

## POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

### Submission



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### Comments

#### **Feedback to Learner**

11/8/21 12:12 PM

Kia, this is AMAZING. Seriously - it's so good. You clearly lay out who you are and how those personal commitments relate to your research interests and research commitments. Really well done.

### **Positionality Statement**

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A researcher's lack of objectivity is not only a problem, it is also an opportunity for reflection. For decades, researchers have been encouraged to acknowledge their cultural, political, and social context, and to reflect on the ways that these contexts influence their research and scholarship. As a novice researcher, one way I acknowledge my positionality is through reflexivity. This statement will address my background, influences, research interests, orientations to research, and my intended approaches to qualitative research.

### **Personal Background**

I am a married African American woman, youngest of three girls, and mother of four natural and two bonus children. I was born and raised in Montgomery County, Maryland, to racially and politically conscious parents, Rebecca and Isadore. When I was old enough to speak, my parents taught me that I was "*proud, educated and Black*" and I still recite that mantra. They reminded me that when I leave my home daily, "*I not only represented myself but I represent the entire Felder family*". I was trained to be an exemplar, to represent my race and my family well, and to "*show them better than I can tell them*". Family, education, and representation matter to me. It is at the core of who I am. As an educator, administrator, and novice researcher, I practice being an A.C.E. – I *advocate* for the underrepresented, I *collaborate* with critical stakeholders and I *educate* children and adults.

My mother held post-graduate degrees in education and was a 30-year educator. My father was a semi-professional boxer and basketball player and his one regret was that as a result of being drafted to the Air Force while a freshman in college and he put the military and his family first, and never completed his college education. Until his passing, he adored his wife and three girls, Kim, Karyn, and Kia, the apples of his eye. He was so proud and lived vicariously through our educational and professional attainments. Isadore practiced the theology of presence. My

father was hardworking, present in our home and at our numerous athletic and educational commitments, parented both tender and tough, and was my first love. Experientially and practically, I know that *Black fathers matter*. The absence of the Black father in many homes and many young boys caught in the invisible/visible school-to-prison pipeline causes my soul to weep and guides my research interests.

It was drilled in my head by my grandfather, that my sisters and I would have Dr. in front of our name just like he did. Silas E. Craft, Sr. was an educator and an administrator and instrumental in integrating the public schools of Montgomery County, MD, past president of the NAACP, and the first Black public school administrator in Montgomery County, Maryland. My grandmother Dorothye Beatrice McKnight Craft and her mother were elementary educators as well. *Teaching and Teaching leadership* is in my DNA. I watched my mother who lived from paycheck to paycheck, take from her own modest earnings and provide dinners, school lunches, books, Christmas presents, socks, winter coats, and mittens for children and families who had less than we did. Like my mother, *I have a burden for education and the welfare of the underprivileged and underrepresented*.

I am a Christian and a minister. I walk by faith and the Word of God governs my convictions, beliefs, and morality. I was called to full-time ministry at the age of 25. I served in Christian Ministry for 20 years and after a change in careers in 2015, I continue to serve in para-church ministry.

### **Educational Background**

I earned a Bachelor of Science in Management and Marketing with a concentration in Marketing, a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies with a concentration in Theology, a Master of Arts in Leadership in Teaching with an emphasis on teaching students with severe cognitive

disabilities, postgraduate studies in Educational Leadership and I am currently a doctoral student pursuing a Ph.D. in special education and I'm leaning toward a secondary in Education Policy or Qualitative Methodology. I have taught for seven years as a special education teacher and served as a chairperson and mentor to pre-service, new, and struggling special educators.

As a special educator in the third largest, predominately African American school district in the Southeast. With almost 210 schools and over 140,000 students, I have personally witnessed many Black and brown students relegated to special education because of a lack of Response to Intervention (RtI) has been implemented, research-based interventions and evidence-based practices have been used as sources of remediation instead of a means to differentiate general education. The student population continues to become more and more diverse. The teacher population is not. Increasingly white, mono-lingual educators are expected to understand, relate to, and instruct a culturally and linguistically diverse student population, without the appropriate tools, understanding, and desire to do so.

