# “Success has always been attractive to me:” Voices of Gifted, Black Males

DISSERTATION

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By

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## Abstract

This qualitative study used social capital theory as the interpretive lens to examine the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, beliefs, and behaviors of gifted, African American male high school students in select high schools at a large, urban school district in the Midwest. The primary objectives of the study were to: (a) understand the school experiences of gifted, African American male students in today's urban public schools; (b) expand the theoretical and scientific knowledge on the social, cultural, and racial implications on the achievement of gifted, African American male high school students; (c) pinpoint the factors that most positively and negatively shape the academic success of gifted, African American students who attend urban schools; and (d) contribute to current research to advance teachers, administrators, and school counselors understanding of gifted, African American students who attend urban schools. Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted to collect data. Additionally, students' high school transcripts and gifted and talented assessment data were used as other major data sources. The sample comprised sixteen gifted, African American male students, from grades $10^{th}$ to $12^{th}$. Educational opportunity structures, academic achievement, academic isolation and loneliness, academic expectations, and support of significant individuals versus non-support of significant individuals were five major themes that emerged from the study. Cultural competency of the teacher emerged as a subtheme from the study. Recommendations for school personnel, parents, and students are discussed.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents,

Wyman and Julia Smith,

I love you for an eternity.

**Acknowledgements**

Not only this academic journey but this life journey is possible because of my parents who were and still are my best teachers with words of wisdom and insight. The sacrifices you made did not go unnoticed. Thank you for exposing me to college and believing that is was for me and being tireless advocates for all that I pursued and achieved. Without your efforts, none of this is possible. You both fostered my love of learning which has garnered so many rich life experiences across the world. A special thank you to my mom, Julia, who was my very first campus tour guide, admissions adviser, scholarship liaison, teacher, editor, coach, and cheerleader.

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learned that hard work, effort, and persistence are important elements to success. You are amazing children and such a blessing to us. I would like to thank my nieces and nephew – Kathryn, Christopher, and Sunita for living your dreams. I would like to thank my Uncle Melvin and Aunt Stella for their support to my family.

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I want to thank God and all of the the blessings on my life. I am so grateful for my relationships and friendships. I appreciate health and wellness and be-ing and all of the opportunities afforded me and that I am still here and standing.

*How firm thy friendship.*

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## Publications

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## Fields of Study

Major Field: Education: Educational Policy & Leadership

Minor Field: Gifted Education
Minor Field: Human Resources

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... ii
Dedication ..... iii
Acknowledgements ..... iv
Vita ..... vii
List of Tables ..... xii
Chapter 1: Introduction ..... 1
1.1 Statement of the Problem ..... 1
1.2 Purpose of the Study ..... 4
1.3 Significance of the Study ..... 5
1.4 Research Questions ..... 7
1.5 Limitations of the Study ..... 8
1.6 Definition of Terms ..... 9
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature ..... 12
2.1 Introduction ..... 12
2.2 The Achievement Gap ..... 13
2.2.1 Factors Hindering Achievement ..... 16
2.3. Civil Rights ..... 20
Chapter 3: Methodology ..... 55
3.1 Introduction ..... 55
3.2 Research Questions ..... 60
3.3 Research Design ..... 60
3.3.1 Theoretical Framework ..... 60
3.3.2 Population ..... 67
3.3.3 Participant Selection ..... 68
3.3.4 Data Collection ..... 70
3.4 Researcher Subjectivity ..... 71
3.5 Trustworthiness ..... 72
3.5.1 Credibility ..... 73
3.5.2 Triangulation ..... 73

3.5.3 Research Team ... 73
3.5.4 Member Checking ... 74
3.5.5 Transferability ... 74
3.5.6 Dependability ... 74
3.5.7 Confirmability ... 75
3.6 Authenticity ... 75
Chapter 4: Results ... 76
4.1 Introduction ... 76
4.2 Description of the Participants ... 77
4.3 Educational Opportunity Structures ... 81
4.3.1 Early Learning Opportunities ... 81
4.3.2 Friendship Factor - Natural Consequence of Cluster Grouping ... 83
4.3.3 Enrichment Opportunities ... 85
4.3.4 Teacher belief ... 87
4.3.5 Cultural Competence ... 88
4.4 Academic Achievement ... 89
4.4.1 Goals ... 89
4.4.2 Perseverance and Resolve – "I'm just normal; I'm just me." ... 90
4.4.3 Procrastination ... 93
4.4.4 Motivation – A shift of perspective ... 95
4.5 Academic Expectations ... 98
4.5.1 Familial Expectations – "They don't want to see lower than a B, basically." ... 99
4.5.2 Teacher Expectations – "You are held to a higher standard." ... 101
4.5.3 Self-Expectations – "Success has always been attractive to me." ... 104
4.5.4 Community Expectations – "There's more of a weight on gifted students." ... 106
4.6 Academic Isolation and Loneliness – "You're a token within your community, within your house." ... 107
4.7 Support of significant individuals v. Non-support of significant individuals ... 110
4.7.1 Familial Support ... 110
4.7.2 Peer Support ... 112
4.7.3 School Personnel Support ... 113
4.7.4 School Community Support ... 114
4.7.5 Non-supportive relationships ... 115

4.8 Summary ..... 117
Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Conclusions ..... 118
5.1 Overview of the Study ..... 118
5.1.1 Research Question 1 ..... 119
5.1.2 Research Question 2 ..... 123
5.1.3 Research Question 3 ..... 124
5.2 Conclusion ..... 134
5.3 Discussion and Implications ..... 135
5.4 Recommendations ..... 139
5.4.1 Teachers ..... 139
5.4.2 School administrators and School District Officials ..... 140
5.4.3 Parents ..... 142
5.4.4 Students ..... 142
5.4.5 Teacher Training ..... 143
5.5 Limitations ..... 144
5.6 Suggestions for Future Research ..... 144
5.7 Final Thoughts ..... 146
References ..... 150
APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ..... 166
APPENDIX B: STUDENT SCRIPT ..... 171
APPENDIX C: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE ..... 173
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ..... 176
APPENDIX E: CODE BOOK ..... 179
APPENDIX F: RESEARCH TEAM ..... 183
APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER ..... 185

## List of Tables

Table 4.1: Frequencies and percentages by age and gender…….. 78

Table 4.2: Frequencies and percentages by grade point average,

free/reduced priced lunch, and school type……78-79

Table 4.3: Frequencies and percentages by highest level of educational

attainment by a primary parent or guardian……...79-80

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The educational odyssey African Americans have taken toward equality has been a circuitous route, with peaks and valleys along the way. From slavery to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the educational opportunities have been sporadic and disparate. Today, the educational landscape has improved drastically, but it is still deficient for many African American students in curricular opportunities and achievement outcomes among and within school districts. Too often, educational resources in urban systems are not adequate enough to overcome the barriers that impede a successful learning experience. Because of these inadequacies, African American students in urban districts often experience lower achievement outcomes than their African American student counterparts from suburban and parochial school systems (Banks & Banks, 1997). As a group, African American students, regardless of school contexts, tend to perform lesser on state and national tests and have lower graduation rates compared to their White student counterparts (U.S. Department of Education 2008, 2009, & 2011; Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

Although the *Brown* ruling was a step forward in helping African Americans gain educational equality, it has not yielded the high academic outcomes seen with other racial groups nor has it been the panacea to correct the educational effects of past federal legislation of "separate but equal." Strong evidence is provided of these effects in past seminal reports *The Coleman Report*, 1966 and; *A Nation at Risk*, 1983. As a result, numerous major federal

legislation (e.g., Elementary and Secondary Act, 1965; the Javits Act, 1988; No Child Left Behind, 2001) – have been introduced to address and rectify the academic achievement disparities between Blacks and Whites as a result of educational inequities of Black students that predated the *Brown* decision. Additionally, the Schott Foundation for Public Education and the College Board have also addressed the problem of the achievement gap in separate reports aimed at drawing attention to this consistent disparity in educational attainment between Blacks and Whites. Unfortunately, "the gap begins at the elementary school and widens as students pass through higher grades" (Ogbu, 2003, p. 4). If students are not helped in the early grades, it becomes increasingly harder for them to stay on grade level or catch up to their grade level and the gap becomes a crevasse which many cannot climb out.

Even though, the education of minority students has steadily progressed, there are still some educational domains that remain elusive for minority populations. One such domain is gifted education (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006) as cited in Ford (2011), "In 2006, Black students were underrepresented by 47% in gifted education; Black females were underrepresented by 35% and Black males by 55%" (p. 13). Although the federal government recognizes gifted education and has offered a workable definition, there are still no federal mandates that exist for gifted education to be executed at the state and local levels. Many states have similar yet varying definitions of gifted education and offer varying funding formulas and service plans. All program and service decisions are made at the state and local levels. According to the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), in the absence of federal minimum standards, "there is wide variability between states, and in many cases, an even wider unevenness between districts in the same state"

(n.d.). Because of this disconnect, school districts are able to interpret codes and laws differently which profoundly impacts student access to gifted programs and services. Further, since there is no minimum standard for gifted education for students, there is also limited teacher preparation at the undergraduate level (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005b), and because states often only require identification and not service, institutional agents do not know how to recruit, teach, counsel, and retain gifted students in their programs (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a). Without adequate training, teachers without gifted training, teachers, specifically those who teach gifted students, struggle with appropriate curricular content, instruction, and options for the gifted students in their classes. Therefore, teachers ask gifted students to act as peer tutors for their classmates, or are given more work to do by teachers to placate their parents and keep them quiet while they teach the rest of the class. They may experience breadth of the curriculum but not depth and/or complexity. Since gifted students are not a homogenous group, teachers often do not understand their behaviors, especially if the student comes from a different racial group than the teacher. For instance, "Black students are socially oriented, expressive and more extroverted than White students. These students may not master social codes that are tacit in school settings and may use Black vernacular" (Ford, 1996, p. 87-88). These different social orientations can lead to misconceptions about children of other cultures and can lead to underrepresentation in gifted education and overrepresentation in special education. Ford (2011) posits that "Black students are consistently overrepresented in special education, in the lowest ability groups and tracks, and among high school and college dropouts" (p. 15). Further, this noticeable underrepresentation is caused by test bias, the teacher referral process, and deficit orientations commonly held by school personnel regarding the cognitive capabilities of minority students (Davis & Rimm, 1998;

Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999; Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006). In addition, African American males are being overrepresented in special education classes (Kozol, 1991; Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). In Ogbu's 1997 study conducted in Shaker Heights, Ohio, he reported that "most students in the 'academic enrichment' or gifted classes were White, whereas most students in 'remedial' or 'skills' classes were mostly Black" (2003, p. 7).

In general, according to Ford (1996) and Ford and Harris (1999), boys are referred less for gifted identification than girls. Further, girls are seen as more docile and compliant while boys can be perceived as lazy and hyper. Teachers are also less inclined to refer them for gifted identification. Bonner (2001) believes that "Teachers must be properly trained if they are to serve as conduits to gifted and talented programs. Proper training should not include only specific gifted and talented identification measures but information on multiculturalism and diverse learning styles as well" (p. 648). In addition, African American males are underrepresented more than their female counterparts in gifted programs. According to Ford (1996), "Black females outnumber Black males in gifted programs by a ratio of 2:1" (p. 127). She further posits that gifted Black males are more likely to underachieve than their gifted, Black female counterparts. In an earlier study, Ford (1992) noted, "They [gifted, Black males] exerted considerably less effort in school and held more negative attitudes about school than females" (p. 128).

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative case investigation, this study sought to examine the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors

of gifted, Black male high school students. Furthermore, the study sought to explore the factors that positively and negatively influenced this student population. Additionally, this study examined the role of institutional agents in the school and if the students felt as though those agents shared vital information and resources with them; thereby impacting their achievement and/or future endeavors.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

When it comes to education research on African Americans, the theoretical and scientific literature base is salient. Thus, there is a paucity of literature on gifted, African American students but even less on gifted, African American males and almost none with regard to the aforementioned attributes who are also high school students. This segment of the population has not been studied to a great extent and the gap in the literature needs to be addressed.

There is research that discusses African American underachievement but not as many scholarly publications focusing on gifted, African American high school males and the psychological, cultural, and social factors that shape their achievement.

Throughout the theoretical and scientific literature, a plethora of studies concentrates on college-aged students who are high achieving or minority populations and their success in college (Bonner, 2010; Jennings, Bonner, Lewis, & Nave, 2007; Harper, 2006; Moore, Ford, Owens, Hall, Byrd, Henfield, & Whiting, 2006). Some studies even focus on high ability males both African American and White in elementary and middle school (Ford, 1992; Bonner & Jennings, 2007), but there is a dearth of research coverage on gifted, African American high school males.

For example, after executing a brief review of the ERIC literature database, it was discovered that over 16,900 articles were related to gifted, 1,800 related to giftedness, and 372 related to gifted, African Americans. Thus, the number becomes even smaller when focusing exclusively on students at the high school level.

There are many important research questions on Black males in regular and gifted education not adequately studied. With this in mind, it is important for educators to understand how race affects student performance. For many children in urban districts in particular, there are many negative factors that often prevent them from performing to their potential – race, poverty, familial structure and relationships, mother's educational level, and English as a second language with the use of Black English (Ford, 2011). There is frequently a constant internal struggle between excelling and acceptance within the student (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Silverman, 2000).

In order to help their minority students, teachers can participate in professional development workshops that promote culturally responsive teaching and using a multicultural infused curriculum (Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997; Ford, 1996; Ladson- Billings, 1994; Ford-Harris, Schuerger, & Harris, 1991). Teachers can provide a differentiated curriculum that is rich with relevant topics and diverse applications. In a past study by Flowers, Zhang, Moore, and Flowers (2004), students wanted teachers to leave behind antiquated teaching methods and styles and come up to date in relating the curriculum to their students. With this in mind, it is quite possible that school counselors can offer students the opportunity to meet with them in one-on-one situations or in small groups for seminars or brown-bag lunches to talk about the issues of giftedness and/or its relationship to their social, cultural or racial well-being, or school

counselors and administrators can meet with all students to promote achievement for all students and creating a school culture of acceptance and tolerance among its student body.

### 1.4 Research Questions

This study focused primarily on pinpointing the factors that had the most influence on gifted, Black male students' academic successes and struggles in high school, by examining their perceptions about the value of education and the role that race, gender, and gifted identification have on their academic successes and pitfalls in relation to cultural, racial, familial, and peer associations. Further, the study was interested in school personnel and their roles that may play in disseminating and sharing information crucial to student outcomes.

The district being studied, located in the Midwest, had nearly 50,000 students, 77% of the student population were comprised of students of color. Although the district had 21 high schools, this study focused primarily on six high schools. (See the list of school demographics in Appendix A). Initially it was planned to recruit 12 students (i.e., four high achievers, four average achievers, and four underachievers) enrolled in Atwater High School[1]; however, there was not enough participation at this one school, so the researcher recruited 10 more students from five different high schools. Three parents were included in the sample and one school counselor and one school administrator. The students were selected based on their gifted identification using state approved tests (i.e., TerraNova, InView, NNAT, MAP, CogAT, and Woodcock Johnson). In the theoretical and scientific literature, the terms gifted and high achieving are used interchangeably/synonymously. Thus, the difference between the two terms

[1] Pseudonyms were created for each school and participant to preserve the identity of all parties involved in the study.

needs to be addressed. Some would argue the terms are one in the same. A gifted child can be high achieving, but a high achieving student is not necessarily identified as gifted. For the purpose of this study, the researcher only sampled those students identified as gifted, using the aforementioned, state approved gifted identification instruments. Hence, only those students who were academically gifted were used for this study.

Generally speaking, this study was designed to render findings that could assist teachers, administrators, and parents with effectively working with Black males and increase their representation in gifted education and academic success in such programs, once admitted. With this in mind, the below research questions were conceived:

1. When examining the academic achievement of gifted, Black male students in an urban school district, what are their perceptions of their high school success?

2. What factors influence the academic success of gifted, Black male students?

3. What factors do gifted, Black male students in an urban school district identify as contributing to their academic success?
    a. What obstacles did the gifted, Black male students overcome to achieve their success?
    b. Conversely, what obstacles do gifted, Black male students face?
    c. What is the role of the institutional agents in overcoming these obstacles?
    d. What types of goals do these students have for their post-secondary lives?

**1.5 Limitations of the Study**

Although there were gifted achieving and underachieving Black males at all of the high schools in the district chosen for the study, only six schools were chosen because those students expressed a desire to participate and returned their assent and parental consent forms. Those students who did not meet the criteria were not selected to participate. At least one parent for

each participant was asked to participate in the study to share their insight on giftedness and their child, but only three participated in the study. In the interview protocol, when the participants were asked if the researcher could talk with and interview a supportive teacher they named, only four of the participants agreed to this because many felt uncomfortable with the researcher talking with their teacher(s). They felt uncomfortable with the process of not knowing how the teacher would respond. For the participants that agreed to allow the researcher to interview their teachers, the teacher had either retired from the district or was on leave from the district. This research addressed critical issues gifted, Black students faced and strategies that helped them achieve and confront the social-emotional issues associated with their giftedness and blackness.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

*Gifted and Talented*

The federal government defines "gifted and talented" students, children, or youth as those who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (NCLB, 2001).

According to the State House Bill 282 and State Revised Code 3301-51-15, the definition of the term gifted is: Students who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience, or environment. There are four categories of gifted identification: superior cognitive, specific academic, creative thinking, and visual/performing arts. Superior cognitive ability is defined as scoring two standard deviations above the mean minus the standard error of measurement. The district uses a baseline

score of 128 to identify a student as superior cognitive. A student is identified as specific academic if he/she performs at or above the 95th percentile on a nationally normed approved individual or group standardized achievement test of specific academic ability such as reading/language arts; mathematics; science; social studies. A student is identified as a creative thinker if he/she scores one standard deviation above the mean, minus the standard error of measurement on an approved individual or group intelligence test and did one of the following: (a) attained a sufficient score on an approved individual or group test of creative ability or (b) exhibited sufficient performance on an approved checklist of creative behaviors by a trained individual (Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-15).

*African American and Black*

The terms were used interchangeably to represent people of African descent.

*European American, White, and Caucasian*

The terms were used interchangeably to represent people of European descent.

*Underachievement*

According to Ford (1993), underachievement is defined as a gap between teacher's expectations and students' performance. Rimm (1986) suggests that underachievement is the discrepancy between the child's school performance and some index of his or her actual ability. Gifted underachievers are students with composite scores at or above the 95th percentile on a nationally normed assessment and grade point averages less than or equal to 2.25 (Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen, & Maxey, 1993). Colangelo (2002) posits that there is a discrepancy between assessed potential and actual performance. A discrepancy may exist between two standard instrument assessments or between a standardized instrument assessment and academic

achievement as assessed by student performance in the classroom. There are three types of underachievement: (a) undifferentiated – general underachievement; impacts all areas of academic study; (b) specific – may be specific to one academic area; (c) hidden – low achievement and aptitude scores and low performance in school, so teachers do not know the true ability of the student.

# Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

## 2.1 Introduction

The literature review addressed topics that were needed to conceptualize the research study. Although race is a dominant theme throughout this study and the effects of race on school achievement, social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) is used as the theoretical framework for this study. In addition to social capital theory, elements of institutional theory (Rowan & Miskel, 1999) and label theory (Rist, 1977) were used as secondary and tertiary theoretical frameworks to explain its effect on the role each plays in the education of minority students. The equal education of African Americans has been a salient topic in the United States since the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) ruling. Educators, parents, and students have often struggled with educational equity and access around the country.

Education has been the cornerstone of the American culture, since the colonial period of American history (Lacy, 2007). Although it was a crime to teach slaves to read and write, "Black and white northern missionaries traveled to the South to tutor slaves who had escaped into protective custody of the Union Army" (Lacy, 2007, p. 27). Most recognized the importance of education – to teach students was to inculcate them as productive members of a democratic society. Sadly, this essential and vital cornerstone did not apply to the masses of Black students until the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century (Ravitch, 2000; Lacy, 2007).

School personnel often are not cognizant that students come to school with a variety of conflicting and competing ideas of education and the role schools should play in their lives.

Because of the historical lens of African Americans in the United States, it cannot be overlooked at the mistrust of those outside of the racial group. Frequently, parents or other family members have had negative school experiences and as a result, have similar expectations for their children (Mickelson, 1990; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a). According to Ogbu (1995), "Although making good grades is strongly verbalized by students, parents, and the community as a desirable goal [for involuntary minorities], there is less community and family pressure to achieve it" (p. 589). There is no pressure to achieve in these situations. Additionally, schools including teachers and principals have to step up and hold high expectations for students. Further, because of these and many other factors, the achievement gap continues to grow in the United States. This impact is felt across the education spectrum (i.e., gifted education, special education, regular education, and vocational education).

## 2.2 The Achievement Gap

According to Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998), "As a result of the disproportionate representation in lower-level classes, African American males receive far less education than their White counterparts" (p. 11). "Far less" education impacts students beginning in elementary school and continues through high school which ultimately impacts their performance on state and national tests. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010) and the College Board (2011) have also addressed the problem of the achievement gap in separate reports aimed at drawing attention to this consistent disparity in educational attainment between Black and Whites. The Black-White achievement gap has been demonstrated using multiple measures of student achievement.

In the 2010 *Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, the report highlighted the educational incongruence of African American males in the broader scope of graduation rates, grades 4 and 8 reading and math levels, and the achievement gap. The report cited that nationally only 47% of Black males graduate from high school.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) outlines the Black-White score gap in mathematics from elementary to high school. In 2004, 9 year-old Black students scored 26 points less than White students. Likewise, 13 and 17 year-old students scored 28 points less than White students nationally in mathematics.

The High School Transcript Study (2009) reports that Black graduates earned a 2.69 grade point average in 2005 and 2009 while White graduates earned a 3.05 and 3.09 in the same years respectively. Additionally, Hispanic graduates earned a 2.82 and 2.84 while Asian graduates earned a 3.16 and 3.26 respectively (U. S. Department of Education, 2009).

According to the Common Core of Data (2010), nationally, Black students lag far behind their White counterparts in graduation rates. In high school year 2008-2009, the total Black graduation rate was 63.6% while the White graduation rate was 81.8%. When broken down further, it is concerning that Black males fall far behind Black female students with graduation rates of 57.4% and 69.9% respectively. But even more staggering is the lag in graduation rates between Black males and White males. Fifty-seven percent of Black males graduated from high school in contrast to 79.3% of White male students. In Ohio, there is a greater chasm between Black and White male students graduating from Ohio schools. On average, the gap is 27.8 points as opposed to the national average of 23.7 points. In 2006-2007, only 50.2% of Black males in Ohio graduated while 82% of White males graduated (Sable & Plotts, 2010).

The ACT High School Profile Report (2010) shows that Black students score significantly lower than their White counterparts on the ACT. In 2000, Black students' ACT scores were 17.8 while White test-takers scored 22.7. In 2011, the average score for Black and White test-takers dipped to 17.0 and 22.4 respectively (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

The College Board (2006) reports the average SAT verbal score for the 12th grade test-taking population was 503. However, the average verbal score for Black students was 434 while White students averaged 527. Nationally, the average mathematics score was 518. Black students averaged 429 and White students averaged 536.

As reported by the Ohio Department of Education (2012), Black students scored less than White students on the Ohio Graduation Test which is taken in a student's sophomore year of high school. In reading, Black students were 68.7% proficient by state standards while 90.1% of White students achieved proficiency. Similarly, in mathematics, Black students achieved 60.7% proficiency while 87.9% of White students reached proficiency (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

The Ohio Department of Education also administers the Ohio Achievement Assessment to test the academic proficiency of elementary and middle school students. Unfortunately, the achievement gap begins early in a student's career. There is a tremendous gap between Black students and White students in grades 5 and 7 in reading and mathematics. Black students were 54% proficient in reading in grade 5 while White students were 82% proficient. The disparity in math is even greater with Black students achieving only 38% proficiency contrary to White students who achieved 74% proficiency. In grade 7, 57% of Black students achieved proficiency in reading while 84% of White students reached proficiency. Similarly in grade 7 mathematics,

Black students achieved 46% proficiency while 79% of White students did so (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2009), in 2006, there were 49,316,000 elementary and secondary school students in the United States. Of those, 6.7% were identified as gifted and talented. However, only 3.5% of Black students were identified as gifted while 7.9% of White students were identified. Ohio's average is slightly higher than the national average in that 7.3% of the students in Ohio were identified as gifted and talented. However, the gap between Black students and White students is still prevalent. Only 4.8% of Black students are identified as gifted while 7.8% of White students are identified. Said another way, 2,191,210 White students were identified as gifted and talented while only 296,150 Black students were identified. Relative to the total school-aged population, the data show Black students are underrepresented and 2.5 times less likely to be identified as gifted and talented. The findings are staggering and can leave school personnel with a sense of hopelessness on how to reach these students.

### 2.2.1 Factors Hindering Achievement

Researchers have been asking what factors help or hinder gifted minority students in the classroom (i.e., racial, cultural, psychological, social, familial). Some argue that racial and ethnic identity (Ford, 1996, Ford-Harris & Harris, 1992; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1988, 2004, 2008; Cross, 1971, 1995; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a; Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986) play significant roles in the achievement or underachievement of minority students. Clark (1983, 1992) argues that a strong familial foundation impacts the achievement of student. The family

structure itself does not have as much an impact as does the relationships within the structure. Steele and Aronson (1995) believe that the psychological history of race in the United States impacts students and their ability to perform to their potential. Socially, Kunjufu, (1988) and Majors and Billson (1992) believe that societal and peer factors influence student success.

It is sometimes believed that African American students squander the academic opportunities given to them. However, Ogbu (1995) posits, "[African American] students who adopt attitudes and behaviors enhancing school success or who make good grades may be subjected to negative peer pressures, including criticism and isolation" (p. 589). Understandably, if students are forced into a choice between achievement and affiliation, it is not surprising why so many struggle. Ogbu also acknowledges that students who can be black in the community and play the White, academic game at school, do not pay the same psychological price as students who do not. Educators may downplay the role race and culture have in a student's "success" as defined by the mainstream or the dominant culture; however, many educators and school personnel have not been on the arduous and sometimes precarious path their students have traveled. Ogbu further explains that "Involuntary minorities may consciously or unconsciously interpret school learning as a displacement process detrimental to their social identity, sense of security, and self-worth. They fear that by learning the White cultural frame of reference, they will cease to act like minorities and lose their identity as minorities and their sense of community and self-worth" (p. 589). Those feelings are complex and confusing for students to wrestle with daily.

Because of their intelligence, students may have to choose between achievement and affiliation. Unfortunately, "The Black community may reject gifted or high-achieving Black

students not because they achieve academically but because they appear to be removed and detached from their indigenous community" (Ford & Harris, 1997, p. 107). Some Black students may detach and/or remove themselves from social situations to prevent peer exclusion or harassment which might be perceived as a rejection of Black culture. According to Ford-Harris, Schuerger, and Harris (1991), "Two penalties accompany the rejection of Black culture; (a) the Black community rejects the gifted Black child and (b) the gifted Black child suffers psychologically, emotionally, and socially" (p. 587). For gifted Black students, this statement has more complex and far reaching implications because high-achieving and/or gifted students may be perceived negatively by their Black peers; thus causing self-imposed alienation or isolation for emotional protection. A perceptive, Black, gifted child may attempt to overcompensate for this perceived detachment and try to hide or sabotage his/her academic ability – thus causing underachievement. Fordham (1991) states that "when trying to live in two different worlds, one is in peril of not belonging to either one of them" (p. 470). One might ask why a student would possibly jeopardize academic success for friendship or group affiliation. This is especially evident for Black children if their academic environment is predominantly White, but their neighborhood or home environment is predominantly Black. Thus, many Black students vacillate between allegiance to their racial group and the dominant group (Smith, 1989).

