Black and Gifted: Hiding In Plain View

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BLACK AND GIFTED: HIDING IN PLAIN VIEW

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by
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M.Ed., Louisiana State University, 2007
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Without God, I could do nothing, Oh Lord
Without God, You know all my life would fail
Without God, my life would be rugged, Oh Lord,
Yes, like a ship, (like a ship)
Without a sail, without a sail, (Without a sail)
Old Baptist hymnal

Lord, without you I am indeed nothing. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for bringing me and sustaining me to this point in my dissertation. There is not endeavor in my life, large or small, through which God has not personally given me the strength to make it. There were so many times in this journey that I simply wanted to let go, God, but your Grace and Mercy have always brought me through. God and the many saints whose interventions I called upon continually held me, so I didn’t let go.

The completion of my dissertation could not have happened without the help of so many people. First of all I would like to thank my parents for instilling in me the thirst for education. My parents were both born into a family of sharecroppers in the 1920s, but once they married and had children, they dared to dream big. It was always understood that my siblings and I were going to go to college even though the opportunities for a child born in the 1950s were very limited. Daddy, you always wanted a better way of life for your children. To that end, you worked hard your entire life at any job that would bring in money to take care of us and secure that future of a higher education. Once the Civil Rights movement caught fire in the 1960s, Daddy dared to dream even bigger. It was his decision to send us all to school at LSU after his glimpse of a few Black students on campus when he was working on the construction site of Kirby Smith. With my graduation, the third of three children, your dream was realized. Mother, I don’t know how to begin to thank you. You were a housewife for over seventeen years until you
decided to give that up and go out to work to ensure that there was enough money to send your
three children to college. Your first and only job as a custodian worker at the newly built
Louisiana State University at Eunice was a sacrifice not many women during your time would
have made. Even when I quit college in my senior year for no good reason, you remained at that
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did return, 7 years later, you were able to retire the following month and proudly proclaim to
anyone who asked, that you had educated all three of your children at Louisiana State University
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determination, and commitment sustained me throughout my entire life. How I wish that you and
Daddy were still here today so that you can see what your most stubborn child decided to do in
the future once that first B.S degree was earned by your insistence! I love you both so much.

I want to thank my brother and sister, whose stellar example of achieving higher
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The beauty of that agenda is that she eventually caught up with me and we entered the Ph.D.
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bouncing ideas around whenever one or both of us became mired in the process. You were always my beautiful baby but you matured into a beautiful woman, both inside and outside and this is rare trait in a human being. I am so proud of you and I love you so very much!

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This dissertation examines representation of African Americans in gifted programs in an urban school district where the creation of gifted programs was enacted as a tool for desegregation. The research is conducted from the perspectives of gifted African American students in an effort to shed some light on whether an achievement gap exists or is the makeup of the program itself a deterrent to the enrollment of African American students. A qualitative study was conducted using personal narratives from students who were enrolled in a self-contained gifted program in the urban school districts. The participants gave personal interviews where they answered a series of questions which recanted stories and details of their middle or high school years in a gifted program. Three African American females participated in the research. Each female was enrolled in a gifted program for at least three years. The interviews were collected and coded for similar phrases and responses to questions about the experience of an African American in gifted programs. Findings in the research revealed that African Americans were in the minority in each participant’s individual gifted program. In addition, each participant revealed that she had no more than two African American teachers throughout the three years she was enrolled in a gifted program. Participants further revealed that she experienced cultural isolation from other African American students who were not in the gifted program. Each participant reported experiencing bias from teachers, traditional students, and fellow gifted students.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Gifted Snippet from a Parental View

I had no idea that a gifted program existed in public education until my son’s 3rd grade teacher mentioned the gifted screening process as a viable option for me to consider for my son. After many parent conferences with my son’s previous teachers, Mrs. Williams asked me to take my son to pupil appraisal and have him screened for the gifted program. I replied somewhat bewilderedly that he was always having disciplinary problems in his classes and he would not be a good candidate for a rigorous classroom setting. She explained that he was disruptive because he was bored and completed his work ahead of his classmates and that was why he behaved in this manner. She further explained that he did not disrupt her class because once he completed his work, she gave him an encyclopedia to read. She told me that by the end of the first school semester, he had read through the first 3 volumes of the encyclopedia. I took her advice and had him tested, but he fell short on one of the skills of the Stanford Binet Psychological Test. Many years later my son revealed that he did not even complete the activities in the gifted testing room because he became bored with the pace of the test and refused to finish the activities.

Testing in the large urban school district in the South relies heavily on the Stanford Binet Psychological Test as identification and placement in the gifted program. Gifted testing is an ongoing argument within the field (Franklin, 2007); strict reliance on an intelligence test is problematic when seeking out multicultural candidates for the gifted program (Newton, McIntosh, Dixon, Williams, & Youman, 2008). According to Passow and Frasier (1996):

To argue that concepts of giftedness should not be limited to high intelligence and academic aptitude does not mean that academic achievement is unimportant. In all modern societies, formal education that often includes postsecondary and graduate education is crucial in the development of specialized talents that are valued. Thus,
identification and nurturing of what is sometimes called "schoolhouse giftedness" constitutes an integral component of nurturing talent potential of many kinds and levels and is not culturally bound. (p. 200)

There are many reasons why a child might not do well on a standardized test for intelligence. It is indeed plausible that the true measure of intelligence cannot be revealed in a testing procedure. Other talents should also be configured into the definition of giftedness and these other talents also should be nurtured. The extent of potential talent is bound by a test or the culture of the child.

When I received a letter that my son did not qualify for the gifted education program, I assumed that I was correct and that his lack of achievement in the classroom was due to his inability to behave properly. I did have him retested when he reached middle school or high school. His behavior continued to interfere with his learning and I assumed I was correct in my original assumption that he could not handle a gifted curriculum if he was unable to control his behaviors. I did have his sister tested for giftedness when she reached 5th grade and she passed the test and entered the gifted program in middle school. By this time my son was exiting middle school, he was accepted into an academic magnet. I accepted the fact that perhaps his needs would be adequately served in the accelerated curriculum of an academic magnet.

Like many parents, my perception determined my view with regard to my child’s education. The lens through which I viewed his behavioral problems is a common view of parents who are desperately seeking solutions to help a child remain a positive, progressive, and achieving member of the public school system. Because the majority of his teachers framed my son as a behavioral problem, I chose to ignore the voice of the one teacher who insisted that he was not a behavioral problem, but rather an advanced student who was bored by the pace of the lessons. When identifying giftedness, Renzulli (2011) stated, “one of the key ingredients that has
characterized the work of gifted persons is the ability to involve oneself totally in a problem or area for an extended period of time” (p. 84). Although unfamiliar with Renzulli’s definition of giftedness at that time, I did believe wholeheartedly that the behavior that my son exhibited indicated that he would not stick to any task for an extended period of time. I addressed his behavior, therefore, and insisted that he begin a task at the same time as his classmates and finish at the same time, or sit quietly until everyone else completed the task.

At the time, I was equally unaware that a child might be capable of gifted critical thinking abilities but also be classified as dual exceptional. Today, this type of learner, labeled twice exceptional, is a child who is gifted but who simultaneously has a disability that masks or overshadows giftedness. The twice exceptional student is a smart student who assumes that the learning task will be easy but is unprepared when the task is difficult which leads to behavior problems such as aggressiveness and carelessness which frequently lead to becoming off-task and a classroom disturbance (McCallum, Bell, Coles, Miller, & Hilton-Prillhart, 2013). Stein (2012) explained:

 Twice-exceptional students may be capable of high levels of abstract and critical thinking that may be masked by a disability making it difficult to identify and serve. The disability often takes precedence over other considerations; and limits students to one label. (p. 37)

I found myself in the unenviable position of wondering who is really responsible for finding the right niche for my child. Is it a properly trained teacher who has received professional development training specifically designed to recognize the nature and needs of the gifted child? Is finding the right niche for my child a job for the counselor who should encourage the child and parent to seek out other programs labeled under the Exceptional Student Services?

The Department of Exceptional Student Services runs the gifted and academically talented program. It is also the Exceptional Student Services Department that assigns students to
Special Needs learning classes, whose numbers are filled with African American students. The Exceptional Student Services Department also identifies students for gifted programs and the White and Asian population remains the dominant occupancy in these programs (Miller, 2013). My son’s life was viewed from the perspective of his teacher, the negativism of the reluctant counselor, and his mother who was a novice to the processes at the time and only saw one perspective—her own. No one bothered to ask my son about his thoughts and perspectives of maybe joining an elite group known as the gifted and talented. We knew not what his perceptions of being different meant to him at the tender age of eight years old. Perhaps if I had taken the time to ask my son why he misbehaved in class, I might have learned that his needs were not being met and tried again in later years to have him tested for the gifted program as his one teacher had suggested.

**Gifted Snippet as a Teacher**

In 2012, I taught traditional students at a high school with a self-contained gifted program within its walls. The program also had a gifted coordinator whose office was in the main office. I was assigned office duty during the final period and my job was to answer the phone, and sell uniform shirts to new students who enrolled throughout the year. One day a family came into the office to enroll a girl who was expelled from Prep High. Both mother and the grandmother were well dressed; the grandmother was wearing a genuine fox fur jacket. There were two other sets of parents there and both were African American. As I getting the appropriate shirts for all 3 parents, the gifted coordinator immediately came out of her office when she heard the grandmother tell me that her daughter was coming from Prep High. The coordinator took over my task of finding uniform shirts for this girl and fired off questions to the parents and told them that the daughter could be in any one of many programs at the school such as Gifted or Great
Scholars. The coordinator took the girl’s schedule from her hands and ushered the girl, mother, and grandmother back to the guidance office to change the schedule. The two sets of African American parents in the office received barely a glance from the coordinator. I completed the sale of the uniform shirts and I remember shaking my head in amazement; it was at this moment that I begin to seriously think about perceptions of gifted. A question that evolved from this encounter is whether or not students of color are somehow systematically excluded from programs that acknowledge the unique gifts and talents of students who are culturally diverse.

**Definition of Giftedness**

The federal guidelines and very definition of giftedness at a national level have often been cited as a reason for the skewed number of culturally diverse students in gifted programs (Ford, 1998). Renzulli (1978) composed the first definition of giftedness that targeted students who show high levels of performance when compared to their peers of the same age. Renzulli (1978) stated:

Giftedness consists of an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits—these clusters being above-average abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing the composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Children who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs. (p. 182)

The 1978 definition of giftedness defines giftedness in broad terms for all children. In 2004, the Department of Education added that these special services should be extended to children who are talented and of varied cultural and economic groups. Gallagher (2004) cited the revised national mandate for educating as:

. . . children and youth with outstanding talent performance or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership
capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (p. 26)

Hopkins (2010) found the lack of consensus about gifted education to be problematic towards the attainment and sustainability of African American students who are gifted. Hopkins (2010) stated:

This lack of consensus on specific identification criteria denotes a somewhat uncertain and unstable foundation for gifted and talented programs across the country, and can be problematic for the identification of students of color who are gifted and talented. Therefore, deciding on standard identification criteria that specify consideration of broader identification criteria that specify consideration of a broader and diverse pool of students is paramount in improving the representation of students of color in these special programs. (p. 25)

In the large urban school district of my research, gifted programs were instituted at the elementary, middle school, and high school level. The primary goal of gifted programs was to serve the special needs of the gifted and talented students of the district while concurrently serving to promote desegregation of the school system. Unlike other magnet programs in the district, gifted programs are not necessarily schools of choice. Parents cannot simply choose to send their child to the gifted magnet program. Parents may choose to send a child to other magnets in the district, such as an engineering magnet or a French Language Immersion magnet. These types of magnets are true magnet schools of choice. Entrance into the gifted magnet requires identification and testing before the child can be enrolled. Ford (1994) denoted:

Several reasons help to explain the relative absence of African Americans in programs for the gifted; Exclusionary definitions and theories of giftedness, culturally biased identification practices, a lack of understanding among educators regarding the effect of cultural differences on learning, inadequate training of teachers to recognize gifted students from diverse cultural backgrounds, a lack of encouragement for African American parental involvement in educational placement decision making, and inadequate definitions of underachievement among the gifted. (p. 359)
In general there is a lack of consensus in how to identify and define the gifted student (Clark, 2008). The definitions are vague and not culturally sensitive (Ford, 1998). Relying heavily on the use of standardized intelligence test causes many states to only define gifted from the view of high IQ scores and this becomes problematic. Ryser (2004) noted the problematic formula:

Unfortunately, some school districts use only measures that are related primarily to school achievement, such as teacher nominations and achievement tests. In other words, it is students who are high achievers that tend to be selected for gifted programs, rather than students with limited experiences who may not achieve as high, but who have high potential (p. 42).

It can be argued that many African American students do not perform well on norm-referenced tests due to test bias (Ford, 2012; Delpit, 2012); therefore, the use of a rigid standardized basis for identifying gifted children is unfairly slanted when applied to the African American student.

**Statement of Problem**

Currently, there are issues between the ratios of African American to white enrollment within the school system in which this research was conducted. On the surface, the numbers show an increase of African American students in gifted programs from its inception in 1984 to the present time, but when I walk the halls and look into the gifted classrooms, the numbers are not congruent. Proportionally speaking, the number of African American students in gifted classrooms is noticeably low when compared to whites or Asian students. That the numbers in a gifted program have not kept pace with the large number of African American students in the public school system is a problem of significant educational concern that could be addressed through research. There has been significant research on the topic of African American representation in gifted programs but there are few narratives from the perspective of the African American students who are gifted. Exploring the perspectives of gifted African American students may shed some light on whether an achievement gap between the races exist, or whether
the closing of an achievement gap lies in researching the experiences of African American students presently enrolled in gifted programs.

Although researchers have studied the perspective of the gifted student from time to time, research of students’ perspectives is not at prevalent. In the research, it is not the voice of the African American experience that is being noted and recorded for research purposes and there are few narratives from the perspective of African American students who are presently enrolled in gifted programs on a secondary level. The purpose of this study is to bring to the forefront the perceptions of gifted American students in a predominantly African American school system.

**Research Question**

This study explored three major questions in regard to gifted program. The overarching question was: How do students in gifted studies encounter and address bias? More specifically: Is there an isolation problem that causes a lack of cultural development for African American students when they are identified and placed in gifted programs? What is the racial makeup of the gifted programs and what does that composition tell us about how students experience their programs? With those questions in mind, some secondary questions for this study that emerged were: Do special programs function as our modern-day approach to segregation? Are students who learn differently relegated to programs for students who have disabilities? Are these students and other students left out of programs that recognize their gifts and talents? Has gifted education legislation created a vehicle for separate and unequal educational circumstances for students of color?

**Significance of Study**

This study of gifted programs in public schools from the perspective of Black students who graduated from the program rendered a unique perspective of those students who traversed
the program and who recalled their experiences as minorities in the program. The study adds to the discourse of racial presence in specialized programs and contributes to the understanding of why the representation of Blacks, specifically in gifted education, is not proportionally reflective of the population of the public school systems. The study also reflects on how race is encountered on a daily basis from the perspective of African American students.

In gathering the views of the African students who graduated from a school where each participated in gifted programs at some point in their public school years, this research serves to further the research of those who have gathered information about African Americans students in gifted programs.

The study is novel in that it is not questioning the giftedness of the participants but rather the participants are alumni of a gifted program.

**Theoretical Framework**

The problems posed in this dissertation were examined through Critical Race Theory’s concept of interest convergence. Pioneered by Derrick Bell, interest convergence is the theoretical framework that he used to describe alternative views of the landmark case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Bell (1995) reflected on the principle of “interest convergence”:

> This principle of ‘interest convergence’ provides: The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites. However, the Fourteenth Amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle- and upper-class whites. (p. 22)

Applications of interest convergence specifically, and Critical Race Theory in general, are relevant to the study of gifted programs as the programs have evolved over time. Applying interest convergence to the lack of cultural diversity in the gifted program, one might surmise that drastic changes to the way that culturally diverse children are recruited would only be
utilized if the need to populate the program was desperate, and/or to the extent select children of color possess other markers that are not perceived as threatening to the social order.

Unless it is in the interest of the dominant culture to make changes, changes will not occur; changes that do occur happen only because they do not serve to threaten the benefits or interests of those with power. Bell (1980) asserted that *Brown vs. Board of Education* did not live up to the broad changes it promised. Bell (1980) wrote that “Most black children attend public schools that are both racially isolated and inferior (p. 518). Bell (1980) further contended that,

> Whites may agree in the abstract that blacks are citizens and are entitled to constitutional protection against racial discrimination, but few are willing to recognize that racial segregation is much more than a series of quaint customs that can be remedied effectively without altering the status of whites. (p. 522)

Thus the application of interest convergence is relative to the gifted program. Changes in the definition of the law, uniform application of the definition, allowances for cultural differences, and intense teacher training only occur if and when it is in the best interest of the dominant culture.

**Cultural Deficit Theory**

Several theories describe the three cultural views of identifying gifted students. The cultural deficit theory assumes that there is something wrong or culturally lacking in children of culture (Ford, 2013; MacDonald, 2009). It is assumed that the part of the culture that is lacking is what makes the culture inferior (Ford, 2013; Salvadore and Shelton, 2007). Children who are judged by this theory are doomed from the beginning and will likely not be considered worthy of identification for a gifted program because of preconceived notions of inferiority (Ford, 2013; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007).
Cultural Conflict Theory

The cultural conflict theory recognizes the fact that there is a cultural difference between what is familiar to the student and the culture they must assimilate to remain in a gifted program (Ford, 2013; Merelman, 1992). In a gifted classroom differences may be recognized but there may not be genuine respect for the culture. This results in “disharmony” for the child or what is sometimes referred to as a culture shock (Ford, 2013; Jack, 2014). The greater the conflict the more difficulty the culturally diverse experiences of the child clash with that of the dominant culture, and the more difficult it is to remove negative educational experiences for the child (Ford, 2013; Lombard, 2014). Retention of a child under the cultural conflict theory is difficult.

Cultural Difference Theory

Cultural difference theory should be the aim of a gifted program. In this cultural setting the child is not forced to mesh with any perceived deficits. Differences between culture and the gifted program are not viewed as inferior to one another. Differences are not viewed as negative or inferior but are rather embraced as a unique part of the child and the experience. A cultural difference theory is the one towards which all gifted programs should aim so that attainment and retention of culturally different students is maximized (Ford, 2013).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom Environment within Gifted Education

Although new and innovative ways of identifying culturally diverse students have grown throughout the nation, only some states are willing to make drastic or even minor changes to the identification process. Johnsen (2004) wrote, “When identifying gifted students, schools need to select qualitative and quantitative instruments that are technically adequate and that match students’ characteristics and the school district’s program” (p. 107). This would improve the identification formula and would also allow a more equitable inclusion of multicultural students. Individual states can modify the identification formula and specific rules can be implemented within the formula. Wellisch (2012) explained the identification formula:

In the recent past, children were identified as gifted if they scored at least 130 or two standard deviations from the norm on an IQ test. This score now appears to be too high on account of changes made to the revised Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children—Fourth Edition [WISC-IV], and downward adjustments made due to the Flynn effect [a substantial international increase in average scores on intelligence tests]. Together, these appear to have reduced WISC-IV’s Full Scale IQ in gifted children from a mean of 128.7 for the WISC-Third Edition validity study to IQ 123.5 for the WISC-IV gifted sample. (p.51-52)

If students just miss the mark of this test and are placed in an environment where they are taught that it is acceptable to think creatively, they are able to master the skills needed to not only remain in a gifted setting but to also pass the test that they had failed earlier (Adams & Pierce, 2006). A gradual move to a gifted program through introduction in a scholastic academy has been shown to help culturally diverse students receive services that meet their academic needs. Such identification programs could also halt the problem of underachievement by African American students. Ford (1998) attested, “African American students were underachieving (42%), mostly because of poor study habits and poor time management” (p. 10). The smaller
class size of gifted programs and the insurgence of more students who belong to the same culture can help close the achievement gap for African American students.

Differentiated instruction is an expected mode of instruction in gifted teaching but it is optional in traditional classrooms where most African American students are placed. Teacher knowledge of student culture is the most important factor differentiated instruction and drives the instruction. Delpit, (2012) contended, however, that culturally relevant instruction can be achieved by teachers other than Black teachers.

How a student is taught can determine how a student will respond. African American students often are not taught on a basis of tiered instruction or differentiated instruction (Stuart and Rinaldi, 2009). A series of teaching methods that incorporate rote memorization and responses has put many African American students in positions where it is impossible to think creatively or assess higher order thinking skills (Hoffman & Webb, 2010).

Teacher Training

Another problem is the lack or absence of adequate teacher training classes to help to identify and place more African American students in gifted programs (Gubbins, 2008). Teachers may have set of ideas about children from certain cultures based upon what they were taught during their training programs and what they learned from social experiences (Delpit, 1995). Teacher recommendation is the common method used when schools are seeking to promote or grow the population of gifted students. Teachers often are unprepared to make such vital recommendations and/or have not been trained to recognize cultural differences in learning.

Regarding the need to educate and train regular classroom teachers, Johnson (1984) declared:

With the present shortage of trained teachers of the gifted, it seems important to direct attention to regular teachers who can provide planned educational experiences for these students in their classrooms. Such instruction must be preceded by in-service training
designed to familiarize the teachers with a variety of evaluative and instructional procedures. (p. 199)

Teachers are the main front that gifted programs seek out when trying to find gifted and talented students (Hebert & Kelly, 2006). Teachers might not have a checklist to which they can refer when looking for certain and specific behaviors in their students.

Teachers who must seek out potential candidates for the gifted program often rely on behaviors such as the student always turns in assignments on time, student will remain on task without any prompting from the teacher, or the student answers questions correctly, and volunteers in classroom setting (Chart, Grigorenko, & Sternberg, 2008). These are not necessarily the behaviors of culturally diverse students such as African American students. Without any concrete teacher training in what behaviors signify a gifted student, the teacher is forced to rely on decisions that are made based on inadequate training (Gubbins, 2008). Teachers need training to recognize learning styles of the culturally diverse student if an increase in the numbers of African American students in gifted programs is to occur.

**Desegregation**

The creation of magnet and gifted programs were put in place in an effort to move forward with the desegregation of public school systems (Grantham, 2004). Even though many successful lawsuits were heard and ratified before the Supreme Court, desegregation was a slow and arduous process particularly for the southern states of the country (Bankston and Caldas, 2002). *Brown v Board of Education* required all states to proceed in desegregating all public schools. Following the successful passage of *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954, the Jim Crow South enacted laws place that nullified the effects of the historic landmark case (Crespino, 2003). According to Emanuel (2011):
The Louisiana Legislature immediately went to work in defiance of the Brown decision. The legislature proposed and the voters adopted an amendment to Art. XII, Sec. 1, of the state constitution, which provided that all public elementary and secondary schools should be operated separately for white and colored children. (p. 199)

Such laws prolonged the actual implementation of desegregation of the school system and allowed states much leeway to create half-hearted shows at desegregation which only led to more litigation which would in many cases span decades (Bragg, 2003). As recounted by Ford (2013):

More than 50 years after the legal physical desegregation of public schools (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954), many reports and studies indicate that schools are more racially segregated now than in the 1960s. Many gains have been lost. (p. 5)

States that were determined to litigate and avoid true integration in schools developed a series of laws that were designed to give the appearance of desegregation. Perry (2003) wrote:

In the pre-Civil Rights era, unequal educational opportunity was an uncontested reality. The ideology of white supremacy and black intellectual inferiority, in communities in the south and in some communities in other parts of the country, was quite explicit. Black people in the Jim Crow South knew that most white people saw them as intellectually inferior and less than human. Indeed, a whole complex of social relations, the exercise of power, and distribution of economic resources, goods, and services were organized in support of this ideological position. (p. 88)

Civil Rights leaders did not agree or accept the concept that Black people were intellectually inferior and disproving this concept became the mission and the stance of Civil Rights leaders (Delaney, 2010). Protest marches and many more filings of legal suits against Jim Crow laws forced the school board system to try another plan for desegregation of schools. Separate but equal laws were put aside and a plan of “freedom of choice” was made into law. As observed by Scott (2005):

While some choice options were developed intentionally to address student diversity, others have no stake in the issue. Still, observers have noted that some forms of choice can exacerbate or increase student diversity within and between public and private schools, given the regulations governing the plan. Others argue that since many urban schools are already segregated, more choice is not likely to further segregate them and that families of color deserve more choices than represented by the public schools attended by their children. (p.3)
Although originally a means to entice the best and brightest to voluntary integrate, the gifted program maintained a higher number of white students in proportion to Black students since its inception (Grantham, 2012). Urban schools became the sites for gifted programs but the creation of the programs did not do much to further integrate already segregated schools.

