transitioning to College

Project IRB Number:

Lynn University 3601 N. Military Trail Boca Raton, Florida 33431

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANT: You are being asked to participate in our research study. Please read this form carefully or the researcher can read this out loud to accommodate. This form provides you with information about the study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Aiyeesha Hill at acandelaria@email.lynn.edu or call 754-252-8893. You can ask questions before, during, or after participating in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals with high-functioning autism from low socioeconomic communities transitioning to college.

PROCEDURES: You will be asked to meet with the researcher in-person or remotely. You will be asked to answer 7 questions regarding your life experience and asked how you think processes can be improved for individuals such as yourself transitioning to college. The participation will take up to 2 hours of allotted time for the initial interview.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORT: You may experience discomfort when you answer questions about yourself and your experience. Please note that your discomfort matters to the researcher. You can pause or back out of the study at any point during the interview.

REPORTING OF ILLEGAL ACTIVITY: As a student at Lynn University, Aiyeesha Hill, the investigator on this research project, is required to report any illegal activity or

any activity that violates Title IX to the Title IX coordinator on campus. Please select the statement below to acknowledge the reporting procedure. You will not be eligible for participation in this study unless you acknowledge this statement:

I acknowledge that the investigator on this project must report any illegal activity or Title IX-relevant activity on my social media profile to Lynn’s Title IX coordinator.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: This study will allow you to discover what it is like to participate in a research study. The results of this study may benefit society in the form of increased knowledge of this subject. Furthermore, these questions are stimulating and enjoyable.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS: If you choose to participate in this study, you will automatically be entered into a raffle drawing to receive a \$50 Amazon gift card. Winners of the raffle will be informed upon the conclusion of data collection.

ANONYMITY/CONFIDENTIALITY: Participation in this study is voluntary and selecting “I consent” and providing your signature at the bottom of this document will imply your informed consent to participate. Your responses to the questions from the interview in this study are confidential. Your name will be removed from your completed questionnaire immediately following the study and placed in a secure location separate from your questionnaire. Only the primary investigator will have access to this information. Data will be stored on encrypted external hard drives with access restricted to only the primary investigator for no more than a year after the data is collected and assessed. When this research is completed, the results will be revealed in a presentation at Lynn University. It will not be used for any other research articles or publications. No names will be disclosed when the research results are reported to the academic community. Your responses are strictly confidential and will be disclosed only as the law requires.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You can choose whether to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. You may stop participating in this research project at any time. Withdrawing from the study will not affect your entry into the raffle drawing for a \$50 gift card.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS/ACCESS TO CONSENT FORM: Any further questions you have about this study or your participation in it, either now or any time in the future, will be answered by Aiyeesha Hill, (XXX) XXX-XXXX or via email at acandelaria@email.lynn.edu. In case you have additional concerns or questions, please contact our IRB Chair, Erika Grodzki, Ph.D. at XXXX@lynn.edu or (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

AUTHORIZATION FOR VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read and understand this consent form. I permit my parents/caregiver to discuss information about me as they see fit. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been assured that any future questions that may arise will be answered. I understand that all aspects of this project will be carried out in the strictest of confidence, and in a way my rights as a human subject are protected. I have been informed of the risks and benefits. I have been informed in advance as to what my task(s) will be and what procedures will be followed. I voluntarily choose to participate. I know that I can withdraw this consent to participate at any time without penalty or prejudice. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

I have read this consent form and consent to participate in this study.

I have read this consent form and allow my parents/caregiver to answer questions about me.

I DO NOT consent to participate in this study.

First Name (printed clearly):

Last name (Printed Clearly):

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Date of IRB Approval: November 6th, 2023

Letter of Acknowledgement of Explanation of Informed Consent:

ASD Participant:

The researcher has read and clearly explained the Informed Consent form. I understand clearly and wish to proceed with this study.

Please sign: _____ Date: _____

Parent or Caregiver:

The researcher has read and clearly explained the Informed Consent form. I understand clearly and wish to proceed with this study.

Please sign: _____ Date: _____

IRB Approval Date: November 6th, 2023

Appendix G

Interview Questions

Student Questions:

1. What has been your biggest challenge in making the transition to college?
2. What supports in HS would have been helpful for you in making your decision to go to college?
3. What role did your parent or caregiver play in your transition to college?
4. How helpful was or is the high school in sharing information about college?
5. What fears do or did you have about applying to college?
6. Do you believe race played a role in your access to information?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Parent/Caregiver Questions:

1. What is your household income?
2. Do you currently receive assistance from the state such as Medicaid (Health Insurance), SNAP (food stamps), temporary cash assistance (TCA)?
3. What problems did you encounter when helping your child transition to college?
4. How can educators help parents/caregivers with low-income status learn about transition support services?
5. Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack resources about transition planning? Why?
6. Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?
7. How can educators assist parents/caregivers in the decision-making process when choosing a college or university?