*Kinship*. Loyalty and fictive kinship are embedded in many cultures. According to Ogbu (1986), African Americans view fictive kinship as a symbol of collective identity. So, if a gifted Black youth disassociates himself/herself from the collective identity, then he/she is seen as denouncing his/her racial identity. Similarly, in Erikson's work with Native Americans, Elkind (1970) suggests that "not only did the Indian sense a break with the past, but he could not

identify with a future requiring assimilation of the White culture's values" (p. 23). There are many different views on why this happens and the consequences associated with this type of allegiance. Maslow (1954) believes a sense of belonging is essential for mental health. In addition, Ford (1993) notes that "threats to the psychological health of Black students include conflicts with members of one's racial group over issues of commitment to one's indigenous culture – that is, fear of being perceived as 'acting White' or somehow rejecting the Black culture" (p. 413).

*Psychological Issues*. The psychological ramifications of racial discrimination cannot be overlooked as a reason for low academic achievement in these students as well as social and cultural implications. The fears of success and failure along with social pressures may answer why some African American students do not achieve given the same academic opportunities as their peers. Thus, labeling these students as lazy is not an accurate nor fair assessment of this fragile and special population. School personnel, boards of education, and parents all play a part in helping these young men find academic success and must pay attention to the reasons why achievement remains elusive for so many.

It is difficult to erase hundreds of years of physical and psychological oppression. Many students struggle on standardized tests for many reasons. African American students have proven they are as smart as their White counterparts; however, it is difficult to erase the collective memory of a race that was told repeatedly you will not receive a formal education because you are enslaved, you are not smart enough to comprehend an education because your race is inferior and you are a slave, and even if you can read and/or write, it will not get you anywhere because your opportunities will be quelled, and you are less than – no matter what you do and/or

accomplish. It is no wonder that bright African American students struggle with racial, social, and psychological issues related to race and achievement. Additionally, it is no wonder their teachers struggle with their own collective memory when it comes to their treatment of African American students.

## 2.3. Civil Rights

Because educational opportunities for African-Americans remained limited, the Civil Rights Movement aimed to equalize the chasm between the education of Blacks and Whites. Ravitch (2000) asserts that "Those in greatest need of education, the black children whose forebears had been illiterate slaves, were consigned to the least adequate schools" (p. 373). Until the middle of the 20th century, minority groups were not seen as having intelligence equal to or superior to that of Whites; therefore, they were assigned to vocational or domestic education so they were employable but not truly educated. According to Comer (1997), "Home economics and domestic sciences were the favored industrial education courses given Blacks, but it only helped them to remain a servant class" (p. 123). Without an equal education, Blacks would remain on the lowest rung in American society and never prosper economically or politically.

With the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) that separate facilities for Blacks were not equal and most of the time substandard and ordered the desegregation of all schools if the segregation was proved to be intentional by school boards or school administrators. According to Ford and Harris (1999), "*Brown* laid the foundation for equality and guided, directly and indirectly, numerous educational decisions affecting Black students into the next century" (p.

16). The decision was based on the premise that "racial discrimination violates our national sense of morality" (p. 16). The *Brown* decision affected not only school policy but opened the door for change in American society. Although many were not ready to be told by the court system that integration was necessary and imminent, the tide began to shift with the introduction of the mass media to the American public. People began to see that desegregation was not just about Blacks being allowed into White schools, but the issue of equality on a much larger scale. Comer (1997) notes that "School segregation was not the critical problem; it was the exclusion of Blacks from the economic mainstream…economic integration was needed to make school integration work, and to improve race relations in general" (p. 31). This lag in and lack of education has cost the American people the gifts and talents of those African American men and women who could have and wanted to fully participate in the American education system but were denied the opportunity.

*Lack of Opportunity.* This denial of academic and economic opportunity for Blacks has led to generational disenfranchisement by parents and students across the country. Ogbu (1978) cites three factors that contribute to lower black performance in school: "the inferior education blacks have been given for generations; differentiation in training between blacks and whites which keeps their education inferior; and the job ceiling" (p. 13). In 1964, to address and combat low school performance, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act which established Job Corps and Head Start. In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which established Title I. The main goal Title I was the improvement of educational programs in educationally deprived schools. The major focus of the ESEA was to improve educational opportunities for children from low-income families. People mistake lost job

opportunities as the fault of the job seeker but do not realize that an inadequate education leads to diminished job opportunities with only menial or low level work available which in turn leads to minimum pay which forces low-income families to remain in low-income housing perpetuating a vicious cycle. Ogbu (1978) argues that the job ceiling negatively impacts Black students' view of education as being the gateway to the American dream. Because of this, they do not see the same rewards for themselves as they do for White students; therefore, they do not work as hard to attain high academic achievement levels. The cyclical pattern continues for generations and essentially begins with educational opportunity structures to break the cycle. Spring (2001) cites the Heller report and the conclusions of Heller. One point that Heller makes is "It is difficult for children to find and follow avenues leading out of poverty in environments where education is deprecated and hope is smothered" (p. 373). If children see education as helping only those who look and act different from themselves, it can cause students to internalize negative feelings about school and their lack of social and financial capital and/or resources. In turn they recognize their diminished educational situation, thus using education as a tool to escape poverty seems hopeless. Mickelson (1980) echoes this sentiment that "Young blacks are not bewitched by the rhetoric of equal opportunity through education; they hear another side of the story at the dinner table" (p. 59). To the contrary, Ford (1992) argues that "many African Americans have a vested interest in the system, even though it has failed them miserably" (p. 199).

*Peer Relationships.* Students struggle with peer relationships, teacher relationships, pleasing their parents, and staying true to themselves. Imagine having to give up peer associations or relationships because of intelligence or the innate affinity for achievement.

Unlike students in the dominant culture, the social, cultural, and psychological well-being of Black students is at the heart of their academic achievement or underachievement. These factors provide a map outlining the obstacle course Black students face in school and the academic and social decisions they must make daily. Kunjufu (1988) conducted a study of 300 students from private and public high schools in urban, suburban, and rural districts and found that "the phenomenon of negative peer pressure transcends class status when it come to academic achievement" (p. 19). He asserts that there is a silent killer among African American youth in the United States.

> The various expressions of this silent killer are: cutting classes, poor attendance, sitting in the back of the class, not asking or answering questions, taking easy courses, not studying, being called a nerd, brainiac, oreo, homosexual, or four eyes; students are not encouraged to speak well, visit museums, or participate in educational experiences; they should not listen to classical or rock music, or hang around non-Black students inside or outside the school building; the students also question the relevancy of school and the future job market (p. 34-35).

Kunjufu (1988) also notes that high achievers also suffer from the silent killer by not earning the highest grades they are capable of and just flying under the radar so as not to be noticed by their underachieving peer. He further explains that for some students, seeing the value of education is difficult; therefore, educators need to explore all factors which may lead African American students to perform poorly in school: racism, slavery, inferior schools, the lack of African history, the job ceiling, fictive kinship, and a victimizing definition of blackness. Ogbu (1978) asks an important question "Are the motives of formal education the same for the minority and majority groups?" (p. 26).

Several studies examine the psychology of academic performance and African American students. As stated in Mickelson (1980), "[John] Ogbu's work examines the American opportunity structure and its possible influence on the scholastic performance of blacks" (p. 44). In his seminal study, Ogbu (1978) studied six societies involving members of different minority groups and dominant groups. He hypothesized that "racial stratification, as distinct from class stratification, generates and sustains patterns of school performance compatible with educational requirements of social and occupational roles permitted to the component racial groups and the mode of social mobility characteristic of the system" (p. 8).

*Involuntary Minorities*. Ogbu (1998) cites three types of minorities – autonomous, caste, immigrant – in his cultural ecological theory. Autonomous minorities may have different cultural, ethnic or religious views but they are not subjected to subordination by the dominant society. Caste-like minorities are also known as involuntary minorities because they are in their society against their will either through slavery or colonization. Immigrant minorities arrived in the society and keep their cultural, linguistic, and religious affiliations but do not feel the burden of the dominant society like caste minorities. Since African Americans are in the Unites States because of slavery, they are an involuntary minority group. This caste status caused slaves and later freed Blacks not to be offered the same educational opportunities as Whites. Pamela Barnhouse Walters (as cited in Lacy, 2007) argues that "southern whites lacked an institutional anchor from which to voice their concerns about education, but that this latter group may have also perceived education as inessential to social mobility because the racial caste system ensured that were blacks situated at the bottom of the social hierarchy" (p. 239). Even when Blacks did have an opportunity to attend school and get an education, there was no guarantee upon

graduation a job would be available as in the case with Whites. “The home and schools do not prepare caste minority children to compete effectively with members of the dominant group for the most desirable adult roles in their society. This happens because caste minorities are restricted to the least desirable social and occupational roles. The barriers against their competition for the more desirable roles generally influence the way their parents train them and the way schools prepare them for adult life” (p. 27). Because of these barriers, Ogbu believes that Black students have lower academic performance because there is no incentive to do well.

*Paradox of Underachievement*. In her 1990 study, Mickelson surveyed 1,193 high school seniors about their attitudes toward school. She concluded that the students had an attitude-achievement paradox towards education and hold abstract and concrete attitudes about school which in turn leads to conflicting outcomes for students. Mickelson argues that the lower achievement of Blacks is due in part to Black students’ accurate perception that for people like them, educational efforts and credentials are not rewarded in the same ways as for Whites. She also asserts that Black and White students hold two sets of attitudes toward schooling – abstract and concrete (p.45). In short, the American achievement ideology is based on the premise that education is the golden ticket to success in life and tangible and intangible rewards come with academic achievement and success. “Abstract attitudes are ideologically based and essentially reflect the belief that opportunity through education is a core component of the American dream” (p. 46). Mickelson found that although students believed abstractly in the concept that academic achievement promoted the American dream, they concretely may or may not have believed in this ideology based on the significant adults in their lives who faced job ceilings and were passed over for promotions and acknowledgments and lacked social mobility. Black students did not

believe that the same efforts put into school by Blacks would be acknowledged in the same way as Whites. Said another way, minorities believed that "the members of the working class often fail to receive the same wages, jobs, and promotions as do middle-class White men" (p. 45).

According to Ogbu (1978) the American achievement ideology holds that "public school education is established to provide equal opportunity for all who have the ability to achieve middle-class status" (p. 26). Unfortunately, the opportunity structures that are in place for Blacks and Whites is unequal which is why the paradox exists for Blacks. The crux of the paradox is that "the abstract and concrete views on education collide because abstract attitudes are the global belief that opportunity through education is a core component of the American Dream while concrete attitudes are situation specific and derived from a person's experiences in his/her own family or community" (Mickelson, 1990, p. 46). In short, Black students believe that school is important but acknowledge that the opportunity structures may not be fair which will not afford them the same advantages as White students. This incongruence can lead to lower school performance because Black students realize that there is a disconnect from what the American achievement ideology can mean for them and what it can and does mean for others. Mickelson concluded several key factors in Black students' academic achievement. First, concrete attitudes are predictive of achievement and are an important factor in a student's grade point average; however, the most powerful predictor of grade point average (achievement) is a student's race with the student's peer group as the second biggest predictor of achievement. "Next to race, the proportion of a student's friends who plan to attend a four-year college is the most powerful predictor of achievement" (Mickelson, 1990, p. 55). Finally, Mickelson argues that being female is "more important in determining achievement for blacks than for whites" (p. 56). Although

policy makers continually struggle to narrow the achievement gap, Mickelson believes that more can be done to address the issue minority underachievement. “The material realities experienced by black youths challenge the rhetoric of the American Dream. Working class and minority youths have parents, older siblings, and neighbors whose real-world experiences challenge the myth that education equal opportunity for all” (p. 59).

*Curricular Programming*. Ford proposes that academic programming plays a significant factor in African American students’ support of the achievement ideology rather than gender. In 1992, Ford conducted a qualitative research study of 148 elementary school students to examine the determinants of achievement and underachievement among gifted and non-gifted African American students. She used a Likert-type scale measuring the student’s cultural, social, and psychological achievement on motivation. Ford found that many of the Black students reported low effort. So, they believed in the achievement ideology that doing well in school will yield high educational outcomes later, yet they reported they put forth minimal effort in school. Black females, however, reported their effort was not low or minimal. Ford purports that being gifted and placed in a more challenging curriculum impacts a student’s support for the achievement ideology. “Gifted students, irrespective of gender, were more supportive of the American dream and the achievement ideology” (Ford, 1992, p. 207). However, nongifted males tended to have lower grade point averages, self-report low effort, the teacher reported low efforts, and scored high on the underachievement subscale. “African-American males were more likely to believe that school was a waste of time in general and even more so for African-American’s. They did not hold much faith in the efficacy of the achievement ideology and the rewards associated with such support” (p. 209). This conclusion is consistent with Ogbu’s theory of low school

performance for African Americans as well as Mickelson's paradox of underachievement especially for African American males.

*Stereotype Threat*. In addition to Ogbu, Mickelson, and Ford, Claude Steele (2003) surmises that something is keeping capable African American students from academic success. However, unlike the aforementioned scholars, Steele posits that stereotype threat is the cause of low academic achievement and underachievement among African American students. "Stereotype threat is the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 111). Furthermore, he explains that stereotype threat is not an abstract concept or someone's self-doubt but a "real-time" threat of being judged and treated poorly in settings where a negative stereotype about one's group applies. Steele and Aronson (1995) wanted to test whether stereotype threat impacted test performance outcomes of African American students. They conducted four studies using the same hypothesis but with different groups of students, still African American and White, using the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and another assessment that measured lexical access processing and higher verbal reasoning. In all of the studies, they used a diagnostic, nondiagnostic, and control conditions. Half of each group was told that their intelligence was being measured, while the other half didn't know what the test was measuring. The White students performed almost equally in the two conditions of the experiment. In contrast, the African American students performed far worse than they otherwise would have when they were told their intelligence was being measured. The researchers posit this was because stereotype threat made the students anxious about confirming the stereotype regarding African Americans and intelligence. Furthermore, they found that the difference was even more pronounced when

race was emphasized. In addition, Steele and Aronson (1995) concluded two very important factors "underperformance appears to be rooted less in self-doubt than in social mistrust" (p. 124) "and that the most achievement-oriented students, who were also the most skilled, motivated, and confident, were the most impaired by stereotype threat" (p. 120).

*Nigrescence Theory*. As Steele and Aronson concluded, the psychology of race and racial identity has a significant impact on African American students. For Black youth, racial identity has a significant impact on achievement, motivation, and attitudes toward school (Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993; Smith, 1989; Exum & Colangelo, 1981). It is difficult to achieve when it is unclear whether or not judgment will result in a backlash from one's peers – dominant and minority – or teachers. In 1971, William Cross developed a groundbreaking racial identity framework on Nigrescence Theory which is used to explain the stages of Black identity. Since then, he and his colleague Vandiver (2001) have updated the model and identified eight identity types in three stages: (a) pre-encounter; (b) immersion-emersion; and (c) internalization. These are as follows:

- Pre-Encounter Assimilation – describes the type of Black person whose social identity is organized around her or his sense of being an American and an individual. Little significance is accorded racial group identity, affiliation, or salience; consequently, race and Black culture are not engaged.
- Pre-Encounter Miseducation – depicts the type of Black person who accepts as truthful, facts, images, and historical information about Black people that are, in fact, stereotypical and forms of cultural-historical misinformation and may hesitate to engage in Black problems and Black culture.

- Pre-Encounter (Racial) Self-Hatred – characterizes the type of Black person who experiences profound negative feelings and deep-structure self-loathing because he/she is in fact Black.
- Immersion-Emersion Anti-White – describes Black people who are nearly consumed by a hatred of White people and White society and all that is represents and will engage Black problems and Black culture but are frequently predictably unpredictable, volatile, and full of fury and pent-up rage.
- Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement – describes a person who is typically simplistic, romantic, oceanic, and obsessively dedicated to all things Black. The person engages Blackness in a nearly cult-like fashion and is subject to Blacker-than-thou social interactions with other Blacks and evidences an either/or mentality about complex issues.
- Internalization Nationalist – characterizes an individual who stresses an Africentric perspective about oneself, Black people, and the surrounding world. There is no question that such persons engage Black problems and Black culture.
- Internalization Biculturalist – depicts a Black person who gives equal importance to being an African American as well as being an American; this person can celebrate both cultures without identity conflicts, doubt, and self-questioning (Grantham & Ford, 2003).
- Internalization Multiculturalist – describes a person whose identity fuses between two or more social categories or frames of reference. He or she is interested in resolving

issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple groups (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

In education, it is important to realize that factors related to race impact student achievement. If an African American student is in the anti-White stage of racial identity and has White teachers who the student perceives as not caring or not sincere about his/her academic progress and does not like or respect him/her, then the student may underachieve and become unresponsive to assignments or direction from the teacher. Conversely, if a student is in the multiculturalist stage of racial identity, the student may advocate for multicultural and multiracial curricular options which address topics important to the students. This may include reading novels, plays, poems, and essays by people of different minority groups. The student may notice the curriculum is one-sided and ask the teacher to address more global topics to address the needs of students in the class and to promote an awareness of others.

*Familial Relationships*. School personnel know that in addition to racial identity and one's attitude regarding achievement, familial relationships, especially among African American people, are extremely important. A student's family life can greatly influence his/her academic achievement. Reginald Clark (1983) conducted an ethnographic case study of 10 Black families. Clark looked at high achievers in two-parent households and one-parent households and low achievers in two-parent and one-parent households. He posits that the overall quality of the family's life-style, not the composition, or status, or family dynamics, determines whether children are prepared for academically competent performance in the classroom. Consistent with Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif's (1998) findings, Reginald Clark (1983) contends that the number of parents and their income is not the major factor in developing high achieving students. The

major reason students achieve is because of the quality of interactions with a parent or guardian. Conversely, students do not perform well in school if the familial support is not present. According to Gurman quoted in Whitmore (1980), "the family is one of the most significant factors influencing the underachiever" (p. 174).

Clark (1983) argues that "there is a substantial body of evidence that children's chances of school success throughout their educational career are significantly increased by a supportive home environment, and conversely are significantly decreased by a 'neutral' or nonsupportive family context" (p. 5). Said another way, if students are supported at home, then their chances of success in and out of school are greater. This can be seen in two-parent and single-parent households. The idea that a single-parent home with a supportive home environment can induce a child to excel academically flies in the face of research that suggests single-parent homes produce more low achievers or underachievers. Clark (1983) vehemently contends that "family processes and culture, not structural and demographic variables, determine achievement orientations in children" (p. 203).

Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998) conducted a study of forty-seven young men along with twenty-nine fathers and thirty-eight mothers. The students were chosen from the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. The study explored the relationship between academic achievement and parental influence on African American male children. The authors wanted to "focus on the highest-achieving young African American males and their parents to identify attitudes, habits, behaviors, perspectives, and strategies that may shed light on what society needs to do, and what parents need to do to reverse the downward trends involving Black male behavior and academic performance" (p. 6). The major purpose of

the study was to identify strategies that educators and parents could use to understand the academic success of young African American males. The study reveals how the young men in the study found success despite racism, the temptations of crime and drugs, and the pop culture value of being cool over being educated.

In accordance with Clark and his belief that a supportive family is key to academic success, parents and the students of the Meyerhoff Scholars noted these factors were key in the academic success of these young men: child-focused love; strong limit setting and discipline; continually high expectations; open, consistent and strong communication; positive racial identity and positive male identity; and full use of community resources. "The challenge facing Black parents is to help their sons believe truly that in spite of racism and societal barriers, their success will depend largely on their own success" (p. 8). That being said, many African American males have a difficult time believing that they will be judged fairly by society whether they commit to excelling in school or whether they commit a crime. One student from the Meyerhoff Scholars Program summed up his feeling about his academic journey, "A White male doesn't have to fight society's view of you. They're already saying, 'Oh, well, you can be a doctor, you can be this.' But if you're a person of color, you have to prove that you can excel, can be a doctor. It's sort of like you're assumed guilty until proven innocent" (p. 101).

*Cool Pose Theory*. This idea of being presumed guilty until proven innocent is sometimes too much for young African American males. Some may feel as if it does not matter what they do because in the end, it is never enough therefore they will find their worth or success using alternative avenues. Majors and Billson (1992) explored the topic of "cool" as it relates to being African American and male in the United States. What they found is that being cool comprises a

mixture of pride, strength, and control that helps Black men cope with the everyday pressures of race, prejudice, and discrimination. What is interesting about the cool pose theory is that it is not dependent on poverty, unemployment, or socioeconomic status. "As a response to a history of oppression and social isolation in this country, coolness may be a survival strategy that has cost the Black male – and society – an enormous price" (p. xi). For decades, African American men were steered into vocational and domestic jobs even if they were capable of more meaningful work. Therefore, it is difficult for these young men with fathers, grandfathers, and uncles who were steered away from academic achievement to suddenly embrace education and all of its promises of the American dream. Furthermore, Majors and Billson discuss the cool pose as a buffer against the cold realities of the world.

> Cool pose is a distinctive coping mechanism that serves to counter, at least in part, the dangers that black males encounter on a daily basis. As a performance, cool pose is designed to render the black male visible and to empower him; it eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities. Being cool is an ego booster for black males comparable to the kind white males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs, and bringing home decent wages; therefore, the black male adopts the cool pose to ward off the anxiety of second class status (p. 5).

Many African American youth have adopted the cool pose as a means of coping both in and out of school. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a happy medium with regard to cool pose and academic achievement. If a student adopts the achievement philosophy, then he/she is seen as rejecting the Black culture or acting White. This can force African Americans, especially males, to choose the academic side or the other side of the proverbial coin. "Distancing themselves from uncool activities can have negative implications for how black males fare in the formal structures of school. Activities that are perceived as uncool are likely to include studying, going on field trips to museums, and relating positively to teachers" (Kunjufu, 1988, p. 46). This

ideology can have a detrimental effect for these students. It can cause a lack of achievement and a loss of educational opportunities. Kunjufu says it best, "We must improve our options beyond the notions that being cool is Black and being smart is White" (1988, p. 31).

*Acting White/Acting Black*. The negative perceptions of uncool activities can also be fueled by negative peer pressure that African American male students face. In his study of 300 students from public high schools in low and middle income neighborhoods, magnet, private, and suburban schools, Kunjufu (1988) uncovered two main road blocks to academic success for African American students – peer pressure and acting White. Ogbu and Fordham (1986) address both of these issues in their groundbreaking study on "acting White." They interviewed eight students: four males and four females from Capital High School in Washington, D.C. Four of the students are underachieving and four are achieving. Ogbu and Fordham look at the rationale for the underachievers as it relates to "acting White" and attempt to unravel the mystery as to why and/or how the other students cope with the burden of acting White. "Acting White" refers to students, who in the eyes of their peers and/or community, are performing well academically. In the broader context, Ogbu suggests that behaving in the manner defined as falling within a White cultural frame of reference is to "act White" and is negatively sanctioned. Unfortunately, acting White also equates to doing well in school. Students dread those two words because it connotes an ugly stigma in the Black community. Kunjufu (1988) argues that "African American students have a difficult time explaining why good grades symbolize Whiteness and being cool is acting Black" (p. 31).

In his study, Shaun Harper (2006) addresses the acting White hypothesis as it relates to high-achieving African American male college students. He contends that the acting White

hypothesis is null for African American collegians because "the participants attributed much of their college success to the support offered by their same-race peers" (p. 337). He notes that "participants reported dissimilar interactions with their same-race peers" (p. 352) and did not accuse them of acting White but applauded their success. The collegial atmosphere is quite different from the elementary and secondary educational experience. The comparison that collegians supported each other's success is not surprising considering collegians make the choice to attend college, often make the choice to attend a particular college, and sometimes choose their roommates. Because K-12 students are not adults and do not process, comprehend, and/or acknowledge the claim as such, one cannot contend that the acting White hypothesis is not prevalent among K-12 students. In college, most peers do not expect one another to fail in this expensive, academic endeavor, and would most assuredly promote their peers well-being socially and academically. The factors influencing K-12 students versus college students are vastly different (i.e., cost, housing, course selection, size of the institution, etc.).

Conversely, Henfield (2006) in his study of gifted, black students, notes that "gifted African American students often described being put in a position of defending their identities as 'real' African Americans or risking being characterized as 'acting White'" (p. 110). He goes on to say that many of the participants in the study had been told at one time they acted White or knew of others who had been told they were acting White because they were being academically successful. In addition to the acting White hypothesis, Henfield addresses the idea of acting Black. The same participants in the study explicated that students who act Black "usually get lower grades, and some tend to lean into the Black stereotype" (p. 114). The experiences of these

students is similar to the findings of Kunjufu about the notion of acting White and acting Black which clearly causes stress to student.

Because of this internal stress or affective dissonance, students may experience psychological stress because they are uncertain that White Americans will accept them if they succeed in learning to "act White" (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Ogbu theorizes that students who have low academic performance have adapted to the idea that they have limited social and economic opportunity. With this limited opportunity, they experience job ceilings and witness low employment benefits in relation to academic achievement. Because of this depressed cycle, Black students do not see the value in school and school as a vehicle or tool to economic prosperity/independence; therefore, there is no incentive to want to work harder.

Along with the academic disillusionment, Black students experience oppositional social identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference. "The oppositional identity of the minority evolves also because they perceive and experience the treatment by whites as collective and enduring oppression. Subordinate minorities (e.g., Blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans) also experience oppositional cultural frame of reference which includes devices for protecting their identity and for maintaining boundaries between them and White Americans" (Ogbu, 1986, p. 181). In attempts to maintain this boundary, peer groups may discourage academic success; and peer groups may negatively label other peers. "High achievers suffer from the silent killer [lower academic achievement] – while their scores are better than those of their peers, they could be higher if many of them did not have to demonstrate loyalty to their peers" (Kunjufu, 1988, p. 35). Both Ogbu (1985) and Fordham (1988, 1991) also discuss fictive kinship which is a kinshiplike relationship between persons not related by blood or marriage in a society, who also

have some reciprocal social or economic connection. The sense of peoplehood or collective social identity evident in many aspects of African-American life, including the numerous kinship and pseudo-kinship terms they use to refer to one another. This sense of fictive kinship or loyalty bonds can cause good students to suffer from negative peer pressure thus causing lower academic achievement. According to Kunjufu, "The phenomenon of peer pressure, and its' impact on academic achievement has reached catastrophic proportions" (p. vii).

*Underachievement*. Because of the unique psychological, cultural, and social factors that African American males contend with, many achieve at lower levels than their potential or underachieve. According to Whitmore (1980), "educators have defined underachievement as performance, judged either by grades or achievement test scores – or both – that is significantly below the student's measured or demonstrated potential for academic achievement" (p. 168). According Banks & Banks (1997), Ford (1996), Rimm (1986), Whitmore (1980), there are three kinds of underachievement: (a) unknown – performance on aptitude and achievement measures are consistently low, hiding the ability of the child who is functionally untestable; or the students underachievement is hidden by "satisfactory" performance and the teachers have no evidence that the student is capable of much higher achievement; (b) high aptitude scores but low grades and achievement test scores; and (c) high standardized achievement test scores but low grades due to poor daily work, whether or not there are aptitude scores that indicate the student's ability. Underachievement is also classified by duration – temporal or chronic – and scope. For instance a situational type of underachievement may occur for a temporary period of time based on a life circumstance such as moving to a new school, ill health, divorcing parents, or a conflict with a teacher. There are many instances where a student will be doing well in their classes except one

or will do poorly for a quarter or semester but then bounce back. If a student has been doing poorly for an extended period of time with no specific rationale, then he/she is a chronic underachiever. In terms of scope, underachievement can be seen in one specific area of ability, one broad content area, or general underachievement. For example, a student may underachieve in the general subject of science but may excel in math and English. Students may struggle with English in all subject areas which impacts their overall achievement. There is a continuum of underachievement which ranges from mild to severe. A mild case of underachievement would be a student struggling to acclimate to a new school. This process could be of short duration until the student understands the expectation of the teachers. Moderate underachievement might occur if a student struggles with an entire content area. The most severe cases of underachievement come when students just stop participating in school all together. According to Hildreth (1966) this lack of appropriate curricular programming is one major cause of underachievement among all students. Because students fail to achieve on a daily basis, teachers may not recognize their gifted potential. The failure on the part of the school can result in many students being left out of the gifted referral process; therefore, minority students are underrepresented in gifted programs (Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006).