Federal law requires that students placed in special education programs be afforded the services they need to achieve in the public school system. Clark (2008) states that in 1978, “The Gifted and Talented Children’s Education Act (P.L. 95-561) became law and provided for separate programs for gifted and talented children” (p. 11). Prior to the landmark case of Brown v the Board of Education, schools were allowed to operate under the canopy of separate but equal. Ford (2013) raises the question of separate but equal practices, as the number of non-white students who are identified and served in gifted classes is greater than the number of non-white students who are placed in special education classes at the opposite end of gifted and talented.

Although the numbers vary from state to state and from school district to school district, it is apparent that gifted and talented programs are disproportionately populated by white students with a sparse number of students of other races represented. If indeed the special programs are designed to help all students with gifted needs that cannot be met in the regular classroom, how is Brown v Board of Education not in peril when only white students appear to be the only one afforded entrance into gifted programs that are most times operated right in the middle of the poorest urban high school setting? According to an article written by Hopkins (2010) this problem is highlighted where the author wrote:

Yet, it is those very programs that also show vestiges of separation, segregation, and inequality resembling the conditions prior to the Brown v Board of Education decision. For example, it is well documented that students of color who have identified disabilities are overrepresented in special education while those who are identified as intellectually exceptional are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. . . they are similar in
that they can both, to some extent, be considered present-day examples of segregated settings. (p. 25)

The solution to this present day misnomer may be as simple as formulating a set of specific criteria statewide for identifying gifted and talented students. Cultural differences are also in play when identifying whether a student is a special education needs student or a gifted and talented student. The typical behavior of a student in a classroom who is bored and not challenged is to disrupt the learning process. When parents are contacted and told that their child is a behavior problem, Black parents often asks about accommodations for special education. These accommodations may include longer time to take a test, shortened assignments, or testing in small group rooms.

**Definition of Giftedness**

A major contributor to the unbalanced distribution of children from different races in gifted and talented programs is that there is no nationwide consensus or federal mandated guidelines for the placement of students in the gifted programs (Clark, 2008). This lack of consensus leads to the instability of gifted and talented programs as opposed to the opposite end of the spectrum—special education programs (Ford & Moore, 2006). With no set state or federal guidelines present, identification of the gifted and talented is based on Intelligence Quotient test (Borland, 2012). The lack of standard guidelines leads to perceptions of teachers, counselors, and others, and once again the cultural perceptions serve as a barrier to the inclusion of Black students in gifted and talented programs (Feldhusen, 2003). Culturally, Black students who misbehave or refuse to complete assignments because they are not challenging enough are more often labeled learning disabled than they are assumed to be gifted (Kitano, 2003). Hopkins (2010) attacked this lack of standard guidelines as a hindrance to correctly identifying Black children in gifted programs. Hopkins (2008) states “when students are not provided opportunities
to be challenged, they often become unmotivated and bored and may become a behavior problem, which detracts from the perception that gifted children do not exhibit behavioral challenges for teachers” (p. 25). African American children who consistently misbehave because they are not challenged skew teacher perception that students from a certain culture and ethnic groups are not considered to be gifted. This perception is compounded if the student is also from an economically disadvantaged home as opposed to a Black student who may have doctors and lawyers for parents. Thus, to compound the teacher perception that students from low-income backgrounds are incapable of thinking on a gifted level, some type of standardized identification process must be in place to assure that all students are afforded the same opportunities and services of gifted programs, regardless of race.

**Closing the Gap of Underachievement**

Perhaps the push by legislation to close the achievement gap between white American and African American students can be one explanation why the brightest and the best of the African American population has gone underserved in increasing amounts in the 21st century (Ambrose, Sternberg, & Bharath, 2012). As standardized testing and adherence to a nationwide Common Core Standard Curriculum has reached the forefront in American educational, the needs of children of color who are already achieving has been assigned to the back burner on the educational circuit (Borland, 2012). Although inclusion of African American students in gifted and talented programs is in a decline, enrollment of African American students in special education programs is at an all-time high (Ford, 2012). Another problem is the twice-exceptional child. In his article concerning the plights of the gifted, Stein, Hetzel & Beck (2012) noted that “The term *twice exceptional* was coined by Gallagher to denote students who are both
gifted and have disabilities” (p. 36). Causes of this underrepresentation are making the circuits as researchers try to determine why the gap is widening at such alarming rates (Peterson, 2012).

**Cultural Isolation**

One cause for underrepresentation can be found in student perceptions and feelings of isolation when they are placed in gifted programs with students who are not culturally and racially congruent (Ogbu, 2003). It is essential that the numbers increase for African American students in gifted programs so that they feel a sense of belonging that does not isolate them from other students in their own culture. This sentiment was expressed by Frye (2010) who suggested:

> It has been shown that African American gifted students experience more emotional and psychological problems than their non-gifted counterparts. The needs to belong coupled with peer allegiance often take precedence in the lives of students of color. African American students who feel unconnected or unaccepted by their peers may become withdrawn, introverted, aggressive, or disruptive. They often choose to underachieve rather than risk being accused by their peers of ‘acting white’. (p. 12)

Not only do the brightest and most talented of Black students need to be part of the closure of the achievement gap but the brightest also need to be educated in settings that include other students within their culture (Buck, 2010). Every student has a need to feel a cultural connection as well as academic stimulus in their young lives (Tyson, 2006). Peer pressure may undo all that programs for Black students with exceptionalities may seek to enhance; therefore, the distribution of placement of students should be conducted in a manner that makes the program racially diversified (Ogbu, 2003).

Culturally responsive teaching, or CRT, is designed for teachers to reach Black students with gifted and talented needs to also connect with their culture without feeling like an outcast.

Culturally relevant pedagogy buy specifically committed to collective not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rest on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success, (b) students must develop
and/or maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of current social order. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160)

Using culturally relevant pedagogy, students learn how to critically analyze society that allows them to critique what are considered to be cultural norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gay (2000) conveyed, however, “…culturally responsive teaching alone cannot solve all the problems of improving the education of marginalized students of color” (p. 1).

Green (2010) asserted that gifted education needs to help students develop a cultural personality that will help them to not only choose academic excellence but to also make academic excellence a choice that resounds with African American cultures. Green (2010) also wrote that gifted education itself is in dire need of a structural change: “…in order to successfully and effectively meet these changes and the needs of students of color, we must begin to align our curriculum and instruction to be culturally responsive to address not only students’ learning needs, but their sociocultural needs” (p. 32). Meeting the needs of the Black gifted and talented student who is already enrolled in such a program is addressed by this formula (Steele, 2003). Problems of initially identifying and placing these Black students in programs still exist. Other factors that keep the identification and placement need to be addressed (Hilliard, 2003).

**Professional Development**

One factor devoid of federal guidelines and that needs to be addressed for racial balance in a gifted program is an informed staff. Without unified written principles, it is up to the teacher to overlook preconceived biases that might portray the face of the gifted as one specific type. Teachers, counselors, and others may perpetrate the notion instituted by vague gifted education
guidelines and legislation that created a 21st century vehicle for separate and unequal educational opportunities for children of color. According to Baldwin (1987):

Although it is important that generalizations not be made for all black children who might be gifted, a good understanding of the variables which might intervene in the process of providing the appropriate educational environment for these children are important. (p. 184)

Currently a lack of professional development exists in this country and tips the scales of inequality even further in the direction of creating a private segregated school environment within a public integrated school facility (Baldwin, 1987). Professional development training should involve stretching the current notions of what is giftedness to include other factors and not rely so heavily on vague federal guidelines and IQ tests (Plucker, Callahan, & Tomchin, 2004).

There are other ways of identifying and supporting students who may be gifted and talented but do not meet the traditional “face” of gifted children (Piechowski & Colangelo, 2004). When teachers and administrators are willing to identify students and value and focus on the strengths and unique talents of each student, the first step is made in creating a community of unified considerate learners who can respect and support each other in an environment where all can benefit, grow, and excel (Johnsen, 2004). The key to teaching whole groups of students and determining who would benefit from further instruction tailored to the exceptionalities of gifted students could be a way of increasing the number of African American students in gifted programs (Dixon, 2006). Even teachers who do not teach gifted students can be given a checklist of certain identifiers for which to look using high-level cognitive thinking skills (Roberts, 2006). A teacher would tailor a class so that it does not operate strictly on rote memorization or the repetition of isolated facts on the lowest level of Blooms’ taxonomy scale (Robinson & Kolloff, 2006). Hence, teachers should be provided with a set of principles of instruction that will allow
them to reach students of all race, social class, and particularly ethnic students of other language backgrounds (Dettmer, Landrum, & Miller, 2006).

Teachers should work to seek simplicity in complex times. Cohen (2011) established six principles that can enhance learning in the classroom and draw out the unique giftedness of students who may not otherwise identified as gifted and talented:

We need to extend our notions of giftedness to include children from every racial and ethnic group, children of poverty, and those with disabilities. The spectrum of giftedness must be expanded to include the peacemaker, the child with extraordinary awareness of the environment . . . Providing opportunity is often the key. When a child from an impoverished inner city environment is offered a violin and lessons, the music she makes may be extraordinary. (p. 136)

In a society where the very definition of gifted is not consistent or plainly spelled out in any guidelines, teachers have the unique opportunity to use their own guidelines to identify children of color who may miss out on gifted services if IQ alone is used to identify the gifted (Clark, 2008). A look outside the narrow focus of the classroom window will reveal many children of different economic races and culture who are talented and overlooked because the focus is too narrow to envision a student of low economic standards as a child who is truly gifted and talented, and posed to benefit from all that gifted programs have to offer.

Identification and sustainability of Black children in gifted programs is a problem that continues to plague the educational system even now in the 21st century. Obstacles to inclusion of Black children have been identified with such broad topics such as “negative stereotypes about academic performance, teacher attitudes, lack of referrals of African American students to gifted education programs” (Singleton, Livingston, Hines & Jones 2010, p. 13). Because of these obstacles, African American students are less likely to be referred to honor programs, AP programs, and also gifted programs. This is a problem because access to high school AP programs can provide readiness for college that is lacking in the Black community.
An obstacle to sustainability and/or identification prevalent in the Black community is parental involvement. Parents of Black students are not always informed about programs, as AP and gifted, and thus do not know what to ask for when seeking help for their children in the public school system (Ogbu, 2003). Many students who have problems staying focused in the classroom are immediately placed in a special needs class of special education and few parents are asked whether they think their child would benefit from the gifted programs. Singleton, Livingston, Hines, and Jones (2010) further cited that “African American students are half as likely as whites to be placed in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) English or math classes and 2.4 times more likely than whites to be placed in remedial classes” (p. 14). If a student is in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, parents may not have knowledge of the benefits of gifted classes and the student may have knowledge but is reluctant to seek out placement in these classes. It is possible that the stigma and pressures from peers in the community would be more than the student is willing to bear. Singleton, Livingston, Hines, and Jones (2010) concluded: “This is why the establishment of partnerships and collaborative efforts among parents and community stakeholders that will nurture and positively reinforce a standard of excellence for academically and intellectually gifted students is needed in economically depressed neighborhoods” (p. 16).

Sustainability is also necessary when considering gender issues, in particular, African American males. Historically, Black males tend to have the most difficulty with even minor achievement battles. When Black males are enrolled in advanced placement classes and gifted programs, the struggle to remain academically elite may sometimes prove to be a Herculean task for them (Granatham, 2011). Currently in our society, Black males occupy the highest number in the prison system, are more likely to drop out of school, are the most frequently suspended and
expelled from school, and occupy the most places in classes for students with learning abilities. To steer a course through high school, the Black male has to adopt a certain persona that entitles him to the label of “cool”. Advancing and excelling academically often is the last thing on the mind of today’s Black youth (Perry, 2003). When questioning the sustainability of Black males in academically gifted classes, Whiting (2009) asked:

How many gifted, high-achieving black males feel they must hide or camouflage their intelligence and academic accomplishments? How many Black males, even when recognized as gifted, do not feel comfortable being intelligent and are willing to sacrifice academics for social or peer acceptance? . . .it appears that social issues, including stereotypes and peer pressures, contribute to the low rates of Black students being recognized and formally identified as gifted. (p. 226)

While facing the impetus of the Black problems of admittance into the gifted program, the few Black males who are identified and placed in gifted programs face peer pressures and other social barriers in a culture that historically does not respect academic achievement, (Whiting, 2009). Of the few Black students who are identified and placed in gifted classrooms, the Black male is in the minority (Winsler, Karkhanis, Kim, & Levitt, 2013).

High achievement by Black males has been discussed in research; initially the Black males faced the same issues as others such as peer pressure and a persona that being academically excellent is attributed to being ‘white’ or ‘not cool.’ (Grantham, 2011). The social network of the Black males who flourished in the gifted programs, nationally, was credited with keeping the Black youths in the game as Graham and Anderson (2008) noted:

These young men were guided a great deal by a social network inclusive of parents and trusted community members. These ‘significant others’ surrounded these students with positive messages often grounded in African American history, providing them with narratives and specific African American heroes, and heroines as concrete examples to which they could relate. . . Perhaps more importantly than sharing anecdotes of African American heritage, these ‘significant others’ modeled to these students the importance of fighting for equity to attain an education as they advocated for their students against the bureaucratic machine called ‘school’. (p. 493)
Throughout the research, it has been suggested that the way to combat low numbers of Black students in gifted program is to surround the students with a strong network of positive people who are vigilant about reminding the youths of how important it is that they reach for the epoch of academic achievement (Widstorom, 2011). This network should begin at home with informed parents who attend the meetings and the school regularly assures that they ask for the services that will allow their children to become the best they can be. The network should then be enlarged to include involved and caring teachers who are able to look beyond classic stereotypical beliefs about the inability of low economic students to achieve on a high academic level (Grantham, 2013). Providing students with a pride in their heritage and the rich works of high Black achievers who came before them is also a means to keep Black males grounded rather than participants of the motto that being smart will rob them of “street cred” (Henfield, 2013). Females need this strong network of positive people as well. The problem is under-representation of Blacks in gifted programs, solutions that are yet to be enacted.

As inner city and urban school systems move towards polarization, the majority race of many of our public school systems is rapidly becoming predominantly minority (Grantham, 2004). The minority races represented include Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians with the majority of the minority numbers represented are Black. Consequently, special programs designed to lure students away from private school sectors have created magnet programs with numbers that tend to underrepresent the Black population. There is a difference between a school that is racially balanced and a racially balanced school with racially unbalanced classrooms (Ford & Harmon, 2001). While the spirit of the idea is sound, the question arises as to whether minorities are represented in these special classes or pullouts. If they are not, then whose needs are served in
the creation of special funds to create special programs designed to attract the best and brightest that the public school system has to offer?

**Who Are the Disenfranchised**

A major factor fought by the landmark *Brown v Board of Education* is argued in the inequitable resources afforded to White students as opposed to the resources afforded to Black students. If we fast forward to the 21st century, the term “minorities” must be expanded to include other races as well (Sarouphim, 2002). Some of the races, such as Hispanics, are very often in the majority in the school systems that serve them, with Black and White students emerging as the minority races. Concentration is marginally focused on whether or not Black students are equitably represented in a school system that employs public funding to create gifted and magnet programs in the school system (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). If Blacks are underrepresented in gifted and magnet programs, the next line of questioning must address whether the public school system has achieved desegregation or “the appearance of desegregation” (Bush and Causey, 2001, p. 34).

**A School within a School**

Magnet and gifted programs were initially set up as a means to provide voluntary desegregation of schools. The success of the programs is still up for debate and the subject of many research studies (Brown, 1997). However, it’s alternative—involuntary busing—was considered a complete failure by the 1980s. The idea of placing a school within a school that allowed for students to freely choose to go to other schools was touted as a far better scenario than busing (Mulhern & Morris, 1985). Yet, if one factors in the idea that the Black student population is excluded or underrepresented in gifted programs within the school, Bush (2001) confirmed the assumption that “many secondary schools reinforce patterns of racial
desegregation” (p. 35). After completing research on ten district wide programs in the
Montgomery County School System in Alabama, Bush and his colleagues conducted qualitative
research in which the opinions of students were added to the research on the district programs.
Conducted with the children served by the “school within a school”, the research illuminated
some racial tensions between Blacks and Whites in these schools. Therefore, through the
qualitative study (Bush, Burley & Causey-Bush, 2001) sought to discover how students define
desegregation, as well as solicited their opinions on the dynamics of the school within a school.
Questions were structured to ascertain student’s thoughts and perceptions of the social, political,
personal, and academic of their school’s magnet program. Many Blacks and Hispanic said they
felt the sting of underrepresentation in the school magnet program. The students’ views on using
gifted and magnet programs to desegregate schools in the district were the equivalent of hiding
segregation schools in plain sight.

White Flight

Gifted programs gained prominence in the 1980s in the school district discussed in this
research. Several factors contributed to the emergence of gifted programs. With the enactment of
forced busing, inner city schools became more segregated as suburban schools showed an
increase in white population. Once a unitary status was declared by the urban school district,
schools of choice were the method chosen to desegregate schools; Bagley (1996) discussed the
school of choice method of desegregation and states:

In essence, through the enactment of these reforms, parental choice is intended to
function as the motor by which the competitive quasi-market in education is driven and
the quality of schooling improves; good schools grow while bad ones either change or
close. The pivotal role of parents in shaping the nature of educational provision, coupled
with increased rights to express a preference and obtain the school of their choice,
could—if informed by ‘race’—have significant implications for the ethnic composition of
schools. If, for example, white parents choose not to send their children to schools with
high numbers of Black or Asian pupils, then the likelihood of schools becoming more ethnically segregated is increased. (p. 3)

It is debatable as to the extent in which schools of choice, such as a gifted program, acted as a means to improve integration and improve the quality of schools. The question arises if the real reason for white flight is that parents have made a conscience choice to not send their children to schools with high populations of multicultural races. Bagley (1996) concluded:

In 1993, a half of white parental interviewees and in 1994s almost a third of white parental interviewees cited the presence of Asian children in a school population as a major factor influencing their choice of school. As the interview data illuminates ‘race’ informs the decision-making process for these white parents in a negative way to put them off choosing a multiethnic school. (p.10)

When parents deliberately choose a school for their children based on the ethnic makeup of the school’s population, a lost opportunity occurs, according to Crosby (2012). To that extent, white flight hurts the students on both sides of the equation. When researching the white flight of the Claiborne County school system, Crosby (2012) declared:

To a great extent, the Claiborne County story fits easily in this narrative of resistance and failure. But I now believe that seeing it only in those terms ignores what were real opportunities for different choices. It also obscures the fact that white privilege has shaped not just the way ‘desegregation’ happened but also our local and national narratives. (p. 261)

Once the parents began to return, the opportunity to return amicably was lost. A similar occurrence of lost opportunity occurred in the Norfolk, Virginia. The system voted to end mandatory busing for integration in grades K-5. The fear of white flight served as an impetus for the resegregation and for ending forced busing. The attitudes, however, did change with the ending of forced busing as noted by Carr and Zeigler (1990) who wrote:

It is clear that the attitudes of white parents toward the Norfolk schools did not improve when busing ended. If anything, both the black parents and the white parents were less likely to recommend the Norfolk schools to newcomers than before. Of those parents who decided to enroll their children in public kindergartens and of those who transferred
their children from private to public schools in 1986, only a small minority gave the end of bussing as the main reason for their actions. (p. 281)

Once the assumption is made that schools are not academically sound, white flight is inevitable and in many cases irreversible because of parental attitudes. The phenomena exacerbates segregation, however, when white flight begins and remains unchecked. The white flight issue is also noted as increasing segregation in the Delaware Public School System. Glenn (2011) noted:

Perhaps, the most important conclusion that one can draw from this study is the importance to school desegregation of finding a way to get different groups of people to live in proximity to each other. Desegregation primarily serves as a corrective device to offset the residential segregation in the nation. . The scope of desegregation is somewhat limited because it does not address the underlying problem, which is residential segregation. Schools will continue to be segregated as long as the locations in which they exist remain segregated. Integrating the housing markets must be the first priority of policy makers seeking to reduce school segregation. (p.20)

As long as the residents of a neighborhood have a majority representation of one race, the segregation of schools is almost inevitable. The emergence of charter schools gives some the ability to go to other schools and to further segregate the public school system. Until some means of mitigating the multiple problems surface, white flight and resegregation will go hand in hand. (Rapp & Eckes, 2007).

A Place to Belong

Attitude towards desegregation and the student perceptions of where they belong are essential elements for discussion. Magnet and gifted programs’ existence depends on voluntary enrollment in these program. Aside from the student who enrolls, there is also the attitude and perceptions of the student who chooses to attend that school but not enroll in the magnet component. Students who display certain attributes that allow them to become a part of the gifted population may soon find that their African American peers shun them. Perceptions of youth will
play into the perceptions of their peers. Cultural characteristics and values are vital to African American youth according to Ford (2013):

Cultural identity is an important source of vulnerability for Black students. For their friends, family, and community, they may intentionally underperform in school, sabotage their success, refuse to be in gifted classes, rebel against authority figures e.g., teachers and school administrators, who are perceived as agents of suppression, and rebel against behaviors associated with whites, such as dress, speaking, and academics. To protect their overall self-image i.e., self-esteem, self-concept, and racial identity, many African American students develop ineffective coping styles that alienate them from school and high achievement, and ultimately hinder their academic achievement. (p. 19)

Finding a place to belong becomes a diminishing dream for many youths in gifted programs. Being an accelerated learner naturally puts one in the spotlight but being an accelerated learner in a gifted program comes with its own unique set of problems (Ogbu, 2003). The first problem is how peers view an African American child in a gifted program. Gifted programs are self-contained but they are not insular. The students are on the same school campus as their peers and naturally wish to interact with them (Ford & Harmon, 2001). This becomes difficult when the child is alienated from his culture because of pre-conceived notions of the representations of Black culture.

The term “acting white” is what the gifted African American child is often labeled by his peers in non-traditional subjects (Butterfield, 2006). Some characteristics of “acting white” are speaking properly, getting good grades in school, raising hands to contribute to the class discussion, and simply the fact that the student has chosen to excel. In Buck’s (2010) examination of the effect of students of achievement being labeled by others in their culture, he found:

Other scholars have agreed that ‘acting white’ has at least some effect. As one set of sociologist found, their interviewees were ‘aware of academically able Blacks who, in order to avoid being accused of acting white, deliberately chose not to enroll in higher-track classes and not to maximize their academic achievement. These scholars believe
that ‘acting white’ causes at least part of the racial gap in academic achievement, because of the ‘power of acting white to shame students as traitors to the race. (p. 34)

High school is a sociocultural existence and even those African American students who have the drive to succeed and the backing of positive supportive parents at home still pause and wish to be included in the “cool crowd” or at the very least, not to be ostracized by members of their own race (Tyson, 2006). This can make for a very lonely existence for the gifted achievers, and some African American youth choose to underachieve rather than choose to be alone in the social context of high school.