8. What can high schools do to improve transition planning for students with autism from low-income communities graduating out of K-12(high school)?
9. What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism from low-income communities experience a successful transition?
10. What fears do or did you have about your child attending college?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Appendix H

Interview Transcripts

Interview 1:

ASD Student:

Question 1: How old are you?

Answer: 21

Question 2: Are you going to, or do you plan on going to college?

Answer: I am going to college. I'm enrolled. I start in a week. I already have classes picked out.

Question 3: How did/ does your parent or caregiver support you during the transition after HS?

Answer: She helps me with financial aid and picks the type of college I am going to. I am going to a technical college. I am going to McFadden.

Question 4: Was your high school helpful in sharing information about college?

Answer: Don't know. Not sure.

During this question, the parent interjected and said the following:

"I was working there also like I wanted him to go to technical high school since 10th grade and the ESE coordinator didn't give me any help. Which was kind of like where me and her got off to a bad start because I worked there, and I was asking her for information about my child. She didn't give me the information, so then I ended up hiring an advocate. So, I end up hiring the advocate I end up meeting the job coach there and I end up meeting the higher-ups who help me with the transitional part. I asked her for the information. She didn't give it to me, you know. She wanted him to stay in the high

school so they could keep the money, which is not good for him. Like a lot of. Students who are older, you know, yes, that we have the pass program, we know the department where I work. But some students don't need the pass program. He stayed in senior year, being bored, taking all these extra PE classes”

Question 5: What fears do, or did you have about going to college?

Answer: Nervous, it's new. I don't know anyone. But excited too.

Question 6: Do you believe race played a role in your access to information?

Answer: Uh, I don't know. Honestly, I don't know. It's because I never experienced like throughout my whole life.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I'm pretty excited about it. The orientation was pretty good. I met an instructor at orientation and the guy said he's going to tell us about his safety, about safety and stuff. I'm taking a mechanic program.

Parent/Caregiver:

Question 1: What is your household income?

Answer: 32,000

Question 2: What is your marital status?

Answer: Single

Question 3: Do you currently receive state benefits such as Medicaid (Health Insurance), SNAP (food stamps), or temporary cash assistance (TCA)?

Answer: Yes. I get food stamps. Medicaid, SSI and subsidy for adoption for Darryl. So, Darryl is not my biological son. He's my brother's kid. I adopted him, him and his siblings.

Question 4: What challenges did you encounter when helping your child transition to college or what challenges do you anticipate your child will experience as they transition to college?

Answer: For me was because he is adopted. I know that they pay for the, college and in College in Florida, you know, but then he also has the VR. So the VR pays too. And then he has financial aid, so the financial aid paid too. So I'm thinking, OK, if he got all these three. Is that like a whole? I had to ask him several times. Like, is that a large sum or is it only or they're all the same. I had to figure it out. They're all government, so. You only get one like.

Well, the challenge was I really didn't face a lot of challenges because he really had a lot of great support because they know I don't play at his school. I have an advocate, they were. And most of it he did on his own. And it happened so fast, I didn't notice. Classes started in January. I thought he was going to start in the summer, and I didn't know he was really going to get in. The FASFA went through in two seconds like. Everything just happened so fast, so I wasn't really. I was prepared, but the people at school were great because they already knew this was going to happen. After all, it was in his IEP plan. That was his post outcome, what it called a postsecondary school level. This was already a part of his IEP plan.

The pass program, you know, going to deferment, deferment program there. So that's where the 21-year-olds go and then the IEP already stated that he was going to go

to the mechanic program there. So that was already a part of his postsecondary plan. So they already had him meeting everybody there at the technical college.

Question 5: How can educators help parents/caregivers learn about transition support services?

Answer: Coming to the school and speaking about the college program in advance for me, I needed to know in advance when Darryl was in 9th grade. They said they stopped telling 9th grade because it's a waste of time. Make sure they know a little and then revisit. Have meetings about it with parents and revisit it once a year, maybe.

Question 6: Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack of resources for transition planning? Why?

Answer: Yes, I feel like a lot of parents don't see what the students can do now that there are parents who believe that their child can't do a lot of things. They don't see that their children are capable of doing so much, you know? Parents don't think their children can go to college. Because word college is very challenging and it's not just college. They forget there are technical programs, there's certificate programs. But so, when you say college, they're thinking of the university part. They're not thinking about a technical education. So we must maybe we need to change the word college and think about it more.

Question 7: Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?