Although the education of minority students has steadily progressed, there are still some educational issues that remain stagnant. Gifted education for minority students has been and still remains inaccessible to many minority students because of the actions of institutional agents/school personnel (Ford, 2011). According to Ford, Moore, and Whiting (2006), "Deficit orientations often prevent education professionals, such as teachers, school counselors, and administrators, from accepting any blame or responsibility for the deplorable educational

outcomes of racial minority groups, including their underrepresentation in gifted education" (p. 174). Many schools espouse equity and access, but then will construct gatekeepers to some coveted educational opportunities. There are several reasons for the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. The two with the greatest impact are lack of teacher referrals most often caused by deficit ideologies held by school personnel and test bias.

*Testing*. In order to address test bias and student misplacement based on race, one has to reflect on the history of testing in the 20th century known as the mental measurements movement. The major proponents of the mental testing movement spanned a variety of fields including psychology, sociology, and education. Although many experts came from different fields, most of them believed that intelligence tests provided information about a person's innate abilities.

At the forefront of this movement were Henry Goddard and Lewis Terman. They believed that intelligence was innate, hereditary, and fixed. Using Binet's intelligence test developed to identify mentally deficient children, Terman created a more advanced test based on Binet's questions and premise to identify intelligence in adults. He developed the intelligence quotient or the IQ scale. Based on his findings, Terman wanted racial segregation based on intelligence. This concept of sorting became popular in schools because it could sort or track students into different curricula based on their IQ scores. He wanted to sort children into five separate tracks. He believed that gifted children needed to be challenged and would fall through the cracks and "dwarf their mental development" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 139). Terman wanted to offer a differentiated curriculum to students early in their educational careers, and this concept

challenged the basic idea of the common school movement which was to educate all students with the same curriculum.

The biggest opponents to the use of intelligence testing to limit and determine the depth and breadth of a student's educational career were William Bagley, Walter Lippman, and Clarence Karier. Bagley believed that the tests would be used to "close the doors of educational opportunity to large number of people" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 147). Many people did use the tests to justify limiting opportunities to minority students. Unfortunately, educators saw the use of intelligence tests as a way to develop the capacities of those with higher intelligence while tracking those with lower IQ scores into vocational or general education tracks. Karier believed that "the use of intelligence testing as a means of establishing a meritocracy became another method of justifying social-class differences and racial discrimination" (Spring, 2001, p. 298). The proponents of intelligence testing argued that test scores were indicative of one's race and denied that formal education and environmental factors attributed to intelligence scores. Unfortunately, this line of thinking has not been quelled by the abundance of research to the contrary because Herrnstein and Murray (1994) the authors of *The Bell Curve* offer two basic assumptions in their research: 1.) intelligence must be capable of rank ordering people in a linear order and 2.) intelligence must be primarily genetically based. Sternberg, Callahan, Burns, Gubbins, Purcell, et al. (1995) vehemently refute the Herrenstein and Murray claim that intelligence is based on genetics and race. They say:

> Their concept of the 'gifted' largely excludes members of many ethnic groups and favors especially those who have traditionally done well on conventional tests of intelligence: Anglo whites, Ashkenzai Jews (their qualification, not ours, of Jewish religion), certain Asians, and so on (p. 177).

Sternberg et al. also question Herrenstein and Murray's use of a single testing survey as the basis for their research. They argue that "a singular survey, no matter how well done, should not serve as the basis for the kinds of sweeping claims" (p. 178). Additionally, Naglieri and Ford (2005) argue that "poverty or low SES negatively affects students' test performance; high poverty is correlated with low tests scores because of issues associated with educational enrichment at home and school. Thus, many students receive low test scores because of unequal opportunity to learn" (p. 33) and not because of their race or genetic make-up. According to Williams (1972), "the deficit model assumes that Black people are deficient when compared to whites in some measurable trait called intelligence, and that this deficiency is due to genetic or cultural factors or both" (p. 81). Williams (1972) also argues that "intelligence is frequently based quite heavily on language factors. It is a common observation that Black and white children do not speak alike. The difference in linguistic systems favors white children since standard English is the lingua franca of the tests and public schools" ( p. 81). Along this same line of thinking, Bonner (2000) states that "the language, culture, and experiences of the individuals who construct these tests become a measure of which students have a better grasp of White, middle-class culture – not what knowledge and information they have acquired" (p. 646). Another factor to be considered in test bias is culture which is similar but not the same as racial bias. Rhodes, Ochoa, and Oritz (2005) argue that acculturation – "the lack of cultural knowledge or the act of acquiring it" (p. 126) – contributes to cultural test bias. Schools cannot expect students from other cultures to take any type of standardized test and score well. Unfortunately, Spanish-speaking students were given state standardized tests and based on those results placed into special education classes. In the case of *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970), the court argued that "testing for special

education placement must be conducted in a student's primary language and that culturally biased items had to be dropped from the test" (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005, p. 124-125).

> Bias in testing will occur whenever a test of intelligence, ability, or achievement that was developed and normed in the United States is given to an individual whose cultural background, experiences, or exposure is not comparable to the individuals who comprised the normative group. (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005, p. 127).

Ravitch (2000) and Spring (2001) provide excellent examples of how intelligence testing if used improperly can cause irreparable harm. According to Ravitch (2000), "Tests cannot measure wisdom, originality, creativity, or insight" (p. 160). This point is true because so many students from low socio-economic circumstances may not test well but are creative and thoughtful and insightful or have the potential to be. Because tests are used to wrongly classify students, those from minority backgrounds are at risk of being incorrectly labeled. According to Ford and Harris (1999), standardized tests may pose problems for minority students because "certain sections of standardized tests tap experiences, social skills, and middle class values" (p. 53). This can be extremely detrimental to students because the teachers can take a test score and attribute the entire educational career of a student to this number. "It is clear that traditional ability tests play a major role in current educational procedures and consequently in determining what doors in life will be opened to a Black child" (Williams, 1972, p. 82).

*Test bias*. According to Frasier and Passow (2011), "The content, construct, and predictive or criterion-related validity of tests of mental ability have long been questioned" (p. 127). Although Herrnstein and Murray (1994) would argue that test bias does not exist, Ford surmises that test bias does exist if reliability and validity are not properly addressed.

> Issues affecting the reliability and validity of tests can result in biases against minority students. An examination of standardized test reveals that (a) language differences exist between the test (or test maker) and the students; (b) the test questions center on the experiences and facts of the dominant culture, and the answers support middle class values, which are often rewarded with more points; (c) the tests favor highly verbal students (e.g., they require a great deal of reading, word recognition, vocabulary, sentence completion, and verbal responses); and (d) the tests do not consider the extent to which some students may not be oriented toward achievement (Ford, 2011, p. 281).

Frasier and Passow (2011) also argue that "standardized tests discriminate against minority and economically disadvantaged students and those whose linguistic and perceptual orientation, cognitive styles, learning and response styles, economic status, and cultural or social background differ from the dominant groups used to norm such tests – i.e., White, middle-class populations" (p. 127).

There are misguided perceptions and myths about gifted students that are often counterintuitive to the notion of gifted education. Myth one is that gifted children are in higher socioeconomic brackets; therefore students from lower socioeconomic brackets are not gifted or not even considered for gifted identification. According to the Ohio Association of Gifted Children (OAGC) the aforementioned myth is the most damaging misconception about gifted children because "there are far more poor gifted children than there are gifted children from rich families in this country. The children who are hurt are those whose families cannot afford private schooling and are not able to provide supplemental work at home" (n.d.). Because of this misconception about where a gifted child comes from, teachers may look at poor students as unlikely candidates for gifted identification referrals and gifted education services. One example of this is from a teacher in a large urban district in Ohio who told a group of teachers that a student could not possibly be gifted because she had head lice and was poor. Although this type

of ideology is shocking, it is not uncommon. Myth two is that gifted children are all nerds. This myth is damaging because it is rooted solely in the appearance of the gifted child. The child who sits in the front row of the classroom, who is precocious, who walks the hallways with a book and is attentive to the teacher at all times may not exist in most urban districts across America for several reasons. It may not be safe to walk around an urban school acting or looking smarter than everyone else and possibly perceived unfavorably by one's peers. It may not be cool to be the teacher pleaser and have all of the answers in class. Many of these misconceptions could be addressed if more teacher preparation existed in colleges of education around the country. Problem one, some teachers from suburban or rural areas have not come into contact with many if any people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Problem two, these same teachers have low to no teacher preparation in the field of gifted education; therefore, asking a teacher who lacks experience in both areas, to refer a student who learns and acts differently than the norm is unconscionable. Ford, Moore, and Whiting (2006) concur that "teachers inadequately prepared to work with gifted students may have stereotypes and misperceptions that undermine their ability to recognize strengths in students who behave differently from their expectations" (p. 181). Similarly, Bonner (2000) postulates that "students who are out of 'cultural sync' with their teachers will go unidentified, regardless of their intellectual abilities" (p. 647).

To equalize the chasm between African American and White student disparities in gifted education, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted & Talented Students Education Act was passed in 1988. The primary aim of the Javits Act is to identify students who would historically be overlooked for gifted programs. The act identifies students from poor backgrounds, disabled students, and non-native English speakers. Although the act does not directly fund local programs, it serves to

support research that benefits gifted students. The act also established the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented which brings together policymakers and researchers to share ideas and best practices about gifted and talented students. Although legislation can aid in closing the Black-White gap in gifted education, there has to be a shift in thinking about gifted education. That paradigm shift occurs with institutional agents – principals, guidance counselors, and teachers. If any one person in that triangle does not fulfill his/her responsibility to provide an equitable and accessible education to all children, then deficit thinking may be present, and the gap persists.

*Deficit Ideology.* Clark (1983) suggests that teacher expectations and student learning experiences are intimately entwined. "Inaccurate teacher assessments of student abilities tend to nurture student failure by reinforcing prejudicial, stereotypic attitudes and perceptions about the learning capability of the children and ultimately about their humanity" (pg.14). This thinking goes back to Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman's (2002) concept of deficit ideology. If teachers have low academic expectations of students based on socioeconomics, class, and/or race then this type of deficit thinking will ultimately be reflected in the teacher's relationships with the students.

Weinstein, Soulé, Collins, Cone, Mehlhorn, and Simontacchi (1991) in their study of expectations and change in high school state that "the dynamics of teacher expectations and how they can become self-fulfilling prophecies have been well illustrated within classrooms and between classrooms" (1991, p. 3). Students often know if a teacher believes in his/her ability to succeed in school. Low teacher expectations which can be attributed to deficit orientation thinking can contribute to a students' underachievement. Valencia (2010) contends that deficit

thinking "blames the victim" for school failure rather than examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning" (p. xv). According to Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman (2002), "A deficit perspective exists when students of color who are culturally different from their White counterparts are viewed as culturally deprived or disadvantaged" (p. 52).

According to Ford, Whiting, and Moore (2009), there are four factors that contribute to deficit thinking: (a) IQ based definitions and theories; (b) testing and assessment issues; (c) inadequate policies and practices; and (d) inadequate teacher preparations in diversity and gifted education. Ford (1995) suggests that cultural differences in learning styles as well as parental involvement are also factors in the underrepresentation of gifted minority students. In a study examining the effect of deficit thinking on African American students as well as educators, Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Frazier Trotman (2002) believe that the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education extends beyond identification instruments and assessment processes, and that a "deficit perspective" exists whereby students of color who are culturally different from their White counterparts are viewed as culturally deprived or disadvantaged. This deficit perspective then hinders educators' ability to properly assess and refer students for gifted referrals. Williams (1972) explicates that Blacks and other minorities are culturally different and not culturally deficient. To this end, he states that "Blacks and whites come from different cultural backgrounds which emphasize different learning experiences necessary for survival…one can be unique without being inferior" (p. 82).

Unfortunately, some teachers may not want to believe that students from certain backgrounds are eligible for gifted service options even when test scores prove otherwise.

Sometimes this myopic view of gifted education can hinder students' ability to get into appropriate classes which impacts achievement motivation. If a deficit orientation is present among educators, they may not communicate with minority families about gifted education services, activities, and other pertinent opportunities (Ford et al., 2002). When this happens, gifted students are unaware of their curricular options which can prove detrimental to their short term and long term achievement. When an inappropriate curricular path persists over the span of elementary, middle, and high school, students can achieve at low levels or underachieve. To combat the deficit thinking model, Williams (1972) developed the cultural difference model which asserts that:

> The differences noted by psychologists in intelligence testing in family and social organizations and in the studies of the Black community are not the result of pathology, faulty learning, or genetic inferiority. These differences are manifestations of a viable and structured culture of the Black American. The difference model also acknowledges that Blacks and whites come from different cultural backgrounds which emphasize different learning experiences necessary for survival...the cultural difference model recognizes that this society is pluralistic in nature where cultural differences abound (p. 81).

The adoption of this model not only benefits the student but positively influences the school as well.

Sometimes, African American students get into gifted programs, but then are unsuccessful and begin to underachieve. It can occur when students attend less rigorous schools, and then are accepted into gifted programs and become overwhelmed and perform poorly. Minority students may also not adapt well to a gifted program because he/she is the only minority in the group. This can cause anxiety among minority students because of unintentional pressure being placed on them to represent the entire minority group; therefore, institutional

agents need to address students' social and emotional needs. "Because of their intelligence, African American children may feel socially induced guilt or shame in an attempt to accommodate to the social norm" (Silverman, 1997, p. 44). This can cause extreme emotional distress for African American students. In some instances, they have to choose between their family and/or neighborhood or show the outward manifestation of giftedness. Therefore, the school needs to provide an avenue where counselors and mentors can talk with students to improve academic performance. For teachers, just knowing these types of dilemmas exist for students of color is important. It cannot be assumed that a student who has potential is underachieving because of laziness or disinterest – more profound factors may be the root cause.

To be trained in gifted education without a multicultural or diverse lens may cause teachers not to recognize differences in gifted populations. "There is a tendency to adopt a deficit perspective of minority students whereby we focus on what they cannot do rather than what they can do" (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997, p. 210). It cannot be stated enough what damage can occur to students because of the perspective of the teacher or other school personnel.

> Minority and other disadvantaged students are less likely to be nominated for or included in an identification or screening process because of the low expectations of educational professionals have for culturally and linguistically diverse students, their low levels of awareness of cultural and linguistically diverse students, their low levels of cultural and linguistic behaviors of potentially gifted minority students, their insensitivity to the differences within and among groups, and their inability to recognize 'gifted behaviors' that minority students exhibit. (Frasier & Passow, 2011, p. 126).

Besides institutional agents, parents can refer their student for gifted testing. According to Ford, Baytops, and Harmon (1997), "Family involvement must include participation in the recruitment and retention process – screening, identification, placement, and programming – to ensure that

students are successfully identified and academically successful in the gifted education program" (p. 211).

*Student Expectations*. Flowers, Zhang, Moore, and Flowers (2004) conducted a study to examine African American student's perceptions at the school-level that hindered their academic achievement. The study also examined the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of African American students in gifted programs. Three themes emerged from the study related to the academic achievement among the 13 African American students: school-related issues, support from school personnel, family, and peers, and teacher expectations and methods of teaching. The students wanted teachers to move into the 21st century with their teaching styles and methods while also acknowledging and handling discipline so that they felt safe. Furthermore, students wanted teachers and counselors to "treat all students fairly" (p. 45). This suggests that students feel as though teachers treat students differently which can negatively impact student performance and hinder achievement. Feeling unsafe, unwanted or out-of-place creates an environment full of anxiety which is not conducive to student achievement and success. The students in the study wanted teachers and counselors to be encouraging and supportive and hold high expectations. They also wanted their family and friends to lend support to their academic pursuits. To retain more gifted African American students in gifted programs, the students suggested that "teachers incorporate more technology in their teaching as well as more hands-on activities, group activities, and in-class competitions" (p. 46) to promote student learning and keep students engaged. Finally, the students suggested that school personnel prepare them better for college. A college readiness focus would include a more rigorous curriculum and real-world application to the content as well as adequate study skills and test-taking skills and strategies.

*Instruction.* According to VanTassel-Baska (1998), "True equity cannot disallow the opportunity to pursue excellence. Bringing the top down does not bring the bottom up; it only lowers the playing field" (p. 516). In education, teachers often struggle with the "fairness" of assignments and the type of work student are asked to complete. This can be rectified by a differentiated curriculum with tiered content, process, and assignments and/or products. All students are required to learn a set curriculum; however, the depth and breadth of an activity can be altered to fit the students in the class. Unfortunately, many teachers do not allow students to progress through the textbook or classwork for fear they will miss some valuable piece of information if not imparted directly by the teacher; however, gifted students may find themselves bored and frustrated with the slow pace of the instruction. VanTassel-Baska (1994) suggests "Teachers should help gifted students guide themselves through a textbook from their own starting points and at their own pace" (p. 368). Some school districts employ flexible grouping for gifted students to enhance their academic experience, but many schools do not because it is seen as a form of tracking (Oakes, 1998). Tracking implies that students are not able or allowed to move fluidly or flexibly through or between a "general or regular" education track, honors track, and Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or post-secondary track. VanTassel-Baska refutes this claim in that "peers of equal or higher ability and rich knowledge bases provide ideational challenges and enhancement that gifted youth need for their own intellectual growth" (p. 373). It is only tracking if someone other than the student and/or parent is making the decision to put a student in a class that does not fit his/her academic needs. Many times gifted students are used to help low achievers without any intellectual stimulation for themselves. VanTassel-Baska (1994) suggests that students of similar abilities need to be in

classes with a heterogeneous population but also need the option of being with students like themselves in an enriching academic environment. Along similar lines, special education students are placed in self-contained classes as a necessary part of their academic life and as required by law in some cases; however, gifted education is not given the same consideration. Gifted education is regulated only at the state level. In many states, school districts are only required to identify students but not serve them.

In addition to the curriculum, teachers need to be aware of the specific needs of gifted minority students. Ford (1996) cites four strategies imperative to minority student achievement: (a) supportive strategies; (b) intrinsic strategies; (c) remedial strategies; and (d) cognitive strategies. In supportive strategies, teachers and/or guidance counselors affirm a student's self-worth and provide social-emotional support in and out of the classroom by allowing students to discuss concerns. Teachers can provide support by creating student-centered classrooms with a non-competitive, cooperative learning focus. Furthermore, the teacher can set high expectations for all students and not succumb to deficit thinking when dealing with culturally diverse students. Unknowingly, teachers often transfer their feelings of intellectual inferiority about their students to their students. Said another way, teachers have low expectations of students and convey those feelings with their actions or words. If teachers do not believe their students are capable of learning at high levels, then the students live up to that low expectation. Terrassier (1985) surmises that "when a teacher is informed of her pupil's actual potentials, she is in a far better position to her realize them" (p. 273). This includes knowing students' academic endeavors, family life, extracurricular activities, and future goals. All students regardless of race, ethnicity, and behavior are capable of high levels of success. All students deserve and crave a

high level of respect from their teachers. They want to be acknowledged as human beings needing to be guided through the intricate process of education in their formative years. Intrinsic strategies help students to develop internal motivation and a sense of self-efficacy. In addition to infusing multicultural texts, essays, and poems into the curriculum, the teacher can increase the number of activities which incorporate concrete, active, and experiential learning strategies. This could include simulations, projects, case studies, etc. Bibliotherapy and the use of biographies to help students connect with others who have traveled difficult or precarious roads may help students to feel like they are not alone and can overcome life's obstacles (Ford, 1996, 2011). Many times, students just need to make a genuine connection which is why providing mentors and role models is critical. Sometimes, remedial strategies need to be employed to help students catch up to their peer group. It may be a matter of teaching students organizational and time management skills. Giving instruction in a one-on-one situation or in small groups may allow students to glean the information with less pressure. The use of cognitive strategies helps improve students' thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers can implement the higher level of Bloom's Taxonomy: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The use of higher level Bloom's inside of the classroom at least gives students a chance to apply or transfer those types of problem-solving skills to other situations in and out of the classroom.

Because students' learning styles are so varied and broad, it is important to teach using a variety of methods. Differentiation in the delivery of the curriculum is crucial to student success because it provides learning opportunities for everyone in the classroom. There are numerous strategies to enhance student learning – learning contracts, curriculum compacting, independent study, acceleration, flexible grouping, and technology activities. Lecturing to students for an

entire class period is antiquated and not realistic. True enough, teachers must get through in inordinate amount of curricular material of mandated by the state; however, if students do not perceive the lesson as important or relevant in their lives, they will shut down. This has never been more true than right now – an age of instant messaging, texting, emailing, and the acquisition of real-time information. Smith (2009) feels that "Educators need to catch up to their students and must stop using analog type educational strategies to capture their students' attention in a digital environment." For teachers, making these minor changes and adjustments can yield vast improvements to student academic achievement – thereby closing the crevasse known as the achievement gap and providing students with the education they deserve.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

Dating back to slavery, the historical plight of African Americans in the United States has a long history of oppressive domination which sought to keep them educationally illiterate, economically stunted, and socially inferior. Sadly, the oppression did not necessarily just come from Whites. Because of the class structure during slavery and which continued after slavery, there was a mind-set among mulattoes and whites that further caused stratification among Blacks. F. James Davis (as cited in Lacy, 2007) surmises that "boundaries drawn by members of the black elite class against other blacks stemmed from the class structure instituted under the system of slavery…a pattern of stratification emerged in which slaves with white ancestry benefited from their lighter skin color and white features" (p. 23-24). Even in the 21st century, this stratification still exists among African Americans in communities across the United States but has been extended to include socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and class structure. Because of these other factors in an African American student's realm, education is just but one aspect of a complex life. The daily cultural, psychological, and social pressures that minority students face must not be underestimated especially how these factors connect with and impact their educational achievement.

Ogbu (1995) explicates that "Involuntary minorities may consciously or unconsciously interpret school learning as a displacement process detrimental to their social identity, sense of security, and self-worth. They fear that by learning the White cultural frame of reference, they

will cease to act like minorities and lose their identity as minorities and their sense of community and self-worth" (p. 589). Those feeling are complex and conflicting for students on a daily basis.

Not all minority students underperform; schools across the country are replete with academically achieving minority students; however, not many studies have been published with positive findings about the educational achievements of minority students. African Americans constantly look at themselves through a racial and/or cultural lens. It is not something that can be turned on and off, placed to the side for a while, or even ignored – it's inescapable. The attachment can be awe inspiring and progressive or sometimes just downright debilitating. Not only debilitating for the student but for the larger society. In addition, African American males struggle with education at rates higher than their White male counterparts and African American females. "Many young minority males find themselves responding to a daunting array of school, social, and community pressures that encourage misguided decisions that fly in the face of academic achievement" (College Board, 2010, p. 10).

Schools find it difficult to compete with the social pressures students feel to "fit in" and not be academically successful. "A wide array of black male images in media – music, movies, and television programs – take characteristics of black culture, tie them to anti-school identities, violence, and misogyny, and use them as forms of entertainment. This means the world is inundated with scenarios that leave false perceptions of black males that these youth must deal with when they enter the classrooms. Such images don't affect the academic performance of nonblack males nor how they interact with school. But, black males are being socially typecast and face constant internal dilemma of fitting into expectations embodying these false

characteristics or finding spaces where they can engage in practices that are counter to the perceptions" (Emdin, 2012, p. 14).

To underscore this point, even gifted and talented students are falling into this negative cycle of failure because of social and cultural pressures regardless of socioeconomic status. When students begin exhibiting behaviors that are not congruent with success, academia, and college-readiness, then teachers usually do not see their potential and sometimes begin to exhibit deficit thinking about an entire group. According to Valencia (2010), "Deficit thinking blames the victim for school failure rather than examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning" (p. xv). Many minority students come to school having learned one type of discourse or mode of communication in their house or neighborhood. This discourse manifests itself in a myriad of ways – oral language, dress, mannerisms, hairstyles, cars, and world views. Some students dress and act in a manner that is not seen as acceptable by the teacher especially if the teacher does not share the same cultural or ethnic background. Gee notes, "Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (p. 7). In short, the way students talk, act, and dress directly impacts a teacher's perception of them. According to Emdin (2012), "To address the low achievement of black males, schools must be willing to accept that there are ways of looking at the world, modes of communication, and approaches to teaching and learning that are unique to black males. At the same time, educators must also acknowledge that these unique ways of being are just as complex as those of other students. The tie that binds all students is the desire to be academically

successful" (p. 15). Unfortunately for Black students, schools are geared toward a White middle-class objective and if students do not adhere to the criteria set forth by the school, departments of education, and society at-large, then they are seen as incapable of conforming, adapting, and achieving. Because of this, "Educators interpret differences as deficits, dysfunctions, and disadvantages in students and their cultures" (Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006, p. 174-175). Because deficit thinking is detrimental to the teacher-student relationship in classrooms across the United States, it has a direct and profound impact on a student's social capital in school. Additionally, Ford, Moore, and Whiting (2006) contend "If a teacher does not understand the primary discourse of a racially or culturally 'different' student, then the teacher perceives the student as not having the necessary tools to succeed in the classroom" (p. 175). Institutional agents (i.e., teachers, counselors, and principals) are the gatekeepers to institutional resources. These people are likely to have the proverbial "keys to the kingdom" and can either share the keys or not. It is not necessarily that they are "hiding" the keys – they opt not to divulge the existence of the keys and/or their location. Sometimes the keys are sitting right in front of the student but because they do not know what the keys look like they miss them. To this point, many aspects of schooling are tacit and if students or parents are not aware of the nuances, then they do not learn important information within the school context and which institutional agents have the answers.

One aspect of education that is not widely discussed is the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs across the United States (Ford, 1996, 2011; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a; Moore & Flowers, 2010). No one group has a monopoly on the number of gifted

students globally; however, Black students across the United States are not being identified as gifted and talented and/or not being served once identified. For gifted and talented minority students, the lack of referrals or service can result in disastrous educational outcomes. In one of the few groundbreaking studies conducted on Black males in gifted education nationally, Moore and Flowers (2010) examined the representation of gifted, African American males in 20 of the nation's largest school districts. Data was collected from the U. S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection. The study examined the total number of African Americans in the districts and the total number enrolled in gifted programs. The results showed that "African American males comprised less than 10% of the gifted and talented enrollment with ample evidence suggesting that African American males are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. African American males represent a considerable percentage of the student enrollment in urban school districts; however, they reflect a small percentage of the enrollment in gifted and talented programs" (p. 67-68).

A gap in the literature exists as it pertains to gifted, African American male high school students and the racial, psychological, social, and cultural factors that impact their academic achievement. How will schools as institutions and their agents know how to foster these students' academic achievement if they are unaware the problem is more far-reaching than completing homework assignments and taking tests? For this reason, the researcher chose to utilize qualitative methodology to conduct the current study. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the students in the study, an analysis encompassing interviews and documents was necessary to share their story. In addressing their achievement outcomes, the researcher

hoped to capture their perceptions and attitudes regarding institutional agents, their peer group, and familial connections.

## 3.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors of gifted, Black male high school students and to see what factors positively and negatively influenced their academic success. The study explored the following research questions:

1. When examining the academic achievement of gifted, Black male students in an urban school district, what are their perceptions of their high school success?

2. What factors influence the academic success of gifted, Black male students?

3. What factors do gifted, Black male students in an urban school district identify as contributing to their academic success?
    a. What obstacles did the gifted, Black male students overcome to achieve their success?
    b. Conversely, what obstacles do gifted, Black male students face?
    c. What is the role of the institutional agents in overcoming these obstacles?
    d. What types of goals do these students have for their post-secondary lives?