Some African Americans are taught that to be a true African American, one must be an underachiever in order to maintain “street creds.” Gifted programs can feed the problems of low interest and the low numbers of African Americans who do not want to trade their social standing for the chance to be placed in a program that will challenge them to achieve at a higher level (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006).

The literature is inconclusive about why academically gifted African Americans choose to underachieve rather than become social outcasts from their culture in the school. Some literature supports the idea that African Americans in gifted programs will embrace the “acting white” theory and use it to spur them on to achieve at even greater heights; the school’s environment can influence students’ reaction to the term. Discourse and the feeding of racial stereotypical academic levels are aided by the use of tracking in a school system. Mickelson and Velasco (2006) compiled a series of writings by authors seeking to refute as well as to analyze the negative connotations of the term “acting white.” Mickelson and Velasco (2006) found that the organizational and structural makeup of the school’s curriculum and classroom setting caused more destruction than the idea that African Americans choose to underachieve: “Tracking is a good example of this point. Tracking—which segregates students in racially correlated ability
groups and thus also imposes racially correlated opportunities to learn—is a notorious structural contributor to the achievement gap” (p. 29). Tracking, at times, is used to place students into teacher’s classes based on how well the student has scored on previous standardized tests and the students’ present grade point average. Not only is tracking a key component in the underachievement of African Americans but it is also a key contributor to the achievement gap between African Americans and other races (Davis, 2014). The idea that students are naïve, and do not realize that they are placed together in one class to assure that they do not disrupt the classroom setting of the other students, is naïve. Many students who are tracked and placed in the same classes together year after year have no desire to become any better than what the school system has already told them that they are capable of being.

The majority of the acting-white words that African American students acquire in gifted classes come from this subculture within the school. Yet it is argued by (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006) that some African American students who are high achieving react in a completely opposite fashion:

Additionally, we found a range of responses to the acting-white label among the academically talented and accomplished black students we interviewed: (1) Some students acknowledged being the recipient of the insult but promptly dismissed it. (2) Some students were greatly disturbed by it—some even admit to crying about it—but, with the help of parents and others, managed to work through that distress. (3) Others rejected the label as being ‘anti-Black’ but were challenged by it. It some way, it motivated them to actively ‘represent their race ‘and assume a ‘Bring it on!’ attitude”. (p. 28)

Because the attitudes and perceptions of gifted African American students are so varied, it is appropriate to conduct research that looks at the gifted program through the lens and the eyes of the student who is living the experience. Research itself can make many assumptions but the story is found in the stories of the African Americans who must achieve and survive in a gifted atmosphere.
Understanding Creative Behavior

The wording of the federal guidelines regarding gifted programs has not clearly defined creative behavior in the area of giftedness. The emphasis in the language of the definition is in the area of high IQ scores and norm-referenced tests. The definition does also require the student to have multiple intelligences or talent and creativity that should also be measured within the intelligence test (Plucker & Tomchin, 2004). The definition also provides a place for creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, and visual and performing arts, but when the test is applied in a realistic school system, it is the high IQ scores and norm referenced tests that make the first cut in placing students. Many schools fall short in providing a necessary component including talented measures of education to gifted students. Students who are talented are also gifted students and it is important to understand creative behavior in order to serve all students.

Creativity is not aptly measurable in norm-referenced test; however, the student who can sing, draw, and create and recite poetry, dance, and play musical instruments are all included in the broad statement of services offered in gifted programs (Clark, 2008). Inconsistencies exist since states are allowed individual interpretation of gifted education, thus many talented students are underserved by their omission from consideration to a gifted program. Students must show first an ability to rank high on norm-referenced tests before the talented parts of their behavior are assigned a place in the program.

Students with gifts of musical talent, acting ability, and artistic gifts are not measured on standardized test scores (Ford, 2013). Therefore, their place in a gifted program will most likely be ceded to the next student who has the ability to score well on standardized tests. Pirto (2004) explained:

The new definition proposed that giftedness—or talent—occurs in all groups across all cultures and is not necessarily in the test scores, but in person’s ‘high performance
capability’ in the intellectual, in the creative, and in the artistic realms. Common sense says that both the intellectual and the artistically talented are creative and that creative people can be both intellectual and artistic. (p. 12-13).

Often, however, this belief is not widespread in schools that are under the gun to make a certain number of points to avoid losing major funding and facilities if scholastic ability and test taking prowess are not the major push in classroom.

Understanding and recognizing creativeness is especially important in rural settings (DeLeon, 1997). Studies have shown that students who utilize a curriculum that includes visual arts enables students to think and develop higher level thinking skills. The ability to access higher level thinking skills allows the student to perform better on standardized tests.

The emphasis on creative skills should be considered foremost when identifying students for the gifted program. DeLeon (1997) expressed that, “Visual arts can develop both individuality and the capability to think clearly, to criticize, to speculate on assumptions and to reason through deductions” (p. 16). DeLeon (1997) also explored the creation of a gifted and talented visual arts program for students in a rural area:

Education of the arts can also help achieve a number of the national education goals for the year 2000. The arts can help retain students in school and improve the high school graduation rate, the arts can promote student achievement in challenging subject matter, and the arts can foster a disciplined environment. Goals of art education include problem solving, higher order thinking skills, risk-taking, teamwork, and creativity, which can also be viewed in terms of the U.S. competitiveness in the world economy. (p. 17)

Not only is the pursuit of an educational program that incorporates the arts vital to a gifted program, its merits can be seen in its usage across the board. Schools that employ a curriculum that incorporates the use of the arts across the subject matter enables students to use the very skills that are necessary to complete rigorous end of course testing. Teamwork and creativity are not only necessary skills for the classroom; they are necessary life skills to grow the country’s economy with a better trained workforce.
New Teacher Training and the Gifted Program

Student teachers or beginning teachers would benefit if school systems required that all teachers of gifted students earn university certification in teaching the gifted and talented before allowing the teacher into the classroom. However, this is not probable except in an ideal situation mainly because all gifted programs are not the same in every school system (Gross, 2004). Some gifted programs are self-contained and have dedicated teachers in a dedicated classroom teaching only gifted students for the students’ entire school day. Other programs are pull-outs, where the gifted student is taken out of regular classes and given one or two enrichment courses per week. Finally, there are gifted students who are distributed into regular classrooms and given extra work to accommodate the fact that they are more advanced than the other students in the class.

Teachers and student teacher can be unprepared to address the needs and institute the planning necessary to teach a classroom of gifted students (Johnson, 1984). Literature suggests that the way to address this issue is to provide a summer institute for regular classroom teachers who are in the position of teaching gifted students. In planning a summer institute, Johnson (1984) suggested that the planners should “provide structured one-on-one and small group experiences with gifted youngsters, allow participants to become actively involved by asking questions, developing learning activities, and working in small groups, and provide field-based objectives” (p. 199). Attending a summer institute is one way a teacher can prepare to teach gifted students but if that option is not available, there are other ways to prepare.

In a teacher program, it is commonly, assumed that the gifted student is innately equipped to access the skills necessary for survival in post-secondary schools. However, the literature supports that the gifted student needs to be taught lifelong learning skills in secondary high school settings. The teacher should tailor instruction to enhance and promote the gifted student’s
lifelong learning skills. These skills include the teaching of higher order thinking skills along with research skills, skills necessary for assessing information and higher order thinking skills are needed for processing information. According to Cohen (2011), the gifted student needs, “creativity skills for modifying, adapting, improving or transforming information; communication skills for sharing information and ideas; study skills for organizing study and managing time; and metacognitive skills for awareness and control of one’s learning strategies and processes” (p. 136).

Delisle (2012), encouraged teachers to improve student’s engagement based on what the student indicates is relevant and appealing in the classroom setting. Many sources are available to teachers to help in structuring a curriculum that makes students excited about learning. Teachers of gifted students have sources and empirical data to reference when designing classroom activities for students. However, a valid method that has proven to contribute to gifted curriculum design is to ask the students what they would like to learn. By asking the gifted student a few pertinent questions, the teacher can gauge what practices stimulate learning as opposed to which classroom practices suffocate learning. Students in the gifted classroom may bore easily and tune out when the learning process becomes more tedious than stimulating. The five Cs of student engagement- control, complexity, common bonds, choice, and caring teachers-seem relevant to the gifted classroom.

**Student Needs from Gifted Teachers**

Delisle (2012) discovered in the survey of students that those who responded wanted to be engaged in the learning process. For them, too much structure in the classroom was undesirable and was viewed as too much control. Students want meaningful exercises rather than a list of advanced work that is piled on strictly as a means of keeping the more advanced student
“busy.” Students thought that teachers should take a poll that would gauge what students already know so that they would not have to repeat the same material year after year (Delisle, 2012). Gifted students also wanted teachers to teach them how to study as opposed to teaching them how to memorize a list of isolated facts. Another common complaint was students did not like a pullout program that only met once a week to give enrichment exercises to gifted students. Students preferred to meet daily in self-contained classrooms where each subject was taught on a gifted level. Without these elements, they thought some enrichment classes are just extra work and extra homework.

Complexity refers to the students’ preference for complex information that is both new and stimulating. The students did not like the fact that the same material was taught every year and was geared to the level of every student (Delisle, 2012). This was done partially because many school districts are under a mandate for every student to be at a particular level by year end so that the students to pass state mandated tests. A major complaint of students was that often they were stuck teaching the slower students in the class. Gifted students were understood or believed to have grasped material and the student was used as a peer tutor rather than providing other engaging activities for the gifted student to complete while others in the class are catching up.

Another additional response was that students wanted a choice in the kinds of material that were presented to them to learn (Delisle, 2012). Most respondents reported that hands-on learning was far more effective than a teacher-led lecture style of delivery. The students wanted fewer limitations and more options in the learning process. That does not mean that the students desired a series of project based learning activities; rather preference was given to a healthy mix of teacher-led activities, collaborative activities, and some project based learning. When given
more choice in the learning process, students reported that learning became more relevant. However, a gifted student did not do well in classes where creativity was stifled (Delisle, 2012). When the teacher presents a question and expects one specific answer, the situation offers no opportunity to explore the element of choice. By opening the discussion to include “outside the box” answers, the gifted student can experience contentment and a measure of choice in the classroom.

Gifted students expressed the need to have caring teachers (Delisle, 2012); and the gifted child is typically very intuitive and responds to teachers who are excited about teaching and love what they are doing. The student wants a teacher who can keep control in the classroom while still making learning fun. When this happens, the students interviewed reported that the classroom environment became alive because of the teacher’s enthusiasm and knowledge. On the topic of caring teachers for from multicultural populations, Gay (2000) wrote:

Just as caring is a foundational pillar of effective teaching and learning, the lack of it produces inequities in educational opportunities and achievement outcomes for ethnically different students. These are apparent in teachers’ instructional interactions in classrooms. Unfortunately, many students of color encounter too many uncaring teachers at all levels of education from preschool to college. (p. 62)

Closely aligned with the idea of having a caring teacher is also the idea of having common bonds with the teacher (Delisle, 2012). Delisle’s study participants wanted a teacher who understood their needs and who designed the classroom with their particular needs in mind. Common bonds between the gifted student and the teacher enabled each participant to believe that there was a kindred spirit involved in setting up the classroom and the delivery of the instruction.

Teachers may use a blueprint that could be followed when the student teacher is designing the delivery of lessons. When designing lessons, student teacher should try to design
lessons that let the students feel that they have some control over the content (Delisle, 2012). The lessons should be challenging and not too easy.

In addition the design of the lesson should not include using more advanced students as student mentors to the less advanced. If there are students who are more advanced than others, the student teacher should consider not pairing those students with slower learning students and expecting the gifted child to teach the concepts to slower child. The teacher should have a plan where students who finish quickly are allowed to engage in other challenging classroom activities and allows the student teacher time to work with the others who have not grasped the concepts. The results of Delisle’s are useful to anyone working with the gifted curriculum or who desires to reach out to students who like learning new concepts and are genuinely excited about learning.

VanTassel-Baska (2012) stressed the importance of using differentiated learning styles in the classroom and claimed that there should be an instrument to measure whether or not differentiated learning is taking place in the classroom, referring to this instrument as the Classroom Observation Scale-Revised or the COS-R. The COS-R, a measurement tool in the gifted classroom, helps teachers to measure advanced instructional strategies such as higher order thinking skills, creative thinking skills, inquiry learning, metacognition, and other instructional practices that do not rely solely on textbook instruction. The design of the COS-R allows for checking and facilitating the use of differentiated learning for students in the gifted classroom. When explaining the importance of using a COS-R, VanTassel-Baska (2012) claimed:

Classroom observation is a seminal part of understanding positive change in education. It affords an opportunity to access the actual instructional experience that is at the heart of teaching and learning. It provides a nexus between the input variables of the teacher and his or her students and the process of instruction itself, a process that combines
instructional intent (goals and objectives) curriculum resources and materials, instructional strategies, and classroom management skills within a delimited unit of time. (p. 44)

With the COS-R, teacher observation is rated on a scale of 3-0 with 3 being effective and 0 meaning that the behavior was not observed. Categories are established for general teaching behaviors, differentiated teaching behaviors, critical thinking strategies, and research strategies. It is suggested that the COS-R be used at least three to four times per year in to get a good measure of practices in the classroom.

Teachers who are interested in providing the richest classroom experience for the gifted students may use this instrument in addition to the school-wide student teacher evaluation forms (VanTassel-Baska, 2012). Teachers who are new to teaching the gifted could be paired with a veteran gifted teacher who could serve as a mentor. During the first two weeks of teaching the gifted for the first time, observation of the mentor teacher becomes a major part of the day. Teachers who are new to teaching the gifted can have a copy of the instrument during this time and use the scale to rate whether the mentor teacher is employing differentiated teaching behaviors in the classroom. There is also a comment block provided after each section of curriculum planning and delivery, accommodation for individual differences, problem solving, critical thinking strategies, creative thinking strategies and research strategies (VanTassel-Baska, 2012). These teaching behaviors could also work in a classroom of regular students, but is especially effective in teaching the gifted.

In planning a weekly lesson plan, the new gifted teacher can use the COS-R as a checklist to make sure that the lesson includes employing brainstorming techniques, engaging gifted students in problem identification and definition, and engaging students in solution-finding activities and comprehensive solution articulation (VanTassel-Baska 2012), all good problem-
solving techniques that should be incorporated in a lesson plan. Some of the sections on the COS-R may be duplicated on the school system’s lesson plan template but using the COS-R in addition can serve as a checklist for teachers who are new to teaching the gifted to insure that these strategies are employed in the daily lesson when teaching the gifted student.

**Teachers as Advocates for Gifted Students**

When speaking of teachers as advocates for gifted education, Roberts and Siegle (2012) presented a case for teachers to take the initiative to promote better practices and more funding for the education of top-achieving students. In a “call to arms” for teachers, Roberts and Siegle, (2012) commanded teachers to take on the battle to make sure that the unique needs of the gifted student are not overlooked or allowed to go unmet in budget talks on a system level, state level, and national level. An example is the mandates of The No Child Left Behind Act that was enacted during President George Bush’s administration (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). The mandate laid out minimum standards for all students to reach but these minimum proficiency standards were for the most part well below the standards already met by most gifted children. The result was a decade of neglect for gifted students who were not in a self-contained gifted classroom program (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). In classrooms, gifted children waited for further instruction while the teacher worked to ensure that the majority of the class was raised to a proficiency standard that met the regulations of this mandate. Since the major article of this mandate was for funding to help low-achieving students, the needs of the gifted student have been stagnated now for many years (Roberts & Siegle, 2012).

Roberts and Siegle (2012) further indicated that teachers are the best advocates for the needs of the gifted and talented but these advocates must be first and foremost well informed advocates. The well-informed teacher needs to set clear goals, be persistent, and prepare data to
support claim and create a setting for change. Roberts and Siegle (2012) stipulated several arenas for advocacy, including advocacy with colleagues, advocacy for a school wide plan, advocacy at the state level, and advocacy at the national level.

When advocating for the cause of gifted education on the level of colleagues, teachers can share strategies for teaching gifted children that can be used in conjunction with regular classroom lessons. Teacher advocates should work diligently to inform other teachers about myths revolving around teaching the gifted such as the idea that the students are naturally bright and will catch on no matter how lessons are delivered (Roberts & Seigle, 2012). Teacher advocates of gifted can share curriculum strategies that will make a gifted student’s learning experiences challenging and meaningful. As advocates for a school wide plan, teacher advocates can effect changes in both small and large scales. In addressing school wide advocacy, Roberts and Seigle (2012) concluded:

This includes sharing the academic needs of gifted students, which involves a continuum of possible services that could be offered from simple differentiation in the classroom to whole-grade acceleration and special schools. It may include documenting how minimal adjustments in curriculum and instruction can have dramatic effects on gifted students’ academic achievement and attitude toward school and learning. (p.60)

As advocates at the state level, teacher advocates’ best line of defense is to join a state gifted organization and work with others to promote best learning practices for all gifted students in that state. Before joining, the advocates must become information providers and educate others on the nature and needs of gifted children. Once teacher advocates have joined together on a state level, it is time to move the advocacy fight to the national level (Roberts & Seigle, 2012). On a national level, the agenda should be petitioning Congress and the Federal Department of Education to provide funding and resources to aid in creating the best educational plan for the education of gifted students.
Teachers should realize that teaching is a profession. Part of being a professional is the need to get involved in pertinent issues and making sure that your voice is heard. As a teacher of the gifted and talented student, the power to effect change on a national or state level may not be achievable at the time but they can become teacher advocates on a school wide plan at any time (Roberts & Seigle, 2012). The teacher could discuss, with other gifted teachers, any strategies that can be incorporated into the curriculum and offer to share these practices with other teachers in the same discipline or in all disciplines at the school.

The teacher can offer to give a presentation at the professional development meetings and show how making small changes in delivery of classroom instruction can greatly enable the gifted student to have a more meaningful and exciting learning experience. If none of these options are open to the new gifted teacher, he/she can always effect change on the classroom level (Roberts & Seigle, 2012). Lesson plans can be written with the needs of a gifted student in mind and the teacher can offer differentiated learning tasks or project based learning that will help students who have already achieved the low proficiency level and are willing and eager to learn something on a higher order thinking skill level.

**Teacher Effectiveness**

Welsh (2011) suggested proposals for measuring teacher effectiveness using a virtual reality environment. Because teachers all teach in different environments and with different students, the article offers suggestions for making teacher effective measurements on a more equitable scale. This scale involves the use of simulation-based effectiveness measures or SBEMs. An SBEM takes advantage of innovations in technology to blend educational measurement on a more equitable level (Welsh, 2011). The use of an SBEM would do away with using standardized test scores as a sole means of measuring student achievement. Since most
gifted students are adept and have mastered test taking abilities, accurate measures of student learning will not manifest strictly on state mandated tests (Welsh, 2011).

Using an SBEM, gifted teacher effectiveness would be measured using a virtual classroom. This classroom would have a set group of students who would all be learning the same content and would be programmable to exhibit the same classroom behaviors. Welsh (2011) elaborated on how the SBEM would aid teachers:

Teachers complete the SBEM after having time to review information about the classroom, including the particulars of the students and after preparing teaching materials for a lesson with a predetermined duration. Teachers would then dress in virtual reality garb—put on a headset with speakers to hear student speech and a microphone to record their own comments . . .and enter the virtual reality classroom, a room with a whiteboard that they can write on directly or use as a screen for projecting images, placed opposite a screen on which they can view their avatar students. (p. 753-754)

Advantages of using SBEMs as a measurement of gifted teacher effectiveness include the ability to create an environment that is equitable to all teachers because the evaluators set the scenarios (Welsh, 2011). The test would also erase existing human bias in evaluations of teachers such as a principal or administrator with preconceived notions of the teacher’s effectiveness. Another advantage is that controls of the tests can be set to elicit certain responses (Welsh, 2011). Most gifted students become bored easily (Clark, 2008). Using the virtual classroom, a student who becomes bored easily can be programmed to fall out of the seat for attention; or the student who wants to answer all the questions would be programmed to blurt out answers rather than raise her hand. How a teacher responds to these common gifted actions and programmed disruptions would provide an equitable measure of teacher effectiveness in the gifted environment as well as classroom management skills (Welsh, 2011).

Teachers could use a SBEM in different ways. The SBEM can be a simulation tool where the new gifted teacher can get some “practice teaching” in a virtual setting before he/she even
steps into the classroom to begin practice teaching on students (Welsh, 2011). Another advantage of an SBEM is that the student teacher would receive feedback as to how well they can manage a classroom before the mentor teacher would put them on their own in front of the regular gifted classroom (Welsh, 2011). New gifted teachers can also gain valuable knowledge on how to address students with varying needs such as an ADD student, disabled student, or gifted student with exceptionalities who are all in the same class together. The simulated setting can help the new gifted teacher overcome weaknesses in the classroom delivery before it is tried in a real setting (Welsh, 2011).

It is important to differentiate what the level of low performance of the gifted learner means in respects to the needs of the individual child. Flint and Ritchotte’s (2012) looked at whether gifted students underachieved because they were not challenged or because some other factors were at work. The authors delved into previous research that identified gifted students as “selective consumers.” Flint and Ritchotte (2012) suggested that too much emphasis was placed on underachieving gifted students who were not stimulated by the present classroom setting and proposed that more attention be given to the fact that “underachievement may be a multifaceted personal, family, school, and/or social issue” that has little or nothing to do with classroom delivery (Flint & Ritchotte, 2012, p. 169). Common themes in gifted research repeat that the teacher’s role in a classroom should not be to rule all students but instead to assist all students into becoming self-directed, autonomous learners who are capable of thinking at higher levels at all times in the changing global world (Flint and Ritchotte, 2012).

According to Flint and Richotte (2012):

. . .stop arguing about definitions of giftedness and underachievement, or whether she or he is an underachiever, a selective consumer, or a twice-exceptional child and focus our collective energy on what matters: teaching students the practical knowledge and tacit skills they need to survive and excel in this world. (p.174)
No matter what the pedagogy, teaching students is the main focus of education. A student teacher may sometimes get mired in the labels and new practices but should be focused on providing the best education for the particular students in your care at that particular time and space (Flint & Richotte, 2012). Student teachers should always be open to new ways of preparing lessons and presenting lessons to the students because this is what teaching is all about. However, a student teacher should also be mindful that not every method works the same way with all circumstances. Flint and Richotte (2012) presented a cautionary tale on how to avoid labeling students and thus positively affecting the way in which the student teacher prepares lessons for classroom enlightenment and edification.

The Best and Brightest of the Multicultural

Federal law requires that students with special needs receive the special services they need to achieve in the public school system. A special education service is the program charged with meeting the unique needs of these students. Students with exceptionalities such as the academically gifted and talented are served in public schools either in self-contained classrooms or pullout classes. Although charged with meeting the needs of all students with exceptionalities, the program has come under fire regarding whether the needs of all races are being served. Prior to Brown v the Board of Education, schools were allowed to operate under the canopy of separate but equal. The question of separate but equal practices again as the number of non-white students identified and served in gifted classes became greater than the number of non-white students placed in special education classes, which are at the opposite end of gifted and talented.

Although the numbers vary from state to state and from school district to school district, gifted and talented programs are heavily populated with white students while African American students are sparsely represented. If indeed special programs are designed to help all gifted
students whose needs that cannot be met in the regular classroom, how is *Brown v Board of Education* not in peril when only white students appear to be the main group afforded entrance into gifted programs that are often operated right in the poorest of urban high school settings?