Answer: I will say yes. Because I know the general truth, you know. And I feel like I did, you know, I got that with Miss Bolin, in Darryl's 9th, 10th grade year that she played in my face. I'm not telling on her or anything. But they know. Yeah, they know who to play with. They know who to play with. They know who's educated, they know

the system. They don't tell parents anything because they know they're not going to search for the answer.

Question 8: How can educators better assist parents/caregivers in the decision-making process when choosing a college or university?

Miss Anna actually teaches the parents because she teaches the older students about transitioning. So, she makes sure the parents are involved. A lot of teachers don't care if they show up to the IEP meeting. Oh, well, they don't show up. No meeting.

Question 9: What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism experience a successful transition?

Answer: To make sure his accommodation is fulfilled, you know that his accommodations are in writing and they're being held as accommodation. I had to learn. There's no help, thank God he was already enrolled with the VR prior to the college. They had to create the 504 plan based on their report which to me, it's more accurate than the IEP.

Question 10: What fears do or did you have about your child attending college?

Answer: I fear a lot. I'm. I'm nervous. I am so nervous because I don't want no one to like, bully him. I don't want him to feel like he doesn't understand. And I want him to make sure that he's asking questions. I don't want him to feel like he can't raise his hand and say, hey, and I told him, make sure you. So, I just told him, like, make sure there's a tutor. And he's like, "What you mean?" I need a tutor. I was like when I was in college, I went to a tutor 3-4 or five days a week. And I'm like, you're going to need a tutor to ask about tutoring. He needs that push and I just want to make sure you download that app

that reads the book too. He needs someone to read it to him, so you know there's an app that reads the pages to you.

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I'm so proud of him. Like I knew it was coming because we had it set up. So because everything was already planned into the ISP, the teachers and the specialists at McFadden knew that when the dates pulled up and he's transitioning because he no longer qualifies for our pass program the next class was starting in January I, which I forgot about. I thought he was starting the summer. He'll finish the school year out. And then start College in the summer. That's what in my mind was because you know. But they said no. They waited for January. They already started the paperwork from him.

Interview 2:

ASD Student:

Question 1: How old are you?

Answer: 18

Question 2: Do you plan on going to college?

Answer: Yes

Question 3: How did/ does your parent or caregiver support you during the transition after HS?

Yes

Question 4: Was your high school helpful in sharing information about college?

Answer: Mr. Adams, my teacher talks to us about college.

Question 5: What fears do, or did you have about going to college?

Answer: I mean yes. I have fears, but like I talked about it with my mom, like. It's part of life, so. I just got to go through it.

Question 6: Do you believe race played a role in your access to information?

Answer: I don't think so. It's like it doesn't matter who you are, as long as you do your best. It doesn't matter who you are, as long as you're doing your best. You can be successful.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: This year, like, I was scared, but my mom was by my side, and I wasn't like, we talked about it and everything.

Parent/Caregiver Questions:

Question 1: What is your household income?

Answer: 38,000

Question 2: What is your marital status?

Answer: Single

Question 3: Do you currently receive state benefits such as Medicaid (Health Insurance), SNAP (food stamps), or temporary cash assistance (TCA)?

Answer: None

Question 4: What challenges did you encounter when helping your child transition to college or what challenges do you anticipate your child will experience as they transition to college?

Answer: I haven't encountered anything yet. I do know that I have to prepare myself because we both know college is not for free. Whether it's vocational school technical school, or college. It doesn't matter. So, I think I'm, you know, my daughter is in college now. So, I'm kind of, I'm glad I've already kind of been through the process. So, I think my previous experience has already been, you know, quite helpful for me to kind of guide. I try to instill him and use the resources that I do have to, you know, prepare him for his journey of what's to come.

Question 5: How can educators help parents/caregivers learn about transition support services?

Answer: I think it's more of the resources, the connections, you know, any information you can get from the schools, the libraries. Sometimes it's just, you know, word of mouth. You know, when a parent that's saying your position is going through the same thing, you just kind of piggyback off each other too, you know, just share information that we might need to know, you know. That support helps, the parents supporting each other helps because you don't feel like you're alone.

Question 6: Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack of resources for transition planning? Why?

Answer: I don't think it really lacks. Not every parent is really involved, you know, in active, in their child's, you know, life, right I don't think it really lacks. I think it's more of. The upbringing and the parents, you know, it's a lot of parents that are not really involved and sometimes we have to be accountable. You know, we can't always, you know, just think that the resources and everything is just going to fall in our hands.

You know, I mean we have the want, we have to be the advocate. Each one, teach one. I think it's more of the individual.

Question 7: Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?

Answer: No. I don't think race plays a part because you know. People from different backgrounds can acquire the same information.

Question 8: How can educators better assist parents/caregivers in the decision-making process when choosing a college or university?