## 3.3 Research Design

### 3.3.1 Theoretical Framework

This research study sought to understand the convergence of social capital theory, institutional theory, and label theory on the academic achievement of gifted, Black male high school students. Alone, any one of these theories could profoundly impact students and their achievement; however, when all three were examined simultaneously with students whose vulnerabilities are highlighted by race, gender, and a gifted identification label, the impact was substantial with far-reaching implications.

Social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). Ream and Stanton-Salazar (2007) believe that "researchers and educators should consider the resources and forms of support found in young people's social networks" (p. 69).

According to Stanton-Salazar (2011), "Social capital consists of resources and key forms of social support embedded in one's network or associations" (p. 1067). He also contends that social capital consists of three fundamental components: key resources, support, and institutional agents. In terms of schools and educational settings, "Social capital is fundamentally constituted in terms of resources or forms of 'institutional support' accessible by ego (e.g., a student) through direct or indirect social ties to other actors who assume the role of institutional agents (e.g., school counselor or teacher). In short, people are able to accomplish meaningful goals through their access to resources not their own" (p. 1086). Institutional (i.e., school personnel) agents have the capacity to steer students toward services, resources, and organizations.

Although Stanton-Salazar (1997) cites five issues related to social capital and low-status children, the researcher will focus on one: "the evaluation and recruitment processes by which school-based agents evaluate and select minority students for sponsorship; such selection processes largely entail perceptions of the student's ability and willingness to adopt the cultural capital and standards of the dominant group" (p. 7). Social capital is crucial to minority students in schools because if these relationships are strained or underdeveloped then students can miss out on valuable opportunities. In the school, social capital impacts what types of information are shared with students from adults (i.e., institutional agents). Information cannot be shared if students do not know the value of the relationship between institutional agents and themselves

and/or are too young to know that such a relationship exists. However, institutional agents know if they are sharing or withholding resources that impact students. By connecting or not connecting students to resources inside or outside of the school structure, institutional agents wield great power in the educational trajectory of some students. “Social capital is primarily a mechanism of privilege and domination, precisely because it is embedded in hierarchical, integrated, and reproductive social structures” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1085).

Currently in the United States, social capital can mean the difference between being innocent until proven guilty or guilty until proven innocent. This can mean probation for some crimes with those having social capital and jail time for others without it. Examples of social capital at play are evident daily in the media. Superstars, movie stars, and athletes commit crimes, but because they have an abundance of financial capital and/or social capital within the public eye and/or media, their transgressions may or may not yield the same consequence as with a person without the same type or similar social capital. Schools, microcosms of the larger society, also experience similar issues based on social capital. One student gets in trouble with the principal for one infraction while another student escapes suspension or expulsion for the same or a similar infraction based on who they are, who they know, what they look like, and a plethora of other factors relating to the social structure of the school.

Not only are there social divisions in schools, there are also economic divisions that occur in schools. This is seen around the country in inner cities and suburban districts where there is a stark contrast in resources (tangible and intangible) and the culture of achievement within schools. Sometimes there are differences within a school district between school A and school B which may be in close proximity of the other. Coleman (1966) researched the *High*

*School and Beyond* data set which studied students at 1,004 public, private, and parochial high schools and concluded that social capital has a significant impact on high school dropouts. According to Coleman (1988), "Social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (p. S98). In addition, Coleman believes that social capital exists in the relationship among persons. This sentiment is true for all students in school – from preschool to college and beyond. Because of race, Black students have and use different forms of social capital based on academic ability, athletic ability, social aptitude, gender and SES.

There is a double-edged sword that exists for minority students but especially African American students. The social capital used in their neighborhoods, churches, boys and girls clubs, etc. may not beget the same type of reward in school. Therefore, schools can be challenging places for students to navigate in the best circumstances, but when students are in a minority group and exhibit high levels of intelligence, the challenge can become confusing, exhausting, debilitating. Students struggle with peer relationships, teacher relationships, pleasing their parents, and staying true to themselves. These factors provide a map outlining the obstacle course Black students face in school and the academic and social decisions they must make daily. According to Kunjufu (1988), for some students, seeing the value of education is difficult. Educators need to explore all factors which may lead African American students to perform poorly in school: racism, slavery, inferior schools, the lack of African history, the job ceiling, fictive kinship, and a victimizing definition of blackness. Ogbu (1978) asks an important question, "Are the motives of formal education the same for the minority and majority groups?" (p. 26). It can be if school personnel can address the academic achievement of minority students

whereby "institutional resources and forms of support necessary for students' social networks can be achieved" (Ream & Stanton-Salazar, 2007, p. 69). Said another way, counselors and teachers can help students navigate the "complex institutional processes that can either facilitate or inhibit the trust necessary for help giving and help seeking – two forms of agency associated with social capital" (p. 69). Deficit orientation thinking from school personnel directly impacts the help giving aspect of social capital and the building of relationships and social networks in schools. Because of this, students may miss valuable opportunities which have far reaching implications.

Because schools are considered institutions of learning, the importance of institutional theory cannot be overlooked when discussing the diversity of educational outcomes and opportunity structures. According to institutional theorists Rowan and Miskel (1999), "Schools are organized to socialize students into a particular type of knowledge, and participation in the institution of schooling has real effects on the patterns of knowledge that students acquire. In addition, patterns of ethnic group formation in society, deeply institutionalized ideologies about the role of pupils in society, linkages among institutional sectors in society, and the distinctive institutional characteristics of schooling combine to affect student motivation and engagement in schooling, and through such processes, indirectly affect student achievement" (p. 378). A plethora of factors can impact student motivation and achievement in school and the unwritten social infrastructure of school culture. One central premise to institutional theory is "the idea that organizational conformity to institutionalized rules shapes the structure of organizations" (Rowan & Miskel, 1999, p. 366). When the discussion of organizational conformity is addressed, student interaction with institutional agents becomes key when looking at the social capital of

students inside of the school organization. Further, when teachers see students through a deficit lens and thus label these students negatively, the institution becomes a place of skewed judgment which has a negative impact on the credibility of the institution and inevitably the student suffers.

Because this study focused on gifted, Black male students, there was power both positive and negative in the labels associated with these male students. For children from disenfranchised populations, these labels can carry negative connotations and can ultimately alienate and disempower these students. Label Theory was borne out of the study of social deviance in sociological literature and is based on the premise that "if a label is applied to the individual, that this in fact causes the individual to become that which is labeled as being" (Rist, 1977, p. 299). For African American males, this premise is profound which echoes the sentiments of Majors and Billson (1992) in tenets of the cool pose theory. As this group struggles to adapt to the main stream and yet be different from the mainstream, a seemingly "good" label (depending on one's perspective) such as gifted can be viewed as a detriment in another setting or with another group (i.e., the African American community). On the contrary, if a student is negatively labeled by teachers and/or other institutional agents in school, then the student will most likely become what the label suggests. Further, Rist (1977) posits that the core of the self-fulfilling prophecy is "an expectation which defines a situation comes to influence the actual behavior within the situation so as to produce what was initially assumed to be there" (p. 299). In the K-12 environment, label theory has been linked to teacher expectations and the seminal study and publication of *Pygmalion in the Classroom* by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). In the broader picture, label theory can greatly impact entire groups of students in that the institution of

education “a major emphasis has been placed upon the role of institutions in sorting, labeling, tracking, and channeling persons along various routes depending upon the assessment the institution has made of the individual” (Rist, 1977, p. 300). For African American students, the internal struggle of having multiple labels can cause confusion if the labels conflict with one another as well as with the expectations of those labels from parents, institutional agents, and peers (Ford, 1996).

This dissertation project investigated the factors that cause gifted, Black male students to succeed or struggle in high school by examining their perceptions about the value of education and the role race, gender, and gifted identification impact their academic success with respect to psychological, cultural and racial contexts as well as familial and peer associations. Furthermore, the project examined institutional agents and their role in disseminating and sharing vital information which may be crucial to student outcomes. For this reason, the researcher utilized the case study approach because “case study assumes that ‘social reality’ is created through social interaction, albeit situated in particular contexts and histories, and seeks to identify and describe before trying to analyse and theorize” (Stark & Torrance, 2005, p. 33). According to Stake (2001), “Case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the readers experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization” (p. 131). According to Cusick (1973), researchers must study the environment through those who have constructed said meaning. Further, the interpretivist viewpoint understands that people construct their own reality which is multi-layered and standpoint dependent. Because of this, people live their lives according to how they perceive

themselves in their reality; therefore, generalizations cannot be used to explain the human experience but only provide patterns which to guide the researcher.

### 3.3.2 Population

The data for this qualitative investigation came from gifted, Black male, high school students in six high schools in an urban school district situated in a large Midwestern city. The participants were tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students. They were given the option to participate or not participate in the study. Although sixteen parents were contacted to participate in the study to share their insights on their student's giftedness and achievement, only three parents responded to one call and one email correspondence to set up a time to meet. To obtain the in-depth data desired, a qualitative research design was determined to be the most appropriate method to explore the achievement and underachievement of students in this school district. Furthermore, qualitative methods were used to answer questions about the quality of programs at their respective schools from their individual perspectives.

This study used a grounded theory approach. According to Creswell (2007), grounded theory research is the process of developing a theory, not testing a theory. An inductive model of theory development grounded in views from participants in the field. Strauss & Corbin (1990) explain that the researcher generates a theory that explains some action, interaction, or process. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that "the researcher prefers to have the guiding substantive theory emerge from the data because no a priori theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered" (p. 41). The strategies of this qualitative approach included analysis of the data throughout the collection of the data, a two-step coding

process that started the development of the theory by compiling field notes of interviews with students, memo writing, and writing up the theory (Strauss, 1969).

Further, the investigator recruited a purposeful sample of 16 students (i.e., six from one school, six from a second school, and four from four other high schools) who were enrolled at their high school (please note permission to conduct this study had already been granted by the principals). Letters were sent to perspective tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders who were identified as gifted, Black, and male. The data was collected using a face-to-face interview process lasting from 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The face-to-face interview process included the administration of a biographical questionnaire and a face-to-face individual interview, based on a pre-established, open-ended interviewing protocol. Field notes were also taken during the interview process. [2]

The face-to-face individual interviews were digitally audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Further, the transcription was done as soon as possible after the interviews by the researcher. The transcripts were coded and analyzed for emergent themes and sub-themes according to the grounded theory process.

### 3.3.3 Participant Selection

The general pool of students was selected based on their gifted identification using state approved tests cross-referenced with race and gender for the entire school. For the last five years, the district used the InView test for ability testing and the TerraNova test for achievement testing. Some students in the sample took the Woodcock Johnson III Achievement Test (WJ III),

[2] Pseudonyms were created for each school and participant to preserve the identity of all parties involved in the study.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), or the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test. The WJ III measures five curricular areas – reading, mathematics, written language, oral language, and academic knowledge. The CogAT assesses the cognitive development of students from kindergarten through grade 12 and measures students' learned reasoning abilities. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is an achievement battery of tests for students in kindergarten through grade 12. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is a computer-based adaptive assessment, designed to be given two or three times per year to measure a student's academic achievement and calculate academic growth. At the time of this study, the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT) was used for individual testing only, and some of the students could have been identified using this assessment. The NNAT is used for special populations including minorities, low socioeconomic students, or children for whom English is not their first language. All of these standardized tests are norm-referenced. Students were tested in grades 2 and 5 with an ability test and K-9 grades with the TerraNova or MAP online achievement assessments. Students were identified as gifted in creative thinking if they scored a 112 or higher on the InView ability test and earned a qualifying score on the *Checklist of Creative Behaviors* from the *Scales for Rating the Behavior Characteristics of Superior Students*. Students were also gifted identified if they scored in the 95$^{th}$ percentile or higher in math, reading, social studies, or science on one of the aforementioned achievement tests. In accordance with district and state policy, once a student is identified as gifted and talented that designation remains with the student throughout their K-12 academic career. For the purpose of the study, only Black male students in grades 10$^{th}$ to 12$^{th}$ and identified as academically gifted participated in the study. Because gifted, Black males would be selected from the entire student

body, this study was a purposeful sampling. These students were sent a letter from the researcher explaining the purpose of the research and requesting participation. Once the students returned the parental consent and assent forms, the researcher emailed the parent who signed the consent form to request an interview for the study.

### 3.3.4 Data Collection

*Individual Interviews*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the purposes of doing an interview include, among other things, obtaining here-and-now constructions of a persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with each student and three parents individually for approximately forty-five minutes to one hour in duration using an audio recording device. The researcher then transcribed the interview and contacted the participants as necessary for a follow-up interview to gain further insight or clarification. "The structured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer knows what he or she does not know and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find out" (p. 269).

*Document Collection*. Once assent and parental consent were obtained for each participant, the researcher reviewed the student's gifted identification and reviewed the student's high school transcript which provided "a rich source of information, contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 277). The researcher also obtained demographic data from each participant, and demographic data for the district and the schools regarding the general populations and the gifted population.

*General Interview Guide*. The researcher used a general interview guide. According to Patton (1990), "The interview guide helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (p. 343).

### 3.4 Researcher Subjectivity

"Qualitative inquiry, because the human being is the instrument of data collection, requires that the investigator carefully reflect upon, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error" (Patton, 2002, p. 51). The researcher is a gifted resource specialist in the participating school district. Furthermore, the researcher worked in the high schools where the participants attended school and engaged in activities geared towards gifted learners. The researcher in this study has been a gifted coordinator and gifted resource specialist in the participating district for 18 years. Of those 18 years, she spent 13 years as a gifted, high school coordinator, one year as an elementary resource specialist, and the last four as a gifted, high school resource specialist. She has been responsible for the Advanced Placement (AP) program that includes the coordination of exam ordering, ongoing teacher professional development, and the audit process. She also coordinated the implementation of a week-long AP Boot Camp during the summer preceding an AP student's school year to ensure a seamless transition and articulate expectations. This concept was then applied to the AP Winter Institute which met weekly in February and March to help students prepare for their AP Exams. Both the boot camp and the winter institute offered English and calculus and were taught by successful AP teachers in the district. The researcher also helped coordinate the AP Calculus Olympiad for the district's 200 AP Calculus students as preparation for the exam. The researcher also provided professional development to

teachers about gifted learners and their needs. The researcher conducted high school seminars for gifted students in grades 9-11 to discuss identification, gifted characteristics, social-emotional aspects of giftedness, and college readiness.

Three of the participants in the study attended gifted seminars the researcher conducted. When asked to take part in the study, the researcher made clear to the students that there was no pressure to participate. Participants were reminded throughout the study that they could withdraw at any time without fear of reprisal. They were also reminded that they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Furthermore, they were told that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process. The information was presented both in writing when they were recruited and verbally when garnering consent and assent.

### 3.5 Trustworthiness

Because of the position of the researcher in the district, methods were implemented to lessen the probability of unethical behavior, coercion, and/or impropriety. The researcher maintained high ethical standards throughout the research. Informed consent was explained to the students and their parents. Each student returned a parental consent form and an assent form. Those who were 18 returned the consent form. It was shared that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the process. Privacy and confidentiality of all participants was maintained and records stored according to The Ohio State University's Institution Review Board (IRB) policies. To conduct the research, IRB approval was obtained (The IRB approval form is included in Appendix H).

### 3.5.1 Credibility

Marshall and Rossman (2006) propose the researcher can establish credibility with "an in-depth description showing that the complexities of processes and interactions will be so imbedded with data derived from the setting that it is convincing to readers" (p. 201). Credibility can be established with triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks.

### 3.5.2 Triangulation

Lincoln and Guba suggest that "steps should be taken to validate each against at least one other source" (p. 283). "Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 202). Marshall and Rossman further assert that triangulation is about finding the multiple perspectives for knowing the social world. The following will be used to triangulate the data:

1. Individual interview data
2. School demographic questionnaires
3. School data
4. Family data
5. Community data

### 3.5.3 Research Team

The research team consisted of four members. One team member was an elementary principal working on his doctoral degree at a neighboring university. One team members was an adjunct instructor at a local college. One team member was a noninvolved retired professional

with whom the researcher had honest and non-confrontational conversation with at periodic intervals. (See Appendix G for full descriptions of research team members).

### 3.5.4 Member Checking

Member checking is a formal and information process whereby data, interpretations, and conclusion are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from which the data were originally collected. "The purpose is to give a respondent an immediate opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge perceived wrong interpretations. It also allows the respondent to summarize the information" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 314).

### 3.5.5 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the purpose of transferability, in which the researcher should argue that his findings are useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice. Rich description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability.

### 3.5.6 Dependability

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), dependability attempts to account for the changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that in order for a qualitative study to be dependable there needs to be a logical, traceable, and documented audit trail. The following techniques were used in developing the audit trail: a research protocol, interview protocol, demographic questionnaire, participant interviews, interview transcripts, code books, research team analysis, and email correspondence with participants for member checking purposes.

### 3.5.7 Confirmability

Marshall and Rossman (2006) propose that the construct of confirmability captures the traditional concept of objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the findings should be able to be confirmed by others. Furthermore, they assert that because of the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry the research should be transparent to others; thereby increasing the strength of the assertions. To this end, the researcher used triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking.

## 3.6 Authenticity

Being authentic means being balanced, fair, and takes into account multiple perspectives (Patton, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Authenticity was practiced by being open and honest with the participants and their families about the necessity and goal of this research to better inform school personnel of the needs of this population. The researcher shared with the participants that by communicating their experiences for this study that their voices would be heard and resound with those who work with gifted, Black males.

# Chapter 4: Results

## 4.1 Introduction

This study sought to examine the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors of gifted, Black male high school students. This study also sought to explore the factors that positively and negatively influence these students. African Americans are alarmingly underrepresented in gifted and talented programs in the United States (Ford, Moore, and Whiting, 2006). In 2011-12, there were 50,044,522 elementary and secondary students in the United States and 6.4% were identified as gifted and talented. Of the 6.4% of gifted identified students, African Americans represent only 3.6%, Hispanic students represent 4.6% while Whites and Asians represent 7.6% and 13% respectively (Digest of Education Statistics, 2015). This chapter provides empirical findings using a demographic questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, transcripts, and member checking responses. The researcher and the research team came to 100% consensus when conducting the initial and the axial coding of the transcripts to ensure confirmability. The researcher used lengthy quotes to fully capture the feelings and experiences of the participants. According to Patton (2002), "Sufficient description and direct quotations should be included to allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented" and that "qualitative analysis is grounded in 'thick description'" (p. 503).

The chapter begins with a description of the participants, emerging themes, and quotes to clearly highlight the themes. The researcher asked the participants to confirm the emerging themes. The results of this study answered the questions of these gifted, Black high school males:

1. When examining the academic achievement of gifted, Black males in an urban school district, what are the perceptions of their high school success?

2. What factors influence the overall academic success of gifted, Black males?

3. What factors do gifted, Black males in an urban school district identify as contributing to their success?
    a. What obstacles did the gifted, Black males overcome to achieve their success?
    b. Conversely, what obstacles do gifted, Black students face?
    c. What is the role of the institutional agents in overcoming these obstacles?
    d. What types of goals do these students have for their post-secondary lives?

## 4.2 Description of the Participants

The researcher obtained permission from the school district to conduct research at all of the high schools in the district. However, the researcher intended only to conduct research at one high school in the district with an adequate number of available participants. The administration of that school disseminated the recruitment letter to all eligible students to participate in the study. Although 27 students were eligible based on test scores for gifted identification, six students returned the parental consent and assent forms. With only six students from one school, the researcher gave the recruitment letter to another administrator from a second high school in the district. Of the 17 students eligible to participate in the study, six students returned the parental consent and assent forms. With only 12 participants, the researcher asked another high school administrator in the district to disseminate the recruitment letter to eligible students. With only three eligible students, one returned the parental consent and the assent form. This happened three more times with the researcher asking high school administrators to disseminate the recruitment letter, and only one student from each of those high schools returned the parental

consent and assent forms to the researcher. Two of the students in the last category were dually enrolled in their respective high schools while also attending classes full-time at the local university. One student was in his senior year in high school while fulfilling his freshman requirements at the local university. The other high school senior from a different high school was in his second year at the same university fulfilling his sophomore requirements (see Appendix A).

Table 4.1: Frequencies and percentages by age and gender

| | **AGE** | | | | **GRADE** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Category** | *15* | 16 | 17 | 18 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| **Number** | 2 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 9 |
| **Pct.** | 12.5% | 18.75% | 50% | 18.75% | 18.75% | 25% | 56.25% |

Table 4.1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the participants by age and gender. All of the participants were gifted, Black male high school students. The participants ranged in age from 15-18 years old. There were three sophomores, four juniors, and nine seniors. Over 50% of the participants were seniors.

Table 4.2: Frequencies and percentages by grade point average, free/reduced priced lunch, and school type

| | **Grade Point Avg. (GPA)** | | **Free/Reduced Priced Lunch** | | | **Type of High School** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Category** | 3.5 and Above | 3.4 and Below | Y | N | NR | Traditional | Lottery | Career | Dual Enrollment |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number** | 8 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 1 | 2 |
| **Pct.** | **50%** | **50%** | **37.5%** | **50%** | **37.5%** | **6.25%** | **75%** | **6.25%** | **12.5%** |

Table 4.2 shows the frequencies and percentages of the participants by grade point average, free/reduced priced lunch, and school type. Fifty-percent of the students earned above a 3.5 grade point average and 50% earned below a 3.5 grade point average. See Appendix A for the breakdown of all participants' grade point averages. When asked about free and reduced lunch price status, eight participants reported they qualified for free/reduced lunch. Six reported they did not qualify for free/reduced lunch status, and two chose not to answer the question. Although this is a public school district, 75% of the participants attended lottery schools within the district. This district defined a lottery school as one where the student applies for admittance to a school with a specialized program and/or curriculum and is offered a seat in that school; additionally, a lottery school was considered a school not in the student's attendance area that a student had to apply to for admittance. Of the 16 participants, six attended a lottery school that was predominantly African American. Six attended a lottery school that was racially diverse. One attended his home school in his attendance boundary area. One attended a career academy with a strong academic focus.

Table 4.3: Frequencies and percentages by highest level of educational attainment by a primary parent or guardian

**Highest Level of Education Attained by Primary Parent or Guardian**

| **Category** | HS Diploma | Some College | Bus. or Trade School | 2 Yr. College Degree | 4 Yr. College Degree | Some Grad/Prof School | Grad/Prof School Degree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number** | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| **Pct.** | 18.75% | 25% | 0% | 6.25% | 18.75% | 0% | 31.25% |

Table 4.3 shows the frequencies and percentages by highest level of educational attainment by a primary parent or guardian. Of the sixteen participants, over 50% of their parents/guardians completed some type of post-secondary degree. See Appendix A for a full summary of this information.

Through the research questions, participants shared their experiences and perceptions of factors that influenced their academic success, the obstacles faced by them and other gifted, Black students in their high schools, and the support given by their families, peers, and/or school personnel to aid in their success. Additionally, the participants shared their perceptions and originally a list of 53 general themes emerged. Axial coding led to five major themes with 100% consensus by the research team. This section is divided by those five themes: (a) educational opportunity structures, (b) academic achievement, (c) academic isolation and loneliness, (d) academic expectations, and (e) support of significant individuals versus non-support of significant individuals. The themes highlighted in this chapter are related to their K-12 gifted experiences and the academic growth of these young men. Furthermore, the chapter explores their individual and collective ties to their schools and teachers and the impact both have on their academic pursuits.

## 4.3 Educational Opportunity Structures

### 4.3.1 Early Learning Opportunities

According to Davis and Rimm (1998), "Quality programs designed to educate young children usually incorporate the best educational practices in the field. Typically, early childhood programs are child-centered, family-friendly, individualized, experiential, developmentally appropriate, warm, nurturing, attend to holistic needs of the child, and integrate theme-based curricula" (p. 73-75). Many of the participants shared that they enjoyed their K-8 early learning experiences and that their schools and teachers prepared them well for the next academic level. Joey, a junior, 3.42 GPA, attended a career academy with a strong academic focus. He attended a K-8 building and described his experience very positively. He stated:

> I went to Fontwell for elementary and middle school. That whole process was good to me. I was actually one of a few who went to the old Fontwell and got to be in the new school, so that was a pretty cool experience. But the teachers were good, we had a good education over there. We learned a lot. Then high school, everything kept going. I went to Atwater. I knew a lot of people from Fontwell who went there also, so that was good. It was definitely harder than middle school, hard than what I thought, but it's all good.

Other students from Fontwell K-8 offered similar experiences with their teachers and curriculum at the school. Jim, a junior, 3.06 GPA, attended a lottery school with an emphasis on college readiness. He said he felt prepared by his gifted experience. "All three were pretty good all around. I definitely thought they prepared us well in elementary and middle school for high school, especially since the high school I go to now is a college prep school. They tried their best getting us ready for that." Kevin, a sophomore, 3.85 GPA, who attended that same school as Jim believed the gifted programming leading up to high school exceeded his expectations and

allowed him to flourish. Fourteen of the sixteen participants were gifted identified by third grade and experienced the district's cluster model, pull out model, and/or self-contained gifted class. Two of the participants were identified after moving into the school district in late elementary/early middle school. Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, expressed his appreciation for the early identification of students as an early learning experience. He shared:

> I would say a strength is early identification, because you knew in 2nd or 3rd grade that you were gifted and they would bring that up every year. I think Damsel Elementary School had it ingrained in the curriculum because there was so many of us, so I didn't really – I don't remember ever being pulled out for that stuff.

As positive as the participants felt about the elementary and middle school gifted programming, that same feeling was absent when talking about gifted high school services. Many felt abandoned when they transitioned to high school because they perceived there was no formalized gifted service because they did not get pulled from class or provided specific enrichment opportunities by a gifted coordinator. Many wondered if they were still identified as gifted since they were not experiencing their "normal" gifted programming. Jasper, sophomore, 3.20 GPA noted, "In high school, I feel we don't really get as much exposure as we did in middle school and elementary. I feel they don't really pay attention to us anymore. Besides the fact that we are in harder classes, we don't do anything special that we used to do at my other school." Many of the participants cited a lack of high school gifted services as a weakness of the gifted program in this district. There seemed to be a lack of communication on the part of the middle school gifted coordinator with the students to alert them to a significant change in gifted programming for high school. In many states, gifted programming at the high school level is

Advanced Placement® courses, International Baccalaureate® courses, honors courses, and college-level programs offered at the high school or at the college. Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, believed that "a weakness would be the continuation into high school and what that means going forward, 'You're gifted. This is what you can do with this. These are some of the options that you can kind of pursue going forward.'" This spoke to the communication from the gifted coordinator and/or the counselor to the students and parent about what to expect at high school.

### 4.3.2 Friendship Factor - Natural Consequence of Cluster Grouping

According to VanTassel-Baska (1989), "Cluster grouping is a type of with-in class grouping. Several talented students or even all of the talented students are placed with a teacher who will respond to their needs by differentiating the curriculum for them" (p. 270). A cluster group can consist of 2-10 students in a larger class. With the participants, the highlight of the cluster group was the establishment of a circle of friends or like-minded peers which usually began in elementary and continued in high school. Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, felt like the strengths of the cluster group was "bringing students together that have similar drives, that kind of each have a yearning for success. I've been friends with people in the program for most of my life now, and we're still in contact. People like I met in 6$^{th}$ grade, I still talk to today." Each student shared that the students they met in the cluster group remained with them for years as they matriculated from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. Jasper, sophomore, 3.20 GPA, said that he associates with people just like him, and they have been together since kindergarten. "They have the same experiences with everything." These

students expressed positive feelings not only about being identified as gifted and participating in a gifted program but also being with a group of peers who are like-minded and understand the importance of achievement. Silverman (2000) echoes this sentiment in that "boys and girls alike are happier and better adjusted when they have opportunities to relate to other gifted children" (p 308). This type of positive peer interaction then helps to lessen feelings of isolation that may occur. Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA felt, "Everyone in my group was good with being smart. I think in 7th or 8th grade, my class – cause we had three different classes, and my class seemed to have all the smart kids. Almost half of the class or more than half the class was definitely AP students and most of us were labeled gifted." Positive peer interactions and influences allowed these students to feel good about being identified as gifted as well as participating in gifted programming. PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, believed elementary school was pretty fun. This illuminates the importance of friends or like-minded peers in these programs so that minority students do not feel isolated and alienated and can continue to enjoy a learning environment they a part of :

> I know your probably not looking for nostalgia, but I liked it (elementary school). I knew a lot of gifted kids. I was on the chess club and stuff, so I was surrounded by a lot of smart people, but we also had fun so that was pretty nice. I think I told you this earlier, but I wanted to skip third grade, but I hesitated. It wasn't that I couldn't handle it, of course I really wanted to. It's that I didn't want to leave my friends.