Hopkins (2010) highlighted this problem:

> Yet, it is those very programs that also show vestiges of separation, segregation, and inequality resembling the conditions prior to the *Brown v Board of Education* decision. For example, it is well documented that students of color who have identified disabilities are overrepresented in special education while those who are identified as intellectually exceptional are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. . .they are similar in that they can both, to some extent, be considered present-day examples of segregated settings. (p. 25)

The solution to warding off modern day segregation within integrated schools may be as simple as formulating a set of specific criteria statewide for identifying gifted and talented students. Cultural differences also play a part when identifying whether a student has special education needs or is a gifted and talented student. A disruptive child labeled special needs might be offered accommodations such as longer time to take a test, or shortened assignments, or testing in small group rooms. These accommodations are granted to the Black child but the question remains whether this type of accommodation is what the child really needs.

A major factor in the unbalanced racial distribution of children in gifted and talented programs is the lack of a consensus or federal mandated guideline for the placement of students in the gifted programs nationwide. This lack of consensus leads to the instability of gifted and talented programs as opposed to the opposite end of the spectrum—special education programs. With no guidelines, identification of the gifted and talented is based on IQ tests. Districts within the same state are allowed to set their own guidelines to identify gifted. This lack of standard guidelines leads to relying on the perceptions of teachers, counselors, and others, and again
cultural perceptions serve as barriers to the inclusion of Black students in gifted and talented programs.

Culturally, Black students who misbehave or refuse to complete assignments because they lack challenge are more often labeled learning disabled than gifted. Hopkins (2010) attacked this lack of standard guidelines as a hindrance to correctly identifying Black children in gifted programs. This is evidenced where Hopkins (2010) claimed “when students are not provided opportunities to be challenged, they often become unmotivated and bored and may become a behavior problem, which detracts from the perception that gifted children do not exhibit behavioral challenges for teachers” (p. 25). These perceptions often reveal teachers’ perceptions that students from a certain culture and ethnic groups are not considered gifted. This perception is compounded if the student is also from an economically disadvantaged home as opposed to a Black student who comes from a more advantaged home. Thus, to disarm teacher perceptions that students from low-income backgrounds are incapable of thinking on a gifted level, some type of standardized identification process is needed to assure that all students are afforded the same opportunities to be serviced by gifted programs regardless of race.

Perhaps the push to close the achievement gap between European American and African American students can be one explanation why the brightest and the best of the African American population has gone underserved in increasing amounts in the 21st century. As standardized testing and adherence to a nationwide Common Core Standard Curriculum has reached the forefront in American educational strives, the needs of those children of color who are already achieving has been assigned to the back burner on the educational circuit. (Ford, 2013)
Researchers are aware of the causes of this widening achievement gap and the decline of African American students in gifted and talented programs, as well as, the all-time high enrollment of African students in special education programs. Additionally there is the problem of the twice-exceptional student. (McCallum, R., Bell, S., Coles, J., Miller, K., Hopkins, M. B., & Hilton-Prillhart, A., 2013) Causes of this underrepresentation are circulating as researchers try to determine why the gap is widening at such alarming rates.

A cause for underrepresentation can be found initially in student perceptions and feelings of isolation when they are placed in gifted programs with students who are not culturally and racially congruent. It is therefore essential that the numbers in gifted programs for African American students increase so that they will feel a sense of belonging that includes them with other students of their own culture. Frye and Hoyt (2010) expressed this sentiment:

It has been shown that African American gifted students experience more emotional and psychological problems than their non-gifted counterparts. The needs to belong and peer allegiance often take precedence in the lives of students of color. African American students who feel unconnected or unaccepted by their peers may become withdrawn, introverted, aggressive or disruptive. They often choose to underachieve rather than risk being accused by their peers of ‘acting white’. (p.12)

Not only do the brightest and most talented of Black students need to be part of the closure of the achievement gap but the brightest also need to be educated in settings that include students of their culture. Every student has a need to feel cultural and academic connections. Peer pressure may undo all that the programs for Black students with exceptionalities intend to achieve; therefore, the distribution and placement of students must assure that the program is racially diversified.

One factor that needs to be addressed for racial balance in a gifted program devoid of federal guidelines is an informed staff. Without written unified principles, the teacher must overlook preconceived bias that present the face of the gifted as one specific type. Otherwise,
teachers, counselors, and others merely perpetrate the growing notions that were instituted by vague gifted education guidelines and legislation in creating a 21st century vehicle for separate and unequal educational opportunities for children of color. Baldwin (1987) declared:

> Although it is important that generalizations not be made for all Black children who might be gifted, a good understanding of the variables which might intervene in the process of providing the appropriate educational environment for these children is important. (p. 184)

A serious lack of professional development exists in this country and tips the scales of inequality even further in the direction of creating a private segregated school environment within the integrated school facility. Such training should involve stretching the current notions of what is giftedness and include other factors, and not rely so heavily on vague federal guidelines and IQ tests.

Other ways of identifying and supporting students who may be gifted and talented do not meet the traditional “face” of gifted children. When teachers and administrators are willing to identify students, and value and focus on the strengths and unique talents of each student, the first step is taken in creating a community of unified considerate learners who can respect and support each other in an environment where all can benefit, grow, and excel. Teaching whole groups of students and determining who would benefit from instruction tailored to the exceptionalities of gifted students could increase the number of African American students in gifted programs. Additionally, teachers who do not teach gifted students can be given a checklist of identifiers to look for when using high-level cognitive thinking skills. To accomplish this, the teacher would have to tailor a class to operate other than on rote memorization or the repetition of isolated facts on the lowest level of Blooms taxonomy scale. Hence, teachers would be provided with a set of principles of instruction that will allow them to reach students of all race, social class, and particularly ethnic students of other language backgrounds.
Cohen (2011) implored teachers to seek simplicity in the complex times and sets out six principles to enhance learning in the classroom to draw out the unique giftedness of students who may not otherwise be identified as gifted and talented. Cohen (2011) advised:

We need to extend our notions of giftedness to include children from every racial and ethnic group, children of poverty, and those with disabilities. The spectrum of giftedness must be expanded to include the peacemaker, the child with extraordinary awareness of the environment . . . Providing opportunity is often the key. When a child from an impoverished inner city environment is offered a violin and lessons, the music she makes may be extraordinary. (p.136)

In a society where the very definition of gifted is not consistent or clearly spelled out in guidelines, teachers have the unique opportunity to use their own guidelines to identify children of color who may miss out on gifted services if IQ alone is used to identify the gifted. A look outside the narrow focus of the classroom window reveals many children of different economics, races, and cultures who are talented and overlooked because the focus is too narrow to envision a student of low economic standards as a child who is truly gifted and talented, and posed to benefit from all that gifted programs have to offer.

Identification and sustainability of Black children in gifted programs is a problem that continues to plague the educational system even in the 21st century. Singleton, Livingston, Hines and Jones (2010) wrote: “…many obstacles to inclusion of Black children has been identified with such broad topics such as negative stereotypes about academic performance, teacher attitudes, lack of referrals of African American students to gifted education programs” (p. 13). Because of these obstacles, African American students are less likely to be referred to honor programs, AP programs, and also gifted programs. Access to AP programs in high school can provide a readiness for college that is lacking in Black communities.

An obstacle to sustainability or even identification that is prevalent in the Black community is parental involvement. Parents of Black students might not be informed about
programs such as AP and gifted, and thus might not know what to ask for when seeking help for their children in the public school system. Students who are having problems staying focused in the classroom might be placed in a special needs class and few parents are asked whether they think their child would benefit from the gifted programs. If the student is in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, the parents might little knowledge of the benefits of gifted classes; the student might have knowledge but be reluctant to seek out placement in these classes and the potential of peer pressure that could come with the stigma of being in gifted classes. A collaborative effort within the community needs to surface to help students deal with the pressures of stigma and biases. A partnership among parents in the community and other community stakeholders could nurture instead of stigmatize the advanced African American student. Stakeholders could provide positive reinforcement of a standard of excellence that academically and intellectually gifted students would regard as mentors (Singleton, et al, 2010). This standard is needed in economically depressed neighborhoods.

The support network must include involved and caring teachers who to look beyond classic stereotypical beliefs about the inability for low economic students to achieve on a high academic level. Providing students with pride in their heritage and the rich works of Black high achievers are means to keep Black males grounded rather than participants of the motto that being smart will rob them of “street cred.” This strong network of positive people is necessary to Black males and Black females. The underrepresentation of all African Americans in gifted programs is a problem to be addressed and resolved.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Study Design

An important element of this study is to tell the story of gifted children’s experience from the point of view of the persons who experienced inclusion in a gifted program. The use qualitative research was the best design for this study in order to grasp the richness of each participant’s experience (Daly, 2007). This study focused on the participants’ narrative experiences in a gifted program for high school students. The research was conducted and reported from the point of view of African American students who were enrolled in a gifted program or had recently graduated from a school while enrolled in the gifted program. In describing qualitative studies, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) wrote:

Any definition of qualitative research must work within this complex historical field. Qualitative research means different things in each of these moments. Nonetheless, an initial, generic definition can be offered: Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. (p. 3)

Chase (2005) stated: “A narrative may be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation” (p. 652). For this study, I interviewed three participants. Two of the interviews were conducted face to face and one interview was conducted on the phone. Conversations with each participant took place prior to the interview in which we shared what was going currently for each of the participant before I asked them to recall stories, anecdotes, and interpretations of their experiences in middle school and high school while enrolled in a gifted program.

The qualitative approach lends itself to broad statements of purpose and then allows the researcher to delve into the messiness and intimacies of the family relationship (Daly, 2007).
Depending on the type of research, this approach can be seen as strength or a detriment. In the case of my research, the narrative analysis approach of qualitative research was a definite strength.

The findings of this research tell a story of the program and critical race tenets that shaped the views of the gifted program at each point in the three young ladies’ tenure. The research is meaningful because it is based wholly on experiences from within the walls of the gifted program, and it is a story of voices from the perspective of African American females. When examining a cultural research study such as African American perspectives of gifted programs, a qualitative study helps to relay whether students of the minority culture have their specific special needs met in a dedicated school wide gifted program.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) considered qualitative research to be a “field of inquiry within itself.” The authors further stated: “It crosscuts discipline, fields, and subject matters . . . These include the traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, and/or methods, connected to cultural and interpretive studies” (p. 2).

Qualitative methods of data include interviews, observations and focus groups. The methods and the use of the instruments differ, however, between quantitative and qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In qualitative research, observation requires the researcher to use all the senses. Questions are open-ended and designed to evoke participant responses. The researcher must observe what is said, while also observing sights, smells, and body language. In addition, the researcher is allowed to make reflexive commentary that is added to the report.

A major strength of qualitative research is that research can be conducted on a personal basis and used to record a participant’s personal experience. The ability to develop trust and
rapport with the participants is vital for a research that will allow for theorizing of a general organization structure (Linn & Erickson, 1990); it enabled me to record the personal data in rich detail as it occurred in the participant’s environment and through insider’s view of personal experiences. All data collected for this study was based on participants’ perspective and was useful for describing case studies of complex occurrences.

I included the environment in which the phenomena occurred and described processes as they occurred. According to Dewey, research should be conducted in a naturalistic environment (Lagemann, 2000). In qualitative studies, data is usually collected in the natural environment, which leads to an ease of conversational flow between the researcher and the student. Qualitative studies lend themselves to local needs, folklore, and local situations requested by stakeholders, therefore individual states and school systems may use the results of this research in an effort to grow or improve the gifted and magnet programs at personal individual schools. Qualitative data use the words and categories of participants to explain why a phenomenon occurs (Freeman, 2009). This allowed me to discern whether the commonality that the participants shared was part of a larger possible problem that is not yet evident.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a technique favored by researchers who specialize in folklore history. The use of stories to tell of experiences creates an interest area for both the researcher and the participant. Initially, the researcher is interested in the topic of research. His goal is to get the participant to get interested or better yet, excited about, recalling the topic of the experience (Chase, 2005). The researcher is able to use the interview approach but instead of grilling questions that would make an interviewee nervous, the researcher uses an interview format that
gently prompts the participant to recant a story of his or her experiences. Manning and Swan (1994) asserted:

If one defines narrative as a story with a beginning, middle and end that reveals someone's experiences, narratives take many forms, are told in many settings, before many audiences, and with various degrees of connection to actual events or persons. (p. 465)

Narrative analysis was therefore relevant to my study in that the participants began their tenure in the gifted program at varying times in their school years; using an interview format allowed my participants to recant stories from their particular years in gifted programs.

To begin the interview process, I began by prompting a question of interest to the participant. The interest was derived from some experience or area of interest in the life of the participant. It was important to me that my pre-set questions served as guiding questions to encourage my participants to tell me the story.

Therefore, approach is a key component of narrative analysis as summarized by Daly, (2007):

In its simplest form, narrative research involves sitting with participants and asking them to tell the story of their experience as it relates to an area of joint interest. Using an interview format with minimal direction, researchers sit down with participants and ask them to tell the story of their experience. . . . The approach is to ask open-ended questions with a minimum of interruptions, using occasional prompts to encourage the provision of detail in a particular area. The challenge for the interviewer is not to let a preordained set of questions get in the way of the story to be told. (p. 115)

As the interviewer, I took minimal control in the telling of the story because the use of a preordained rigid set of questions may interrupt the story flow. Although I began the interview with the same questions for all three participants, I allowed them to tell their stories and, as such, the nature of the questions took on different directions for each participant and produced a richer pool of data. Ideally, the interviewer walks a fine line where he wants the story to be told in a
manner that resembles a jointly constructed narrative (Daly, 2007). When viewing the lens of narrative research, Chase (2005) states:

Narrative researchers treat narrative—whether oral or written—as a distinct form of discoursor. Narrative is retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience. Narrative is a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole. . .Thus, in addition to describing what happened, narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations. (p. 656)

This study’s participants gave personal interviews where they recalled stories and details of their high school and middle school years as gifted students. They spoke on topics that asked them to recall cultural climates, stereotyping, racial makeup, and personal interpretations of the gifted program. Personal narratives were of great importance in this research. The importance of the personal narrative was supported by Ellis and Bochner (2000):

The usefulness of these stories is their capacity to inspire conversation from the point of view of the readers, who enter from the perspective of their own lives. The narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflects critically on their own experience, enter emphatically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered. (p. 748)

Personal narrative determined the lens through which the research in this study was viewed. The participants recounted stories of how being African American in a program with a minority of African American students affected them on a social, educational, and emotional level. Although no student gave up on challenging academic achievement, their personal narratives told stories of how the difficulties of identifying with the African American culture and the personal need to excel academically shaped their early teen years.

Using narrative analysis in a qualitative study allowed the African American students to engage with me on any topics that would not have been given a voice in other studies, such as quantitative studies. Morgan-Fleming, Riegle, and Fryer (2007) emphasized:
Narrative research then provides a means for researchers to access these disparate voices. Indeed, whereas a macrolevel analysis emphasizes the structures and those who control them, narrative research and microlevel analyses potentially provide opportunities to glean how the ordinary people interpret and enact the imposed representations placed on them by those in power. (p. 85)

Accessing the voice of the participants is important because it allows the researcher the advantage of gathering a richer, deeper, more diverse project. The researcher has the advantage of researching single phenomena of interest and then stating this phenomenon in a broad purpose statement. Chase (2005) emphasized how important the personal interview is for researchers who collect narratives:

For researchers who collect narratives through intensive interviews, a central question is how to treat the interviewee as a narrator, both during interviews and while interpreting them. For all narrative researchers, a central question revolves around which voice or voices researchers should use as they interpret and represent the voices of those they study. And although all qualitative researchers address the question of the relationship between the relatively small ‘sample’ they study and some larger whole, this question is particularly poignant for narrative researchers, who often present the narratives of a very small number of individuals—or even of just one individual—in their published works. (p. 652)

There were three participants in the sample included in this research but each contributed to the larger whole. The larger picture of how race, cultural isolation, and bias configured in the lives of these participants was evident, regardless of the small size of the group interviewed in this study.

**Epistemological Approach**

It was important that I created my research problem from the perspectives of the participants who were immersed in the gifted program as a part of everyday school life; the use of the participants’ stories about their experiences told a story of how the African American child was identified during their experience in the program; they also highlighted the participant’s position as an accelerated learner while relaying whether his culture complimented or disrupted
his experiences. According to Moen (2006), “Narrative research is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, chiefly because teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives” (p. 2).

Further discussion on the use of narrative involves the way in which a narrative research can be used to connect other disciplines through the use of storytelling. Because the narrative research is based on lived experiences it is useful to bring in the stories of many domains. In the book, Daly (2007) stated:

Narrative approaches introduce a number of important bridges into qualitative inquiry. With its close affiliation to literature and fiction, narrative serves to connect the broad domains of art and science . . . With its inclusion of the everyday and the extraordinary, narrative bridges the mundane and the exceptional. With its emphasis on lived, embodied experience and the nuances of private life, narrative bridges the emotional the rational. The narrative approach, with its roots in many domains, thereby offers many opportunities for exploring lived experience in many forms and at many levels of analysis. (p. 109)

Narrative research can take multiple forms; biographies are a common form of narrative research. Common characteristics of the narrative research include delving into the experiences of an individual, life stories, restorying, and chronology of experiences. In quantitative studies philosophical worldviews that must be addressed. “In planning a study, researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice” (Creswell, 2014).

Postpositivists is a deterministic philosophy in which causes determine outcomes; therefore, the problems that are studied by postpositivists will lean towards experiments and a need to identify and access the causes that could possibly influence the outcome (Creswell, 2014). Davis (2004) wrote:
Structuralists developed the case that the meaningfulness of language derives from the interconnectedness of vocabulary. These discourses thus focused on the internal structures of languages, mathematics, and other symbolic systems. Poststructuralists embraced the structuralist premise, but focused elsewhere. They looked neither to what language was thought to name nor to the internal structures of language, but to that which remains un-named and unspoken—to the background that must be ignored for an object or event to be made the figure of perception. (p. 114)

In this study, I hold a constructivist worldview, as how one view personal experience will heavily affect how truth is viewed (Davis, 2004). In the constructionist worldview, the basis is a social construct that individuals, being social creatures, will seek to find meaning and understanding of the place in which they live and work. It is an approach that lends itself towards qualitative study.

The transformative worldview is a more radical view and approach (Creswell, 2014). It is based in the belief that all research or inquiry should be entwined with the political nature of the time to effect a political change agenda that will confront social oppression at whatever levels it may occur. The transformative worldview is a focus for transformational research (Creswell, 2014). The pragmatic worldview is a derivative of pragmatics’ way of thinking. The worldview focuses heavily of methods and the emphasis is on the research problem (Creswell, 2014). A philosophical basis for the pragmatist worldview includes the facts that pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality; pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity, and a pragmatic researcher seeks out how to research based on the intended consequences—where they want to go with it. It is basically a mixed methods approach to research (Creswell, 2014).

Given the three worldview approach to research, the constructivist worldview was the one that was best suited to my qualitative approach to research. My research focused on the human experience and how participants viewed the world in which they lived and worked;
therefore, my approach relied on the participant’s view of the situation that was studied. My questions were open-ended, broad, and general and allowed me to listen to what the participants’ responses.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was done by interviews conducted in person or by telephone. Participants chose whether to be interviewed in person or by telephone; this was done to put the participants at ease by choosing what was more convenient and comfortable. Two participants chose to be interviewed by phone and one participant chose to be interviewed in person.

Fifteen guiding questions were the interview protocol instrument used to collect data. Occasionally, the instrument was put aside and other pertinent questions were asked based on the participants’ responses of the to the instrument questions.

In qualitative data collection, the outliers are the most interesting parts as opposed to quantitative data where the outliers are cut off from the analysis (Daly, 2007).

**Participant Selection**

Initially, the design of this research included gifted high school students; however, there was concern that the narratives of high school stories are still basically incomplete. To counteract and avoid incomplete narratives, participants selected for this study were graduates of high school and graduates of a four-year college institution. All participants were female. They were asked to recall instances in their tenure as gifted students in either elementary, middle, or high schools.
**Sampling**

For this study, I used purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, the researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Daly, 2007). Usually the method for choosing the individual is to make sure that the individual can offer ‘information rich’ data, but in order to be able to do such, the participant needs to understand the phenomenon being studied (Silverman, 2005; Daly, 2007). The participants in this study were chosen from the group of friends and parent friendships that I maintained when my child was in the gifted program. Participants agreed to meet with me and recall stories based on the time they spent in the gifted program.

I used purposeful sampling when selecting the participants for this study. Each participant had to be an adult who had completed college at the time of the interview. (Silverman, 2005) affirmed:

> Purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested. However, this does not provide a simple approval to any case we happen to choose. Rather, purposive sampling demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are studying and choose our sample case carefully on this basis. (p.129)

**Data Collection**

The collection of data in qualitative studies involves the selection of people and sites that can best help us to understand our phenomenon. For this research, I relied on personal interviews with students who were once enrolled in self-contained gifted classes.

Once the data was collected from the personal interviews, the data was coded and key phrases that were used by all participants were highlighted and grouped for discussions in the findings section of this research. Experiences that were indicative to only one participant were also highlighted and discussed in findings under the participant’s pseudonym.
Participant Selection

The sample of participants was three African American women who were enrolled in a gifted program in a local high school, middle school, or elementary school. The participants each had at least three years of experience as a gifted student, ensuring the participants had experience as gifted students for a sufficient amount of time, a function of purposefully sampling (Daly, 2007). All participants were college graduates at the time of the research. The years that the student was in gifted programs were not imperative, but I chose participants who had spent at least three years in the gifted program at some point and time in elementary, middle, or high school. Choosing young adults for this study gave the study the hindsight perspective as the adults reflected on racial issues that they were unable to see when they were younger and immersed in the gifted program.

Below are brief biographies of the participants in this study.

Bella, the oldest participant in the study, graduated in 2004 from a gifted program. Bella entered the gifted program in third grade and remained in the program until her high school graduation. At the time of this study, Bella had graduated from college with her Bachelor’s Degree in Fashion Design. She was raised in a two-parent household and also had a sibling who attended an academic magnet program.

Dawn was the second oldest participant in this study. A 2007 graduate from an academic magnet high school, Dawn participated in the gifted program in middle school grades sixth through eighth. Prior to entering the gifted program in middle school, Dawn attended a magnet elementary school. Dawn graduated from college with her Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management. Dawn was raised in a single-parent household with her mother as the primary custodial parent who shared custody with her father. She has a host of siblings.
Luna was the youngest participant in this study. She is a 2007 graduate from an academic magnet high school and participated in the gifted program in middle school grades sixth through eighth. Prior to entering the gifted program, Luna attended a performing arts magnet school. Luna graduated from college in 3 years with her B.S. degree. At the time of this research, Luna was continuing her college education with advanced degrees and certifications. She was raised in a single-parent household with her mother as the primary custodial parent and very involved maternal grandparents. She has an older brother.

Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis for this study was coding the data. The object of the coding process was to make sense out of text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes. Themes were either layering themes or interrelating themes. Layering analysis means representing the data using interconnected levels of broader themes. Interconnecting themes means that the researcher connects the themes to display a chronology or sequence of events.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity was involved in my embarking on this project, although this should not necessarily be viewed as problematic. According to Fine, Weis, Wesen, and Wong (2000) who stated, “It should also be pointed out that a call for the inclusion of subjective experience of the researcher into what has traditionally been conceived of as subject matter bears different implications for differently situated researchers” (p. 109)

First of all, I am interested in interviewing African American gifted students and I am an African American female. I am also a teacher but I do not teach gifted students nor have I ever been employed as a teacher of gifted students; my experience is with the traditional students.
Additionally, I have certification to teach gifted students, however, I think that this particular subjectivity will aid me in understanding the process as opposed to making me subjective.

I have taught for years in schools that were predominantly African American in population. Since I have taught in this environment for many years, I may experience some subjectivity in my views of the experiences of African American students in the public school system.

As a parent, I have a child who went through the gifted program during middle school years; therefore, I have had experience with the unique concerns of gifted African American students. I have experienced also both sides of the identification of African American gifted students as I had one child who was denied the services of the gifted program.