Answer: Um, I think I've had assistance with choosing because you still want to go, you know, look at the environment. Look at the facility. You know, look, you know at the. The location, sometimes even and you know, just know if that is. If you're making, making sure that your child is going to get the education he or she needs, you know, what kind of resources the college has, you know if they have any programs that they offer tutoring if they offer, you know, any, you know program. How are you gonna service my child? We all have a choice to decide what is best for our children.

Question 9: What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism experience a successful transition?

Answer: I would say it still kind of offers some of the classes you know like in their high school, you know bringing you know some of the classes kind of help them transition into college as well. You know, like some of the resources that the kids do have in high school, make sure they still have, you know, availability to some of those resources in college. So they can slowly transition to it. You know it's a new beginning. So you know you don't want everything to just come up as, oh here, you know more, you know, then take the necessary steps to just guide them through, make it easier.

Question 10: What fears do or did you have about your child attending college?

Answer: It's a bigger world, you know, when it comes to even the campuses itself, you know? If Aiden doesn't know anything or he doesn't know how to get somewhere. He's gonna ask. So other than that, I think he'll do very, very good. He has a sister or twin. That's kind of, kind of showing him the ropes in and out, you know, so and there's no doubt, you know if he needs her she's going to be right there to help him you know, or help assist them so. I don't have too much fear. I think it's going to do very, very good, very good.

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I look forward to what's to come, and I really do. He's very bright. He's very humble. I see good things happening for him. I try to keep supporting him and motivating him.

Interview 3:

Student Questions:

Question 1: How old are you?

Answer: 18

Question 2: Do you plan on going to college?

Answer: I really don't know. Yeah, my mom told me. Told me about some classes I can take. Got like animations for the day and also every time, like every college that comes near us, I ask them what I want to do, but they just don't really know how to help me because it just. It just gets confusing, and they want me to do like be like a doctor or whatever electrician, but they don't know what they want to do any of that. I

want to make movies or something that and stuff like that. Because I've been watching like watching videos on card characters.

Question 3: How did/ does your parent or caregiver support you during the transition after HS?

Answer: She's supposed to, you know, she's supposed to be fine with that. She should help me. And she, she, she helps me out with a lot of stuff. Well, she, she sometimes she when I don't have money. She also just gives me some money, money and time and time. And she has she. Even though I don't really know my.

Like card number, she doesn't really argue with me. She just wants me to practice more and she just gave it to me. So I don't ruin anything.

I mostly talked to her about, like, everything that I'm with because I'm mostly I'm. Yeah. I'm mostly comfortable with it and she has she instead of going and telling me that I need to go to college she decided to want me to just go to classes too.

Question 4: Was your high school helpful in sharing information about college?

Answer: I have to be honest. Not really. It's just they never really talked to us about college until we became seniors. And last year too they didn't even. Just find the College where you want to go before it's too late and it's like they don't tell us.

How much money it's going to cost? I just realized that I was watching some videos about, like, college that they said about, like, the books are so expensive.

Question 5: What fears do or did you have about going to college?

Answer: I don't really have any fears about college. I know how to pay for stuff. I know how to take care of myself. I watched the videos by the college. I'm not really afraid of them. I'm not really worried about it.

Question 6: Do you believe race played a role in your access to information?

Answer: In my better opinion, no, not really. Just mostly how you grow up in a way. You know I when I. Go when I like. I remember in Maryland when I was in Maryland, it was the same thing with Black people and any kind of people. And when a person grows up into like a yeah, it's mostly how people grow up in. It's like when I would look at when I my personal opinion when a Black person like live in like a good neighborhood in the hood they can actually see like a lot of difference between these types of people. When a kid, when a Black person living in the neighborhood kind of way like not saying there's a White neighborhood, they speak more properly. They speak more properly. They are more happy than more positive. They got like a lot of humor and stuff like that, and they're just a lot more different when people live in the hood.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: Well, I'm going to be honest with you. I know when I move out, I feel free in a way. Even when I'm with the boys. I feel free, I feel like. Freedom, because I. Because you know. I feel more comfortable. Yeah. I feel more comfortable. No offense, mom. But I've been to just, it just feels like when I'm with the boys, I can just actually, like, be myself.

Parent/Caregiver Questions:

Question 1: What is your household income?

Answer: \$48, 000

Question 2: What is your marital status?

Answer: Married

Question 3: Do you currently receive state benefits such as Medicaid (Health Insurance), SNAP (food stamps), or temporary cash assistance (TCA)?

Answer: No

Question 4: What challenges did you encounter when helping your child transition to college or what challenges do you anticipate your child will experience as they transition to college?