My research interests and research questions emerge from this dichotomy. I have an interest in the effect and impact of research-based interventions and assistive technologies on the identification, placement, and servicing of African American males in special education. My research interests extend to the capacity, agency, and self-efficacy of pre-service and novice educators to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in K-12 educational settings. As a result of a lack of intervention and the implicit bias that is inherent in the identification and placement of African American students, I subsequently have research interests in the overrepresentation of African American males and other culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education.

**Novice Researcher**

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Who am I as a novice researcher? I am still discovering this reality. My family, personal and educational backgrounds, and lived experiences have shaped my perspective and passion for research. As an educator and mentor teacher, I feel the burden to give educators voice and to ensure they feel equipped for the tremendous responsibility of educating racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. As the daughter and granddaughter of pioneers of integration and justice, I feel the weight of the victims of the Whiteness of education and how historically a western view of history has silenced the voice and contribution of culturally diverse persons. As a mother of young black boys, I feel the void of the African American male who has all too often been misunderstood, misidentified, mistreated, and placed in the revolving door entrance and limited exit of special education.

The framework I lean towards is Critical Race Theory (CRT) and DisCrit (Disability Critical Race Theory). I view research questions through the tenets of DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2012). DisCrit:

- Focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.
- Values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race *or* dis/ability *or* class *or* gender *or* sexuality, and so on.
- Emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.
- Privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.

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- Considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.
- Recognizes whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens.
- Requires activism and supports all forms of resistance.

I also see problems through a dis/ability studies lens. I:

- Embrace interdisciplinary examination of disabilities in education
- View disability through the lens of a minority group model
- View disability as both a social phenomenon as well as a civil/human rights issue.
- Make a distinction between impairment and disability
- View human difference or diversity as normal
- Embrace inclusive education which strives to remove all barriers to the curriculum and learning for all children
- Aim to use research as an emancipatory vehicle for the voice of disabled persons so that they can tell their own stories

### *Theoretical and Conceptual Framework*

A researcher's choice of framework is not arbitrary but reflects important personal beliefs and understandings about the nature of knowledge (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). My theoretical framework, DisCrit, as well as the Scholar Identity and Cultural Deficit Models, drive what I believe my future methodology will be-- conducting qualitative research through narrative

inquiry and counterstories.

The major source for constructing a conceptual framework is *me*, the researcher. As a result, my mind map that contributes to my conceptual framework around the problem of the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education includes the student's identity encompassing self-esteem, competence, worth, and confidence and the educator's agency, self-efficacy, cultural responsiveness, racial disquiet, and implicit biases. As a novice researcher, my research interests rest at the intersectionality of race, dis/ability, and education. The social co-construction of race and disability has always been at the center of labeling, surveillance, exclusion, and punishment and I have research interests in how factors of esteem, identity, intellectual capacity, power, and socialization influence the identification, eligibility determination, placement, and discipline of African American males in special education. *Research Interest and Research Questions*

I am most interested in qualitative research and utilizing narrative inquiry to give voice to the vast amount of African American males in special education in K-12 education up through age 21. I love the way narrative research highlights people's lived experiences and can be used as a starting point for understanding how people make sense of their lives and for understanding how and why people's stories are shaped and reshaped (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). The progression of this type of research that moves the narrative beyond simply telling the story to an understanding of the broader social and historical significance is compelling (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). For this course, my research questions center around four educators' perceptions of their agency, self-efficacy, and readiness to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Research shows that educators who have low agency and self-efficacy refer African American students to special education with greater frequency than their more self-efficacious peers (Darling-Hammond et al,

2020).

I am the primary source of both constructing and understanding my positionality, social identity, experiences, beliefs, prior knowledge, assumptions, ideologies, working epistemologies, biases, and overall perspective on the world (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). As my journey continues on the path to becoming a valuable qualitative researcher, I know my conceptual framework will continue to be refined.



**References**

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