Finally, subjectivity exists for me on the level that many of the historical issues that may arise as a result of this research are “lived’ experiences for me. I grew up in a small southern town during the 1960s. I attended both segregated schools for 6 years and was sent to an integrated school for the other 6 years. I experienced Jim Crow laws firsthand, watched the Civil Rights Movement unfold, and personally struggled along with others while school systems fought valiantly to keep the separate but equal foundations for the school system.
CHAPTER FOUR – COUNTERSTORY

Counterstory is used in critical race theory to challenge the story of the dominant cultural while giving voice to marginalized cultures whose voice have been silenced. The following is a fictional story.

It is 1954 and the Supreme Court has heard all the arguments from the plaintiffs in the case. Deliberations have begun and the stakeholders all over the country are waiting for the final ruling. The inhabitants of the rural southern town of Briar Patch are quietly unaware of the changes that await them.

Briar Patch is a farming town of approximately 10,000 residents. Like most towns in the Jim Crow South, the town’s residents live segregated lives. Separated by the railroad tracks, the Black residents live on the west side of town, while the White residents occupy the rest of the town. The Black residents have one school, named Freedom High, which houses grades 1 to 12 in a very old building located in the center of the west side of Briar Patch. Segregation is an accepted and mostly unchallenged way of life and the Black residents subsisted on the resources they had. The textbooks are out of date editions that were given to them once the White schools received new textbooks. Pages in the textbooks are tattered and bindings are loose and broken. However, Principal Marsellus and his staff of all Black teachers require each student to cover the textbooks and to treat them with care and respect. Brown paper bags used to bring home groceries are cut up and used by each student to protect the old textbooks. There is always a good chance that the Black school would not receive textbooks for another ten years so each grade level has to protect what they have so that younger classmates will have a book for the future classes.
The west side of Briar Patch has three corner grocery stores within the community. All grocery stores are owned and operated by white entrepreneur families except for the store across the street from Freedom High. This little store, Transparent Grocers, is operated by a mulatto family. At least the family was assumed to be mulatto. No one has ever been sure of the family’s racial identity and the family does not confirm or deny its racial background. It is just easier that way.

That is the extent of Black owned businesses. If the Black residents need anything besides groceries, they are allowed to cross the track and give business to the white owners of everything. As long as they walk on the edge of the sidewalk and step off the sidewalk into the street when a white family is approaching, they could shop in the clothing, grocers, and furniture stores of the white people of Briar Patch. However, they must enter in the back doors of these establishments and wait until the salesperson is no longer assisting white patrons. Then they are able to sit in the storerooms of the business and pay the same price for goods and services that the white person paid.

Briar Patch is proud of its one movie theater and on certain days of the week, Black people on the West Side are allowed to attend. They must enter through the Colored Only door, and sit in the balcony. Once the balcony is full, no Black people are allowed to enter, even if there was space on the lower level. Everyone understands that a Black man/woman cannot sit in a seat next to a white person in the theater. The only means of public transportation is a passenger train that travels to other states in the South. There is one rail car dedicated to the Black patrons and there were only wooden, backless benches in the car, but no seats.

The white residents have an elementary school on every third street of the neighborhood. There are two separate junior high schools placed strategically near the elementary schools and a
huge air-conditioned high school in the middle of an old cotton field. White students are afforded school buses to get to school if the parish deems that the three block walk is too much for the little children. No expense is spared to meet the educational needs of the white residence of Briar Patch. After all, their children are the future.

Ever resourceful, however, the Black residents on the west side of Briar Patch accept separate but equal laws and made the best of their resources. The teachers are educated in historically Black colleges and return home to give the best education possible with the resources available. The auditorium of Freedom High serves as a meeting hall and Black leaders use the area churches as a means of communication to call meetings to inform the residents of current events. Very few Black households can afford a television and only a fortunate few own radios. At one of the town meetings, the residents heard the outcome of the historic landmark case of Brown v Board of Education.

Reverend DooRight called the meeting to order with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. In a strong clear voice he announced, “The Supreme Court has declared that from this day forth, separate but equal practices is unconstitutional. From this day forth all people will be granted equal resources in the public schools. Racial boundaries in this town will not change but whatever resource is given to the white schools will also be given to the Freedom School.”

This ushered in a new era for the Black residents. A sense of community had what made them strong during Jim Crow South and that did not change. Freedom High received new lab equipment, new books, band instruments, and even school buses. The Black teachers worked to introduce new educational opportunities for the students. Once the resources poured in, the teachers noticed the advanced abilities of some of their students. Students identified with advance aptitude were taught in the same classrooms but were given added resources to keep
pace with their achievement level. The community of the west side of tracks of Briar Patch began to grow at astonishing rates and became even more self-serving and autonomous. Cotton fields and farm patches gave way to grocery stores, textile mills, shopping malls, libraries, and cultural art centers. With the equal resources allotted by law, the Black residence educated their brightest and best who in turn remained in the community and made strides that grew by the decades. A Black student discovered a cure for cancer in the science lab and the crafty lawyers of West Briar Patch immediately put a patent on the cure. Money poured into the community.

Black teachers pushed to educate the best and the brightest in the classroom and their efforts pushed the community into unforeseen growth. No longer did the Black residents cross the tracks to buy goods or services from the white-owned establishments. They built their own, hired their own, and invested into their own businesses. Student achievement grew and the strong sense of community allowed others to encourage and help teachers to push students. As a result, Freedom School graduates went on and used their education and creativity to make significant discoveries. The graduates created an oil dripping cup for trains, the carbon filament for light bulbs, a shoe making machine, the telegraph, peanut products, Black hair lotions, the hot comb, the gas mask, the traffic light, and a control device for guided missiles. Lawyers in the community immediately put patents on these new creations and the west side of Briar Patch rose to affluence. When news of the discovery of a device for guided missiles reached the ears of the anxious white residents of Briar Patch, a meeting was called. What if the strides of Blacks did not stop at Black-owned businesses? Had not the white establishments suffered at the loss of business from their patrons who used to enter through the Colored Only door? What if the creative graduates of Freedom High began to make weapons that they would turn on the White residents and blow the east side of town into oblivion?
A consortium of politicians from the east side of town was formed immediately and they crossed the railroad tracks to speak with the leaders of the west side of town. They approached Black leaders with a novel idea. Why not create a special school to educate and nurture the best and brightest of all communities? The students would have their own little boarding school and together they would create and excel and make the town of Briar Patch the premier town of the South. The Black leaders listened to the proposal and called a community meeting in the auditorium of Freedom High. The auditorium was now three times larger than before, air conditioned, and outfitted with the latest technology. The Black leaders presented the proposal to the community and asked for feedback. Because of the strong sense of family and community closeness, the families voted down the measure; they would not allow their youngsters to leave home in grade school to attend a boarding school on the other side of town.

The residents of the white community were not happy with that decision and would not take no as a final answer. Riders were sent out at night to spy and set up surveillance in the Black community. Bribes exchanged hands under the cover of darkness and by the White surveillance team obtained the names of the most gifted kids in the community. Late one night, a team of white riders snatched the kids and whisked them off to a secret underground bunker to be educated together with the brightest and best of the White community.

Then, an unexpected communication problem arose. The Black students are unable to communicate with their new classmates because they were reared in a separate community and spoke their own language that was indecipherable to white classmates. No one in the white community could understand them and the Black children at the exclusive boarding school only communicated with each other. The results were not what organizers desired, so another surveillance team was dispatched under cover of night to the west side of town. The team needed
one or two teachers and approached several, but no one agreed to teach at the school. One night the surveillance team encountered the bitter loser of the last Black community mayoral election and offered him an obscene amount of money. He agreed to serve as an interpreter and teach the white community the language spoken by the Black gifted students.

Once the white community could interpret the language, they taught the Black gifted students along with the white gifted students. The students saw no one but each other for the remainder of their school years and they also began to date each other. Gradually the Black students lost all traces of the culture they knew when living on the west side of town. They assimilated well into the new dominant culture . . .
CHAPTER FIVE: VOICES FROM WITHIN

Bella

I’m Black but Not Really. Isolation is a concern for students who are the minority representation in a school system. African Americans are the minority in the gifted program at Bella’s school, although African Americans are the majority population. I asked Bella whether the majority of her friends were in the gifted program or in traditional classes. Bella answered that her friends were all gifted and when I asked her why this was the case, she replied:

Because there is little interaction outside of class with the other students. It was in the elementary school when I had friends from some programs but in middle school and high school it was very difficult to interact with these other students unless there was an extra ancillary program like track or an after school program. There wasn’t a lot of talk.

Like the other participants, Bella was enrolled in a self-contained gifted program. The program was located in a school with neighborhood kids but the gifted students took all of the core courses together. These self-contained classes included English, science, math, social studies, and a gifted magnet. The only class where gifted students might have had contact with traditional students was in an elective course or physical education course. Otherwise, gifted students were legally a class of seventeen students who had identical schedules for the majority of the day.

Traditional students were students who were not enrolled in a magnet classes and were assigned to the school according to attendance zones.

When asked if she felt targeted, bullied, or treated differently by traditional students because she was African American and in the gifted program, Bella was quiet and appeared downcast before she began this story. She said:

Yeah. Well. One that really stood out for me was that in high school there was a girl. We never took a single class together, we didn’t have any shared extracurricular activities; she just got in there and decided she did not like me. And the main reason was she didn’t like me because she thought I was uppity and I was too good and I thought I was too good. And she meant to show me my place. Well that was weird because I wasn’t the
Bella did not understand why a classmate would target her when the classmate did not ever make an attempt to get to know her. Even in adulthood when she met her former classmate in public, she still subjected Bella to rants about how little she knew about being Black. At this point, Bella said, “... and I tell you that once and for all I dismissed her which probably was what I should have done all along.” There are many approaches African American can take when confronted with the ‘acting White label.’ Mickelson and Velasco (2006) stated, “Additionally, we found a range of responses to the acting-White label among the academically talented and accomplished Black students we interviewed. Some students acknowledged being the recipient of the insult but promptly dismissed it” (p.28). Bella initially reacted with confusion and bewilderment but eventually dismissed the criticism and did not allow anyone to define her ‘Blackness’ as she matured.

**Facing Bias from Teachers.** When seeking the best and brightest for admission into the gifted program, the teachers are usually the first line of defense. Students who tend to complete tasks early and accurately are often recommended for an advance course such as gifted. The participants in this research, however, reported that they felt targeted or racially profiled by teachers at some point in their gifted classrooms. When asked how her teachers treated her in her gifted program, Bella replied with the following story:

The only time I ever had any trouble or serious misgivings about an instructor in high school, I had a teacher who taught a language class. There weren’t any gifted language classes. Everybody took the language classes. So I was in this class and she would separate the class where the gifted students were on one side and the traditional education students were on the other side. And it turned into a competition between the two which I didn’t mind. But she would always talk about how much better the traditional students
were and she’d say “the gifted students weren’t ‘all that’, “Just because you are in gifted doesn’t mean you are smart, you weren’t necessarily better than anyone”. I don’t know why anyone would think that in the first place but that was something that always annoyed me because I never thought I was better than anyone else just because I was gifted.

The slang term ‘all that’ means that one is not as high or as great as one believes. Teacher bias in this situation made Bella uncomfortable because she did not believe that she had achieved greatness simply because she was Black. In addition, Bella was accustomed to biased remarks that usually promoted gifted as the best in the class, as opposed to the language of teachers remarks that sought to make general statements that gifted students were on a lower level in comparison to traditional students. Bella also remarked that she had a geography teacher whom she described as having a “white knight” syndrome and said that the teacher would be “mean hard on me about not putting forth my best effort.”

Ford (2011) wrote that retention of African Americans in gifted programs becomes a problem when African American students are culturally separated and forced to choose a cultural side. Racial and culture differences lead to cultural incongruence where interpretation of cultural characteristics lead to frustration or cultural shock. Bella told another story of a time when she felt she was treated differently but this story had a different twist. Her story involved a conversation with a teacher in seventh grade who treated her differently on the basis of race when Bella thought she was simply going through a simple middle school identity crisis. She said:

Although I did have a teacher in 7th grade who treated me differently in the sense that in the seventh grade, I was going through my own kind of identity crisis and I was doing different things with my hair and I was doing different things with my clothes. I don’t know, just figuring out who I was. And they were pretty wild I will say. In class one day this teacher pulled me aside and she said, “Have you ever read Uncle Tom’s cabin?” and I said no but I was familiar with it. She said well there is a character in the story called Toby and I really think you should think about how you are dressing because there was a time when people were forced to dress the way that you are dressed and I think you are
being a little insensitive and a disservice to your race. And I was just stunned. I couldn’t believe that she told me that. . . not to mention that book was written by a White woman and not really our lives I’m thinking. . . Just because I don’t look the way you want me to look doesn’t mean not good enough and not doing what I should be doing in life. It’s just hair, it’s just clothes. It always stuck with me, it still sticks with me today because I’m thinking you don’t have the right to tell me how to be Black or how to be acceptable or how to be me.

Ford (2013) stated, “For gifted cultural different, this cultural shock and disharmony can include being placed in a gifted class where students, teachers, and school personnel may not understand or respect their cultural styles, beliefs, values, and traditions” (p. 17). Bella experienced a culture shock that remains very vivid in her mind today. Instead of the teacher viewing her sudden change in grooming as a teenage phase, the teacher made Bella think that she had a responsibility to represent her race in everything she did, even dressing.

**Facing Bias from Students.** Because the majority of her friends were also gifted, I asked Bella to recall an instance when she thought she was treated differently by other African American students who were not in the gifted program. Bella responded without hesitation:

Yeah, all the time. I mean, it wasn’t all negative but most of the time it was negative. It was . . . I was trying to be White, I didn’t know my place, I wasn’t Black enough, I thought I was better than other students or they assumed I was wealthy which I was not and a lot of them just thought I was wealthy.

Bella graduated from high school in 2004 when the gifted program was fairly new in her school district. She was unique from my other participants in that she remained in the gifted program from elementary school through graduation from high school. At some point in her school experiences, Bella experienced culture shock. Ford (2011) stated:

Culture shock is a transitional or temporary experience of moving from a state of low to high self-awareness and cultural awareness. Frequently, individuals experience culture shock because they cannot use their own cultural references to convey and validate central aspects of their identity in the new culture or with someone from a different culture. (p. 2)
I asked Bella to elaborate on her story of different treatment from students who were enrolled in traditional program. She related that initially in elementary school, because of the age, she honestly didn’t notice a difference between White or Black kids. It was when she began middle school that she began to see differences between her and other cultures. She said:

When I was in elementary school, I started realizing that there was a difference. There was this one time on the playground, we were playing jump rope, doing double-dutch. And I had never done it before and I tried doing it and failed miserably and one of the students who was in traditional classes said, “Oh looks liked gifted kids can’t do everything,” and I didn’t really understand what difference that made but it always stuck to me because that is when I started wondering what the difference was between the two programs.

Double-dutch is a jump rope technique that using two ropes swinging simultaneously in opposite directions. In urban settings, young Black girls learn to double-dutch jump rope at an early age. Although used and employed by other races, double-dutch has gained widespread recognition in urban Black communities. The remark made by the traditional student had a double meaning; on one hand, the student was referring to the fact that Bella was gifted but could not do everything perfect, and on the other hand, the implication was there that because Bella was not really “Black”, she could not master a game that the other Blacks on the playground were capable of performing.

**Racial Class Makeup.** Bella was enrolled in gifted classes in elementary school year. At the time, there were no self-contained gifted classes as the program was in the startup years. She was recalled that one day,

I didn’t even know what I was being tested for; they just told me that I was selected to go into a special class and do some activities in that class for about an hour a day.” When asked if she could recall the racial makeup of the gifted program Bella replied, “There was a good mix, almost fifty-fifty White to Black students or I should say minority to White students because we would have a small amount of Asians and a few Latino students.
When asked how many of the teachers in the gifted program were Black as opposed to white teachers Bella responded:

Most of the teachers were white. There are few who was Black. I probably had in all my years of learning, I had 3, whew, 2 because the other one wasn’t a gifted teacher. So gifted teachers I had 2. And of those they were all like temporary teachers. One of them was in elementary school, another was in middle school. In high school, none of my teachers were Black.

Kennedy (1991) stated, “Teachers do much more than literally teach content. They also personify content. They stand as models for what it is like to be an educated person” (p. 660).

Yet in the public school system, there is an alarming disparagement between the numbers of White teachers hired to teach in the gifted program as opposed to Black teachers. Bella remarked that she never really thought hard about it until I asked the question. In retrospect, she stated that it would have been helpful during her formative schooling years if she seen more African American teachers. Bella spent twelve years in a gifted program, taking at least four or more core subjects on each grade level, and she only had two African American instructors. Those two African American teachers were temporary and were later replaced with White teachers.

Dawn

I’m Black but Not Really. I began the interview with Dawn by asking her if the majority of her friends were gifted or traditional students. Dawn said they were all gifted and when I asked her if any of her friends were traditional students, she replied, “Um, not really; those…those just weren’t really the students that I kind of um. . .spent my time with.” That Dawn’s friends were all in the gifted program was not surprising as the program was located within a public school but was operated as a “school-within-a-school.” Gifted students took the majority of their daily classes together and the electives, such as talented art elective, talented drama elective, and violin, were tailored to gifted students. When I asked Dawn how well she got
along with the gifted students she replied, “Very well, because they were like minded. Maybe like one or two hours a week, um, maybe go to the movies, usually something like that, go to the movies or go skating, or something like that.” Dawn seemed adamant about her decision to befriend gifted and only gifted students, I asked her if she was the target of any type of hazing or bullying from other students because she was African American and gifted. Dawn replied, “Ah, I do remember a time when there was like free dress. Ummm, and I think I wore some knee high socks and the kids were making fun of me. That would have been in the 6th grade or something.” The trend of wearing over the knee socks emerged in the 1980s after Alicia Silverstone wore that style in the movie Clueless. Very few African American females followed that particular trend so Dawn’s African American peers might consider anyone who wore that trend to be one who is “acting white.”

**Facing Bias From Teachers.** I asked Dawn if she thought her teachers treated her the same as the students from other cultures, as an African American, or if she treated differently than the whites in her class. Dawn recalled the following story:

I remember one time in 6th grade, umm, I was working on something and I asked my teacher for some White-Out [liquid paper]. She said, “I’ll let you use it; you just make sure you don’t sniff it. You aren’t going to sniff it to get high?” I was eleven. I didn’t even know what she was talking about. And I was like, no. So uh yeah, I got accused of being a drug addict at eleven.

Dawn graduated from high school in 2007, yet this incident that happened to her in middle school remains vivid for her. When recounting the story her facial expression changed and her tone was very sarcastic. I asked Dawn if she had any other stories on the topic of teacher bias and she replied:

Um, I remember a teacher I had in 7th grade, she was my literature teacher. She seemed to really. . .um…kinda pick on me a little bit, kinda, I don’t know. It didn’t seem…hmmmm…how to put it, I don’t know if she was trying to raise my standard,
make me work harder, or she wasn’t a nice teacher, but she would pick on me more than I felt the other teachers would.

In her gifted program, Dawn reported that there was “probably like 15-20 percent African Americans students, if that.” She didn’t feel this contributed to her being singled-out by other teachers and students, but it shows she did notice the racial makeup of her class.

Luna

I’m Black but Not Really. Like the other participants in the study, Luna attended majority White schools most of her life. When she entered 6th grade, she began middle school in the gifted program, however; Luna experienced a paradigm shift for the first time in her schooling as the racial balance of the school changed. The middle school had a majority Black population and Luna felt drawn to friends of her own race. When I asked Luna whether the majority of her friends were in the gifted program, she replied:

When I was in gifted, the majority of my friends were actually traditional students. I didn’t befriend many of my gifted friends as one might have thought I would have. I never understood but it was mostly the traditional students that was my friends.

I asked her why she thought this was so and she replied:

Um, I didn’t wholly know. In my case, the majority of the kids in gifted were not Black and I had just gotten to a school where the population was majority Black. So, um, I kind of just gravitated to people of my own race and it, the majority of the people of my own race were traditional. Now it’s not to say that I didn’t befriend the Black people in gifted. It’s just that since there was so few of us in number in my particular class, the majority of my friends were actually made in P.E., which were traditional students.

I inquired as to whether or not Luna felt that other African American students in her school treated her differently because she was a part of the self-contained gifted program. She emphatically replied, “Oh, sweet, yes, yes, so many times. Even though I had a lot of friends that were traditional, it was a constant ribbing.” When asked to give an example of the constant ribbing she received because she was gifted, Luna replied:
It was a constant thing of ‘You act like a White girl, you such an Oreo cookie.’ You know you so White on the inside, why you talk so proper all the time? Why you talk so good? That drove me crazy. Uh, you know, um, ‘you think you better than everyone else because you smart’. Even though I had traditional friends who would tell me I was one of the coolest gifted kids they know because I didn’t act in such a way where I had a superiority complex, but it was a constant ribbing from other students and, um, within the gifted program I had a lot of ribbing from other Black students for different reasons.

That last statement needed more explanation and I asked Luna how other Black students in her gifted program treated her differently. She replied:

Um, I was just excluded. Class wise I wasn’t as good as they were. I uh my parents were divorced so you know the whole stigma of, oh you have a single Mom, you don’t have as much money or actually a lot of people in gifted thought I was really weird which is funny because everybody in gifted was weird. But they thought maybe I was a little too eccentric. Um, I got a lot of that too so I got it on both sides of the fence believe it or not. So the majority of my friends, which I had like one or two Black friends who I was really, really close with and I still am to this day very close ones but, um, a lot of ribbing came from that and it was just everybody always had the stank face when it came to me again probably because I was a little too eccentric by their means. I never really asked, you know; I just assumed that was typical teenage foolishness, if you will.

When the status of single-parent families is brought up, perceptions are often unfairly skewed that the children of single-parent households are poor, neglected, and unable to bridge the racial achievement gap (Ford, 2011). The child of a single-parent household may be seen as inferior to one who has a two-parent household and may be assumed to be unable to compete in a gifted program; another assumption is that the program is primarily for privileged and rich White students. Blacks who make it into the program need to conform close to the “rich White norm” factor to be considered worthy of inclusion in the gifted academy.

Luna explained to me that nothing could be further from the truth. Her mother was not a single parent but rather a divorced parent who was extremely involved in Luna’s education. Her mother held a steady job and, in Luna’s words, she was afforded “one hundred percent of the things I needed and seventy-five percent of the things I just wanted.” Her mother did not just want her to achieve; her mother expected her to achieve. Because of that expectation, Luna
never attended a neighborhood school. Her mother researched the best schools in the system and
enrolled Luna and her brother in that magnet program.

**Facing Bias from Teachers.** Luna’s story was different from the other participants in
that she indicated that she faced teacher bias from gifted teachers and once again when she exited
the gifted program and went to a magnet high school. I asked Luna if she experienced any
teacher bias in the gifted program and she replied:

I remember one particular instance with the teacher who was White who constantly
mixed me up with another African American student in my math class and it made
absolutely no sense to me because this particular young lady and I looked absolutely
nothing alike. I mean she was darker than I was, she was shorter than I was, her hair was
longer, you know. I wore a cheerleading uniform, she didn’t participate in anything. Like
our attitude was different, we sat on opposite sides of the classroom. It made absolutely
so sense to me.

I asked Luna how was she certain that the teacher was mixing her up with the other student.

Luna explained that her grades in that class were abysmal and her mother became concerned.