Answer: Well, I think it's the struggle between he wants his independence really bad and I've been there. I mean, I know what that's like. I just like, you know, want to be. Out there too, but for. Making him realize or helping him to realize how expensive it is. Like you said, you know to pay, for TV, to pay for food, to pay for all this stuff. I mean as much, you know. Yes, it is horribly expensive down here. Terrible. And I lost money coming from Maryland to come down here. And that's expensive up there. But so, you know, making him realize that that, you know, I understand you want your independence. Think I I worry a little bit because at college I don't think a lot of kids realize. And they obviously don't prep them well. College is not like high school. It's not like middle school. It's not like it's. College is a whole new level, and extremely hard.

Question 5: How can educators help parents/caregivers learn about transition support services?

Think I worry a little bit because college I don't think a lot of kids realize. And they obviously don't prep them well. College is not like high school. It's not like middle school. It's not like it's. College is a whole new level, extremely hard. You know what I

mean, and stuff and they don't play. You know what I mean? You're not, you know, giving this. They don't care if you have trouble with your handwriting or you have this or whatever. They don't care about that. You get it done and you, you know, and you have a certain time to do it. And you're in a whole classroom, and you may have to do stuff in front of 50 people, you know, like these big whatever. And you're in a whole classroom, and you may have to do stuff in front of 50 people, you know, like these big whatever. That's why I suggested that maybe he just think about it. Since he's not really looking for a degree so much as you know, OK, all right. And I just got some information from me about an ATC thing too, but the. You know, that's what I suggested to him. Maybe he'd want to just do, like, find an anime class, a graphic class, whatever. One or two, try. Yeah, see if he really does like it, you know, and then maybe he could look into what he wants to do. If it does require a degree, which I don't think it does, but if it were to, then he can move on from there. But see first, if that's really what you want to do and how hard it is going to be. Well, and the other thing that really upsets me is that what I've seen and where we came from up in Maryland, you know, we're an interracial couple and up there, the schools he went to were predominantly White just because of where we live. But there were Black children there. But what I noticed up there is like the IEP meetings and everything. Regular. I mean regular meetings; I mean all through elementary. And then when you go there's like a table full of people including the principal sit around and went through everything. But when we came here, one meeting at the elementary school down here and not one since he has been at the high school.

Question 6: Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack of resources for transition planning? Why?

Answer: Definitely, and that's what I was saying. I think that I'm not blaming anybody at Piper. I mean, they got some nasty people over there at some of what he's told me about some of them. Security or the teachers or whatever, but. But I also believe it's the fact that it's the area, it's the lower-income area and the schools reflect that.

Question 7: Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?

Answer: Access to information from the school. Yes. For. Yeah, but I kind of do. Yeah, because I think it's, it's again, it goes back to being low income and they just, I don't know if they just figure the kids, they can't afford it. So, they don't worry about it. You know, that's kind of what it seemed like. Yes, and they don't really. And to me, they shouldn't be like that.

Question 8: How can educators better assist parents/caregivers in the decision-making process when choosing a college or university?

Answer: The big thing that I notice is they don't care. They don't. The thing I've noticed with [REDACTED] is, they send you an e-mail. And then that's it. Yep. And like, OK, you know, you could have missed that e-mail, or you might not have been able to come. You know it's like. It's not that they flood you with emails because they don't, they just send it out and then it's just like, yeah, yeah, it's they're just done. It's like they fulfill their responsibility.

Question 9: What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism experience a successful transition?

Answer: I would think this is if I understand the question is that those types of places should be getting with the high schools to find out who these kids are and getting information to the parents. I haven't heard anything. So, I also think that all these places have packets of information though, you know, some people would rather look at that just to go through that and you. And yes, OK, then I guess their thought is that it falls on the parent, you know. So, they've done their due diligence, they've sent the e-mail, and then if they just nothing else, they don't follow up this like, well, I didn't hear from this parent, let me follow up again it goes back to like they just don't care. You know what I mean?

Question 10: What fears do you have about your child attending college?

Answer: Paying out of pocket would be one. If he's not living at home. But that's the thing I need to get over. It's not on him. I think it's wanting him to be successful, you know This is something with me. I have to work out, but being able to help, being able to do it for him, I can't do that. You know what I mean? And worrying about if you know if he's going to make it. He wouldn't be comfortable there and he wouldn't, you know, fit in there or whatever and stuff just because not to say that we're better than them. But you know, we're just not.

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I guess it goes back to what I was saying earlier, just the realization of what's coming at him. You know, the cost of things and you. Me and his Pop ain't going to be here forever and doing things on his own and you know, just a lot, just in the world is horrible.

Interview 4:

Student Questions:

Question 1: How old are you?

Answer: 19

Question 2: Do you plan on going or go to college?

Answer: Yes, I'm currently attending American College.