Worrell (2012) as cited in Siegle et al. (2016) "determined that ethnic or language minority group members my find a similar sense of belonging when grouped with academic peers" (p. 120).

### 4.3.3 Enrichment Opportunities

Enrichment is often regarded as something extra, a nonessential frill that is not considered during serious discussions about student achievement. Yet, ignoring this critical component of instruction belies the importance of student engagement and motivation to learn and the dynamic quality that occurs when this energy exists in the learning environment. When students' interests and choices related to their own learning are considered, engagement in learning is enhanced (Reis & Fogarty, 2006; Siegle & McCoach, 2005). All of the participants in the study believed the enrichment opportunities they received because of their gifted identification provided them with unique and varied learning experiences. According to Frank, sophomore, 3.56 GPA, "The gifted program is definitely good, especially in middle school when you can do a lot like the mock trial and a math competition that we went to." Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA concurred with Frank's observation of participating in the mock trial competition. "I got to see different things I wouldn't have seen doing like mock trial and stuff. I definitely know I wouldn't have seen anything like that just being a regular student." Leonardo, senior, 4.58 GPA, liked that the enrichment activities seemed tailored to the interests of the gifted students. He stated that:

> It's been a great experience. Its let me see new things, try new things and really showed me how great I am as an individual both in school and out of the classroom. I wish that there were more opportunities as a high schooler for the gifted and talented program. I know that there's not enough time in the schedule of high schoolers to pull them out for separate activities, but it is really helpful to have that experience in middle school. They'd take you out and do different things that are separate from the curriculum set up already for everyone. It's tailored toward you as an individual to try new things and experiment and take on challenges.

Several students cited the tailored curriculum as both a personalized experience and a unique opportunity that general education students did not receive; and yet, was a benefit for identified gifted students. Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, noted that "it felt like your path was your own and not because you were in some group or some clique, but because you were allowed to choose which course you took, how you took it, if it suited you or not. I felt it was definitely more tailored to the experience of the individual, not so much the experience of the group." Consistent with the student's perceptions of their academic experiences, Henfield (2008) notes that given appropriate curricular opportunities students will thrive.

Gifted students are not a homogenous group; therefore, a one-size fits all approach can be detrimental to students. As school personnel, it is important to tailor programming to meet students' academic, social needs and help them to navigate social pressures (Schroth, 2008). According to Jim, junior, 3.06 GPA, he credited early learning opportunities and appropriate curricular programming as the foundation for his educational path:

> I think being a gifted-- I went into the self-contained GT program in 4th and 5th grade, so I think that kind of set in motion my educational path starting from there. When I started that I went to Goodson MS which had a lot of gifted kids there and from there I ended up going to Boxted for smart kids, really good teachers, stuff like that. So I think that being labeled as gifted really just kind of allowed me to have better opportunities educationally.

Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA, felt similarly in that "The gifted program provided me a lot of possibilities and career choices and ideas. It has showed me more doors for the positive. I feel like just having the chance to be in a gifted program was great, and I feel like being in it has only boosted my chances to succeed." Of all of the participants, Daniel, junior, 2.70 GPA, cited school personnel as being the conduit for the opportunities shared with students. "In VCS, you

get lots of special opportunities. The counselors will send you a lot of emails to different programs of your interest. If you tell them about colleges that you're interested in, they'll let you know far ahead of time when certain colleges are coming to visit your school." This revealed opportunities being provided by gifted resources specialists, gifted coordinators, or school personnel. However, in high school, the students rely on guidance counselors for information about post-secondary possibilities. Although Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, appreciated the academic opportunities the gifted program afforded him, he felt like the students in the visual and performing arts and athletics lacked equivalent opportunities and their needs were not addressed in the enrichment experience:

> I felt like the opportunities allotted that student that was identified specifically in the science – or the four courses, the social studies, the math, the science, reading, those areas. I felt they were very good at giving us more opportunities to succeed more rigor, more – just a faster track through high school course, more opportunity. I felt a shortcoming was when it came to the students. I didn't find visual arts, performing arts, or athletics. I felt like the focus there wasn't as strong to give those students more – a piano prodigy more practice, more personalized education in that field. I felt like the focus was more on the academic book work students instead of the art students. I felt it definitely hurt that community as far as their possibilities and their growth, not to say they weren't able to grow given the school's opportunities.

#### 4.3.4 Teacher belief

A function of being afforded educational opportunity structures is that of teacher belief which is directly related to teacher support, teacher expectation, teacher competence, and student achievement. Oftentimes teachers are considered the gatekeepers of access to gifted programs because teachers usually refer those students who sit quietly in class, complete all work, and are well-behaved. This bias can negatively impact culturally diverse learners. Teacher beliefs are powerful as evidenced by the seminal work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) and the self-

fulfilling prophecy regarding student achievement. Cranston, Jack, and Leonardo felt they were given opportunities to participate in gifted and talented programs because of the belief of their teacher in their academic abilities. It has been well documented that deficit ideologies exist for teachers when referring minority students for gifted identification (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005b; Silverman, 2000). According to Evans (2000), "The deficit model, as it applies to the gifted child in the school system, results in (1) lack of identification of the child as being gifted; (2) lack of encouragement to develop gifts and talents; (3) and identification of the child as a discipline or behavior problem when she or he acts defiantly, resulting in referrals for placement in special education" (p. 280). None of the participants felt as if their particular teachers did not believe in their abilities and potential for success. More specifically, Leonardo appreciated that his English teacher believed in him for a part in the school musical. Jack, senior, 3.65, echoed this sentiment as he discussed his self-contained gifted teacher when she selected him to read his poetry for the Black History Program at his school:

> So I remember I think I was in 4th grade and it was the year President Obama first got elected for his first term. So my school did something for – Foxmill did something for Black History Month and I was chosen to play Barack Obama for – to portray his inauguration. So I felt that – I was also told to give one of my speeches that I wrote at the time.

### 4.3.5 Cultural Competence

According to the National Education Association (NEA), cultural competence is "having the awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families" (n.d.). With regard to teachers, cultural competence became salient in the interviews with the participants. They cited different types of cultural competence related to engagement (PK), gifted

identification referrals (Jim and Jasper), knowledge with regard to African American history and language (Jack and Kevin), establishing a nurturing a relationship that encouraged them to extend beyond their potential and seeing the capability of the student (Jack and Leonardo), and seeing potential in students (Cranston and Jack). Students differentiated between teacher belief in them and exhibiting cultural competence. Students knew how the teachers motivated and encouraged them because of how they believed in them; whereas, they also expressed the teachers awareness, knowledge and acceptance of diversity and diverse learners. This is in line with Ford and Milner's (2005) assertion that "Teachers must recognize the historical and contemporary issues that frame the experiences of culturally diverse students, and use those unique experiences to make connections, to bridge issues, and to create effective pedagogy" (p. 12).

## 4.4 Academic Achievement

### 4.4.1 Goals

In pre-school and elementary school, the concept of self-regulation is reinforced by teachers in everyday activities. Young students learn to control their behavior, follow directions, set goals, and persist towards those goals. As students matriculate through school, these skills are practiced and reinforced regularly. According to Bronson (2000), "Self-regulating behaviors include goal-setting, strategic planning, strategy implementation, and monitoring. Motivation is at the center of self-regulation and must be considered in relation to the development of all forms of voluntary control" (p. 5). The students in the study set goals to achieve for various reasons. Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, described his drive to perform well insightfully with the following:

> So it's more so I've always just been driven by my own goals and passions, just to succeed and make a difference. So aside from parental support, from parental involvement to make sure I do do well, I feel like the only reason why I would stay up an extra hour to do homework or stay after school to get some work done is for my own goals, the best way for me to do it, regardless of the stress of school or whatever, but I certainly do feel the end justifies the means in this case.

Although Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, wanted to do well for his own sense of well-being, he was keenly aware of the sacrifices of his parents and wanted to do well for them and himself. "Other than my parents – well, I know what my parents work for. I just want to make their life easier as I go on. I know how much college costs and stuff, so I want to take as much of that burden away from them or off of them, so I work hard to get good grades so I can assure that I'll go to college." John, senior, 3.8 GPA, also acknowledged his parents expectations but ultimately felt that he has to do well for himself. "I definitely have pressure from my parents to do well. But I guess other people, they're used to getting like C's and stuff and 2.0's, and I could never do that. I would not feel comfortable with myself if I got that." Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA, wants to major in athletic training and was offered a partial scholarship offer from a local university. He stated, "Just that I know I can, and I have a goal. I know what I want to be and what I've got to do to get there. It's just that."

### 4.4.2 Perseverance and Resolve – "I'm just normal; I'm just me."

All of the students exhibited resolve, persistence, and perseverance even if their grades did not always reflect their ability. Cook and Cook (2009) believe that:

> Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and control our own behavior, emotions, or thoughts, altering them in accordance with the demands of the situation. It includes the abilities to inhibit first responses, to resist interference from irrelevant stimulation, and to persist on relevant tasks even when they don't enjoy them (p. 352).

Tony, senior, 3.06 GPA, took a class that he enjoyed knowing it would mean he would have to take another class that was more challenging and less enjoyable. He retained his focus even though his class was challenging and not the class he really wanted to take. He persisted knowing the class would be beneficial preparation for college:

> Chemistry is not my favorite subject. Sadly I couldn't get into AP Biology this year. It didn't fit in my schedule. I realized that I really wanted to take Major British Writers and that was more important to me than AP Bio, so I was like, "Okay, put me in AP Chemistry. That way I'll learn something to prepare me for college classes," instead of saying, "You know what? I don't have to take a fourth science credit this year." So I regret it every other day when we're learning or taking a test in chemistry because it's definitely not the easiest subject for me. Other than the fact that I have to do it every day, no matter what happens, I will come to school and I will sit in the class. I know a lot of people, if they don't like a class they'll skip it, even if it caused like our high standards. I don't think I've ever wanted to quit so much that I've decided to actually do it. I know that AP Chemistry is a class that I need to take, so I'm going to take it and I'm going to try, even if I can't physically force myself to just do everything that's necessary, I will try to do whatever it takes to get through the course and to learn. I think that what I take from the class is more important, to me at least, than the grade I might have in there.

Some of the students attended high schools with rigorous college preparatory programs. Although their pathways to college were different, the curricular experiences for two of the participants was rigorous enough to prepare them for post-secondary education. Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, persevered through a challenging curriculum but felt prepared by his high school experience for college:

> Then, high school was kind of the opposite of my K-8 experience. It was a very shocking moment. You get there and you are a number. You are a general statistic that a lot of the teachers – I don't want to say they take for granted, but they overlook you and your needs. So that's why I think a lot of the kids either got kicked out or dropped out of Payne, or just left to transfer because it was difficult. The teachers would go very fast. If you weren't prepared to keep the standard, you were left behind. So it was a very big shock in terms of the learning curve at Payne. But the standard I feel like for me, as my

> sophomore year rolled around, as a standard was set higher and higher. It gave me that room to grow, grow into the model that they were setting up for us. If you weren't keen to challenge, you were left behind.

Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, believed that although he received a good education from the college-prep, lottery school he attended, he would have preferred to attend another school because of an engineering program at that school. However, his parents wanted and encouraged him to attend the more prestigious lottery school because of the robust and rigorous course offerings. Even though he attended the school of his parent's choice, he persisted for four years in relative unhappiness about their decision:

| | |
|---|---|
| Smith: | So, what individuals have been least supportive in your academic pursuits, if any? |
| Jack: | Someone who really hurt my academic experience, me being in high school now it's hurt me a little bit because I'm not able to take classes that are relevant to my field of choice, whereas I probably would have had those opportunities in another school. So I'd say probably a parental doing of which school I go to. Although it had benefits, it also had its negative side. My parents were the negative influence in my career, but more so I feel like it was a decision made that kind of affected me both ways, both positively and negatively in different ways, not having a class here for engineering or business, more opportunities, more things like that. It was a kind of a double edged sword, but I'd say for as much support as they've been over the years, I feel like that one decision has kind of stuck out to me more. |
| Smith: | So having said that, what would you have changed? |
| Jack: | Well, if I were to change anything, I probably would have chosen to go to another school that had the courses I would have liked to have taken in the future, for instance Stratford for the engineering classes. Not specifically because the coursework at Boxted is insufficient, but because to give myself a better resume, better description of my interests and what I'm looking to do in the next stage of school. |

These two students persevered in spite of and beyond stereotyping by those in society. Although they could have responded negatively, both participants used the experience to educate or inform to dispel the stereotype.

> Smith: You talked earlier about that you like to dispel the stereotypes and break down those kind of expectations, those negative expectations. Do you think your peers feel that they have to live up to those negative expectations?
>
> Leonardo: I personally don't feel that they have to. They can break them in their own special ways. Some are good at art or music, or in the class maybe science or something. They can break those stereotypes in their own way without being identified as gifted. We all face the same pressures. I don't think the label changes that. I think we're all viewed in the same way possibly. You just have to keep going and get beyond it (Leonardo, senior, 4.58 GPA).

Craston, senior, 3.31 GPA, felt similarly to Leonardo in that as an African American male in today's society, a person just has to be true to themselves:

> People don't expect it because of the way I act and talk – I'm normal. I remember when I went to the shooting range because my cousin is a police officer and we got certified at this gun range and this dude – some white dude, some old white man was talking about school and asked me what my favorite subject was and before I even said anything, he said I bet you don't even have a favorite subject and I just looked at him like, what? I was like twelve or something and I said no, my favorite subject is math and he was surprised because a lot of people don't like math and I enjoy it. He made an assumption based on a stereotype and probably the way I look. I don't really carry myself like, "Ah, I'm the most prestigious thing and you are below me. I'm just normal." I'm just me.

### 4.4.3 Procrastination

Many of the students expressed frustration that they procrastinated on assignments and studying which ultimately impacted their academic performance. In some cases, the impact had a nominal effect within one class or one subject area. For other students, the impact was felt across the span of the school year or their entire high school career. Daniel, junior, 2.70 GPA, noted that

he has not achieved to his highest ability because of procrastinating. “I’ve formed a habit of procrastinating. If I didn’t procrastinate, then I would definitely have achieved a higher grade point average and also higher overall marks.” PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, shared that there is a duality to perfectionism and procrastination:

> It’s like, “Okay, if I can’t do the best, then screw it. I’m not going to do it at all,” and obviously that hurts you when you realize there are only a certain amount of points available in the class. And then when you start procrastinating or when you just say you’re not going to do it at all, you realize you have to make it back somewhere and since I freak out-- Let’s say you’ve got 9 weeks here. You’ve got these assignments all worth this much and this percent of your grade. So, okay, if I do well on the tests here, get like a B average on the tests, homework on these chapters here, screw those other ones, and I start working it out, working it out.

Students also acknowledged that they did not procrastinate in other areas of their life where they found enjoyment or had a passion for particular topics. Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, explicated “In other parts of my life, I don’t procrastinate. With my passion for fitness, I’m always trying to learn new things every single day. That is my passion, and I don’t procrastinate with that. If I could turn it off and on, I would, but I can’t. It’s just – I’m not really interested in what I’m learning right now. So, it’s kind of hard for me to get engaged in that kind of thing. I’ll still do it because I have to.” Tony, senior, 3.06 GPA, conveyed a similar story as Will. He procrastinated because he did not put forth as much effort into endeavors he did not care about. He shared that he loves psychology and reads those textbooks in his spare time:

> I am a bit of a procrastinator. That’s definitely been one of my biggest issues forever. I think that when I have something that I really want to do, like I want to study in psychology, so I know that no matter what happens in my life, I will always push myself to do that. At the same time, if I don’t like the book we’re reading in Humanities, I might “Spark Note” it instead of spending 45 minutes to read it, because it’s boring and I don’t want to fall asleep on the bus home. It’s more a personal decision that I have for some things chosen not to care as much as the things I’m really passionate about.

Some students noted that they loved learning for learning sake and that school did not always address that thirst for knowledge. “I like learning why things happen or why something is the way it is. Like just to know the ‘what’ doesn’t really interest me that much. It’s like how did it get there and also why are we still doing it like that?” (PK, senior, 2.57 GPA). The issue Tony raised about homework was echoed by other participants in the study. For Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA, he cited that a lack of balance between academics and extracurricular activities impacted his achievement:

> Just academically, I know I slipped up my sophomore and junior year for pretty much the whole time. I could have done so much better. My GPA could be way better than what it is right now… during sophomore year it was because of football and I didn’t know how to balance it. But then after football season ended, the bad habits had already started and I just never – I didn’t break them until junior year last grading period. It wasn’t as bad as it could have been where I wasn’t getting one points. I was getting 2.7’s and 2.9’s which is bad for me, but it might not be as bad for somebody else. I don’t study at all. I don’t. I’m a good test taker. I’ve never had to study really. While I’m a good test taker, I’m bad at doing homework. I procrastinate and I don’t like to do it, but I always know, yeah, I could have done better just because I know I don’t do my homework well. I know I don’t like doing work. I like learning information, but homework is just boring to me.

#### 4.4.4 Motivation – A shift of perspective

Motivation and effort mirrored engagement and interest and were significant topics with the participants. Some students identified their lack of motivation as laziness while others discussed their boredom in their classes. John, senior, 3.8 GPA, admitted that he could have performed better in school had he applied himself. “Sometimes I get lazy, and I really don’t feel like doing work. I’ve done good, but I could have done better.” Fourteen of the 16 students said

they could have performed better academically. Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, explained his lack of motivation as a lack of challenge from his classes:

> I haven't put my best effort into everything school-wise. My dad always says – cause I'm real competitive athletically too, and my dad always tells me to look at school like track or basketball and how hard I work in those sports I need to work that hard, or twice as hard academically. I've just got to work harder. I think I'm busy, but I'm really not. I can always put forth more effort. In terms of studying, I probably study about 5 hours maybe. It's not a lot. That's one thing I've got to work on, my study habits. I'm not a very good studier. I could have a 4.0 every quarter. School is not hard to me. Sometimes I just don't feel like doing it. It's not hard. Some stuff might be challenging, but I don't think it's anything I can't do and I have plenty of resources to help me.

Although Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, was a high achiever, he struggled with procrastination, perfectionism, and a lack of engagement. He overcame them all to graduate at the top of his class, but he still felt like something was missing which impacted his high school experience.

> I just feel like what I've been learning in school hasn't been what I would think is interesting to me. I don't know. I've always been good at a number of things, but just because you're good at something doesn't mean you enjoy it. That's basically, how I feel, my take on school. I've always gotten good grades, but I've never really enjoyed the classes.

Similar to Will, Tre, junior, 4.02 GPA, discovered his life passion in middle school and reinvented himself to reflect increased self-efficacy:

> When I was in 8$^{th}$ grade, I started finding personal self-development. I started wanting to improve as much as possible, so I created a vision board and on my vision board I have all my list of goals and consciousness that I want to do. So what that allowed me to do was find my true passion which is international relations which I want to go around the world to help people, but I also want to be an entrepreneur so help to find and start my own business.

PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, reiterated the previous point about the purpose of homework and wanted more practical preparation for his post-secondary life:

> I guess I wasn't taking the work (in high school) seriously. I still don't. Like, I know its purpose. I get what it's there for. I get the skill they're trying to build for you in adulthood. I understand why we take these classes, but when you just look at it it just doesn't seem important. It's like it becomes hard to care about this stuff enough to do well at it. You know there's going to be another, right? There's going to be another packet. There's going to be another test. There's going to be another whatever. Maybe it just requires the shift of perspective on your part, but after a while it's just like why am I trying so hard and nothing different is happening? Maybe that's even a problem that you expect things to change. Maybe that's like an entitlement, I don't know.

Daniel, junior, 2.70 GPA, expressed both his motivation and lack thereof as a function of knowing what he is supposed to do conflicting with what he does on a daily basis. "What motivates me to excel is when I think about college and what all I can achieve later on in life if I do well. Then what motivates me to not do well are just distractions like my phone, or TV – not TV as much, but getting on the computer, playing games and stuff like that." Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA, shared he was motivated by being the best of the best. In more than one class, he sought out points he missed/lost on tests and homework assignments to raise his overall grade. He believed he knew the material more thoroughly than what he actually knew and skimmed over new concepts, but then saw the material again on quizzes and tests:

> I'm always looking for the extra two points that I didn't get and I always really hated it. I think it's really silly mistakes and glazing over things kind of causes that. Then maybe triple checking my work would help with that. I got 105% on a test in math recently, but I felt like I wanted to retake it because I didn't get 110%. I missed one question which would have given me a perfect score. Most of the time, I see myself as a perfectionist. Sometimes even if you need to know when you couldn't have gotten that extra point, but a lot of times I do want to be the best of the best.

Leonardo, senior, 4.58 GPA, shared Kevin's sentiment about being the best. He also labeled himself a perfectionist. "I want to strive to be the best I can be. I've been labeled a perfectionist by some. I'm very competitive. I just have great expectations of me." Some participants noted the amount of homework either was overwhelming in volume or not a priority because of other activities. Although these students persevered in spite of their lack of enjoyment and fulfillment at school, they were not achieving to their potential. Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, on the other hand, felt rewarded for not applying himself in high school. "I could have been valedictorian if I wanted to, but it was very interesting because I would receive the grade, I would get the grade and I'd look at it and I'd be like, 'Wow, I didn't study for this at all, and this is the grade I'm receiving.' That just threw more wood into the fire and like, 'Okay, I'm not going to study the next time either.' It was just like this continuing cycle of, 'Okay, you didn't study this time and you got this grade.'"

Although 14 of the 16 participants had grade point averages above 3.0, that same number of students underachieved. There was a gap between their potential and their academic performance. They cited poor time management, a lack of effort, and not committing enough time to studying. Rimm (1995) believes most gifted and talented youth profit from explicit training in time management, study, goal setting skills, and prioritizing to prevent them from becoming underachievers.

### 4.5 Academic Expectations

All of the students in the study shared that their families held high expectations for them for different reasons. Some parents and families expected the participants to attend college

because either they attended college or wanted their child to attend but could not afford to send them. There were expectations related to being a role model for younger siblings. Some parents held high expectations for their student because they knew the student were capable of high achievement or performance. The students also noted a level of expectation from school personnel. If students exhibited potential or high achievement, the teachers expected the students to perform well. All of the students held high expectations for themselves. Even if the students were not performing academically up to their potential, they still held high expectations for themselves.

### 4.5.1 Familial Expectations – "They don't want to see lower than a B, basically."

For nine of the participants, their parents attended and graduated from college, and the students felt the pressure to follow suit. Kevin's mom stated, "I think our child is motivated by our high expectations of him. We both have graduate level degrees, and he is aware that we want the same success for him in the future" (Mrs. Newman, parent). According to Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, "Doing good in school is expected. That runs in my family. I have no choice but to excel in school. At a young age I've been learning. Learning kind of comes easy and I enjoy it." Joey also shared that both of his parents attended and graduated from college as well as aunts, uncles, and at least one set of grandparents. Frank, sophomore, 3.56 GPA, echoed similar sentiments in not only having the college expectation but having high grades:

> Having almost everybody in my family go to college, I kind of want to keep that going. I don't want to be a bum on the streets. I want to have a good future to keep things going in the family name. In my house, you are expected to do your best, not necessarily all A's, but they don't want to see lower than a B basically.

Jim, junior, 3.06 GPA, felt that his parents expected him to attend college because they attended college. They also held him to a high standard because he was the oldest child and identified as gifted:

> I'm expected to do a lot because I'm a gifted student and also my parents were college graduates, so they're expecting the same out of me. I also think being the oldest goes into that because I'm supposed to be the role model for him [my brother]. So being labeled as gifted as well as being an older brother, they expect a lot out of me. It isn't necessarily a bad thing; it's just kind of natural.

Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, was told from an early age by his mom that he was going to college but that he needed to get it paid for in the form of a scholarship. His mom's expectations for him and his brother were clear to them from the beginning:

> Mom was like, "I'm not paying for school – for college." She would always say, "Either you're going to go for sports or you're going to go for academics, so you've got to keep both up." She'd tell us that every night and every day. "I don't have money to be paying for you all to go to school."

Daniel's, junior, 2.70 GPA, family did not express the same collegiate expectations but did expect him to perform well in school. "My whole family knows I'm GT, so I would say that they see me in a very positive light and they have great expectations for me as well." John, senior, 3.8 GPA, said that his parents also held high expectations for him to perform well in school. He was more specific in his commentary about grades than was Daniel. "I guess the expectations are higher because I've always gotten good grades. If I came home with a C or something, that wouldn't be acceptable." Cranston, senior, 3.31GPA, shared that his mom stressed the importance of school because he is an African American male and not because he is gifted. "Growing up being an African American male, my mom said grades are important. There is no

pressure or expectations for being gifted." Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA, shared the same sentiments as Cranston with regard to his mom's expectations. "It's not because I'm gifted that my mom expects me to do good in school. She just expects me to do good in school because she knows I'm capable of it." Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, knew he was capable of high achievement and relished in his parent's expectations. "At home, I'm just always expected to do my best. I'm capable of great success. I've been held to a high standard." For Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, extended family expressed high expectations for him and held him accountable for his low academic performance in school:

> Like my uncle, who's working on his Ph.D., the first two quarters of school I was pretty good. I think I had a 3.5, 3.6 maybe and then the third quarter I started falling off. He made me call him every Sunday to give him a report of my week, tell him what I was learning – we just talked – to make sure I gave him a little grade checkup and stuff.

### 4.5.2 Teacher Expectations – "You are held to a higher standard."

The participants in the study repeatedly talked about their academic capabilities and being held to high standards by their teachers because their teachers knew they were identified as gifted and talented. The participants identified teachers at all grade levels that had high expectations for them. Frank, sophomore, 3.56 GPA, said, "My elementary gifted and talented specialist, Miss James, kind of instilled what a gifted and talented student is and how they carried themselves and that we're on a higher level – that we are held to a higher standard than others. She was my favorite." Other students felt that the teacher/s who held them to high standards were also their favorite teachers or at the least well-liked by them. Some participants even

appreciated that teachers saw potential in them when maybe other teachers or school personnel did not:

> In elementary school, my first and fourth grade teachers, they really saw something in me. A lot of times, I feel like, I don't know what happened. The little dings, the behavior problems I had, just overshadowed everything, so a lot of teachers just would be blinded by my little behavior problems, but Miss Cobb and Miss May, they actually saw I was a good, smart kid that just had to keep me focused. They recognized that (Cranston, senior, 3.31 GPA).

Leonardo, senior, 4.58 GPA, expressed a similar experience with his middle school teacher in that she saw potential in him and referred him for gifted assessment. Leonardo felt like their expectations of him carried him even when school became difficult:

> Actually a teacher in 6th grade moved to 7th grade. She saw that I had potential and then wanted me to be tested for the gifted and talented thing. Then, when I passed and qualified for superior cognitive, she was really proud me. Then, I feel like it has brought the level of expectation of my teachers on me to be higher than most. They know that I can do things and if I'm slipping or not doing well, they're like, "You can do it." They're pulling me up. They know what I'm capable of even if I don't know it myself.

Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, repeated a similar feeling of being held to a high standard. "I think when we were in middle school there was a higher expectation, not only in terms of the work you turned it, but your behavior as well. They just expected more in how you acted in the classroom." Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, recalled a similar middle school experience from his teachers. "A lot of times when I was in middle school, the teachers used to always tell my parents that I'm not working to my potential and knew I could do more and that I'm smarter than what I was doing." The following quotes highlight that the teachers of these students knew and saw the capabilities of the students and then held high expectations of them to perform at high levels in the classroom. Although there are many instances of teachers having low

expectations for students, none of these participants experienced low expectations by school personnel.

> Teachers also expected a lot out of me because I was gifted. Whenever I would do assignments or things like that, they always expected me to get it in on time, have it pretty close to perfect if not perfect. So I'd say just high expectations (Jim, junior, 3.06 GPA).

> I think once I get to know a teacher and they see what I'm capable of they will not expect me, but know I can answer questions in class and stuff like that, but it's never really "you have to." Because I know like in Mr. Kellogg's class last year, I was always on it. I knew the stuff and I know he knew that, so it was kind of – not weird or anything, but he knew what I was capable of – he knew I was capable of doing it and if nobody knew the answer he might ask me just because he knew I would know (Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA).

> I think that the teachers that know that I've been identified as gifted have expected more of me and sometimes I have fallen through without giving them what they thought I should have done better on but, for the most part, I think they – they say, "Okay, obviously you can do that, so let's see if you can do more." I try and sometimes it doesn't work out (Tony, senior, 3.06 GPA).

> Then my coaches, a lot of them – not all of them – but a lot of them, if you didn't do well in school, you weren't playing. So that was a huge focus. They don't care how good we're going to be because I really sucked at football. So that was because a lot of our students weren't performing academically. So it was a very huge focus on academic achievement (Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA).

> The teachers look at you to lead the class and be the one that's doing the right things and set an example for the other students. That is your relationships with the teacher (Frank, sophomore, 3.56 GPA).

> So I guess as far as teacher/student goes from elementary to middle to high, it's just more like, "Oh, we, as teachers, hold you to a higher standard because you fit in this GT group. So we want you to succeed and do well." So whenever you got that F or you didn't do that assignment, of course it resonated more than if you weren't a GT kid, because you know you're held to this bar that you have to achieve and reach every time which was interesting to me. Not necessarily that it hurt my relationships with my teachers, but it certainly had a role. No matter how close or whatever barrier you broke through as far as teacher/student, that was always there. "Okay, you can do well. You're capable of anything now. We expect you to meet that bar every time." So that was definitely a great example of that (Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA).

### 4.5.3 Self-Expectations – "Success has always been attractive to me."

Beyond procrastination and perfectionism lies the expectations these participants held for themselves. Many of them achieved high marks in school, participated in prestigious programs and activities, and received numerous accolades for their academic and extracurricular efforts. They worked to meet the expectations of their families and teachers, even if they fell short. However, for them, it was a matter of pride to expect more from themselves - to find that extra gear - to persevere in the face of adversity and obstacles. VanTassel-Baska (1998) posits that helping "students negotiate a healthy balance between inner and outer expectations, as well as helping them develop reasonable expectations for performance based on ability, interest, and personality factors, is critical to the development of self" (p. 493). Some participants shared their expectations of themselves with very specific goals regarding college attendance, their future majors, and wanting to do well for themselves and for their family. Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA, gleaned inspiration and motivation to perform well because of his parents' academic success. They both earned advanced degrees which helped to illuminate Kevin's path to medical school. "I think seeing my parents do so well makes me want to do well or even better if I can. That's pretty high. Also, I have kind of what I want to do with my life and I want to have the education to be able to do that." John, senior, 3.8 GPA, said, "I want to be successful in the future and I want to go get into a good college, so I have to have good grades." Jasper, sophomore, 3.20 GPA, echoed the sentiments John shared for performing well in school:

> There's a lot. I want to go to a really good college. I want to go to a HBCU. I want to go to a good college and it motivates me. I know if I go to college I'm not going to drop out or anything, especially if it's scholarship. I'd just keep going so I can go to medical school. I don't even like myself to give up and get lower than I'm expected by my parents and everything. That really motivates me too.

Other participants acknowledged having goals about following their dreams and passions in life. On the other hand, PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, conceded the heaviness of the gifted label with his family and himself – the weight of expectation:

> You invest a little bit in the label and you try to live up to it. You try to live up to your family's expectations. You try to live up to the expectations that the state has put on you because of it. It's a lot of trying to live up to things and you put that burden on yourself and it's like you internalize it.

Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, believed his goals were developing long before the start of high school. According to him, his drive was evident to peers and teachers:

> What motivates me to excel in school is just my own personal goals, dreams and passions. I've often been told by my friends and some of my teachers who I've developed personal relationships with that I seem to be very driven, very goal oriented and that's just the center I've tried to hold myself to from, I'd say, as early as 5th grade, maybe even middle school.

For Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, he recognized that his self-expectation was not only tied to his parents' expectations of him but also tied to the success of his older brother. However, he was not discouraged or crushed under the weight of expectation by his parents or his teachers, who often compared him to his brother. Instead, he acknowledged that his parents wanted all of their children to be the best they could be, and he wanted that for himself as well.

> Smith: What motivates you to excel in school?
> Will: I feel like a lot of it is living up to expectations. My older brother always did really well in school; like really, really well. From middle school to high school he never got anything lower than an A in the class. So obviously coming into middle school and especially high school, I had very, very high expectations that were set for me. All the teachers already knew my name. They're like, "Oh, you're the next one in line." I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, I am." They'd always reference him like maybe, "Oh, that's

what he would do." "Oh, just like your brother." I'm like, "That's just me." But I do feel like a lot of it's just living up to his shadow but, other than that, I've always just wanted to do my best. Success has always just been attractive to me. I always knew that doing your best was going to open up doors for you. If you always tried your hardest, then eventually something would work out for you.

Smith: Did your parents ever expect you to walk in the shadow of your brother? Sometimes there is that expectation. However, sometimes it's not. So is education just an expectation or did he set the bar so high that there was no other option, or both?

Will: I feel like both. They wanted me to do as well as I could, but seeing that one of their kids could do so well, they just figured "Why not you too?" So I feel like they always wanted us to do the best we could, learn as much as we can, be the – they always wanted us to be the best, the best of the class, be the best of the school. Regardless of what we were doing, they always wanted us to be the best. I feel like because he did so well, it just kind of pushed that even further.

### 4.5.4 Community Expectations – "There's more of a weight on gifted students."

Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA, discussed the external weight of expectation similar to that of PK and Will. However, his weight was rooted in community expectations and not familial or self as evidenced by the following excerpt:

Smith: As an African-American male, what pressures have you experienced as a gifted student and how do you think these pressures may differ from your non-gifted peers?

Kevin: When I spend time with people from the African-American community, it feels like there's more of a weight on gifted students like me to do well and kind of represent in places that other non-gifted students haven't been able to.

Smith: So then how do you feel about that weight?

Kevin: I don't really think about it. I acknowledge it and I know it's there, but I either just focus on trying to do my best and succeeding to the best of my ability.

## 4.6 Academic Isolation and Loneliness – "You're a token within your community, within your house."

When asked if they felt isolated in their elementary and/or high school experiences, the participants were split with eight acknowledging isolation and eight saying they felt no isolation at all. Two of the eight just responded that they did not feel pressure while Jim, junior, 3.06 GPA, pointed out he was in class with like-minded peers. "I don't feel isolated in advanced classes because people that are searching for a higher class to take are also like those people of the same mindset or the same kind of standard." The remaining five participants all agreed that there were no feelings of isolation because they were in an elementary cluster group with their friends or an advanced class in high school with the same gifted friends from elementary school. "I didn't feel isolated. I had a good group of friends and the teacher was really nice too, the special teacher" (Leonardo, senior, 4.58 GPA). Jasper, sophomore, 3.20 GPA, felt similarly to Leonardo. "No, there was no isolation. We were all together, and it felt good." "No, I didn't feel isolated because I was always with my friends in the gifted program" (John, senior, 3.8 GPA). Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA, discussed being with the same group from kindergarten. "No, I wasn't isolated. We were always – especially going to Fontwell, where we all knew each other from kindergarten going on up. We were all cool with each other and everything." Daniel, junior, 2.70 GPA, shared that he and his best friend were in the same gifted classroom which precluded any feelings of isolation:

> I have not because my – me and my best friend were tested at the same time and then we both found that we were gifted in the same areas, so that gave us another way to connect. Then I made friends with all the rest of the people in the gifted program at my elementary school.

The other eight participants shared their thoughts of isolation in various situations in their K-12 experiences. Tre, junior, 4.02 GPA, shared that his isolation was selective and self-induced. He chose not to interact with his gifted peers in his advanced math class. "Yes, well only because I didn't really know anybody else who was gifted or talented in middle school. Well, they all were gifted and talented, I guess, because they came with me to Math I in 8th grade, but I didn't really talk to them that much or associate with them that much. I was always just like a lone wolf." Rico, Jack, and Will all believed that their peer relationships were affected by their gifted label which then caused some level of isolation. More specifically, Rico and Will explicated that they felt isolated in their AP classes. Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, felt isolated because of the small numbers of gifted Black students in advanced level classes while Will felt isolated because the students in the AP class were focused on that which was trendy. In essence, Will did not feel like he fit in with his classmates:

> Yeah, in my AP classes, yes, I did feel isolated. I was surrounded by people who were in the same class as me, but I always kind of felt different than everybody else. I don't really know why. I guess I was – I feel like they always tried to go with the tide, the trends, that kind of thing and I've never been one to do that. So I've always kind of felt alone in that sense. I've only had like one or two friends throughout my entire high school career that have kind of stuck with me on that. They didn't understand or they didn't like the trends and they were mature enough to kind of just be their own person. So I felt like most of the kids in my AP class were the opposite, so I feel that that's why I kind of felt isolated (Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA).

Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, did not see his friends in his AP classes. For him, the limited interaction with his friends made him second-guess the stability of their friendship and yet worried about his teachers finding out about certain situations his friends engaged in and possibly tried to convince him to participate. He shared:

> It's an interesting thing about Payne, because you had a very diverse population. At the same time you get to the advanced classes – like I was taking Algebra II as a freshman and you get to those classes and I'm taking it with all seniors. Then the next step is pre-Calc and Calculus and by the time you get to pre-calc there's only white students; calculus, I was the only black – me and my best friend, we were the only two black kids in that class out of the 20 that were in there. So the higher you got also with AP English and Spanish, you're with the kids who were native Spanish speakers, but everybody else was white. Then with English the same thing. You're the only one in there in those AP classes. So that would separate you from – you see your friends-- Like I played sports, so I saw a lot of those guys at football, track and wrestling, but during the day I never saw them because we were never in the same classes. It was like are we really friends, are we not really friends cause they would have these jokes and whatnot throughout the day, but I wouldn't be there to see them because my teacher would have killed me if I was in those situations.

Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, explained that his non-gifted peers felt like they could not relate to gifted students which then led to feelings of isolation because he wanted to establish those relationships in elementary school:

> So it definitely showed me that there was really no being, not being labeled GT, is not to say that you're incapable, which I thought a lot of students felt especially during elementary and middle school, which affected my friendships with some of them too, because they felt like, "Oh, we're not on the same mental level," so it's hard to be friends with them.

PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, revealed his community ties were not strong, and he felt isolated because of mobility issues. He and his mom moved several times over the course of his high school career which impacted his community connections. However, he remained at his high school because it was a lottery school and his attendance was not affected by his address. "I don't really talk to that many people in my neighborhood or community, so there's no one really holding me accountable, but I'm also trying to keep myself together and in that some things fall by the wayside." Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, was the only other participant

who shared a sense of isolation with the community. He also disclosed a sense of isolation within his own household due to his mom's inability to academically connect with him. He states:

> You're pretty much at outlier. You're the token within your community, within your house. I think it was when I was in 9th grade my mom knew that I was going to go to college and I was going to do things – that I was going to surpass her, which is a thing all parents want for their kids. But when you come home and you're like, "I cannot do all this homework. I've got to do this, this, and this," and they can't help you with the homework. You're kind of stuck thinking like, "Why can't my mom help me with the homework." It's been a long time and I figured out it's because she can't. It just feels like you're kind of alone in terms of intellectually surpassing your family and your peers around you. It really is you by yourself. Then when you get to college, then you start finding those people who are very similar to you, but while you're in the community you're one of one.

## 4.7 Support of significant individuals v. Non-support of significant individuals

### 4.7.1 Familial Support

When asked by the researcher who had been the most supportive and nurturing person on their educational journey, many of the participants agreed that one or both of their parents were very supportive of their academic endeavors. Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA, smiled when he said, "I think really my parents. They've worked very hard to make sure that I can succeed and live up to the potential that they see in me. I feel like they've sacrificed a lot as well to try and spend as much time with me and work with me to make sure I follow the correct path." Tony, senior, 3.06 GPA, echoed Kevin's sentiment when he shared, "My mom is just as encouraging and just as disappointed when I fail as any parent, I think, would be." Tre, junior, 4.02 GPA, who had the support of his mother and grandfather, further stated that "She [my mom] loves everything I do and if I decide to do something new she's fully behind it and supports me."

John, senior, 3.8 GPA, concurred with Tre's statement about support from his mother. "I think my mom, because she always encourages me to get good grades and whenever I got the grade, she'd be proud." Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, beamed with pride about his family legacy of education. "I'd probably say my family, parents. My grandparents, my uncle who's working on his Ph.D. right now, aunts. The expectation is that everybody will achieve. I come from educators and educated people." Joey's dad was perplexed at the thought that someone close to them would not be supportive. "You know, we don't even focus on the negative. Somebody who hasn't been supportive? That seems kind of foreign. That person isn't even in the circle, man. If you're not supporting the kids and their growth and development, you're nowhere near our circle" (Mr. Wilson, Joey and Frank's dad). Cranston, senior, 3.31 GPA, discussed the support his extended family offers as well:

> So, my older cousins, who are in there twenties, tell me like I know you are bright and smart but you can always be better. They said when they were in high school they were messing around and not getting good grades. They always express like it may seem like I'm living fine but I could be better. They tell me you could better. They know I'm a smart, intellectual person and I can be something.

Jim, junior, 3.06 GPA, expressed great admiration for his single mom and credited her with more support than anyone else in his life. "Definitely my family, above teachers or administrators, things like that. To my mom more specifically, she's the one who kind of like wants me to strive to be the best I can be. So I would say her above anyone else." Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, admitted that although his mom was a solid rock in his life that his friends also kept him from going down the wrong path:

> I had my mom who was a very solid rock in my life, but then I also had a whole ton of negative experiences that could have definitely taken me a different route in life. She was

> there, but she wasn't there 24/7. Where I was very lucky was that I had a lot of very good, very close friends who kept me on the same path as they wanted to go. I think it could have turned out very poorly for me looking back on it now. It could have gone either way.

PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, and Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, both acknowledged their brothers as being supportive figures in their lives:

> Well, obviously, my mom. I talk about her a lot and I talk about her fondly. My brother, his name is Forest. He's pretty cool. He's a lot like me and he has a lot of that mindset wanting to know why things work, like taking things apart, dissecting, whatever. Forest knows a lot about math. I don't really ask people for help. I feel like that's weakness. That's probably another problem, but we might just get to talking about things and when we get to talking about things you learn a little bit and then you figure out what you've just learned can be applied to either that situation or your world view in general. Then I might be able to use something. That's pretty cool (PK).

> I feel like the number one person that has contributed to my growth would be my older brother for sure. I feel that he respects that I'm my own person and I haven't gotten all As, at least I'm not on the same level as him, but he's never really teased me for that. He's always been really mature about it. I feel that's just because he understands how I feel. He's done well, and he's just acknowledging that and saying, "Try and do your best. Don't worry about what they say about me or what I've done. Just try to make your own path." So I've really respected him for that. He's always kind of pushed me harder just because of that too, because he always wanted me to do better than him, at least that's what he said. I feel like he knows how much pressure that's been on me and how it's kind of affected me throughout my years. I feel like at one point it really held me back. I just kind of felt like I wasn't good enough because I wasn't doing as well as he did. So he's always been pretty tough on me just to make sure that I'm doing my best (Will).

### 4.7.2 Peer Support

In agreement with Rico about his friends keeping him out of trouble and steering him in positive ways, Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA only associated with people who accepted him and were like-minded in their pursuit of education. Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, thoughtfully examined his peer support structure and had this to say:

> Kind of like how I said before. I've gotten mixed feelings. Some people are supportive, like my close friends, my close group of friends. They always support me in everything that I do academically and just outside of academics in general. I've always felt a lot of love from them for being a gifted student, just because I don't only focus on schooling, but I also try to have a good time and I try to do the things that I enjoy including sports, that kind of thing. So I've always gotten support from my friends.

### 4.7.3 School Personnel Support

In acknowledging a parent as a supportive force in their lives, two students shared their appreciation for their teachers' support and others shared the general support of school personnel.

> I would say mostly teachers and my parents have really supported me in my educational upbringing a lot. I can't name all of them because I had so many teachers over the years and they've all contributed in their own special way. A lot of the teachers here have nurtured my enthusiasm to learn and go after and take risks for things that I want to try. I feel teachers act as a guide, like they steer you in the right direction so you can one day have all the tools necessary to do well in life and be a risk-taker and try new things (Leonardo, senior, 4.58 GPA).

> Of course my mom, Miss Cavanaugh for sure. It's definitely teachers from middle school that real helped me. They're all just good teachers like Mr. A, Mr. J, Mr. D – well, that's elementary school but still, Mr. D, Mr. L. It's just like – of course Ms. Faircloth and Ms. James, they were all just – those are all just teachers and people that really were helpful, just education really (Deante, senior, 3.20 GPA).

Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, relayed his admiration and respect for his self-contained gifted teacher and his middle school gifted specialist:

> Ummm. For instance, Mrs. Russell's case is more of a tough love. It's not so much like, "Oh, I don't care how you feel." It's more of a "I understand you feel this way, but there's still work to be done." Ms. Peterson was more understanding a little bit, more comforting. Of course it was a different atmosphere in middle school than in elementary school, so their attitudes to me reflected the different moods. The more tumultuous time of middle school, it was appropriate atmosphere for demanding a little bit more, support a

> little bit more. I felt it was appropriate for both times how they handled it. Whenever I felt overwhelmed or whatever, I felt like I had support to get through that.

Tre, junior, 4.02 GPA, thought his school was amazing. "I loved it there. I had a lot of friends, some of them that I still talk to today. While there, I actually met one of my favorite teachers and now she runs the school. She's cool." Tony, senior, 3.06 GPA, admitted that his school counselor influenced his thoughts about his future:

> In middle school, I had a school counselor named Dr. Dillon, and she was almost like the pre-introduction to gifted and talented. So me and her had a close relationship. She did a sort of literature class with, I think, 40 kids sometime during the day and we got to – it built a relationship between me and her and we talked over a lot of things and how my school life and home life was and just all kinds of stuff. She influenced me in a really good way, because it got me thinking about what I want to do with my life, especially in psychology. I think she might have started that pathway most of all.

### 4.7.4 School Community Support

Cranston, Joey, and Jasper all attended the same high school and shared similar feelings of support from those in their school community. Jasper, sophomore, 3.20 GPA, said, "I haven't really experienced a lot of pressure because of my giftedness. Atwater and Fontwell were all African-American mostly and we were just with each other. We still support each other too to do better and really help each other out. So I don't really feel a lot of pressure. I've got the right support." Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, agreed with Jasper's assertion that their classmates were supportive of their academic pursuits. "Down here everybody – when we were doing the honor roll thing, almost the whole lunchroom in there was honor roll. So getting good grades and achieving high success in school down here is a main priority it seems like." Cranston, senior, 3.31 GPA, offered this observation of his school experience in the same school as Jasper and

Joey. “No, it’s just fine…there a couple juniors in my class but like I said just like-minded people. No, people understand that I’m trying to do something. That this is what I want to do. Nobody mocks or makes fun of that we are in higher classes, they actually want us to – they are like I wish, I wish. That is what they are like. I’m just grateful that I got this experience.” Jack, senior, 3.65 GPA, who attended the lottery school across town, may not have had the full support of his school but was grateful for the peers who chose to take advanced classes and support one another. “So I felt like the numbers – the group of us who were at least glad to have been in that group dwindled over time, which I do find sad, but I’m thankful that whoever stuck in that group kept each other strong. We let each other pursue and push through the stresses and rigors of coursework whether it be middle school or high school.” Joey, junior, 3.42 GPA, shared another experience that he said spoke to the level of support in his high school. “As a freshman, I took advanced math with sophomores. I never felt isolated. The sophomores were clapping me up basically saying, ‘Oh, you’re really smart,’ all this stuff. It kind of made me happy. Like they helped me out, I helped them out. It was just a good learning experience.”

### 4.7.5 Non-supportive relationships

All 16 participants discussed positive and supportive relationship either with their family, peers, school personnel, or the school community. However, three students reported non-supportive interactions from their peers and explained the resolve to move forward in spite of the revelation.

> I would probably say maybe every now and then you have that friend who’s kind of trying to hold you back from what you’re trying to do and then it comes to the point where you’ve just got to cut them off, or limit the time you actually see them (Tre, junior, 4.02 GPA).

> Well, there are always naysayers who really don't want to achieve to the best of their ability, so they think that you should follow suit. There haven't been that many people like that in my life, because I've tried to make friends with the most positive people. But those who are like that, really it's just people my age who don't think that they can live up to such a high standard, so they don't think that I should have to do that as well (Kevin, sophomore, 3.85 GPA).

> Definitely my peers and it was tough. Like I said before, you wanted to fit in in high school, so do I fit in by like saying forget school or forget my homework or do I fit in or where do I fit in in terms of that? Cause all their views on school is very negative and my views on school were not negative. I wanted to do my work and I wanted to do well but, at the same time, I don't want to show that. So how do I balance it? I think it was definitely my peers that were a negative influence on that (Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA).

PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, voiced his displeasure with the gifted program in the district. He believed that high school gifted students lacked support and were afforded little or no opportunities for their high school gifted experience:

> In high school I guess maybe it's because you're supposed to be nearing adulthood and it's like, "We'll just take away all the coddling and the support and pretty much everything we gave you and let you figure it out." Maybe that's why they do it like that or they keep so much stuff under wraps, but there is very little high school support or even opportunity for gifted students.

Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, grappled with the reality that his dad was not supportive of not only his academic efforts and pursuits but of his life in general. He acknowledged his physical presence in the house but lack of mental or emotional support:

> I feel like my dad kind of was one of the most least supportive people in my life. He just – I mean – I don't know, he didn't really talk to me very much about school or what I wanted to do or anything like that. He was there in my life physically, but he wasn't present. He was just kind of there. He paid the bills, you know, he did his part, but he wasn't really that dad figure, that father figure that I really wanted.

Will's mom acknowledged that his dad was not an advocate for him or his siblings.

> It's hurtful to say that, but his dad. All of them, they're always asking him to go and be with them. They are crying and dying for him to come watch them playing or get award or anything. Most of the time he doesn't go, but when he goes, they hate that too, because one time he went, and he was sitting saying, "When we go? When we leave?" So, I'm wondering why he came in the first place (Mrs. Miller, parent, Will's mom).

## 4.8 Summary

This chapter examined the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors of sixteen gifted, Black male high school students. Using data from the demographic questionnaire, transcripts from the semi-structured interview, and member checking responses, the following themes emerged: (a) educational opportunity structures, (b) academic achievement, (c) academic isolation and loneliness, (d) academic expectations, and (e) support of significant individuals versus non-support of significant individuals. A subtheme emerged from the data regarding the cultural competency of the teacher. This subtheme in conjunction with teacher belief, expectation, and support was labeled – teacher nexus.

# Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Conclusions

## 5.1 Overview of the Study

This qualitative study examined the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors of sixteen gifted, Black male high school students at a large urban school district in the Midwest. The study also sought to understand the school experiences of these gifted students in today's urban public schools while also expanding our understanding of the social, cultural, and racial implications on the achievement of gifted, Black male high school students. The body of work from this study will contribute to current research to help teachers, administrators, and school counselors understand this special population.

The researcher used the constructivist approach to this study which is consistent with the interpretive tradition. According to Charmaz (2006), "A constructive approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (p. 130). This interpretive lens allows the researcher to reflect on his or her own "interpretations as well as those of their research participants" (p. 131).

This qualitative study was conducted in a large, urban school district in the Midwest. Because one high school in the district had a robust sample size of Black students identified as gifted and talented to conduct a reasonable number of interviews, the initial goal of the researcher was to obtain participants from this school alone. After the recruitment flyer was given to the eligible students, only six participants returned the assent and parental consent forms

to the researcher. Since prior permission was obtained at the district level and from all of the high school principals in the district to conduct the study, the researcher was able to recruit students from five other schools in the district. Once all of the consent and assent forms were obtained, the researcher asked the students to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in one 45 minute to one hour semi-structured interview.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using open coding and comparing each incident in the transcript to the next to "separate data into categories and to see processes" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 51). After the initial coding, axial coding was used to "bring the data back together again and provide a frame for researcher to apply" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60-61). From the coding, six major themes emerged: (a) educational opportunity structures, (b) achievement attitudes, (c) academic expectations, (d) academic isolation and loneliness, (e) support of significant individuals versus non-supportive significant individuals, and (f) teacher nexus.

The overarching question that this study sought to answer was what factors, positively and negatively, influence the academic success of gifted, Black students who attend urban schools. To this end, three questions sought to get at the question. The findings from this study will help inform parents, teachers, principals, and senior administrators, on ways to support and enhance the academic experiences of these students.

### 5.1.1 Research Question 1

*When examining the academic achievement of gifted, Black students in an urban school district, what are their perceptions of their high school success?*

According to Cash (2016), "Setting goals is a significant factor in achieving self-regulation for learning. The person setting the goal must understand what is realistic to accomplish, what outcomes are doable" (p. 69). Each of the participants in the study, set, implemented, and monitored their goals. When asked on the demographic questionnaire about educational and career goals, one participant outlined his plan and shared with the researcher his vision for accomplishing the task. Many participants transferred their academic goal setting into extracurricular activities as well.

The students who attended Atwater High School and Boxted High School exuded a palpable pride. The findings of this study indicate that most of the participants perceived their overall high school experience to be positive. All of the participants were either successful academically and/or in their extracurricular activities. Five of the six students at Atwater played on the football team. Three of those same six students at Atwater participated in drama club, the school musical, and/or a poetry competition. Three of the four students at the individual high schools played in one or two varsity sports. The students who attended Boxted High School did not participate in sports; however, many of them were involved in STEM or robotics club. Many of the participants desired to reach high levels of academic achievement. They engaged in self-regulating behaviors and had high expectations for themselves in their academic pursuits/endeavors. The students had short and long term goals in mind. Fifteen of the sixteen participants expressed the goal of earning a 4.0 grade point average in at least one nine-week period if not the entire semester or school year. Other participants desired to maintain their current grade point average which was over 3.0. Although some of them had external motivators, they pointed to doing well for themselves and hold themselves to a high standard as being most

important. One student beamed that he had more resolve than his non-gifted peers and implemented strategies to ensure strategic implementation of his long term goals. He developed a vision board as his guide to keep in the forefront of his mind his short term and long terms goals. Many of the students exhibited resolve, persistence, and/or perseverance. One student wanted to take a British literature course, but it conflicted with AP Biology, so he took AP Chemistry instead because he wanted to make sure that his schedule remained rigorous. Unfortunately, he detested AP Chemistry but stressed that he would attend everyday without fail because he wanted a good grade and was grateful he could take British literature.