Eventually her mother scheduled a teacher conference to discuss her grades with her math
teacher. Luna said:

So my Mom sat down with this particular teacher and asked what was going on. So the
teacher told my Mom, ‘Oh you know her grades from last year were horrible. She’s really
been struggling in math for years.’ and my mom asked her what was she talking about,
the lowest grade her child ever made was a B. And you know, once my Mom repeated
this story back to me when I got home that day I said, ‘You do realize that she is mixing
me up with the only other Black person in class whose grades the year before were not
that good...’ Everybody thought she was racist. To me, it was like ‘all Black people look
alike’ because she would call me by the girl’s name and I’m like what are you talking
about. So for her to mix us up as if all Black people look alike to me not only was it
insulting because I didn’t think this girl was pretty but to boot, I thought this girl’s
attitude sucked. I’m like, geez, you would think that you would know the difference
between the two of us especially at the level of respect we would give you but she just
kind of lumped us all in the same bucket.

Luna remained in the gifted program only for three years of middle school. In eighth
grade, she opted to leave the gifted program and attend an academic magnet high school. She
said, “I ended up leaving the gifted after middle school and entering back into the magnet program because of the prestige of the local magnet school despite the warning I received about treatment at this particular magnet school.” I asked Luna about the warning and if she felt she was treated differently by magnet school teachers. She replied:

Oh, oh Lord, constantly. There was constant gifted student bashing at my high school. You would constantly hear teachers tell you, ‘Oh you gifted kids, ya’ll were so spoon-fed all the time. Everybody always gives you everything. Ya’ll don’t really know how to do work.’ It was almost like they felt that gifted students had no real academic ability because of being given special services to promote creativity and so on so forth in the gifted program. So they felt that we were weak and had extra help you know and because you were a special education student technically you were given more services. Their perspective of gifted students was unfairly skewed. I think that you should have a student in your class and judge them based on the merit of how they perform in your classroom and even at the level of determination.

Attitudes toward gifted students have been studied in the context of the social-emotional development of the gifted student. To a gifted African American student, the unfair labeling is particularly disturbing as the student already faces bias and labeling because of race. Clark (2008) stated, “The very term used to label children who exhibit high intellectual ability, ‘the gifted,’ indicates that their success has been given, not earned. Therefore, giftedness is to be viewed with suspicion, if not outright hostility.” (p.151). Luna was prepared for the attitudes she received in her magnet school but still displayed some outrage at the unfairness. She remarked, “And to just, you know, generically say that all kids who are gifted are essentially lazy and partially actually dumb, you know, was to me a misnomer if anything and incredibly inaccurate.”

Luna’s narrative on the bias of teachers was inclusive of herself and on behalf of all gifted students who were enrolled with her in the gifted and magnet school program. I asked Luna to narrow her story and tell me whether or not she felt that her teachers respected and encouraged her within the gifted classroom. Luna replied:
Well, there were those who you know like my 8th grade math teacher who didn’t even know who I was and you know, and then other instances where I had teachers who I can recall who just kind knew academically I was able. But I was never viewed as a favorite in the class or recognized for my academic abilities or anything. I was kinda always, well, I was jealous of this one particular young lady because even though we had the same grades in the classes, the majority of the time, she was the one who got all the attention. I was just sick of that. But she was white. Creative in her own merit, absolutely, and a very talented young lady but I always felt like I got passed over because of her and to me that was like the level of disrespect that I felt I experienced. There was always disrespect. You were disrespected by teachers. You were disrespected by students. You couldn’t satisfy the Black people because you thought you were too much. You couldn’t satisfy the white people because, heck, you weren’t white. The only people who sorta respected you were other gifted Black students and barely that so you were just a fucking freak.

As she navigated her years in the gifted program, Luna’s interactions in daily school life often led to frustration and bitterness that went beyond the typical teenage year’s discomfort. The racial injustices can hinder the learning experience of the multicultural student. In many cases it can inhibit positive self-concept and reduce racial pride (Ford, 2012).

**Racial Class Makeup.** Luna referred to the racial makeup of the gifted program as “white spaces”. She reported very few Black students and an absence of Black males as well as Black teachers. She remembered consciously counting the number of Black students in the gifted program one day. She stated:

Just very, very white. The few Black people that we did have in my classroom were mostly females. There were very few Black males. The most were actually girls. I think that when I actually ended up counting it on my hand one day just to kinda remember, I think it came out to maybe 20. Maybe there was more but that’s all I could remember in my specific class. And there was about a class of about roughly 80 to 100 per grade level of gifted students. It was majority white and we had a lot of Asian and Indian students as well. I met one Native American and he was not my classmate. I only had one Black teacher throughout my entire three years in the gifted program.

Luna attended school in a predominantly Black school system. It is significant, however, that after being out of high school for seven years, Luna could still recall the racial makeup of her class.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

I want educators, the majority of whom are White, to understand and accept that there is no going back—only forward. Culturally different students are here to stay, are increasing in numbers, and will soon be the majority. The future is now and we are on this journey together (Ford, 2013, p. 201).

Facing Bias

As mentioned in chapter five, the three participants experienced instances of bias. They experienced bias from teachers in the gifted program who had preconceived notions about the achievement abilities from Black students. As teachers are the first line of identification in placing students in gifted programs, it is counter-productive to have anyone who views Black students as low achievers to serve as the person making referrals to the program. According to Ford (2013), “Teacher referral or lack thereof is fundamentally about expectations. When expectations are high and positive, teachers are more likely to refer culturally different students; when they are low and negative [grounded in deficit thinking], then referrals are unlikely” (p. 88). Students are unlikely to be referred to gifted programs, and it is possible that the small number of referrals will not be treated equitably in the program.

The participants in this study agreed with this sentiment. When asked how did ended up in a gifted program Dawn stated, “I was at a regular elementary school and my teacher recommended I get tested for gifted, my 5th grade teacher.” When Bella was placed into the gifted program, the program was fairly new and in need of African American students. Bella stated:

When I was in elementary school, I was in 7th grade and at the time it was called SOAR and they would test you. I didn’t even know what I was being tested for; they just told me that I was selected to go into a special class and do some activities in that class. Then for an hour each day we would go to separate class. About me and maybe 4 or 5 other students would do things that I thought were really fun compared to what we would normally do in class.
Teachers who were not attuned and unreceptive to the giftedness of these two Black two participants would have prevented them the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program. Administrators of the program relied heavily on teacher opinions of giftedness. However, this is problematic because these teachers received no professional development or multicultural training to ensure that the recommendations they made were fair and equitable. Staiger (2004) stated:

Thus, while identification procedures provided an uneven playing field for non-white students and those with less cultural capital, the entitlement associated with the gifted label and the retaining of the label throughout one’s school career intensified the inequities in access to gifted education and cemented the link between whiteness and giftedness. (p. 165)

If teachers are given a leadership position in a gifted program, they must be expected to handle this position effectively when judging African American students as gifted. They must receive training and a checklist of attributes for which to look when deciding who is appropriate for the program.

Luna’s entrance into the gifted program did not involve teacher recommendation. Her mother was proactive in her education and researched better schools for Luna as she advanced from elementary school to middle school and high school. As an educator, however, her mother had prior knowledge of school programs to which other parents might not have access. When asked how she got into the gifted program, Luna replied:

Middle schools in my district were not very good. They had pretty bad reputations and my mother is an educator; and she figured, you know, with having an older sibling who went through middle school and had trouble that middle school to her was the formative years. As far as she was concerned, middle school could either make you or break you. So she decided to have me tested. I achieved a good enough score to go into the gifted school in middle school so I really ended up into gifted because of a push from my mom.

Unlike the other two participants, Luna’s mother was the person who initiated the testing process for her. Luna did not indicate that any of her teachers in middle school suggested her placement
in a gifted program. Indeed, Luna’s perceptions of her teachers were quite the opposite. The majority of her elementary school teachers were white and Luna did not think that her accomplishments in her gifted classes were appreciated as were the efforts of classmates from the other cultures. Luna stated:

They [teachers] weren’t blatant about it or anything but not always and I don’t know if it was really intentional. You know, I think that a few of them still had to fight their ideas and stereotypes of Black people and the ability of Black students in their classroom because you know they kinda, you know, ‘We treat you all the same and we all love you but this one student over here is exemplary.’ Clearly, you know, my friends and I, our academic work was fantastic, you know, but it’s not like it ever warranted any attention from any of them. So we may have gotten treated the same on a base level but as for having grander recognition for our academic achievement, I always felt they kinda passed us over a little bit and didn’t pay attention very well.

Ogbu (2003) supported the sentiment of lower expectations for Black students and indicated that students pick up on the attitude of teachers who feel that Blacks are not expected to achieve at the level of fellow white students. Ogbu (2003) stated:

A common complaint against teachers was that they did not believe that Black students could perform academically like white students. . . .In interviews several Black students reported that teachers did not expect them to do well. They made it clear that they were talking about teachers in general, that regardless of race teachers had more negative expectations about how Black students would behave in class. Such expectations inevitably had negative effects on their academic performance. (p. 124)

Though placed in gifted programs, the students in the programs did not feel that they were always treated fairly when compared to the white culture within the classroom. Deep-seated mores are difficult to mask despite the inclusion of Black faces in a federal program to keep the federal dollars flowing into a school system suffering from rapid white flight.

White flight from the public school system is a reality that many schools in the South struggle to circumvent. With the inclusion of a gifted program in desegregation orders, school systems enticed white families to remain with the public schools for a while but it was not a permanent fix. Often centered in schools with majority Black population, the gifted program
evolved into a “school within a school” where Black students were left out and the white students who remained were, for a time, made to feel safe because they did not attend classes with the Other element.

Staiger (2004) agreed that the discourse of protection afforded to white students as a reward for inclusion in a segregated gifted program within a desegregated school. She also maintained that students included in a gifted program were inherently white and they were placed there with the understanding that they will be protected from taking classes with multicultural students, and that the white gifted students could always feel safe and protected from the traditional students in the school environment. She stated:

. . . Where it would not have been appropriate for teachers to talk about white students’ need for protection, protection of gifted students allowed teachers to communicate a selective concern for gifted students that at once whitened those inside against a backdrop on non-whiteness, non-giftedness on the outside. The common sense notion of “protection” thus served as a rationalization for limitations on unwanted access and contact, for maintaining privilege, and ultimately, for segregation, all the while allowing those who adhered to it to maintain a “colorblind” language. (p. 171)

Colorblindness, a component of Critical Race Theory, is the claim that one does not see color or race in other individuals. It is a means of disregarding race when selecting individuals to participate or receive services. It adheres to the belief that all people are created equal and are treated equally by everyone. This belief disregards the existence of white privilege in American society and allows members of society to ignore the disadvantages imposed upon the non-white population in American society.

In the case of gifted programs, allowances are made for the disproportionate ratio of enrolled white to Black students. It is quietly billed as a “safe place” for white students, thus pandering to the needs of white families poised to exit the public school system. According to Staiger (2004), “…teachers and administrators served as the intellectuals that produced a
‘rearticulation’ of the meaning of whiteness In this, protection as well as giftedness itself had become code words that indicated race…,” without uncomfortably challenging the dominant ideas of race (p. 171). The application of a colorblind language further aids negative attitudes towards the inclusion of non-white students into the program, and produces a ground where the seeds of Blackness as gifted have been choked and weeded out.

To accuse the authors of public education in a post Brown v Board of Education era as self-serving racists in developing a gifted program is not a far-fetched, unsubstantiated accusation. Gifted education was touted as a tool for desegregation, yet it excluded Blacks at every turn. It is akin to accusing those who designed gifted education legislation as a vehicle for separate and unequal educational circumstances for students of color, and that labels the program as racist. Racism in public education in a post-segregated society is not uncommon. The discussion of racism as normal is the first tenet of Critical Race Theory. According to Ladson-Billings (2013), “The first tenet of CRT is the notion that racism is not some random, isolated act of individuals behaving badly. Rather, to a CRT scholar racism is the normal order of things in US society” (p. 37).

Racial realism is an idea within CRT that racism is more than a long held collection of unfavorable attitudes towards members of the oppressed societal group; rather, it is a system of power that denotes privilege through a system of hierarchies that determine who gets the best jobs and schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Therefore, even though all three participants were in the same classroom setting receiving superior grades equivalent to the grades of the dominant culture, there was a still a devaluing of achievement from Black students within the same spaces.
Constantly feeling as though she did not fit in any spaces, Luna experienced negative body issues, confusion, and discomfort within her own skin, a feeling that often occurs with girls her age. Although middle school is a place where this occurrence is egregious, Luna remarked more than once that she did not fit in because of how her body did not fit the exaggerated woman parts that were glorified in rap language at the time; additionally, she was in a predominantly white classroom space and she did not fit that mode either. Luna stated:

Umm, in most instances inside the classroom, um, I guess it was just typical teen teasing but a lot of time the Black girls did not want to sit around me for this reason. Inside the classroom the majority of my friends were actually guys and they weren’t the Black guys either because they thought I was too weird. I was flat chested; I wasn’t considered pretty to them so they didn’t want to be around me. Now, of course, you know it still happened; it was middle school and I was still called ‘flat booty’ and ‘mosquito bite tits’ and, ummm, you know, whatever they could think of-- ‘nappy head’ you know, anything they could possibly think of.

Although some amount of teasing and jeering is a common occurrence in the teen years, it is particularly harsh to the Black student who feels bias from many directions, including teachers, traditional students, and fellow gifted students. It is often the price Black students pay when they are educated in predominantly white spaces. Delpit (2002) was concerned with the emotional state of a Black child who attends a majority white school when she states:

When Maya was in the middle of the fifth grade, I became concerned with her emotional state in a small, predominantly white private school. Although the instruction was excellent, she seemed to sinking into some sort of emotional abyss. Although her class had several African American boys, she was the only African American girl. She was often excluded by the other girls. She began to say things like, ‘Maybe if I were prettier I’d have more friends.’ When she approached me one day and requested that she be allowed to get plastic surgery because her lips were ‘too big’, I knew I had to act. She transferred midyear to a new start-up public charter school with a population of about 98 percent African American children (p. 34).

Adolescence is difficult for most female students. Changing body images and peer pressure all contribute to the difficulty. The African American female has the usual adolescent problems and
a high sensitivity to being labeled as different. This can cause them to develop deeper negative body images.

Attending a school or enrolling in a program with a limited number of multicultural students can intensify negative self-image. The participants wanted to achieve but they also wanted to be accepted. Luna acknowledged having a strong need to hang out and befriend students in the traditional program because she wanted to know more about the culture of Black students. She further admitted that she spent very little of her time with other gifted students because she was stuck in a classroom with them all day, so did not want to spend her free time with them also. Luna explained:

Because since I saw them all day, I wanted to hang out with my traditional friends and we would you know, talk to each other and share our stories of what happened in the classroom. It was kind of cool for me because even though I wasn’t in the traditional classroom, I was always curious to know what happened. You know, you see their teachers yelling on the hallway, and cursing people out like that was normal. But I was kind of curious, did that happen in the classroom. It did. It did. But they would give all these funny stories of what happened in their classroom and I kind of got to live vicariously through them and felt a little more accepted even into their crew.

Acceptance is necessary for the comfort and well being of African American females as they face bias on many directions. Black gifted female experience intersectionality early in their lives. Intersectionality is the view that the Black female faces oppression in varying degrees in life and her oppression intersections with other configurations, forming a link between forms of oppression, discrimination, or domination. Intersectionality creates patterns of oppression that are cultural. The patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of intersectionality are found in not only in race and gender but also in class, ethnicity, and sometimes abilities (Crenshaw 1995).

Each of the three participants of this study vividly recalled the times when she faced bias, oppression, and discrimination through several of these intersections. Luna recalled that she was
not wholly accepted by the white students in the gifted program but was also shunned by the Black gifted students because her mother was a single parent, and therefore, they assumed that she was poor or on welfare and did not measure up. At the same time Luna expressed feeling isolation from fellow gifted students because she was a little eccentric, and she said her main friends within the classroom were males. She also separated along class lines: “Racially speaking, we were divided along class lines so, you know, people who were from a different class. Once again, I was the kid on reduced lunch so whatever.” Further intersections surfaced in Luna’s discourses with me as she thought her teachers lauded the accomplishments of white gifted classmates while ignoring her equally brilliant abilities.

Bella remembered that members of her own race treated her differently because she was in the gifted program, and traditional students equated her inclusion in the gifted program with an assumption that she was rich. She further stated:

At the time the gifted program was so new a lot of the students who got into it first were white. They were more affluent they had better access to education just like the statistics will tell you but it wasn't surprising because it was the early stages of the programs and then as we got older you saw more affluent Blacks, middle class Blacks getting their kids into the program.

Bella graduated from high school in 2004, the early inception of the gifted program in her school system. As a Black female in the newly created gifted program, she recalled how she was treated as a rich kid and shunned by traditional students on the basis of class and race. Bella shared that her family was working class and it was very confusing to her that traditional students continued to call her a rich girl.

No matter from where it comes, stereotyping can have a negative effect on achievement in African American students. Besides the negative impact on the achievement level of African American students, stereotyping also can widen the achievement gap for multicultural students.
This study’s participants, however, said that negative stereotyping did not have an impact on their grades; this is the exception to the rule according to the researchers. Hilliard (2003) stated:

> But virtually all aspects of underperformance—lower standardized test scores, lower college grades, lower graduation rates—persist among students from the African-American middle class. This situation forces on us an uncomfortable recognition: that beyond class, something racial is depressing the academic performance of these students. (p. 11)

Although negative stereotyping did not affect the academic performances of the participants in this study, negative stereotyping often is a factor in underachievement of African American students. Expecting that African American students cannot do well on standardized tests can lead to a lack of effort on the part of the students, as some buy in to the negative stereotypes. For Bella, inclusion in a gifted program served as a motivational tool. Bella said, “It almost became like a bragging right, who stayed up the longest to study, who spent the most time on a project, who had been at the library the longest.” Within her gifted program, there was competition and an expectation of excellence and achievement. There was a push to succeed, however, negative stereotyping can take on other forms, such as Luna and Bella experienced in being a little different. Neither understood why this ‘difference’ should cast them as a person who was not Black enough. Bella said, “I know I was a little weird to some but it didn’t have anything to do with me being Black.”

Trying to measure up to an image of ‘being Black’ can be very confusing to Black students. They get backlash for something for which they feel they should already own. “Well, aren’t we already Black?” each participant queried. However, each participant told stories of names they were called and how they were made to feel different from a culture with which they identified their entire lives. When I asked each participant whether she could recall an instance when other African American students treated her differently, each had a reply.
Dawn:

I think they respected me, but I think because of the way that I spoke or my interest that I played in the orchestra, I think they may have ‘othered’ me. Like, they saw see me as like Black, but not really Black. So I think I was treated well with respect and people saw me as a worthy, um, student, you know, someone I could do my work with, but I think they didn’t actually see me as like a real Black person.

Bella:

Yeah, all the time. I mean, it wasn’t all, most of the time it was negative, but it was I was trying to be white, I didn’t know my place, I wasn’t Black enough, I thought I was better than other students or they assumed I was wealthy which I was not and a lot of them just thought I was wealthy. Not all of them for the most part, a lot of the interaction was like that until they got to know me better and they realized I was just another person but most of the time it was not positive.

Luna:

It was a constant ribbing of you act like a white girl, you such an Oreo cookie. You know, you so white on the inside, why you talk so proper all the time, why you talk so good? That drove me crazy. Uh, you know, um, you think you better than everyone else because you smart.

The above instances caused the participants to feel stereotyped and isolated from those of their own color. Students in the traditional student classes did not accept Dawn, Bella, or Luna for who they were or as Black people with different ideals. Instead, the participants were jeered and ostracized by the Black community—the very community into which they longed to be accepted because, in their eyes, they were all of the same culture. Culture and community are important to the African American race. It was through a shared community that African Americans were able to escape slavery and send for their loved ones. It is a sense of community where all Blacks want to see everyone’s child do well, succeed, and become the best in life they could be. Therefore, entire small communities feed each others’ kids, correct each others’ kids when they are misbehaving, and hand down life lesson speeches whenever they think they are needed. These were the underlying ideals and principals to which Dawn, Bella, and Luna were
drawn, and they desired that one community that, in the past, was willing to put its arms around another and draw that person into the circle. Instead, their community jeered at them, attacked their self-esteem and tried to make them feel inferior as Black people because of perceived differences, i.e. the gifted program in which they were enrolled.

Buck (2010) asserted that the ‘acting white’ is a label that should be taken and studied with some seriousness. When students are in a well-interrogated school the race relations are worse. Buck (2010) further stated:

In short when we feel that we are a part of a beleaguered group that is caught in a struggle for dominance, it becomes all the more important to stick together as a group and to punish group members who seem disloyal. That is what the ‘acting white’ charge does. It is a perfectly normal human reaction, akin to the group solidarity felt by all types of minority groups. (p. 153)

The three participants were in a program that welcomed a majority of white students into the program, but Blacks within the program were regarded as disloyal and forced to choose a side. The only way for them to be completely accepted was to leave the legally formed “school-within-a-school” and transfer to classes that were allotted strictly for traditional students. How the minority sector views, perceives, or experiences school affects the way in which it responds to school and to individual schoolmates. Cultural identity and language are pieces in this perception. As a result, minorities may resist or reject and label this curriculum as “white” (Ogbu, 2003).

A natural jealousy developed between the gifted Blacks and the traditional Blacks. Because the Black students were participants in the gifted program, other teachers and administrators in the school were viewed as privileging them and pandering to them.

Historically, gifted classrooms have access to more computers in the classroom, have class sets of tablets and other technology equipment, more printers and more freedom to move around the
class and express their creativity (Horvat & O’Connor, 2006); Title 1 under Exceptional Student Services funds the extra technology. By Federal Law, the classrooms of the gifted cannot exceed 20 students. A traditional student may be in a classroom that has 33 – 35 student bodies, and often they have to sit at tables because the class is too large and the classroom is too small to support that number of desks required. Therefore, the traditional students jeer at the African American students included in gifted programs because they are in these select classes with a majority of white students, and getting special treatment, and they must, of course, be ‘acting white’.

A similar complaint emerged from students disenfranchised by their own culture and placed in the gifted program. Steele (1999) recalled a similar experience in college:

The students expressed a litany of complaints that could have come straight from the mouths of the Black friends I had visited there thirty years earlier; the curriculum was too white, they heard too little Black music, they were ignored in class, and too often they felt slighted by faculty members and other students (p.44).

When unable to attend a school environment with fellow multicultural students, African American students often feel hostage to a curriculum that does not address their unique needs and characteristics. Instead, they must assimilate into the white culture of the curriculum that was created by white people for white students, and the students may balk at the restraints. Forbidding Blacks from hearing their music is a grievance; often it is their music that keeps them connected to their culture and able to feel they have some “Blackness” and connection to those of their culture who have expressed deep, soulful feelings of life stories through their music, since the first slaves set foot on American shores. Denying Black students the right to listen to or discuss their music in class when the music of other cultures is welcomed is a disenfranchisement for Black gifted students.
In a discussion of music and free time spent with students outside of the gifted classroom, Luna had a long and bitter narrative. Luna loved the music of the 1980s and the 1990s, the time periods of childhood and teen years. She laughed about how spastic she was in elementary school where she attended a majority white school. When she moved on to middle school, the entire population of the school was Black, but her class time was still spent with a majority of white students in the school-within-school gifted program. Luna gravitated toward other Black students in the traditional program who did not judge her because she was enrolled in the gifted program. She related the following story to me:

I do remember this one time, there was this particular young lady who I was actually a cheerleader with. Um, she was in gifted as well and we were in class and we were like you know, we were just sitting there. Now we’re in PE at this time and, uh, she was a gifted kid and I was a gifted kid. I was just fooling around and joshing with my friends which you know in PE were my traditional friends. And we were just clowning about singing rap songs that were popular then and you know being loud like most middle school kids are annoyingly so to me now but it wasn’t annoying back then. So she just came out of the locker room and looks at this and all of a sudden she was like, “Why are you acting so niggerish?” And I just whipped my head towards and like, did she seriously just say that? And like all my friends looked and I’m like this girl can’t be that bright cuz there was like a ton of Black people running around. So I went after her to go charge her you know, to go and beat her and I was just going to have to take that punishment I was going to get when I got home for getting suspended for starting a fight. But my friends, you know, held me off her and were like, ‘Naw, it’s not worth it for you to get in a fight over that,’ but for her to just flat out say that!