Question 3: How did/ does your parent or caregiver support you during the transition after HS?

Answer: Well, she reassured me that whatever effort that I put out, she would support me and stand by me. And so I ran with that and. I came here and here I am.

Question 4: Was your high school helpful in sharing information about college?

Answer: I would like to say that there are two. There are two different sides that, let's say two sides to a coin. On one side I believe they've mentioned information about a lot of things and on the other side, I may not have always been paying attention like that. So, I knew about FAU, FIU. I've toured FAU with the algebra project program in Coconut Creek. Yes, it's ran by three different teachers. But yes, I toured FAU so I have knowledge about the college they have mentioned, if you're willing to take things to the next level. So, for example, if you're in certain programs that boost your academic hemisphere. They'll give you opportunities. For example, when I was in Creek. But I moved to a different school. I received different emails, but not well. Yes, emails and mail from different universities or colleges. For example, LSU, Berry University, Kaiser University, and some others. I think the teachers were even more so talked about college. They more so mentioned it as a way of oh, if you do well in school, whatever college you

see fit to seek out, I'm sure you'll get into it. I don't think they mentioned a lot per se about specific colleges you would like to get into like. I don't think I've ever had a conversation where if it wasn't, what color would you like to go to then? It wasn't really heavily spoken about on the topic of college.

Question 5: What fears do or did you have about going to college?

Answer: I had a fear. Well, I had more so fears where it's like. If I if I fail, I would have to payout of pocket and. I want to say I have more fears of failure, fears of failure in academics, and pretty much anything striving or stemming from college. I would be afraid.

Question 6: Do you believe race played a role in your access to information?

Answer: No, I don't believe so. In every school that I have come up to this very point, I don't believe race has ever been the issue per se where it's like, oh, this student gets more information than me because of, you know, they are mixed or they are any different. I don't think that played a role, or a part at all.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I want to say it was interesting. I feel like it was more so like. My mom sat me down and she talked to me about it, and she was like, you know if you're feeling it then, you know, dive into it. And which I did. It wasn't always easy, but I. You know, I felt. It felt. Good. It felt like I was taking a different step in education. Very different. Yes, college is very different from high school. I want to say it's very important because in high school you couldn't really do things at your own pace like, if you flunked like, let's say if you dropped, the letter grade. If you drop the letter grade, you only have X amount of time to make it up until a certain time comes down. Now college is different

because you have a certain set of classes, and you have that for an entire year if I'm not mistaken in high school. Semesters are both in college and high school, but you spend more time in a class. Or in a specific class trying to make up the grade than in college per se, but I do like that college is somewhat your own pace.

Parent/Caregiver Questions:

Question 1: What is your household income?

Answer: 49K

Question 2: What is your marital status?

Answer: Single

Question 3: Do you currently receive state benefits such as Medicaid (Health Insurance), SNAP (food stamps), or temporary cash assistance (TCA)?

Answer: None

Question 4: What challenges did you encounter when helping your child transition to college or what challenges do you anticipate your child will experience as they transition to college?

Answer: One of the main challenges was, just I want to say because he was because he was in a private institution he's dealt with differently and so I found that like they there was an, you know, I guess in regular high school maybe they automatically send the transcripts and things like that. But there were. I found that that was a little bit of an issue from the private school to the high school to college the first year. I also felt like probably. I didn't get as much information about the transitioning. Maybe he got the information and maybe like you said, maybe sometimes he didn't, you know, he was not

paying much attention, right? Right. But I didn't feel as supported, I would say. I also felt like probably. I didn't get as much information about the transitioning. Maybe he got the information and maybe like you said, maybe sometimes he didn't, you know, he was not paying much attention, right? Right. But I didn't feel as supported, I would say.

Question 5: How can educators help parents/caregivers learn about transition support services?

Answer: I think all of the teachers in the high school should at least have some knowledge of what it's going to take to get to the next level, because I think they know what it is to complete the grade. But like, for example, foreign language and so on like he has like an idea. To make sure they make requirements meet requirements. Or to enforce certain things. So, I found that like, you know, they would highlight. You know, students who were in dual enrollment, students who were already accepted in a college but yet and still. I never had a conversation with anyone about the prospects of college. Actually, in private school. I don't know if I have ever even seen an IEP. That they were working with. So, I think it was just inconsistent, and then understanding what his issue was because I had to understand. So, it was about major distractibility and he's an introvert. And he's always been. And when he was younger, he had some developmental delays. So, I feel like. We've always been playing catch-up to some. You know, so it would have been good, I think to just kind of have a better map, a road map of how to move into the next level. So, there were, there's no such thing. I mean, even though we got the testing. Assessment. And then in through everything.