Across schools and grade point averages, the students had similar goals they set for themselves: earn high grades and have a high grade point average; get a scholarship to attend college; go to college; have a career; make their parents proud. Each one of the participants articulated these sentiments as being extraordinarily important to them. One student who did not want to attend his high school articulated these same types of goals even though he stayed physically ill for most of his tenure at his high school. He attributed his illness to the stress of attending the rigorous school that was very competitive. Although he held some anger toward his parents for making him attend the school, he persevered and focused on graduating and attending the local university.

In addition to having high expectation of themselves, the students not only expected but wanted their parents and school personnel to hold them to high standards. Some of them thrived knowing they were held to a higher standard of behavior from their teachers. One participant said that his teacher knew he could count on him to answer questions and engage in classroom discussions if his classmates were not being participatory and/or cooperative. Another participant

shared that his teachers knew they could count on him to step up in class as the role model when his classmates were being disruptive.

All of the participants cited supportive relationships as one of the reasons for their high school success. Some participants from single-parent households recognized the sacrifices of their single mothers in raising them and ensuring academic opportunities and exposure to different activities. One participant noted that in first grade his mother lobbied to have him moved to a more engaging classroom because his behavior was a function of boredom in the classroom he was in. He was so happy that she believed in him "even then, when I was little." This same participant expressed appreciation to his second grade teachers for referring him for gifted testing and not giving up on him because he had some behavior problems.

All but one participant appreciated the rigorous curriculums their schools offered. Boxted offered AP classes as well as IB classes which gave the students more choice to take classes suited for their interests. Four schools offered AP classes and college level courses in-house. One of the high schools did not offer AP classes, but students had the ability to take the college level courses if they exhausted their high school curricular options. Tre, junior, 4.0 GPA, was frustrated that his school did not offer AP and that his only option was to take a college level course which he worried would impact his grade point average if he struggled with such a high level curriculum. One of the participants shared what it meant to be dually enrolled in high school and college. "I would say it was being accepted into Crane State my senior year and doing the College Program, because that kind of solidified me like, 'I'm going to college. I'm going to go do this.' It was a very good experience because after that I was, 'Okay, I have to study now. I have to do this, this and this to be successful'" (Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30).

### 5.1.2 Research Question 2

*What factors influence the academic success of gifted, Black male students?*

The findings of this study indicate that most of the participants believed that preparation was a key factor in their overall academic success. In receiving that preparation, most of the students concurred that having positive early learning experiences and being taught organizational and study skills were key to their academic success. Those skills were then tested in a rigorous curriculum. According to Jim, junior, 3.30 GPA, "One strength of the program is that those in the gifted classes are put in a pretty rigorous curriculum, and it really helps them down the road, even though at the moment it might seem hard but, in the long run, it helps you out." Each of the students participated in enrichment activities which supplemented the schools' regular curricula: mock trial, debate, Power of the Pen, Scripps Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, chess, STEM club, robotics, TEDx, Invention Convention, Math Counts, science, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. oratorical contest.

Another factor the participants noted was the exposure to like-minded peers. Every participant articulated their positive, gifted experiences were due in part to their kinship with their peers. Cranston, senior, 3.30 GPA, encapsulated the sentiments of the entire group.

> Being with other gifted students, well since elementary school when they pulled us out of classes and they pulled me out with these people and I made friends with them. I still got or have most of those friends – the ones who we got pulled out in middle school, they came here (Atwater HS) and we still friends. We are still close. We are on the same mindset; we actually care about our grades, our future, our mindset, so we just naturally came together.

Participants also cited teacher nexus – belief, cultural competence, expectation, and support – as imperative to their overall success. They believed when teachers believed they were

capable, exhibited cultural competence in showing cultural empathy or relatability, expected them to perform at high levels, and offered support when necessary that the teacher truly cared about them as students and people. Half of the participants shared stories of their gifted resource specialist as having a profound impact on their learning and self-esteem. For those in the gifted self-contained classes, those teachers served a surrogate parents to the students. Some of the parents relied on them to reinforce the high expectations at home.

All of the participants displayed persistence and perseverance during their K-12 academic experience. Some students dealt with difficult situations like the death of a parent or profound illness during their school experience. Other participants moved into the district in late elementary or middle school. For others, just getting to school and persisting despite bullying or a lackluster curriculum showed their resolve to succeed.

The participants acknowledged that they could not take this journey alone and cited a strong support network of parents and teachers but also with a circle of friends and/or like-minded peers in and out of gifted classes. What resonated most with Cranston, senior, 3.30 GPA, was having supportive classmates in his corner. “For sure, it is special when there is someone rooting you on that is not your mom or dad that - that feels great. Someone who is not related to you who wants you to do good.”

### 5.1.3 Research Question 3

*What factors do gifted, Black students in an urban school district identify as contributing to their academic success? What obstacles did the gifted, Black students overcome to achieve their success?*

There were numerous obstacles that the participants overcame to succeed; however, the most salient of those obstacles were peer influences, non-supportive relationships, lack of rigor in the high school curriculum, isolation, underachievement, and perfectionism and procrastination. Even though Kunjufu (1988) writes that negative peer influences can have a detrimental effect on students who want to achieve, only three of the participants cited their experiences with negative peer influences. The other thirteen participants were nonplussed when asked about negative or non-supportive peers. Frank, sophomore, 3.75 GPA, summed it up when he said, "I'm cool with everybody. I get along very well with everyone, but the bad kids I just wave and keep on moving. My friends are mostly gifted and talented also and the ones that aren't, they're still great students." The participants did not shun their peers who were not achieving, but they did not engage them either. They carefully navigated the school/community landscape in order to maintain their positive academic identity.

Along the same continuum of non-supportive relationships from significant individuals, two students discussed their frustration at one or both of their parents in being non-supportive to their academic endeavors. One of the participants said his father did not support him and did not ask about his accomplishments or academic endeavors. The same student felt guilty for feeling upset with his dad because "some students do not have a father in the home." Another student expressed frustration with his parents because they pressured him to attend a school with an IB program, but he wanted to attend another high school with a STEM focus. Since he wants to be an engineer, he thought the STEM school would provide a better foundation for him to take STEM courses in college. Because he was at the IB school, he experienced systemic illness for

the four years of his high school career which caused him to have more resentment towards his parents.

One of the schools in the study did not offer AP classes in their curriculum, so the student was taking regular social studies and science classes and college level math and English classes. The student noted that he may be behind when he gets to college because of his school's sparse curricular offerings. He also started the school year with a full class of twenty students but by the end of the first nine weeks, he was the only student remaining. His classmates struggled with the rigor of the college level curriculum when they had not been adequately prepared to take such classes. The other five schools in the study boasted robust curricular offerings that included a variety of AP courses, IB courses, STEM related courses, career/technical courses, and college level courses.

Although academic isolation and loneliness were findings in this study, when asked the question, none of the participants said they would opt out of the gifted program. For some, having the gifted label became part of their identity. With this in mind, several students discussed isolation and loneliness but in different contexts. Rico felt isolated because his mom could no longer offer assistance with this school work. With the exception of Will, the other participants did not experience academic isolation until high school. This physical and psychological isolation occurred because students were no longer purposefully clustered with their like-minded peers. Three participants noted that they felt physically isolated in their AP classes because either they were the only African American student or one of two (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a). Since all of the schools in the study were diverse in student population, this frustrated the participants that the AP numbers did not translate into more minority students in

the advanced level courses. One student mentioned racial isolation as a barrier because of his gifted label:

> So being a student of color has always kind of created a barrier almost. I feel like I've always had a hard time falling into a group of peers because I had this label, "Oh, you're gifted. Oh, you're smart," so I couldn't really bond or create very good friendships with people who weren't. I just feel like they never really wanted to talk to me. They're like, "Oh, you think you're better than everybody else," or 'You think you're better than us because you're gifted." And then the students who weren't minorities, when I tried to bond with them, I felt like I was too much of a minority. I don't know, I just – you know, it's being a student of color and then trying to-- Basically it's like the saying, "Too white for the blacks, but too black for the whites." That's exactly how I felt all the time. I still kind of feel that way to this day. It's just been a challenge trying to find people who don't really feel that way or don't really care (Will, HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA).

One of the biggest obstacles that most of the participants overcame to achieve their academic success was underachievement. This manifested itself in a myriad of ways: lack of motivation, lack of focus, academic and physical isolation, a lack of study time, a lack of time management, procrastination, and boredom associated with a mundane curriculum. According to Davis and Rimm (2004), "Children are not born underachievers. Underachievement is learned; therefore, it can be unlearned" (p. 317).

Although many of the seniors lacked motivation in various capacities, all but one continued to persist through to the end of the school year. PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, declared that "I used to want to excel in school because that's what smart kids do, so you just surround yourself with that culture. Now, there's kind of a blasé attitude I have towards school." This lack of motivation could be caused by the mourning of his father and the complicated relationships with his siblings had him feeling alienated. In general, he liked attending school and especially enjoyed his AP English classes and found profound enjoyment in his extracurricular activities

such as drama club, poetry club, and band class. He, however, did not enjoy the rest of the curriculum and passed his other classes with minimal effort and engagement.

One of the most pervasive obstacles in this study was perfectionism and procrastination. Many of the participants admitted they were perfectionists which sometimes caused them to not hand in assignments or turn in projects. They did not believe their work was as good as it could be. Luckily for them, their teachers knew their patterns and coaxed them into turning in and/or completing the assigned work. One student admitted that he asked the teacher if he could re-take a test just to gain two more points (equal to one question) which would increase his overall final grade, and he would have earned *over* a perfect score. He acknowledged that this was a typical practice for him that stemmed from his need to earn perfect scores on his school work. He admitted that this practice often backfired because he would turn in late work just to be sure that every answer was correct. This trap also caused him to sometimes overthink problems on tests and quizzes. In addition to perfectionism as an obstacle, procrastination caused him to fall behind in some classes and not attain the 4.0 grade point average that he had hoped for in that nine week period. According to Cash (2016), "Procrastination is the postponing or lack of initiating tasks that need to be accomplished to reach a goal. When procrastination becomes crippling, it is time to deal with it." All of the students shared minor to major levels of procrastination with regard to studying, handing in assignments, and getting a handle on time management. Will, a HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, voiced what several of the other participants surmised about their feelings about procrastination. "I feel like procrastination has just kind of been really present in my life, so it's just kind of hindered me a lot and caused me to struggle more than I should have. A lot of times the schoolwork wouldn't even be hard."

At the school without AP, Tre, junior, 4.0 GPA, lamented that his regular classes do not challenge him but the college level classes do provide a challenge. "As a high school student, I feel like the regular core classes don't actually challenge me, but the college level classes do. So most of the time I'm sitting in class and I kind of zone out and do what I can to do to help me in that moment." Although Cash (2016) argues that boredom is a state of mind and the opposite of engaged, it is not hard to sympathize with the participant in light of his limited curricular options. Because Tre, junior, 4.0 GPA, participated in the ROTC program in his school, he did not want to be disrespectful and fall asleep or engage in detrimental behavior or conduct unbecoming. He showed persistence in spite of his year-long predicament. Many of the participants also thought that homework was futile and had a hard time completing assignments. They perceived that they mastered the material as evidenced by their participation in class or earning high grades on the tests and/or quizzes. They felt frustrated that homework grades brought down their overall grades.

*Conversely, what obstacles do gifted, Black students face?*

Participants cited several obstacles that other gifted and non-gifted, Black students face. Several students believed there was a lack of parental or community support and/or engagement for students. As stated earlier, one student did not feel like the community he lived in supported achievement. One participant also noted that he was raised by a single mom who was not always around to know what was going on and to stay on top of his academic and extracurricular activities. She still had high expectations but could not be present many times. Will, HS senior and college freshman, 4.4 GPA, posited that "a lot of students, they think they can get by without an education. I feel like they look for shortcuts and they don't want to take the long path, the

longer harder path. I feel like most of it has to do with that life at home." Some of the participants thought students performed poorly because they lacked role models in their lives.

Some students shared that parents and school personnel need to stress the importance of getting a good education. There is talk of a better life or better opportunities without concrete examples to show students. Rico, a HS senior and college sophomore, 3.30 GPA, vociferously stated that in his house there was expectation without explanation with regard to the importance of school. "I think I could relate that back to my life where me and my brother's lives where my mom said it was important to go to school, but she never said why, what the ultimate goal was behind it. So you're like stuck in this, 'Okay, school's important.' Why? That question why was never addressed, never answered."

Some participants felt that Black students experienced obstacles because of stereotyping by school personnel and low teacher nexus – belief, cultural competence, expectation, and support. They believed this impacted a student's social capital or social standing with school personnel and that students were then labeled as unmotivated or behavior problems. They also believed that teachers with low cultural competence did not understand Black students; thereby, holding deficit ideologies towards them and not referring these students for gifted testing or other educational opportunities. They wanted their teachers to have knowledge about African American history and current writers, poets, and activists. A few participants thought that racism was an obstacle for some minority students. Jim, junior, 3.30 GPA, concurred with this line of thinking:

> I think just that idea of subliminal racism I would say. If someone sees someone as Black, they're not going to think, "Oh, that person can be gifted." There are lots of people like that, not only in the education system but maybe some teachers as well. I never had to

> deal with that personally, but I know there have been teachers that my friends have talked to and they would treat one kid better than the other. This is like something whether they knew they were doing it or not, it might have been subconsciously, but, yeah, I would say just primarily the reason, the color of their skin. So I would say if you're a teacher teaching gifted students, then a really important thing to do would be to actually get to know the student for who they are and not like things that you might think about them before you even speak to them.

Others shared Jim's sentiments in that they believed school personnel believe the stereotypes of young, Black males perpetuated by the media and their own deficit thinking. They expressed that this in turn can cause students to tune teachers out who they believe hold deficit ideologies and have low expectations of them. Two students concluded that negative stereotypes about African American men created obstacles because of how they are perceived by those in the overall community. Many of the participants have worked to overcome those perceptions and continue to move forward. They also believed that minority groups experience daily pressure in their lives because of negative stereotypes.

A few of the participants believed that school personnel but especially teachers needed to exhibit patience with students. Joey, junior, 3.3 GPA, believed "I think everybody has the ability to learn and learn at a high level, it's just how you teach. And some teachers might not have the patience to pull a student aside or something and talk with them to see what's going on, so it might add to the fire of the student which would then lead to behavior problems." Other students believed the teachers moved too quickly through the curriculum for some students which is why they were not performing to high levels and ultimately got left behind.

Jack, senior, 3.75 GPA, cited low motivation and a lack of academic tenacity when asked what obstacles belie African American students. He noted, "The older I got the less common it was to see students who were selectively, actively, purposefully inundated with coursework or

hard work, going that extra mile." To Jack's point, "Many students of color are unwilling to remain in stressful gifted education programs. Because such programs are typically comprised of mostly White students, African American students often withdraw and opt for general educational tracks to be around more African American students" (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a, p. 53).

PK, senior, 2.57 GPA, recited the stereotype threat study by Steele and Aronson (1995). He believed that students were underrepresented in gifted programs and underachieving because of stereotype threat. He stated:

> I remember hearing about studies and stuff where you have a black kid and a white kid took the same test, as long as you don't say anything about it, they'll do pretty much the same. So maybe it's that reminder, not letting the kid just figure it out or just let him be. It is like, "Oh, yes, you're black, so there's also this and you have to deal with this and be stereotyped, and this and be stereotyped. You have to deal with this too and it's just like you just don't let them live. So you already have that weight coming in and then you have to do the work and the test.

*What is the role of the institutional agents in overcoming these obstacles?*

All of the students believed that teachers aided them in their success. One student reflected that the institutional agent most responsible for his love of learning and being able to deal with stress was his school counselor who also served as the gifted specialist. Another student cited his school administrator as the reason he overcame obstacles. The participants believed that teacher nexus – belief, cultural competence, expectations, and support – influenced how they handled the obstacles in their academic experiences. Of note is that the participants wanted their teachers and other school personnel to be culturally competent. They longed to have their teachers know about African American history, culture, and language. Not only did they

want the school personnel to be competent, they wanted them to be empathetic to minority groups and relatable. Jack, senior, 3.75 GPA, expressed appreciation that his teachers were not blind to diversity and therefore taught it to him and his classmates.

> I've been inundated with so much diversity from young age demographically speaking. I felt like the teachers of these students from around the globe were very – weren't blind to this diversity and used it positively to allow us to understand one another, to open our minds to the global issues and help us to become more global minded citizens than just citizens focused on the affairs of this country or just or people group or our ethnic group. So, in that regard, I feel like I've had a good experience with diversity and differences and people - people groups.

*What types of goals do these students have for their post-secondary lives?*

Fifteen of the sixteen participants plan to attend college right out of high school; one participant enlisted in the Army before the conclusion of high school and plans to attend college after his time in the Armed Forces. Another student plans to attend a service academy so he can ultimately become a Foreign Service Officer. See Appendix A for a full list of academic and career goals of the participants.

The findings of this study indicate that many of the participants perceived their academic opportunities as wholly beneficial, and they would not alter their unique educational experiences; however, several worried about those peers and classmates who did not receive the same type of exposure to various educational advantages. Many gifted students can have a heighted sense of awareness towards social justice and equity issues (Davis, 2015). While waiting to meet with one of the participants, a young woman who attended a gifted seminar by the researcher and a colleague, stopped to share her frustration that not all students get the opportunity to participate in the "really cool stuff" that the gifted kids do. The participants in this research study were no

different. A few of the participants in the study mentioned that non-gifted students did not have robust educational opportunities like them. What they did not know is that a small percentage of gifted minority students are served by a license gifted specialist.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This study sought to examine the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors of sixteen gifted, Black male high school students at a large urban school district in the Midwest. Based on the findings from this study, achievement oriented, gifted, Black males have strong support systems that include supportive friends and family, exposure to meaningful and engaging activities inside and outside of the classroom and other educational opportunities that support their interests and curiosities, have high teacher expectations, and self-regulatory behaviors which help them to set, monitor, and maintain goals. Except for one student, the participants in this study did not have to choose between their academic identity and affiliation with peers or family. They surrounded themselves with others who held similar beliefs as themselves about achievement and success. Only one of the students believed that his gifted identification label negatively impacted him socially and caused some level of isolation; however, none of the other participants felt that being identified as gifted had any residual negative effect on them. On the contrary, they relished in knowing that they were looked up to as role models, held to higher standards, supported by their families and teachers, and provided a plethora of varied and engaging educational opportunities. Even the one student who felt isolated stated that he would not want to give up his gifted label. The students held similar beliefs about goals and goal attainment. Most of the participants implemented

strategies to help them reach their short term goals. Although eight students earned a 3.5 grade point average or higher, six of those students still underachieved relative to their potential and study habits.

### 5.3 Discussion and Implications

The participants gave numerous accounts of their unique experiences of being gifted and receiving opportunities to participate in engaging and special activities that opened their minds to educational and career possibilities. The enriching opportunities activated and increased their academic engagement. One of the premises of social capital theory is that people are able to accomplish meaningful goals through their access to resources not their own (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). What was clear while the researcher visited schools to recruit participants is that underachieving and/or failing gifted students had minimal levels of social capital within the school among institutional agents. Those students who were behavior problems, truancy problems, or not engaged in the business of school were not afforded engaging or enriching academic opportunities like their more well-behaved gifted peers. Social capital in schools is based on the mindset of the institutional agent (i.e., teacher, counselor, and/or school administrator) about gifted and talented students. Often mired in myths, institutional agents can believe that gifted education is elitist and not necessary because gifted students do not need help because they should be smart enough to learn content on their own (OAGC, n.d.). Mistakenly, they may believe that resources are better served towards less able students. If an institutional agent does not value the contributions of the gifted child, then the child will not reap the resources the agent possesses. These students are conflicted because their gifted label tells them

they have potential; yet, their academic circumstances tell them that they are ok or sound and do not need additional resources or support. Because of the Pygmalion Effect, gifted minority students may not recognize when the label that they earned is being used against them. They do not realize that their social capital currency is compromised. When pressed about giving up the gifted label, no one was willing to relinquish their gifted label which had become part of their identity. Although the expectations were high and they were expected to be role models to siblings and classmates, everyone felt that being identified as gifted made them special and they wanted to live up to that expectation. Even the two participants who have lower grade point averages than the rest of the participants said they believe that the "burden" of the label made them stronger. They wanted the challenge and to be challenged.

Schools with institutional social capital have more resources and offer a more robust curriculum than schools without a significant amount of social capital. These schools have increased support by the district based on demographics of the student body, the zip code the school is in, or institutional memory about past expectations of the school. There is an increasing range of disparity of rigor in the academic content areas across the schools in the study. One of the schools in the study did not have high levels of institutional social capital within the school district; therefore, not given as many resources which in turn impacts the curricular offerings and the rigor of those courses offered.

Underachievement among most of the participants was a prevalent theme. Many of the students reflected that they were not achieving to their potential even though half were earning A's. Students at all grade point levels struggled with inconsistent study habits, poor time management, and procrastination. All but two of the participants admitted that they did not spend

enough time studying. When asked how many hours a week are devoted to studying, two of the students admitted to not studying at all. They said they were able to get through school without having to study. Deante, senior, 3.0 GPA, shared, "Yeah, I don't study at all. I don't. I'm a good test taker. I've never had to study really." John, senior, 3.75 GPA, repeated this sentiment with his revelation that he had never studied because it was not necessary. The other 12 participants revealed they studied as little as 30 minutes a week to one studying 12-18 hours a week depending on the content.

The participants complained there was not clear communication about gifted service when they transitioned from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. The students complained that they were not told there was no gifted service at high school. As per the State Department of Education in the state, high school gifted service is considered AP, IB, college level classes, and early graduation. The students definitely wanted more interaction to occur in high school among the gifted students. They wanted this to be facilitated by the gifted resource specialist or by someone in the school. Joey, junior, 3.3 GPA, argued that an improvement to the gifted and talented program is peer interactions. "Yeah, more interactions with each other and having discussions about school and stuff, just more like time together. I think the AP courses and stuff are good, but I like interaction."

Students were asked if they felt pressure as a Black student. Leonardo, senior, 4.0 GPA, delineated between academic and social pressure. He said they all have pressures as African American males. He did not feel that academic pressure was significant to him because he pushed himself to achieve at high levels and enjoyed that pressure. However, one quarter of the participants had gifted siblings who were high achievers and this put pressure on the participants

to achieve at high levels which sometimes caused them to struggle and have angst and doubt about their abilities. Their parents held high expectations that they could achieve at the same or higher levels than their gifted siblings.

A notable recurring theme in school districts across the country is the plight of gifted, Black students and the plight of gifted, Black males (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kunjufu, 1988; Mickelson, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Harmon, 2002; Ogbu, 2003; Henfield, 2006). However, in the study that was conducted by the researcher, there was a glimmer of light that shone on the participants and the school district they attended. The young men in this study experienced positive early learning opportunities; they shunned negative peer influences either because of positive peer influences or because they stayed true to themselves; they exhibited academic persistence as well as mental and emotion fortitude when faced with overwhelming obstacles; they motivated themselves with thoughts and dreams of short term and long term educational and career goals which were made possible by their self-regulatory behaviors. Each one of them had high expectations for themselves and were disappointed when they did not meet their standards. Parents and teachers held high expectations for them too along with an abundance of support – academic and emotional. To their knowledge, not one of them encountered racial discrimination or deficit thinking by institutional agents. They shared meaningful and long lasting friendships with those in their gifted clusters, pull-out groups, and/or self-contained gifted classes, and they exhibited a self-awareness about themselves that was refreshing. They took academic and intellectual risks because they were groomed for that by their high expectation wielding teachers and supportive parents and enjoyed the time spent engaging in academic pursuits with their gifted friends. The district supported various

competitions and activities specifically designed for the gifted students at all grade levels but especially in kindergarten through eighth grade. All was not perfect for a few students who experienced academic isolation and loneliness. The feelings of loneliness came from a few who had instances of physical isolation from friends or others who looked like them. One student felt caught between two worlds but did have friends in both worlds. One student did isolate himself for reasons only known to him, but he reaped the benefit of the positive early learning experiences, high expectations, unwavering support from family and school personnel, and extraordinary goal setting. In the end, they were all allowed to be popular and smart and thespians and athletes. Their academic identities along with their other labels were allowed to shine. Gifted. Black. Male.

## 5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several suggestions are provided for teachers, building principals, school districts, and other school personnel to support the needs of Black and culturally diverse gifted students. Also included are recommendations for parents, students, and schools of education. These recommendations are not exhaustive but offered to improve the experiences of gifted and potentially gifted, Black and other minority students.

### 5.4.1 Teachers

1. Practice having high teacher nexus – belief, cultural competence, expectations, and support.

2. Attend professional development activities and/or graduate course offerings to increase awareness of cultural competency and to eliminate stereotyping and negative deficit orientations.
3. Engage in culturally relevant practices.
4. Engage differentiated lessons whenever possible to allow gifted students to move through the curriculum at a faster pace.
5. Incorporate Passion Projects into the curriculum.
6. Help students develop and maintain self-regulating behaviors.
7. Encourage students to challenge themselves and take academic risks.
8. Keep current on gifted related best practices.
9. Establish and maintain a positive rapport with the students that will allow them to feel safe and comfortable enough to discuss their inadequacies and shortcomings.
10. Utilize the positive rapport to foster and nurture intrinsic motivation; thereby, having an influence on their study skills, time management, and awareness of their capabilities.

### 5.4.2 School administrators and School District Officials

1. Continue to support current and future gifted education programs in the district.
2. Collect and disaggregate gifted and talented program participation data by race, gender, socioeconomic status, grade level, and description of the gifted and talented program.
3. Ensure that selection committees for gifted and talented programs are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

4. Develop and utilize a variety of strategies (e.g., portfolio assessments, student transcripts, observational and performance-based assessments, nominations by parents, teachers, and peers) to identify and select Black males for gifted and talented programs.
5. Eliminate any policies or practices that might prevent Black males from participating in gifted and talented programs (e.g., admissions fees, attendance requirements, and parent contracts/agreements).
6. Ensure that gifted and talented programs are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.
7. Be open-minded about the students identified as gifted in your building.
8. Offer gifted services as early in their academic journey as possible to the student.
9. Employ a multicultural curriculum to show students a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, and races in their everyday learning.
10. Provide resources for teachers to attend gifted professional development opportunities.
11. Provide culturally relevant training for all staff members in the district.
12. To avoid confusion, communicate the continuity of service from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school with clear expectations about what gifted services look like at the next transition point.
13. Continue with the self-contained gifted classroom.
14. Continue with the cluster model and having like-minded peers with them.
15. Offer an accelerated curriculum to meet the needs of the students.
16. Meet the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students.
17. Provide a personalized experience to meet the needs of the student.
18. Increase interactions with other gifted students in high school.

19. Offer multiple testing opportunities for identification in the primary grades.
20. Use the pull out model as a service for gifted students.
21. Implement parent-training programs in urban schools to help families or legal guardians to better understand the benefits of gifted and talented programs.
22. Offer and fund enrichment opportunities such as debate, mock trial, Invention Convention, spelling bee, Geography Bee, Math Counts, Power of the Pen, chess, and TEDx. This list is not exhaustive but offered to students in the district the research was conducted.

### 5.4.3 Parents

1. Although teachers model note-taking techniques and other study techniques for the students, there needs to be a clear discussion about why students should study even though they can earn high grades without doing so.
2. Articulate and model to students why education is important to you and should be for them.
3. Promote realistic expectations for your students.
4. Continue to support and advocate on behalf of your gifted child.
5. Participate in gifted parents groups or associations at the district, state, and national levels.

### 5.4.4 Students

1. Continue to advocate for yourself and your needs as a student and as a gifted student.
2. Continue to set appropriate goals.

3. Ask for help if you are having trouble in school.
4. Challenge yourself and do not be afraid to take academic risks.
5. Articulate your academic and social-emotional needs to your parents, teachers, school counselors, and administrators.
6. Avoid, whenever possible, negative peer influences.
7. Continue to stay balanced by engaging in those extracurricular activities you enjoy.
8. Take advantage of opportunities that are offered to you and provided by the district and other outside organizations.
9. Participate in summer enrichment activities to foster the academic momentum gained during the school year.
10. Learn how to study and then apply it in high school.