In this case, Luna was not ‘acting white’ and that created a problem for her fellow gifted white classmate. She was not adhering to her usual quiet demeanor and was caught up in the new wave of culturally specific music of rap. In her classroom setting, Luna admitted to being a different person. She admitted that she would assimilate into the accepted norms of gifted student classroom behavior and that it freed her to finally embrace her culture altogether. Luna welcomed the times when she could throw off the constrictions of gifted behavior and just have fun with her traditional classmates such as in the PE classes that she took with other minorities. I
asked Luna to explain to me what she was doing when her white gifted classmate came out of the locker room. Luna said:

Rap, you know. Beat boxing. I was singing songs that were Black songs. I went through an African American renaissance in middle school because my other schools were diverse; in elementary school our school was half and half. The majority of the time I was in class with white students so, um, there was none of that where I came from. It was actually very Euro-centric; but once I got to middle school it was a totally different world for me. I was around people that looked like me and talked like me.

Once again the threat from stereotyping became a problem from a student who was in an environment lacking in multiculturalism. The fear of stereotyping can cause an adverse effect in academic achievement for the African American student. Critical race theorists adhere to the concept of race as a social construct. Ladson-Billings (2013) stated:

Thus, while critical race theorists accept the scientific understanding of no-race or no genetic difference, we also accept the power of a social reality that allows for significant disparities in the life chances of people based on the categorical understanding of race (p. 39)

Luna felt a natural pull towards the traditional students because of her need to identify with children of her own culture. She enjoyed the music of rap that was prevalent in the 1990s in which she grew up. Luna expressed that she was not consciously doing anything with her traditional friends because it was an expression of her “Blackness”; rather she was just having fun with people whose company she enjoyed. It was the perception of her white classmate and the statement she made towards Luna’s actions that were a part of the social construct of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Because Luna was in class all day with white students and a limited number of Blacks, her white classmate expected that she would behave in a certain manner. Her outrage at Luna’s dancing and rapping as well as the classmate’s outrageous exclamation that Luna’s behavior was “nigrerish” were socially constructed.
Essentially the white classmate proclaimed that Luna was acting like a Black person and that acting as such was beneath a student who was in a gifted program. The white student projected the social construction of Black people on Luna; Luna, because she was gifted, was not supposed to act Black. Behaving with the actions of a Black person—rapping, being noisy, and dancing—were considered to be negative. Luna was not supposed to engage in Black actions and behaviors because she was gifted. To the white student, being a gifted person meant that Luna was supposed to act intelligently, quietly, not rap, the antithesis of a Black person; therefore, Luna was acting “niggerish” or “too Black” and needed to be corrected. For a gifted child to act in this manner was deemed to be ignorant, so behaving in this manner of “Black people” was constructed to be ignorant, what Luna was not supposed to be. In short, “acting Black” or “niggerish” was the white student’s way of correcting Luna’s behavior, thus her cultural background, to fit the mold of intelligence, an attribute the white student equated with whiteness, not Blackness.

**Desegregation and Gifted**

The creation of gifted programs accelerated with the passage of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented students Act of 1988. The passage of this legislation provided funding to state and local education that gave priority to inclusion of African Americans, economically disadvantaged, limited English-speaking students, and other racial minorities (Ford & Webb, 1994). Yet, over 25 years later, the gifted and talented program is anything but a program that includes African Americans in any meaningful way.

Many cases that were brought before the court addressed racial segregation of schools in the country, but in 1954, the Supreme Court handed down the landmark mandate that racial segregation of public schools must end. In 1954, *Brown v Board of Education* demanded an end
to separate but equal schools (347 U.S. 483, 1954). This ruling did not mean that segregated schools immediately welcomed Blacks into their segregated schools. Jim Crow laws were still in force, particularly in the South, and they were still used to circumvent this ruling. Any attempt to allow even one Black student into previously segregated schools was met by heavily charged protest marches. Ruby Bridges was such a test case. Born in same year as the passage of Brown v Board of Education, Ruby’s family moved to New Orleans where they sought job opportunities.

When Ruby Bridges’ family agreed to send her to a segregated white school, her parents and five other Black families agreed to allow their children to attend the all-white William Frantz Elementary. The other five families backed out and Ruby was the only Black child to attend. She was escorted to school by four federal marshals every day and faced the true brunt of the Supreme Court ruling. Screaming mobs of white people protested Ruby’s entrance into the segregated school. Ruby did not take classes with other white students but instead sat in a classroom of one, with her white teacher from Boston who agreed to teach her. She was not allowed to mingle with other whites for lunch, recess, or class instruction. This test case ended with her parents suffering great losses for their courage. Her father lost his job, her mother was not allowed in the grocery store, and her sharecropper grandparents were evicted from a farm they had lived in for over 25 years (Wells, 2004).

Prior to the Brown v Board of Education, schools in the South were racially and physically segregated. Adhering to a policy of separate but equal, the schools for African Americans did receiving equal funding and resources. African Americans wanted a change but balked at the assumption that unequal funding equated to an inferior education for African American students. The teachers and administrators at segregated African American schools were equally dedicated to educating the youths with whatever resources were available. Bell
offered a different opinion for the rationale of ridding the public school system of the practice of separate but unequal. (Bell, 1995) stated:

I contend that the decision in Brown to break with the court’s long-held position on these issues cannot be understood without some consideration of the decision’s value to whites, not simply those concerned about the immorality of racial inequality, but also those whites in policymaking positions able to see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation (p. 22).

According to Bell (1995), interest convergence is a practice where whites support and promote advances for Black only to the extent that the advancement of racial issues also serve white interest. In Brown v Board of Education and the striking down of separate but unequal public education, white self-interest was served in several ways.

In deciding to move immediately to end segregation, America gained credibility with third world countries that had viewed America as hypocritical in its assertion that “all men were created equal” (Bell, 1995, p. 22). Also regarding white self-interest, removing separate but equal practices would repair the psychological damage done to World War II Black veterans who asserted that it was horrific to draft Black servicemen to fight in America’s wars, only to have the veteran return to America to face oppression and racial practices (Bell, 1995). Finally, the ending of the separate but equal practices had the potential to improve industrialization in the South. By doing so, the white self-interest served by the Jim Crow practices of the South were removed and industrialization would rapidly expand in the South (Bell, 1995).

A team of researchers in the 1940s offered another reason for the change of mind and the push for ratification of Brown v Board of Education. Commonly referred to as the “babydoll” test, researchers used this test to prove that segregation was egregious and harmful to the psychological development of Black females (Vaughn, 1986). When young Black girls were shown a white babydoll and Black babydoll, they were asked to choose which doll was prettier.
When nearly all of the young ladies choose the white doll, researchers determined that Black females had a negative race image and turned to white images as the model for beauty and perfection (Vaughn, 1986). Proponents of *Brown v Board of Education* used this research to argue that separate but equal laws were harmful in that they destroyed the positive self-image of Blacks, and caused Blacks to inherently feel inferior to whites because of separatism and segregation.

In my study, a search for the specific data to illustrate the number of Black students presently enrolled in the gifted program in the school district of this study was met by protectiveness and flat refusal to release any numbers. After searching fruitlessly in the Educational Special Service department and the local school board office, and the schools in the district that housed the gifted programs in local high schools, it became apparent that no data involving the racial makeup of the programs would be released. However, the participants of this study were forthcoming in this area. When I asked Luna if she could recall the racial makeup of the gifted program she replied:

I think that when I actually ended up counting it on my hand one day, I think it came out to maybe, twenty students who were Black . . . and there was about a class about roughly 80 to 100 per grade level of gifted students.

When I asked Dawn if she could recall the racial makeup of her class she replied, “Um, I can’t say numbers, but it’s just a like a percentage, probably like 15-20 percent, if that.” Both Dawn and Luna graduated from high school in 2007, and also attended middle school in 2000s. By that time, the numbers of Black students in gifted had begun to dwindle and continued to drop.

Regarding the racial makeup of the gifted program, Bella gave a different story. Bella graduated from high school in 2004, and attended elementary school in the 1990s. During this
era in Bella’s school district, there was an active, conscious effort to recruit Black students.

When I asked Bella what was the racial makeup of her gifted class, she replied:

   At the time the gifted program was so new, a lot of the students who got into it first were white. They were more affluent, they had better access to education just like the statistics will tell you but it wasn’t surprising because it was the early stages of the programs. And as the program got older, you saw more affluent Blacks, middle class Blacks, getting their kids into the program and by the time I got to high school you saw everybody of all different backgrounds.

In Bella’s district, the federal money to fund self-contained gifted programs began in earnest in the early 1990s. Years of forced busing and redrawn attendance lines resulted in white flight in alarming numbers. In an effort to stem the white flight, the school system offered a school-within-a-school gifted program. The gifted program was set up in inner city schools where the majority of the population was Black students.

   In this way, the gifted program could attract white students who had fled to private schools, with the promise that they would receive a specialized accelerated curriculum. In a secondary but lesser way, the program could further integrate inner city schools by placing the white students who signed up for gifted education in the school in an enclosed environment. At the same time, it was imperative at its inception to include a certain percentage of Black students because the gifted program had been marketed as a means of voluntary desegregation of inner city schools. Bella offered her opinion of the recruitment of Blacks into the program:

   I know it was a concerted effort to do it because I remember when they would have the IEP discussion with my parents, they would have to take a head count of all the students like Black and non Black, and I always thought that was weird, like who cares? But it was a big thing back then that there weren’t enough non Black students because of the whole desegregation thing they had to do which is why I got moved from my home school I would have gone if I had stayed in the traditional program.

The IEP of which Bella spoke, the Individualized Education Plan, is given to students in specialized programs. An IEP falls under the department of Special Education or Exceptional Student Education, as it is named in today’s schools. The funding for ESS students comes from a
special fund in the federal department of education. Because gifted education is funded from federal money, strict attention is paid to the inclusion of minorities in any specialized program. That was why it was important for administrators in Bella’s school to get a head count of non-Black students, especially since the program was new and it was touted as a means to facilitate voluntary desegregation and remove government control from the long-standing desegregation order placed on her district. Bella made further observations on the desegregation efforts in her school district. Bella stated:

And when I got to middle school, for a moment, they had the gifted program at Woodcrest. Well they decided that Woodcrest was overcrowded or didn’t have the resources to continue with the program so they moved us to Southdale after being at Woodcrest for 2 weeks for our sixth grade year. And not only did they move the students, they moved the teachers, which was interesting. And it was weird because all the schools were way away from me except for Brownville that was the closest one. And the only reason why I was able to go to those schools was because of the gifted program. At the time, if I had wanted to go to those schools because I thought they were very good schools, I wouldn’t have been able to. I think my high school was maybe half and half because it was in a Black neighborhood and also because time had passed enough where more people of different backgrounds could get their students in those gifted programs.

Bella’s narrative tells the story of how the gifted program in the 1990s was used as a “chess piece” for desegregation as her school district fought tirelessly to get the district out of federal oversight in the long running desegregation case. Moving the gifted program from predominantly white schools and placing it in urban majority Black schools helped the district to recruit Black students and gave an appearance of integrating urban schools by placing the self-contained gifted schools in one majority Black population to another.

This practice is still in place in Bella’s school district even though the district is no longer under federal regulations. Today, the moving of the gifted program is used to raise the test scores of failing inner city urban schools and not as much attention is placed on trying to recruit Black students as it was during the inception of the program. From 2007, when Luna and Dawn
graduated from high school, just three years from the time that Bella graduated, the gifted program fell from 50/50 white and Black students to 15-20 Black students.

According to CRT, the dominant culture will racialize different minority groups at different times to respond to shifting needs within that society (Stefamic, 2012). Therefore, when there was a need to get the gifted program off the ground, the dominant culture actively recruited minorities to the program. A few years later, that need shifted and the lifting of the desegregation court order allowed the dominant culture to relax its recruitment efforts. Instead, the need shifted to the importance of having higher test scores in failing inner city urban schools. The gifted program’s location was shifted to the failing schools to raise test scores and allow the school district to stave off state takeovers.

Bella observed that, from its inception, the gifted program was slanted towards a particular cultural group, specifically, affluent white families. As a young Black lady, Bella still has issues with other people’s perception that she was rich because she was in the gifted program at the time. All three participants in this study alluded to the fact that at some point and time, the gifted program was more classist than it was gifted, a tool for desegregation. Bella offered her view:

The only thing I didn’t like was that people would automatically assume I was well off or wealthy or must be rich to be in the gifted program—white and Black students. Because that was interesting, um, because it doesn’t cost any money to be in the gifted program in a public school. So I always thought that was a weird association. I think it came from how the program started where you had a lot of rich white folks who wanted their kids in a specialized program because they are talented and gifted so but yeah, as I got older the classes evened out more.

Bella’s narrative supported the fact that the gifted program became a haven for affluent white students. Essentially the program was a more economical way to give white students a private school education within an inner city school. Because it was advertised to provide individualized
instruction, small class sizes, and an accelerated curriculum, the program was infused with students from affluent white parents who wanted their child to have the best college preparation curriculum without the inherent problems of attending a predominantly Black inner city school. The gifted students were insulated from the neighborhood population and in some cases, given their own building on the school campus with their own special set of teachers to teach them. Whenever the program moved to another site, the teachers were required to move also as only teachers with advanced degrees were allowed to teach in the gifted program. Human Resources carefully screened the teachers and the school principals at the sites where gifted programming was offered. Staiger (2004) drew a similar conclusion in her article where she stated:

> Accommodating demands for desegregation constituted a progressive move by the schools. However, using gifted programs to lure white students into a predominantly non-white school and retaining practices and policies that continue to exclude non-whites ‘insulated’ the original demands of integration in a way that did little to disrupt the pre-existing racial order. In fact, both practices may have exacerbated the ‘badge of inferiority’ that was the mark of segregation (p.179-180).

Instead of becoming a tool for desegregation as initially put forth, the gifted program became yet another example of white privilege. As the program has moved forward, it has benefited white parties far more than it has benefited Black patrons. Exclusionary tendencies continue to grow with the program as desegregation takes a back burner and the gifted program becomes an exclusionary school within a public school system. Although the dominant culture may not recognize it, the creation of a gifted program to desegregate the public schools system has benefited the white culture far more than it has aided minorities. This is evident in that the school system studied in this research declined from its 50/50 mix of white and Black participants to less than 15 per cent participation of Black students between 2004 and 2007.
Magnet Programs

The participants in my study attended gifted programs at different points in their lives. Bella became a gifted student in elementary school and remained a gifted student throughout high school. Dawn and Luna became gifted students in middle school grades 6, 7, and 8. Both Dawn and Luna were in magnet programs prior to entering the gifted program in middle school, and both Dawn and Luna chose to exit the gifted program after middle school and attend an academic gifted magnet high school program.

A magnet school is a public school offering special instruction and programs and is designed to attract a more diverse student body from a school district. The other feature of a magnet is that the program offers a particular curriculum focus or alternative modes of instruction. It provides an alternative to mandatory busing as a means to achieve racial balance in a school system (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). Magnet schools and gifted programs share similarities in that both are specialized programs designed to draw students away from their attendance school zones to achieve voluntary desegregation of school districts. Usually the gifted program and the magnet programs are located in majority race urban schools. Unlike the gifted program, the magnet programs do not require special testing for intelligence. A magnet program has a selective admissions process that usually involves a minimum grade point average. Once an IEP is created for a student to be admitted into the gifted program, the student is able to continue in gifted throughout the school year (Sternberg, 2004). In a magnet program, failure to maintain the minimum grade point average will result in the student’s reassignment to the attendance zone school. Gifted programs do not force students to return to the attendance zone school if their grade point average falls during the year. Instead, an individual educational
program meeting is called between the teacher and the parents to decide ways to improve on a child’s performance in the program.

Luna chose to leave the gifted program in eighth grade and to attend a magnet program in high school. Luna spent her elementary school years in a magnet program, entered the gifted program in middle school years, and exited the gifted program in high school. When I asked Luna why she left the gifted program in high school and she replied:

Um, I ended up leaving gifted after middle school and entering back into the magnet because of the prestige of the local magnet school and I know that. . .it’s not like I had anything against gifted, my teachers even advised me that I could do well in both a gifted and a magnet program. But the gifted school that I would have gone to was not as prestigious as the local magnet school. So since the magnet school had accepted me because of my grades and my work, I decided to once again become a magnet student despite what teachers had told me about how teachers at this particular magnet school treated gifted students.

Magnet programs are often very aggressive in their recruitment of students for the program. Even though gifted programs had nurtured the creative side of Luna, she chose to attend an academic magnet that had achieved status of a Blue Ribbon School. Luna thought that she would be challenged in the magnet program as much as she was challenged in the gifted program.

However, the two programs intersected for Luna in that she once again was in the position where she had to deal with teacher bias. Although warned by her teachers at the gifted magnet school that she would face bias, Luna chose to exit gifted. When I asked her about her experience of once again facing teacher’s bias Luna replied:

Everybody constantly talked about it and everybody knows it. There was constant gifted student bashing at my high school. You would constantly hear teachers tell you, ‘Oh you gifted kids, ya’ll were so spoon-fed all the time. Everybody always gives you everything. Ya’ll don’t really know how to do work.’ Which was, uh, I graduated from this high school with honors so obviously the complete opposite of what they thought; but it was almost like they felt that gifted students had no real academic ability because of being given special services to promote creativity and so on so forth in the gifted programs. So they felt that we were weak and had extra help, you know, and because you were a special education student, technically you were given more services.
The teacher bias that Luna experienced in magnet programs as well as gifted programs was a result of neither programs’ attention to a culturally responsive learning environment (Ford, 2013). If we can view each program, gifted and magnet, as a culture within itself, then it is imperative to treat students from each culture with sensitivity and without preconceived judgment. Ford (2013) stated:

Culturally different students are at the heart of culturally responsive education, which includes curriculum, instruction, assessment, relationships, and so much more in its components . . . I use the real analogy that students in our schools/classrooms are like guests in our homes. Our classroom is our home; our curriculum is our menu, and so on. Our students—our guests—must be treated with the upmost respect, which necessitates not being culturally assaultive (p. 174).

In this respect, culture is not necessarily based on the racial makeup of an individual. Culture is also the environment in which one lives and forms relationship. In Luna’s case, she was not only an African American, but she was also a student who was educated in cultures of challenging, accelerated academic programs. Such students should not have to face with judgment and bias from teachers. Instead, teachers should be at the forefront to provide a learning environment conducive to feeding the student’s nature or culture for challenging educational settings.

Dawn also chose to leave the gifted program in middle school and gave reasons similar to those of Luna. When I asked Dawn why she chose to leave the gifted program in middle school and attend a magnet school in high school, she said:

Um, I got accepted into the magnet school program and I knew both, either, um, the gifted program in high school and the magnet program in high school, they’d both be challenging, with different types of challenges. So I still wanted to do something challenging but just a little different.

Bella, on the other hand, told me of how she struggled with her decision to choose a gifted high school or a magnet high school. Both the magnet high school and the gifted high school came to Bella’s middle school and presented very convincing recruitment programs. Bella
said that she remained on the fence, however, because she could not make up her mind. Finally Bella confided that there was one kid who made a remark that helped her immediately to choose a school. She said:

But there was this one kid who made me change my mind, made me make my decision when he said to me that I’d probably go to Magnet High because I wouldn’t be able to handle it in the hood. And I said well I guess I’m going to Gifted High because I wanted to prove to people that it doesn’t matter where you are from or where is your school or who you are or what kind of Black person you are if you put in the effort, you’ll be fine as long as it’s a quality school. And he didn’t know that my grandmother lived just down the street in the hood; he didn’t know my life. I may have had a very different upbringing than a lot of the other students that go to that school but it was a good school and at the time it really was. And so that’s how I ended up going to Gifted High rather than Magnet High.

Throughout this research Bella’s narrative indicated that she often struggled with misconceptions of her life because she was a gifted student. In assuming that she could not handle the gifted program because it was located in a school in an area of town that was always Black and was now riddled with crime and urban blight, Bella thought that the traditional student who made that comment was attacking her “Blackness.” She was inaccurately judged as rich, privileged and “acting white” for the majority of her school years simply because she was in the gifted program. Given the choice to attend two equally good schools, Bella chose to attend the school where the program was located in the hood. In Bella’s words, “And that is how my decision was made and I have never regretted that decision and it was a good one.”
CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

The fictional story introduced in Chapter 4 is revisited in this chapter and explained under the tenets of counterstory.

The west side of Briar Patch has three corner grocery stores within the community. All grocery stores are owned and operated by White entrepreneur families except for the store across the street from Freedom High. This little store, Transparent Grocers, is operated by a mulatto family. At least the family was assumed to be mulatto. No one has ever been sure of the family’s racial identity and the family does not confirm or deny its racial background. It is just easier that way.

That is the extent of Black owned businesses. If the Black residents need anything besides groceries, they are allowed to cross the track and give business to the White owners of everything. As long as they walk on the edge of the sidewalk and step off the sidewalk into the street when a white family is approaching, they could shop in the clothing, grocers, and furniture stores of the White people of Briar Patch. However, they must enter in the back doors of these establishments and wait until the salesperson is no longer assisting White patrons. Then they are able to sit in the storerooms of the business and pay the same price for goods and services that the white person paid.

Briar Patch is proud of its one movie theater and on certain days of the week, Black people on the West Side are allowed to attend. They must enter through the Colored Only door, and sit in the balcony. Once the balcony is full, no Black people are allowed to enter, even if there was space on the lower level. Everyone understands that a Black man/woman cannot sit in a seat next to a White person in the theater. The only means of public transportation is a
passenger train that travels to other states in the South. There is one rail car dedicated to the Black patrons and there were only wooden, backless benches in the car, but no seats.

The White residents have an elementary school on every third street of the neighborhood. There are two separate junior high schools placed strategically near the elementary schools and a huge air-conditioned high school in the middle of an old cotton field. White students are afforded school buses to get to school if the parish deems that the three block walk is too much for the little children. No expense is spared to meet the educational needs of the white residence of Briar Patch. After all, their children are the future.

Ever resourceful, however, the Black residents on the west side of Briar Patch accept separate but equal laws and made the best of their resources. The teachers are educated in historically Black colleges and return home to give the best education possible with the resources available. The auditorium of Freedom High serves as a meeting hall and Black leaders use the area churches as a means of communication to call meetings to inform the residents of current events. Very few Black households can afford a television and only a fortunate few own radios. At one of the town meetings, the residents heard the outcome of the historic landmark case of Brown v Board of Education.

Reverend DooRight called the meeting to order with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. In a strong clear voice he announced, “The Supreme Court has declared that from this day forth, separate but equal practices is unconstitutional. From this day forth all people will be granted equal resources in the public schools. Racial boundaries in this town will not change but whatever resource is given to the white schools will also be given to the Freedom School.”

This ushered in a new era for the Black residents. A sense of community had what made them strong during Jim Crow South and that did not change. Freedom High received new lab
equipment, new books, band instruments, and even school buses. The Black teachers worked to introduce new educational opportunities for the students. Once the resources poured in, the teachers noticed the advanced abilities of some of their students. Students identified with advance aptitude were taught in the same classrooms but were given added resources to keep pace with their achievement level. The community of the west side of tracks of Briar Patch began to grow at astonishing rates and became even more self-serving and autonomous. Cotton fields and farm patches gave way to grocery stores, textile mills, shopping malls, libraries, and cultural art centers. With the equal resources allotted by law, the Black residence educated their brightest and best who in turn remained in the community and made strides that grew by the decades. A Black student discovered a cure for cancer in the science lab and the crafty lawyers of West Briar Patch immediately put a patent on the cure. Money poured into the community.