Question 6: Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack of resources for transition planning? Why?

Answer: Yes and no, because I think if you. If you can afford it, the culture in your home is different. You know, and I think. There are times when probably I couldn't afford it, and the culture in my house is just to understand, you know, and so I think there are some things that maybe they might even be interested in doing, but they don't bother because they know that you know whether we can't afford the time, you know, or we financially can't afford it, so it's not like he's held back.

Question 7: Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?

Answer: UM. I think. I don't want to say race plays a role in my situation. I do believe that systemically race plays a role just because, like I said. You know first. Where can you afford to live? How does that city, you know, assist? How does that county, you know, provide services and so on? I feel like. If you're in certain places, you can get more exposure to assistance, just as an educator, I have just seen more availability of things and it is more advertised, more promoted I feel like. And I feel like race probably is not directly the cause of that, but indirectly some type of grouping. I feel like because I know right that right because I feel like they did have a magnet program, but those students essentially are kind of separated from. For me, race and affordability are tied up in those systemic things like where you live and where your kid is assigned to go to school. And yes, you can do school choice and kind of move them, but you know, are you the type of parent that can really afford to drop off and pick up your kid? And you know, give them that type of time or are you a parent that has to have two jobs? You know what I mean? So, I found that I was constantly. In schools with other parents that kind of had to have

two jobs and didn't you know, wasn't able to necessarily go to all the meetings and they're all right. And that's all, I think, and socioeconomic status, you know, kind of this discourages the movement.

Question 8: How can educators better assist parents/caregivers in the decision-making process when choosing a college or university?

Answer: I think the transition should be mandatorily a part of the IEP. Once a student is in a certain grade. That's what I think. I think maybe when they're about to start 12th grade like the previous year, the last part of 11th grade, there should be some sort of portfolio or something that is mandated by the IEP that gives some options for students that even show. You know, what are some of the things that students can explore? You know, they did this, you know, assessment with for them occurred, maybe all of them need a career assessment, you know, at a certain point, maybe in 12th grade and from that career assessment, you know, some suggestions could be made.

For the directions that would ensue. You know the students. So, they're not just graduating dry, you know. More focus could be placed on what, what the possibilities can be for. So, I think, especially in today's society, for the students, you have to show them what the possibilities are for them, what are the possibilities for them, what? What direction? So, this is the start, you know, even get them to understand how long it takes if they're going to go to like a, you know, Mcfatter. How long is it going to take to become a so and so in so many years you could be this or you could. Be that and. You know, after completing this program, this is what you could do, you know, and kind of giving them a road map through the transition with options that you know they can say well.

Question 9: What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism experience a successful transition?

Answer: I think. Within the group. I feel like. Do a preface with those types with those families like a prep before they enter that space or those meetings or whatever. This kind of prepares them. You know, I think one of the things. For students under the spectrum, most of them always respond well to the structure or information or ideas about the structure of certain things and just kind of an introduction like a pre-introduction to this information. You know what I mean so that you can start to set up that mental process. I think it takes longer to connect, you know, it's pragmatic. Why does this make sense? It takes a lot longer to connect and to see why these small things that we do lead to this independent life. That you're going to live. I know it might be very difficult, but like just the prep. Just let them know this is what you're going to experience in this meeting at the end of the meeting. Tell them what the outcome should be. This is what you're trying to do at the end here. You're going to find a school that you like. Everybody has to come up with one place that they like, you know.

Question 10: What fears do or did you have about your child attending college?

Answer: I'm very nervous, I fear. I fear that. We haven't really disclosed. You know because I feel like. I didn't want to. Ask for help anymore. I didn't like the help. I don't like the help I've been getting, and I just feel like I still have to be there. So, I have to be a part of it. So why get them involved? And it's very strenuous, especially when as an advisor, I recommend that, you know, go to accessibility services. So, we have not. Because I fear the type of assistance that's available, I fear. He's an adult now and I can't go everywhere with him, so the unknown is I think you know, just not knowing. Like the

accommodations, because I feel like. I don't know if I even prepared him to understand how to advocate for himself in that way. I fear that I've advocated too much, and maybe he didn't get an opportunity to properly learn how to, or even the importance of advocating, or what to advocate for.

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I feel like sometimes you feel alone in the process, like a bit more support. You know, I like I have. I felt like the most support came. From the admission. Rather than from the school or you know. What I mean is the institution as, the institution as a whole, I felt like once we got. In the college setting, I was like calmer. You know, we were like, ready for a new experience. And I felt like we have to kind of fight to figure it out, you know, instead of being, you know, just kind of helped along the way to say, you know, this is what's going to be needed. I think parents that have students that struggle, we're struggling ourselves, we almost miss a lot of things. And then you still have, you know, between work and family and taking care of your kids.