### 5.4.5 Teacher Training

In order for teachers to be culturally competent while working with diverse populations, Ford and Harris (1999) recommend that teacher training focus on such topics as (a) understanding culture and its impact on testing, learning, and teaching; (b) examining teachers' cultural biases and stereotypes and their influence on achievement and self-image; (c) understanding the needs and development of children who live in poverty; (d) promoting positive racial identity among diverse students; (e) helping children cope with negative peer pressures and isolation; (f) understanding variables that promote the underachievement of diverse students and how to improve their achievement; (g) developing multicultural curricula that promote student

achievement, motivation, and racial identities; and (h) working with culturally diverse families to promote student achievement (Flowers, Milner, & Moore, 2003; Milner et al., 2003).

### 5.5 Limitations

This study shares specific insights regarding gifted, Black male high school students. However, only the perceptions of these students were collected. Hence, the responses should not be generalized to all gifted, Black males or to all gifted, Black females. Furthermore, consistent observations of the students in their individual schools would have been beneficial. Although sixteen parents were contacted to participate in this study, only three parents followed through with the interviewed. Having more parental input in the study would have highlighted differing or similar parenting styles and the influence of these styles on parental expectations and academic pressure and/or isolation. It may have shed light on the varying levels of parental involvement depending on the grade point average of the student. Increased parent participation may have offered insight into the parent's perception of the gifted label for their child. Obtaining teacher perspectives would have been valuable to this study; however, only four of the sixteen students agreed to allow the researcher to talk with a favorite teacher. Two students gave the researcher the name of the same teacher who had retired from the district the previous year and moved out of the state. Another teacher who was recommended by a student was out on medical leave, and one teacher did not return a phone call to meet with the researcher.

### 5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

There are several topics of interest for future research. Since most if not all of the students will be in college in four years, the researcher would like to conduct a follow-up study

to glean information from their collegiate/military/life experiences and the foundation that was laid in their K-12 education. The study would examine their achievement attitudes during their post-secondary experiences. Many of the participants enjoyed their enriching academic experiences, and it would be beneficial to see if they sought similar types of enriching experiences in college or the military (i.e., study abroad programs or graduate school outside of their home state, or special military duties). Since so many of the participants felt supported by their family and peers, it would be meaningful to see if those relationships were maintained and if the same or greater levels of support were attained in their post-secondary lives. It would also be of note to examine the attainment of their career and/or educational goals. Many of the participants did not practice good study habits because they could succeed in high school without studying. It would be interesting to talk with them to discuss when and how they began to study. Since many of the seniors and some of the juniors lacked motivation, it would be interesting to find out if college and/or the military provided more motivating and interesting experiences. Most of the participants felt as though elementary and middle school prepared them for advanced level classes in high school. The researcher would like to explore if their high school preparation held true at the collegiate level, and they were prepared for the pace and breadth of college.

Since the researcher studied gifted, Black high school males, it would be of interest to examine gifted, Black high school females at the same schools as the male participants. It would also be of interest to research gifted male and female African American students who are in the top 5-10% of their high school classes to examine their achievement attitudes and feelings of support from their family, peers, and school personnel.

## 5.7 Final Thoughts

The study sought to examine the achievement attitudes, gifted identification, racial identity development, and academic beliefs and behaviors of gifted, Black male high school students. Social capital asserts that people are able to accomplish meaningful goals through their access to resources not their own. In addition to interpretivism, this theoretical lens was used to highlight the experiences of gifted, Black male high school students and their delicate relationship with institutional agents to provide and/or offer academic opportunities not otherwise shared with or given to other gifted students. One student knew he pushed the envelope with teachers and administrators by only wearing half of the school uniform regularly. He added that he did not get sent home or provided an appropriate piece of clothing because as a gifted student, he performs and does what he is asked. Thereby, he earns a level of credit for his academic performance, amenable behavior, and willingness to play the role model. Because he entertained the expectations of the school personnel, he in turn did not have to always adhere to the rules like his peers. Although this is story of clothing, this scenario occurred with college visits, allowance or exclusion from AP classes, schedule changes, and/or rules violations with student within and outside of this study. The levels of reciprocity with regard to social capital were apparent and its uses in the high school. Label theory was also applied and illuminated the positive feelings the students felt about being labeled as gifted and the perception of themselves. The students would not shed the label because not only did it provide capital in their academic and social circles, it also provided opportunities from institutional agents that they knew everyone else was not receiving. The academic identity of these participants melded with other facets of their being – race, gender, and socio-economics. They all proudly wore the gifted label

even if they felt it was burdensome at times while appreciating the visible and invisible benefits of their social capital.

The district as an institutional entity promoted and supported students with the gifted and talented label. The district employed a centralized way of assessing and identifying students with specific guidelines and expectations for services and offered a myriad of gifted service to students in elementary, middle, and high school. Unlike many districts referenced in this study, this district promoted and nurtured gifted programming. The culture of the institution supported the social-emotional and academic needs of these gifted students. This was done by systemically placing gifted students in a learning environment that exposed and nurtured the dynamic of having them in a cohort of like-minded peers along with meaningful learning opportunities.

The exploration of social capital theory, label theory, and institutional theory offered insight into the participants, the different schools they attended, the school district, and revealed the systemic mechanisms of support provided for the participants. When institutional theory is applied not only to school districts around the country but to the bastion of colleges of education in the United States which is rich in diversity, there is a question as to why more preservice teachers are not exposed to multicultural curricula and diverse students early in the program. In order for teachers to feel culturally competent about teaching diverse populations, they must be exposed to culturally diverse students during all phases of their teacher training (Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005b; Milner et al., 2003). “Teacher education programs, around the country, bear tremendous responsibility to help preservice teachers become more comfortable with and sensitive to issues related to multiculturalism and diversity” (Milner et al., 2003, p. 68). Several

of the participants shared the sentiments of Ford, Moore, and Milner (2005b) that educators must be culturally aware, knowledgeable, and competent.

There are a variety of best practices for teachers to integrate and retool their pedagogy to address the cultural and affective needs of minority students in their classrooms. Therefore, schools and more specifically teachers need to adopt a multicultural curriculum infused with a variety of teaching strategies and interdisciplinary connections to keep students engaged. "A primary rationale for multicultural education is the promise it holds for engaging students and giving them opportunities to identify with, connect with, and relate to the curriculum. It is deliberate, continuous, planned, and systematic opportunities to avoid drive-by teaching – to make learning meaningful and relevant to students, and to give students of color perspectives to reflect the gifted educational curriculum" (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005b, p. 174). Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998) assert that "children need to learn African American history so students will have greater pride in their own accomplishments" (p. 57). This sense of pride will enable them to combat the trap of underachievement. Ford (1996) believes that gifted underachievers lack the motivation to succeed academically because of boredom and feeling the curriculum is out of touch with who they are. Therefore, a comprehensive multicultural curriculum needs to be developed. Banks and Banks (1997) feel this is accomplished by implementing the following components: (a) content integration; (b) the knowledge construction process; (c) prejudice reduction; (d) an equity of pedagogy; and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure. The concept of content integration encourages teachers to use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups "to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline" (p. 21). The knowledge construction process allows students to

investigate cultural assumptions and perspectives with a discipline. Prejudice reduction invites students to view different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups from a different perspective and develop positive attitudes about them. An equity of pedagogy allows teachers to reflect on their teaching and decide whether their curriculum reflects diversity among racial and cultural groups and promotes the achievement of minority students. The school culture is paramount to school success for most students because it says, "You are welcome here, no matter who you are, what you look like, and how much money is in your pocket." A positive school culture promotes gender, cultural, racial, and social-class equity. According to Banks and Banks (1997), "to implement multicultural education in a school, we must reform its power relationships, the verbal interactions, the curriculum, extracurricular activities, testing, and grouping practices" (p.23).

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# APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

## Participant Demographic Information

| Name | Gender | Age | Grade | GPA | Advanced Courses Taken | Educational Goals | Career Goals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cranston** | M | 17 | 12 | 3.31 | AP Calculus<br>AP U.S. History | Increase my high school cumulative GPA and do better in class; attend college and keep my grades up | To become an accountant or some other path in finance and to "like my career" |
| **Daniel** | M | 17 | 11 | 2.70 | IB English SL | Graduate from college with a Master's degree in aeronautical engineering | To join the Navy as a pilot and become and engineer and develop an aeronautics company |
| **Deante** | M | 18 | 12 | 3.20 | AP Chemistry | Attend college and earn a Bachelor's degree in athletic training | To become an athletic trainer for a high school or higher level football team |
| **Frank** | M | 15 | 10 | 3.56 | None | Achieve a 4.0 GPA and graduate from college | To become an entrepreneur and to own an architecture company |
| **Jack** | M | 18 | 12 | 3.65 | IB Math HL<br>AP Physics | Earn a Bachelor's degree in engineering and minor in business | To work in the industry of choice and market my inventions/innovations to the public |
| **Jasper** | M | 16 | 10 | 3.2 | None | Maintain a 3.0 or higher GPA to receive many academic scholarships | To attend medical school and earn a medical degree and become a plastic surgeon |
| **Jim** | M | 16 | 11 | 3.06 | IB English SL<br>IB Anthropology<br>IB Math Studies | Graduate high school with a high GPA and attend the college of my choice | To find a profession that I really enjoy doing that also pays well |
| **Joey** | M | 16 | 11 | 3.42 | None | Graduate high school with a 3.5 or higher GPA; attend college on a full scholarship; major in sports marketing | To become a marketing manager either for a small family business or a major corporation such a Nike or Adidas |
| **John** | M | 17 | 12 | 3.8 | AP Calculus<br>AP U.S. History | Graduate from college | To work for ESPN |
| **Kevin** | M | 15 | 10 | 3.85 | AP Chemistry<br>AP U.S. History | Attend a good yet-low cost college and earn a Bachelor's degree; then attend medical school at a renowned college | To attend medical school and become a neurologist to help patients. |
| **Leonardo** | M | 17 | 12 | 4.58 | AP Biology; AP Chemistry; AP U.S. History; IB English | To be the best I can be to obtain the best education possible; to learn as | Undecided but go into a science oriented field |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | HL; IB Visual Arts HL; IB History HL; IB Math SL; IB Theory of Knowledge; IB Biology HL; IB Spanish B SL | much as possible in science, biology, and mathematics | |
| **PK** | M | 17 | 12 | 2.57 | AP Literature & Composition AP U. S. History | Graduate from college and maybe get a Master's degree in environmental studies | To enlist in the military, attend college, become a park ranger, and attend the fire academy, then go into public office |
| **Rico** | M | 18 | 12 | 3.30 | AP Spanish; AP English; AP Calculus | Earn a Bachelor's degree in education and earn a doctorate in the medical field | To develop a wellness clinic in an underserved community that addresses major health disparities in the United States |
| **Tony** | M | 17 | 12 | 3.06 | AP Chemistry | Graduate and learn as much as possible in preparation for my future | To become a criminal psychologist as a liaison with law enforcement |
| **Tre** | M | 17 | 11 | 4.02 | Two college level classes offered at high school | Earn a Bachelor's degree in international relations/studies | To become an Army Officer and later a Foreign Service Officer (FSO) |
| **Will** | M | 17 | 12 | 4.4 | AP Calculus; AP U.S. History; AP English Literature & Composition; AP Biology | Earn a Bachelor's degree and additional schooling based on my goals at the time | To open my own gym and earn enough to live comfortably |

| Name | Family Makeup | Free/Reduced Eligibility | Family Education | Community Makeup | Type of School | School Size | African American | White | Hispanic | Asian | Multi Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cranston | M | Y | M-4 yr. degree F-Some college | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 777 | 91.5% | 2.1% | 2.4% | 0.8% | 3.1% |
| Daniel | M/F | Y | M-2 yr. degree F-HS diploma | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 799 | 53.6% | 30.0% | 7.1% | 4.0% | 5.0% |
| Deante | M/Stepfather | N | M-Some college F-HS diploma | Even White & African Amer. | Lottery | 777 | 91.5% | 2.1% | 2.4% | 0.8% | 3.1% |
| Frank | Both – Shared Parenting | N | M-Graduate/Prof. degree F-Graduate/Prof. degree | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 777 | 91.5% | 2.1% | 2.4% | 0.8% | 3.1% |
| Jack | M/F | N | M-Graduate/Prof. degree F-Some college | Even White & African Amer. | Lottery | 799 | 53.6% | 30.0% | 7.1% | 4.0% | 5.0% |
| Jasper | M/F | NR | M-Some college F-HS diploma | Even White & African Amer. | Lottery | 777 | 91.5% | 2.1% | 2.4% | 0.8% | 3.1% |
| Jim | M | N | M-4 yr. degree F-4 yr. degree | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 799 | 53.6% | 30.0% | 7.1% | 4.0% | 5.0% |
| Joey | Both – Shared Parenting | N | M-Graduate/Prof. degree F-Graduate/Prof. degree | Predominantly African Amer. | Career Academy | 694 | 71.0% | 10.5% | 10.1% | 5.6% | 2.8% |
| John | M | N | M-4 yr. degree F-Some college | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 777 | 91.5% | 2.1% | 2.4% | 0.8% | 3.1% |
| Kevin | M/F | N | M-Graduate/Prof. degree F-Graduate/Prof. degree | Predominantly White | Lottery | 799 | 53.6% | 30.0% | 7.1% | 4.0% | 5.0% |
| Leonardo | M | NR | M-Graduate/Prof. degree F-Graduate/Prof. degree | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 799 | 53.6% | 30.0% | 7.1% | 4.0% | 5.0% |
| PK | M/Father Deceased | Y | M-some college | Predominantly African Amer. | Lottery | 777 | 91.5% | 2.1% | 2.4% | 0.8% | 3.1% |

| Name | Family Makeup | Free/Reduced Eligibility | Family Education | Community Makeup | Type of School | School Size | African American | White | Hispanic | Asian | Multi Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rico | M | Y | M-HS Diploma<br>F- HS Diploma | Predominantly African Amer. | Dual Enrollment | 846 | 39.9% | 36.9% | 8.4% | 6.4% | 8.0% |
| Tony | M | Y | M-Some college<br>F-Bus./Trade school | Even White & African Amer. | Lottery | 799 | 53.6% | 30.0% | 7.1% | 4.0% | 5.0% |
| Tre | M | Y | M-HS diploma<br>F-HS diploma | Predominantly African Amer. | Traditional | 902 | 69.8% | 17.0% | 4.7% | 1.7% | 6.5% |
| Will | M/F | N | M-HS diploma<br>F-HS diploma | Even White & African Amer. | Dual Enrollment | 1023 | 58.8% | 7.8% | 12.3% | 16.6% | 4.3% |

## APPENDIX B: STUDENT SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project entitled, "Inside the Experiences of High-Achieving African American Male and Female Students in Gifted and Non-Gifted Programs." You are one of many gifted African-American students at high schools in Valor City Schools who have agreed to share their perceptions and attitudes toward achievement, gifted identification and school support, teachers, school counselors, and administrators. No one has agreed to participate just by attending the meeting. You have just expressed interest in the research.

Your participation will require about 1 hour to 1.5 hours of your time. During this time, you will complete a short demographics questionnaire and one face to face interview. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed in verbatim. Some participants may be asked to help with member checking. Member checking happens after all of the interviews have occurred and is a way to make sure that we understand what experiences are common for gifted, African American students. This process may take an additional 1 to 1.5 hours of your time.

As part of the study, we also want to understand the experiences of the teachers, school counselors, or administrators who have worked with you. We are asking you to share the name of that person who has been helpful in your success in school. That person will be asked to participate in the study and given a consent form too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. At any time if you wish to discontinue your participation in the study you may do so, without penalty. Please also note that all information generated will be treated confidentially. All information obtained from your participation in the study will be stored in a secured file cabinet in my office at The Ohio State University.

If you are interested in participating, please review with your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) the attached parental permission form and the informed consent form. If you and your legal guardian(s) do not have any reservations about you participating in this research project, please sign your name on the assent form and have one of your legal guardian(s) sign his or her name on the parental permission form and the informed consent form. After you and your parents have signed the documents, please put them in the drop box in the counselor's office. Please feel free to contact me via telephone (614-247-4765) or e-mail (moore.1408@osu.edu), if you need additional information.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to hearing back from you!

## APPENDIX C: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Student Demographic Questionnaire

**Directions: Please answer these questions to the best of your ability. Feel free to skip any question that you feel uncomfortable answering.**

Pseudonym_____

Place of Birth (check answer): United States_____ Other_____

If the United States, what City_____ and State_____

Race: _____Gender: _____Age: _____What grade are you in?_____

Do you qualify for free/reduced lunch? Yes or No

Check (√) your best estimate of your high school grade point average?
_____ A+ (4.00) (98-100)
_____ A (4.00) (92-97)
_____ A- (3.75) (90-91)
_____ B+ (3.30) (88-89)
_____ B (3.00) (82-87)
_____ B- (2.70) (80-81)
_____ C+ (2.30) (78-79)
_____ C or lower (less than 2.00) (less than 77)

What elementary school(s) did you attend? _____

What middle school(s) did you attend? _____

When were you initially identified as gifted and talented? _____

What gifted services have you received (Name School):

Elementary School Level _____

Middle School Level _____

High School Level _____

Did you take advanced courses in middle school (i.e., Algebra I, biology)? Yes or No

If yes, what courses? _____

Are you currently taking honors, AP/IB, or College Credit Plus courses now? Yes or No
If yes, what courses? _____

Check (√) the highest educational level completed by your parents:

| | Mother: | Father: |
|---|---|---|
| No school | _____ | _____ |
| Elementary School | _____ | _____ |
| Middle School | _____ | _____ |
| High School Diploma Equivalent | _____ | _____ |
| Business or Trade School | _____ | _____ |
| Some College | _____ | _____ |
| Two Year Degree | _____ | _____ |
| Four Year Degree | _____ | _____ |
| Some graduate or Professional School | _____ | _____ |
| Graduate or Professional Degree | _____ | _____ |

What is the make-up of your residential community?
_____ Predominately African-American
_____ Predominately White
_____ Predominately Other (please specify)_____
_____ Evenly Distributed with African-American and White
_____ Evenly Distributed with Other (please specify)_____
_____ Other (please specify)_____

Check (√) the category that best describes your living arrangement:
Single-Parent Home _____ Two-Parent Home_____
Other_____ (please specify).

If you live in a single-parent home, whom do you stay with: _____ Mother, _____ Father, _____Grandmother, _____ Grandfather _____,
or Other _____ (please specify).

What are your educational goals?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What are your career goals? _____
_____
_____
_____

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Individual Interview Protocol - Student

1. How would you describe your school experiences in Valor City Schools (e.g., elementary school level, middle school level, and high school level)? How do you think these experiences may have differed in a suburban school district?

2. What is it like to be a gifted, African American male/female student in Valor City Schools? In your household? In your community?

3. How does it feel being labeled gifted? How do others treat you as a result of having the label?

4. Tell me how being identified as gifted has affected your life (e.g., teacher-student relationships? Family relationships, and peer relationships).

5. Do you ever wish you were not identified gifted? Why or why not?

6. What motivates you to excel in school? And, what motivates you not to excel? Please be specific.

7. As an African American male/female, what pressures have you experienced as a gifted student? How do you think these pressures may differ from your non-gifted peers?

8. Have you ever felt isolated in your gifted and talented program in elementary or middle school? Why or why not?

9. Have you ever felt isolated now in your advanced high school courses? Why or why not?

10. What individuals have been the most influential in supporting and nurturing your achievement (e.g., family, teachers, school counselors, administrators, peers, and other)?

11. Describe specifically how these individuals helped support your academic, emotional, and/or social development. In what ways have these individuals affirmed your quest for high achievement?

12. What specific individuals have been the least supportive in affirming your giftedness/achievement? In what ways have these individuals deterred your quest for high achievement?

13. Based on your experiences, how would you describe the gifted and talented program in Valor City Schools (e.g., strengths and shortcomings)? Provide specific examples, if possible.

14. As a student, how do you learn best? How have your teachers met these needs? Not met these needs? Provide a specific example, if possible.

15. Why do you think African American students are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs? What are some of their pitfalls or roadblocks in school in general and gifted and talented programs specifically?

16. Have you ever felt like withdrawing from the gifted and talented program? If yes, what was the turning point that caused you to feel this way? If no, how did you retain your focus in the gifted and talented program?

17. Do you think that you have achieved to your highest ability? Why or why not?

18. How many hours do you devote to studying from Sunday to Saturday, not including homework? Do you think that you are devoting enough time in your studies? Why or why not?

19. Does your school effort in your courses accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?

20. How often have you received a grade in class that you knew that you could have done better in? What inhibited you from doing your best?

21. What has been your proudest moment in school as a gifted student?

22. If there is anything that you would like to share that we did not discuss, please feel free to share it.

# APPENDIX E: CODE BOOK

## Emerging Themes: Categories and Subcode Definitions

**Connections**

- **Support of family (SUPP)**
  Responses related to parental and family impact on student giftedness
- **Support of friends (SUPF)**
  Responses related to the impact of peers on student giftedness
  - Circle of friends (COF)
  - Like-minded peers (LMP)
  - Drifting from friends (DFF)
- **Support of school personnel (SUPPSP)**
  Responses related to the impact of school personnel on student giftedness
- **Support of school community (SUPPSC)**
  Responses related to the impact of the school community on student giftedness
- **Support by the community (SUPPCO)**
  Responses related to community impact on student giftedness
- **Support of coaches (SUPC)**
  Responses related to the coaching impact on student giftedness
- **Non-supportive family (NONSUPPA)**
  Responses related to non-supportive family members impact on student giftedness
- **Non-supportive friends (NONSUPPE)**
  Responses related to non-supportive friends impact on student giftedness
- **Non-supportive school personnel (NONSUPPSP)**
  Responses related to non-supportive school personnel impact on student giftedness
- **Non-supportive community (NONSUPC)**
  Responses related to non-supportive community impact on student giftedness
- **Isolation (ISO)**
  Responses related to isolation impact on student giftedness
  - Isolation in high school (ISOHS)
  - No isolation (NISO)
  - Challenge connecting with peers (CHCP)
  - Connecting with older peers (COP)
  - Fewer African American students in these classes (FAAS)
- **Lack of knowledge about African American History (NKAAH)**
  Responses related to student perceptions about teachers' lack of knowledge of AA history
- **Lack of communication about the content between students and teachers (LCC)**
  Responses related to student impact on teacher-student communication
- **Role model schools (RM)**
  Responses related to student impact on being a role model at school (RMS)
  Responses related to student impact on being a role model home (RMH)

**Experiences**

- Treatment by Others (LTBO)
- Positive experiences (PE)
- Success GT program (SGTP)
- Diverse students (EXPDS)
- Global thinking (EXPGT)
- Activities outside of the classroom/field trips (EXPOA)
- Lack of experiences as a reason for underachievement (LEXP)
- Exposure to Educational Opportunities (EXPEO)
- School Transitions (DSTE)
- Conflict (CONF)

**Expectations**

- Low expectations – general (LE)
- Student Expectations (SE)
    - Expectations of self (EXPS)
    - Expectations of family (EXPF)
- Familial expectations (FE)
- Expectations of school personnel (EXPSP)
    - Teacher expectations (EXPTE)
    - Low teacher expectations (LTEXP) (i.e., deficit ideologies)
- Community expectations (EXPTC)
- Goals (GLS)
- More resolve than non-gifted peers (MRNG)

**Preparation**

- Gifted service
    - Early development of gifted students (EDGT)
    - Positive early learning experiences (PELE)
    - Elementary school is pivotal to laying the foundation for student success (ELF)
- Teachers
    - Interactions with gifted personnel (IGTP)
    - Good teaching (GOTE)
    - Saw potential in student (SPIS)
- Curricular Programming (CP) –
    - Rigorous curriculum (RIGC)
    - Advanced curriculum and classes (EXPAC)
    - School has limited courses (SLC)
- Instruction (IN)
- School (SCH)
- Study skills; effort/lack of; time management skills (SELT)

- Boredom (BORE)
- Academic choices made (ACM)
- Lack of motivation (LOM)

**Opportunities (OPP)**

- Exposure to Educational Opportunities (EXPEO)
- Various opportunities (VO)
- Being pushed into career fields with low minority participation (LMCF)
- Testing opportunities (TEO)

**Interest/Curiosity/Engagement (INTC)**

- Not enough for high school students (NECP)
- Wanting more creative classes (CCP)
- More personalized instruction/tailored academic experience (MPI)
- Wanting more gifted programming (MGP)
- Choice in curricular programming (CHCP)
- More involvement (MIN)

**Psycho-social Behavior/Resolve**

- Identity (ID)
- Gifted label (IDGL)
- Stereotypes (STE)
- Breaking stereotypes (STEB)
- Racism (RAC)
- Self-regulatory behaviors; adaptability and adjusting (SRB)
- Pressure (PRS)
- No pressure (NPRS)
- Perfectionism, procrastination, perseverance (3PS)
- Distractions (DIST)
- Parental Involvement (PII)

## APPENDIX F: RESEARCH TEAM

## Description of Research Team Members

**Researcher: Kirsten J. Smith**

The researcher in this study is a 46 year-old African-American female student currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Policy and Leadership doctoral program at The Ohio State University. She earned her Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Virginia. Currently, she works as a gifted resource specialist in a school district.

**Research Partner 1:**

Research Partner 1 is a 45 year-old African-American male principal currently pursuing a doctoral degree in the Educational Policy doctoral program at Ohio University. He is ABD and he completed his Master's degree in Educational Administration from the University of Virginia. This research partner has taken several quantitative and qualitative research courses. He has served as an elementary principal for 19 years.

**Research Partner 2:**

Research partner 2 is a 58 year-old African-American female clinical instructor at Columbus State Community College. She completed her Bachelor of Science degree in Health Information Systems from the University of Cincinnati. This research partner has taken several quantitative courses.

**Research Partner 3:**

Research Partner 3 is a 56 year-old African-American female who is retired. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in the Social Work program with a minor in German from Olivet College. She has taken several courses qualitative analysis.

## APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

# Initial Submission Approved for #2016B0047

Buck-IRB <irbinfo@osu.edu>

Thu 9/29/2016 4:44 PM

To: moore.1408@osu.edu <moore.1408@osu.edu>;

Cc: smith.323@osu.edu <smith.323@osu.edu>; max.7@osu.edu <max.7@osu.edu>;

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

**Behavioral Institutional Review Board**

300 Research Administration building
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1063

Phone (614) 688-8457
Fax (614) 688-0366
orrp.osu.edu

09/29/2016

Study Number: 2016B0047
Study Title: Inside the Experiences of High-Achieving African American Male and Female Students in Gifted and Non-Gifted Programs

Type of Review: Initial Submission

Review Method: Expedited

Date of IRB Approval: 09/29/2016
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: 09/29/2017

Expedited category: #6, #7

Dear James Moore,

The Ohio State Behavioral IRB **APPROVED** the above referenced research.

In addition, the following were also approved for this study:

- Children (permission of one parent sufficient)

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring that all individuals assisting in the conduct of the study are informed of their obligations for following the IRB-approved protocol and applicable regulations, laws, and policies, including the obligation to report any problems or potential noncompliance with the requirements or determinations of the IRB. Changes to the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before implemented, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University's OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378 and is valid until the expiration date listed above. ***Without further review, IRB approval will no longer be in effect on the expiration date.*** To continue the study, a continuing review application must be approved before the expiration date to avoid a lapse in IRB approval and the need to stop all research activities. A final study report must be provided to the IRB once all research activities involving human subjects have ended.

Records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 5 years after the study is closed. For more information, see university policies, Institutional Data and Research Data.