Black teachers pushed to educate the best and the brightest in the classroom and their efforts pushed the community into unforeseen growth. No longer did the Black residents cross the tracks to buy goods or services from the White-owned establishments. They built their own, hired their own, and invested into their own businesses. Student achievement grew and the strong sense of community allowed others to encourage and help teachers to push students. As a result, Freedom School graduates went on and used their education and creativity to make significant discoveries. The graduates created an oil dripping cup for trains, the carbon filament for light bulbs, a shoe making machine, the telegraph, peanut products, Black hair lotions, the hot comb, the gas mask, the traffic light, and a control device for guided missiles. Lawyers in the community immediately put patents on these new creations and the west side of Briar Patch rose to affluence. When news of the discovery of a device for guided missiles reached the ears of the anxious White residents of Briar Patch, a meeting was called. What if the strides of Blacks did
not stop at Black-owned businesses? Had not the White establishments suffered at the loss of business from their patrons who used to enter through the Colored Only door? What if the creative graduates of Freedom High began to make weapons that they would turn on the White residents and blow the east side of town into oblivion?

A consortium of politicians from the east side of town was formed immediately and they crossed the railroad tracks to speak with the leaders of the west side of town. They approached Black leaders with a novel idea. Why not create a special school to educate and nurture the best and brightest of all communities? The students would have their own little boarding school and together they would create and excel and make the town of Briar Patch the premier town of the South. The Black leaders listened to the proposal and called a community meeting in the auditorium of Freedom High. The auditorium was now three times larger than before, air conditioned, and outfitted with the latest technology. The Black leaders presented the proposal to the community and asked for feedback. Because of the strong sense of family and community closeness, the families voted down the measure; they would not allow their youngsters to leave home in grade school to attend a boarding school on the other side of town.

The residents of the White community were not happy with that decision and would not take no as a final answer. Riders were sent out at night to spy and set up surveillance in the Black community. Bribes exchanged hands under the cover of darkness and by the White surveillance team obtained the names of the most gifted kids in the community. Late one night, a team of white riders snatched the kids and whisked them off to a secret underground bunker to be educated together with the brightest and best of the White community.

Then, an unexpected communication problem arose. The Black students are unable to communicate with their new classmates because they were reared in a separate community and
spoke their own language that was indecipherable to White classmates. No one in the White community could understand them and the Black children at the exclusive boarding school only communicated with each other. The results were not what organizers desired, so another surveillance team was dispatched under cover of night to the west side of town. The team needed one or two teachers and approached several, but no one agreed to teach at the school. One night the surveillance team encountered the bitter loser of the last Black community mayoral election and offered him an obscene amount of money. He agreed to serve as an interpreter and teach the White community the language spoken by the Black gifted students.

Once the White community could interpret the language, they taught the Black gifted students along with the White gifted students. The students saw no one but each other for the remainder of their school years and they also began to date each other. Gradually the Black students lost all traces of the culture they knew when living on the west side of town. They assimilated well into the new dominant culture . . .

Counter-story

Counterstorytelling is a means by which what the student is saying is also taken into account with what that student may not be saying, but revealing through discourse. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) stated, “The use of counterstories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups” (p. 27). A counterstory is a story that goes against the dominant narrative about power structures. Counterstories are sometimes mistakenly used to give voice to one person’s specific story, when it is instead, supposed to reveal the farce of the dominant narrative. Telling just any story, however, is not an accurate use of counterstory. Storytelling lacks the necessary tenets when used as just a story. Fasching-Varner (2009) stated:
Storytelling in and of itself, however, is not enough, particularly when the storytelling is void of or lacking the analyses endemic to CRT’s use of storytelling. Unpacking and analyzing (counter)stories using tenets of CRT located within legal discourse as an analytic is one way to address previously mentioned concerns. (p. 812)

In the counterstory presented in Chapter 4 of this research, a twist was added to the landmark *Brown v Board of Education*. Instead of handing down a ruling that separate and unequal schools were unconstitutional, the Supreme Court maintained separate facilities but both races were given equal resources. The counterstory tells how each race utilized equal resources and how the use of equal resourcing to Blacks became problematic for the dominant white culture. To unpack the tenets, table 1 provides a detail description of the major players in the counter story.

**Table 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of Story</th>
<th>Actual Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Briar Patch</td>
<td>A small agricultural town in a Southern state where residents have always lived according to Jim Crow separate but equal law. Both races accepted this law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Side</td>
<td>The area west of the railroad tracks where all Black residents reside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Side</td>
<td>The other areas in town where only white residents reside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Downtown Area</td>
<td>Areas where both Black and white residents are allowed but co-mingling is kept to a minimum. Blacks are allowed downtown only to spend money in white-owned establishment, then expected to return to Black side of town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Blacks used a strong sense of community to raise family, make decisions, and provide a united front in everything, including child rearing and education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverend DooRight</td>
<td>Black spokesman for community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consortium</td>
<td>Group of white politicians who obsessively followed the amazing progress of Blacks who were making their own separate communities and sought to capitalize on it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the counterstory, the west side of Briar Patch is the side of town where Blacks lived.

Like most rural south towns in the 1950s, there is little access to industry, businesses, or market
independence. Within the community, there was only one Black owned family business. In the counterstory, the opening dialogue speaks of a time before the passage of *Brown v Board of Education*. Living on separate sides of town, and the inability to own anything or to buy land and property anywhere but in the designated areas of town were ideas accepted by both races. No one questioned or made waves to change the status quo, one of the first tenets of Critical Race Theory. Racism was normal and not some random or huge act. It was the accepted way of doing things and the little town of Briar Patch operated businesses, schools, property ownership and everything else in the normal order of things.

The fact that the White side of town had many schools, all the industry and businesses, and better housing was also quietly accepted. Blacks were only permitted to cross the tracks and enter the White side of town when they needed to purchase goods and services that they did not have access to on the Black side of town. The CRT tenet of interest convergence was in full operation at this point in the counter story. Although Black patrons still used separate entrances to White own grocery stores, department stores, or movie theaters, they were allowed in to spend money in the White own businesses. Interest convergence operated in this section of the counter story in that the dominant culture would do anything to erase racial injustice unless it was in the best interest of the dominant culture. The White own businesses of Briar Patch made money from the oppressed culture while continuing to oppress.

Things shifted in the counterstory once the Supreme Court ruled that equal resources had to be allocated to both races, with no exceptions. The Jim Crow allowance for maintaining separate schools and facilities remained. This allowed the Black people of Briar Patch to level the playing field with equal educational materials, which they used to educate their children to higher levels of achievement. Black community and solidarity was also a result of separate but
equal resource laws in effect in Briar Patch. Thus, the students of the all Black high school become advanced and gifted learners whose creativity allowed them to create major inventions which were quickly patented and used to build up the west side of town. As a result, the Black community thrived and quickly became autonomous.

The tenet of essentialism came into play at this point of the story. One must understand that a strong sense of community is not the same as essentialism. The Black residents of Briar Patch did meet and agree as a community on how to make the best use of equal resources and to educate the gifted and talented members of the community. (Ladson-Billings, 2013) stated:

Essentialism is a belief that all people perceived to be in a group, think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways. Such thinking leads to considerable misunderstanding and stereotyping. On the one hand there is the need for people to participate in group solidarity for social, cultural, and political purposes. . . However, on the other hand, people do not relinquish their individual rights, perspectives, and lifestyles because they share group identities (p. 40).

Because the residents of Briar Patch exercised a strong sense of community does not mean that everyone in the town thought alike, or acted the same, simply because they were Black residents living on the west side of town. Once the consortium of white politicians entered the town by night, they found people whom they could bribe and who were willing to give up the location of the young inventors in the town who were making the west side of Briar Patch prosperous. Interest convergence was at work again in this part of the counterstory because the white side of town wanted to integrate the schools and educate the gifted and talented students in a special school. Loss of business from Black people along with the continued growth of inventors in the gifted Black classes caused the dominant culture to reverse its issues with separate but equal schooling.

Assimilation of the Black gifted students occurs at the end of the story, once the children are separated entirely from the Black culture and placed in all White school settings. Deprived of
the company of Black culture, the students date, talk, and act like the dominant culture they are forced to be with in an educational setting.

**Implications for Loss of Culture**

The participants of this study were barraged with labels because they were enrolled in a gifted program. All three participants recall hearing “Oreo cookie”, “acting white”, or “You think you better than everyone else because you are smart”. Living with these labels can cause African American students to underachieve or avoid accelerated programs such as gifted. Those African Americans who choose to remain in the role of a high achiever can expect to find new challenges in representing their race as gifted students. Even at young ages in life, the participants of the gifted program experienced racism. A similar sentiment was shared by research participants by Mickelson and Velasco (2006), who stated:

> Even at this relatively early stage in life, these students had encountered racism. They were aware of lowered expectations for black students held by teachers, counselors, school administrators, and sometimes even from their own relatives. They considered the acting-white label to be part of the insidious legacy that impugned black people’s intelligence. . . Because the slur acting white often is leveled by lower-achieving students, our high-performing students perceived the label as a reaction to their academic success. But it also implies that they are not really black (p. 42).

This dissertation has allowed me to have discourse with young ladies who did not allow the slur of acting White to discourage them from setting high goals and who continued to achieve and challenge themselves educationally. All three participants are college graduates and are presently working at careers as a fashion designer, business manager, and teacher, respectively; however, these young ladies admit to being a very small minority in a program that was marketed as a means to desegregate the school district. If the needs of only a small percentage of African American students are being met in a gifted program, the gifted program is not living up
to its premier marketing campaign to attract the best and brightest of African Americans to voluntarily integrate public schools.

A further implication for student’s loss of culture in gifted programs is how the students who were denied by their culture are left in a state of bewilderment and confusion. Bella said, “I know I was a little weird to some but it didn’t have anything to do with me being Black.” Luna recalled almost coming to blows with a white student who put her down if she did anything that was not a “gifted white behavior”, such as when she chose to have fun with traditional students of her own race. Luna said, “Ever since then I have never had anything for this particular young lady even in adulthood. It left an awful bitter taste in my mouth.” The sentiment was shared by Dawn who did not even seek friendship with students in the gifted program. When Dawn said that all her friends were classmates in the gifted program, I asked her why she did not hang out with people from her own culture who were in traditional classes. Dawn replied, “Mmm. .I think they thought we were like stuck up or something. They didn’t wanna like hang out with us.”

Ford (2012) referred to the loss of culture for students in a gifted program as “culture shock” (p. 2). It is imperative that teachers and other school personnel work closely together to create a culturally competent climate for multicultural students placed in accelerated programs such as gifted programs. It is important for reducing cultural shock, creating cultural congruence, and lessening the cultural transition that may create negative student educational outcomes (Ford, 2012). Ford further stated:

Culture shock is a transitional or temporary experience of moving from a state of low to high self-awareness and cultural awareness. Frequently, individuals experience culture shock because they cannot use their own cultural references to convey and validate central aspects of their identity in the new culture or with someone from a different culture. As a result, they often become frustrated, confused, angry, hostile, punitive, self-righteous, or even dogmatic (p. 2).
Judging from responses of this study’s participants, the feeling of isolation from their culture was indeed frustrating and confusing. Each found a means of coping and did not give up in her pursuit of challenging educational achievements. However, it appears that interest convergence played heavily in the makeup of the gifted program in this particular school district. The needs of the dominant culture were met by having a program that provided quality educational opportunities while sheltering the dominant culture’s children from the traditional student element present in the school in which the gifted program was housed. Active recruitment of minority students did not fit the interest of the dominant White culture, except in the very beginning of the program’s creation. After a span of about three years, the number of minority students in the program dwindled while the numbers of enrolled white students climbed.

**Implications for Using Gifted Programs as a Tool for Desegregation**

In an effort to end mandatory busing and redrawing attendance zones, school districts sought to end desegregation and return the districts to a neighborhood school system. However, many neighborhoods were already racially segregated with inner city schools having a large population of Black students and the schools in the suburbs a majority White population. School districts turned to the practice of creating magnet programs that offered something special to entice students from other neighborhoods to voluntarily agree to transfer to schools outside of their attendance zones. The expanding of school districts’ gifted and talented programs was an attraction to find other means of desegregating schools.

Based on the research of this dissertation, the use of the gifted program as a tool for desegregation has not been positive or successful. In fact, the opposite has occurred. The gifted program has offered a means to further desegregate the school district by funding a program that serves the needs of White students by a significant percentage in most cases.
According to the participants in the study, White students were always the majority of the racial makeup of the gifted programs where they were enrolled. When asked to recall the racial makeup of her class, Luna said: “White spaces. Just very, very white. The few Black people that we did have in my classrooms were mostly females. There were very few Black males.” When asked the same question, Dawn responded, “Probably like fifteen to twenty percent was Black, if that.” Bella, who had been in the gifted program since elementary school recalled that the numbers began to dwindle as she progressed from elementary school to high school. Bella said, “There was a good mix. Almost always 50/50 white and Black students or I should say minority to white students because we would have a small amount of Asians and a few Latinos attending.”

There was a difference of three years between Bella and the other participants, Luna and Dawn. Within the span of three years, the gifted program went from a composition of almost fifty percent of minority students to a mere fifteen to twenty percent.

With low numbers such as fifteen to twenty percent enrollment of African American students in a system of 80,000 students, it is evident that the use of gifted programs as a tool for desegregation is not working and is certainly not successful. Magnet coordinators in the head offices of the school board conduct research every year during magnet recruitment time. The numbers in the gifted program, however, continue to remain low.

In addition to low numbers of African American students in the gifted program, the alarmingly low number of African American teachers in the program is of equal concern. Parents and students alike would probably feel more confident engaging in a gifted program if the prospect of seeing teachers who look like them was a part of the recruitment. The study participants said they had a total of two teachers who were African American throughout the years of enrollment in the gifted program.
A check of school websites at the writing of this dissertation indicated that the low number of African American teachers in the gifted program remains the same. I attempted to get data from the school boards, Exceptional Student Services offices, and Magnet Program Coordinators. All my efforts to achieve data were met with denial that any such data on the gifted program was available. I asked for any public information records or a flyer that offered statistical data on the gifted program, and public record information was also denied to me. I was asked a number of probing questions such as: “Why do you want this information?”; “What is the name of your graduate program? Where will you use this information?”; “What university are you enrolled and what is your major study?” and “What is the name of your graduate advisor?” After I answered the questions, I was always told that the office did not keep such records, or I was promised documents to be emailed that never materialized. I concluded that the gifted program is protected from outsiders and there must be the data that the school districts do not want to reach publication.

**Implications for Facing Bias**

This dissertation documents well that the African American participants who chose to enter into the gifted program faced bias on many levels and on a regular basis. They exhibited extraordinary courage and commitment to achievement in facing the many levels of they encountered, yet they did not opt out of the program. The high achieving Black group in which these participants found themselves was too small to form a culture within itself. It was difficult to listen to the student bias, teacher bias, and bias among classmates they encountered all because they were a part of the gifted program.

Traditional students placed unfair labels on these participants and challenged them on their ‘Blackness’ on a regular basis. White teachers were in the majority within the gifted
program and they had preconceived ideas that giftedness meant whiteness. They often did not believe or treat the study participants as achievers able and equal to the white students in the program. Other students within the gifted program judged the African Americans if they exhibited behaviors that did not conform to the behaviors of the dominant culture in the program. Many times during these participants’ school years, they questioned their own place within the African American culture and felt that they did not really belong or “fit” in any spaces.

Judgment and bias followed the two participants who exited the gifted program and went to a magnet program for high school. Magnet school teachers verbalized that they believed they had lived a “charmed” life and were “spoon fed” at the gifted program. Luna said;

They were skewed. The perspective of gifted students was unfairly skewed. I think that you should have a student in your class and judge them based on the merit of how they perform in your classroom and even at the level of determination. And to just, you know, generically say that all kids who are gifted are essentially lazy and partially actually dumb, you know, was to me a misnomer if anything and incredibly inaccurate. Besides, all of my friends who decided to leave the gifted school and go to the magnet school with me, we did incredibly academically well.

Such attitudes and judgmental statements might cause some people to give up and stop trying, but this did not happen to the three participants in this study. They fought through the biased remarks and continued to challenge themselves and continued to achieve. Listening to their stories, however, made me consider that perhaps there are other African American students who are just as gifted and talented but not as strong. If they had to contend with such bias and isolation from others, maybe the reason that the gifted program does not show any growth from African American students is the negative treatment by those who are supposed to nurture the giftedness within the African American student.

The purpose of this research was to examine the experiences of gifted African American students. The research was conducted using personal narratives because it was imperative that
their stories are heard and are reported from their perspectives. Based on recurring themes of their stories, it is evident that the gifted program presented several challenges to these gifted African American students. They persevered through a loss of culture, a feeling of not belonging in any spaces, teacher bias, student bias, and many misconceptions. Through the narratives a realization emerged: The gifted program is hiding much in plain view. The program’s lack of commitment to its original purpose of fostering desegregation in the school system is hiding in plain view. The struggles of African American students who choose to remain in challenging academic situations are also hidden in plain view. Most of all, the gifted program is a school within a school that is hidden in plain view within a majority Black population, yet primarily serves the needs of the white dominant culture. The program is hiding in plain view because of the operatives of racism. Racism itself is an operation of the matrix of the dominant culture. Racism is normal, it is not overt; there is only the existence of microaggressions.

**Directions for Future Research**

The findings in this research lend themselves to future research of gifted programs. The participants mentioned the lack of male African American boys in the program. I believe that a study is warranted of why African American boys do not enroll in the gifted program at the rate of African American girls. The research should be done with African American males presently enrolled in high school to ascertain how the program is operating. The research should conducted to see how long they choose to remain in the program, and if they are forced to deal with a different set of cultural bias than the African American females. Also, it would be interesting to explore whether an African American male loses “street cred” when he chooses programs of challenging academic achievement.
Another angle to explore is research on African American males who have graduated from the gifted program. This male perspective would offer a unique view because their story is already a lived experience. Likewise, the perspective of the African American male who is presently enrolled in a gifted program is important because that story is current and ongoing.

Another study should be that of gifted African American males in. How has their giftedness served or hindered them in college? There are no special programs for gifted males in college, or research that asks how the dynamics have changed for them as they are pursue a college degree in the general populace. Research could also determine if academically gifted African American high school males were subjected to negative slurs, and if so, if the treatment is carried over to college. Topics to address would be whether the loss of culture is realized in the college setting and whether the attributes of giftedness are welcomed on the collegiate level.

A study of African American students presently enrolled in gifted programs could be a further study. Potentially, the pool of participants could be expanded and the addition of students who are presently enrolled in college but who were part of the gifted program could be conducted. Comparisons in this study could be made according to gender, experiences, and age differences. This study could seek to discover whether the trend of decreasing enrollment in gifted programs by African American students continues, or whether the program adds to the number of African American students who are enrolled within a time period when the two groups of participants attended high school and graduated to go on college.

Tracking is another study that should be conducted. Tracking is the practice of assigning students within a school population into classes according to whether they exhibited above average, normal, or below average scholastic achievement. Student standardized test grades are the usual documentation used in student placement. Once placed in a tracking system, students
attend classes only with students whose overall academic achievement is the same as their own academic achievement. Students know if they are in a class of high achievers or low achievers. The group that falls within the middle ground of normal is not as affected as the group that falls at the extreme end of the scale. Tracking requires study with gifted research because a student perceived as a low achiever based on arbitrary standardized test scores may be tracked as far back as elementary school, and the possibility diminishes for that student to be recommended or viewed as a candidate for a gifted program or AP class in high school. Studies of tracking should focus on whether this practice has contributed to the low number of African Americans enrolled in gifted programs, whether it is from the perspective of the adults who identify students for the gifted program, or whether it is from the students’ perspective of their potential achievement level.
References


Borland, J. H. (2009). Myth 2: The gifted constitute 3% to 5% of the population. moreover, giftedness equals high IQ, which is a stable measure of aptitude--spinal tap psychometrics in gifted education. Gifted Child Quarterly, 53(4), 236-238.


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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Deanna Wilson
Curriculum and Instruction

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: July 18, 2014

RE: IRB# E8868

TITLE: Black and Gifted: Hiding in Plain View


Review Date: 7/17/2014

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 7/17/2014 Approval Expiration Date: 7/16/2017

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): ________

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) ________

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.  
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.  
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report) prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.  
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.  
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.  
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.  

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS

Project Title: African Americans and Gifted Education: Hiding in Plain View

Performance Site: Public Library, Coffee House, Phone Interview

Investigators: The following investigator is available for questions, M-F, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Ms. Deanna Hayes Wilson
(225) 405-0516

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to provide insight on the perspectives of gifted children who have been enrolled, at some time during their school career, in a gifted education program.

Inclusion Criteria: Adults ages 21 and older.

Exclusion Criteria: Children who do not meet the age requirements or who have not been in a gifted program at least one school year.

Description of the Study: Over a period of one month, the investigator will conduct interviews with students about their experiences as a gifted student. The investigator will encourage students to tell stories relating to incidences encountered while in the gifted program.

Benefits: Subjects will have the opportunity to speak of their own experiences and give Voice to their own perspectives of gifted education. The study may identify intervention strategies which will help the subjects to better acclimate to the gifted environment while attending school with other traditional students. The benefit to other students and the teacher is identification of techniques to help provide a more inclusive manner of meeting the needs of gifted students and other advanced students.

Risks: There are no known risks.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary, and participant will become a part of the study after signing consent form. At any time, either the subject may withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included for publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any compensation to the subjects for participation.

Signatures:
The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.
Participant Signature:_____________________________ Date:____________________

The participant has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the participant and explained that by completing the signature line above he/she has given permission to participate in the study.
Signature of Reader:_____________________________ Date:____________________
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. Were the majority of your friends in the gifted program or were they in traditional classes? Why do you think this was the case?

2. Recall an instance where you were treated differently by other African Americans at your school if this has occurred to you.

3. Tell me a story where you may have felt you were treated differently inside the classroom for any reason.

4. How did you get into the gifted program?

5. How long were you in the gifted program?

6. Can you recall the racial makeup of your gifted classes? How many students were African Americans?

7. How did you relate to your friends that are not a part of a gifted program, if you had any?

8. How often did you spend free time with your gifted friends (if any)?

9. How often did you spend time with your non-gifted friends (if any)?

10. If this has occurred, tell me a story about a time when you were treated differently by traditional students.

11. Tell me how your teachers treated you in the gifted program?

12. Do you think your teachers respected and encouraged you in the gifted classroom?

13. How did they respect you, of if you feel they didn’t respect you as a student, how did they not?

14. Do you think your teacher treated you the same as students of other cultures?

15. How did they treat you the same as other students or how did they not?

Followup: How did the student from other cultures treat you in the classroom environment?
VITA

Deanna Lynn Hayes-Wilson was born in Eunice, Louisiana. She graduated from Eunice High School in 1975. She was a member of the fifth integrated class of seniors at Eunice High School. Two of Deanna’s interests in high school were Business and English which she pursued into college. Determined to pursue an associate’s degree initially, Deanna attended Louisiana State University at Eunice for two years. In 1977, Deanna transferred to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge where she changed her major to Business Education with a minor in English Education. After working several years as an administrative assistant, Deanna shifted her career to teaching Business courses in the Louisiana Technical System. After 3 years in the Louisiana Technical System, Deanna switched to the public school system, where she presently works as an English teacher.

While working in the public school system, Deanna decided to return to graduate school and earned her Master’s Degree from Louisiana State University in 2007. She later earned an Ed.S in Gifted Education from Louisiana State University in 2011.

Deanna entered the doctoral program to pursue the doctor of philosophy degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Curriculum Theory in 2013. Her scholarly interests include the desegregation of specialized educational programs, such as gifted programs in K-12 and equitable representation of minority population in academic magnet programs in K-12.

Deanna will be conferred the doctorate of philosophy at the 2014 Fall Commencement.