Interview 5:

ASD Student:

Question 1: How old are you?

Answer: 18

Question 2: Do you plan on going to college?

Answer: I'm not sure yet.

Question 3: How did/ does your parent or caregiver support you during the transition after HS?

Answer: Training me to be an adult. Like driving, getting driver's license, and like getting my own house.

Question 4: Was your high school helpful in sharing information about college?

Answer: It was ok. Life lessons, math, history, and more.

Question 5: What fears do or did you have about going to college?

Answer: I don't know. Not sure. She once took me on a tour of a college. Showed me places to hang out, where to eat, and the library. I wasn't really excited about it. Not really interested.

Question 6: Do you believe race played a role in your access to information?

Answer: I don't know.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: When I leave high school, I want to go to New York.

Parent/Caregiver Questions:

Question 1: What is your household income?

Answer: 45,000

Question 2: What is your marital status?

Answer: Married

Question 3: Do you currently receive state benefits such as Medicaid (Health Insurance), SNAP (food stamps), or temporary cash assistance (TCA)?

Answer: None

Question 4: What challenges did you encounter when helping your child transition to college or what challenges do you anticipate your child will experience as they transition to college?

Answer: I guess it's kind of like deciding on what he wants to work on. What he wants to focus on is also like the interest and I want him to know whether he wants to go or not. I know he wants to focus on it. So, we've been kind of, I've been trying to get him prepared for that like him being taken responsibility and initiative and wants him to go.

Question 5: How can educators help parents/caregivers learn about transition support services?

Answer: I think like having the college come to the school. It's a perfect way to have talks and just talk about college and services and the different options available to them.

Question 6: Do you believe economic status contributes to the lack of resources for transition planning? Why?

Answer: Definitely. Um. I guess. It's our world, the way our world is set up. That's how I feel.

Question 7: Do you believe race plays a role in your access to information?

Answer: I believe so. It's the way the world is set up, it's systemic.

Question 8: How can educators better assist parents/caregivers in the decision-making process when choosing a college or university?

Answer: Them having the information in front of them. Me, myself, I have gone on my own to find out information which is how I found out about the program I just applied to for him. Just yesterday I did.

Question 9: What can postsecondary institutions do to ensure students with autism experience a successful transition?

Answer: Support system. Even as far as transportation services, maybe that can continue as far as college. That would be helpful for a “buddy up” program.

Question 10: What fears do or did you have about your child attending college?

Answer: I want to make sure he finds where he is supposed to be. Just being able to fit it in. I don't think it will be a problem for him. Just the whole college experience, I'm nervous. I know they have to be more independent.

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

Answer: I just continue talking to them and sharing information, letting them know they have options, building self-confidence, and self-awareness, make them feel like they can do it, and they are capable. I don't really allow his disability to define him. I tell him the truth. To be honest with you when he was young, I didn't but now I sit with him and tell him what an IEP meeting is. When you go to college it's going to be different, and you have to make a lot of decisions on your own. Get him ready to be an adult.

Appendix I

IRB Approval(s)



Institutional Review Board
3601 North Military Trail
Boca Raton, FL 33433

DATE: 11/06/2023
TO: Aiyeesha Hill
FROM: Erika Grodzki
PROJECT NUMBER: 23.01
PROTOCOL TITLE: *Lost in Transition: A Qualitative Narrative Study on the Lived Experience of BIPOC Individuals with High-functioning Autism Transitioning to College*
PROJECT TYPE: New
REVIEW TYPE: Full
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: 11/06/2023
EXPIRATION DATE: 11/06/2024

Thank you for your submission for this research study. The Lynn University IRB has APPROVED your NEW Project. This approval is in accordance with 45 CFR §46.111 Criteria for IRB approval of research. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

It is important that you retain this letter for your records and present upon request to necessary parties.

- This approval is valid for one year. **IRB Form 4: Application to Continue (Renew) a Previously Approved Project** will be required prior to the expiration date if this project continues beyond one year.
- Please note that any revision to previously approved materials or procedures must be approved by the IRB29 before it is initiated. Please submit **IRB Form 5 Application for Procedural Revisions of or Changes in Research Protocol and/or Informed Consent Form 1 of a Previously Approved Project** for this procedure.
- All serious and unexpected adverse events must be reported to the IRB. Please use **IRB Form 6 Report of Unexpected Adverse Event, Serious Injury or Death** for this procedure.
- At the completion of your data collection, please submit **IRB Form 8 IRB Report of Termination of Project**.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact the chair of the Lynn University IRB, Erika Grodzki (egrodzki@lynn.edu).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Grodzki".

Dr. Erika Grodzki, Institutional Review Board Chair
Institutional Review Board
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