

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF NON-WHITE STUDENTS IN A SECONDARY  
GIFTED PROGRAM: THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2018

ABSTRACT

Non-white students are underrepresented in gifted education. The purpose of this narrative case study is to describe the stories of non-white students who have graduated from the gifted programs in a Midwest suburban district. This study explored the history of gifted education, an examination of gatekeeping measures that denies non-white students admittance to gifted programs, advocacy measures that can be taken to increase the non-white representation in gifted education and the role of leaders as change agents in gifted.

The case studies of six non-white gifted students that graduated from the Motown school district were the focus of this research and were used to inform this study. The participants of the study were asked to share their experiences while in the gifted program. In addition to their narrative statements, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Demographic questionnaires, artifacts, and school records were collected to provide a thick, rich description of the non-white gifted students' experience. The stories of the participants were used to inform about their experiences and to advise potential changes that could benefit non-white secondary gifted students.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled “Underrepresentation of Non-white Students in a Secondary Gifted Program: The Students’ Experience” presented by Lori Ann Dameron, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## PREFACE

When a former student graces me with a notice of college graduation, an invite to an awards ceremony, or a copy of a recently published book, I am always amazed and grateful that I have had the honor of working with the many fascinating students I have had in my career. These students, many underserved, non-white, have the label of “gifted,” but their humanity far surpasses any categories our educational institutions and academia might impose. They have vision, they are caring, they are resilient, they are imaginative and creative, and they are living their lives to their full potential. The fact that they take the time to remember me, their high school advisor, at such important and distant times in their lives fills me with pride, but at the same time makes my heart and mind sad for those who go unrecognized. As a white female with a middle-class background, born and raised in the Midwest, I bring my positionality to the research topic of exploring the experiences of nonwhite students with gifted programs. England (1994) pointed out “we are differently positioned subjects with different biographies; we are not dematerialized, disembodied entities” (p. 248). Yet, I dare to speak and advocate for underserved nonwhite students knowing that to illuminate issues of access to Gifted and Talented programming for these students raised questions about my positionality. Who am I as a white female to question the status quo? I believe it is the responsibility of educators to promote social justice and advocate for all students. Every student has a right to a quality education and should be encouraged and empowered to fulfill their potential. As an educator with 25 years of experience, it is my responsibility to bring to fore difficult issues that impede students from reaching their potentials. It is my duty and my passion. With my positionality in mind, I maintained an awareness of possible bias, which also was included as limitations of the proposed study. I kept a journal of my thoughts and reactions during data collection and

analysis. I had a critical friend, who shares the background of the students in the proposed study, that was used to question and review my interpretation of the data.

However, thinking of these students over the years that I have encountered in gifted education makes me seriously reflect on my time working with the gifted education program, how it can be improved and how more students can be included. One pertinent student story I share below:

I was invisible. I can prove it because I set the record for missing the most days of middle school and nobody cared or noticed. Occasionally my mom would get a letter in the mail about it, but since I was home anyway I would throw it away. One day my science teacher in high school told me I was smart. The next thing I knew I was being tested to see if I was gifted. I could not believe it because there hadn't been any Black kids in the gifted classes in my other schools. When I got in I decided it was time to pay attention. As I leave for Cornell to begin a new phase in my life I believe my gifted program changed my life. I want others to know about this so they can be a part of it (Personal communication, 2011).

Jared and scores of other non-white students, disproportionately underrepresented in our nation's gifted programs, deserve to have a voice and equal representation in gifted education which will allow them to access the services they need to realize their full potential. These marginalized brilliant minds with frequently silent voices need an advocate. That is my purpose for wanting to study underrepresented gifted youth and find out how we can best serve these students, allowing their voices to be heard and their experiences shared. I hope to inform other non-white gifted students and school districts about the importance of high school gifted programs that represent all students. Hopefully, this will provide more students access to gifted programs that will facilitate them in developing and obtaining their educational and career goals.

As a veteran teacher of gifted students, I am drawn to working with students to help them maximize their potential and achieve their goals. Working in a high school setting, I encountered many students who ultimately achieve their post-secondary goals and many

who do not. I noticed the disparity with non-white students. I began examining on a superficial level what was making a difference. Then I began my research and determined that there are resources and programs that educators can use to make a difference in the progress of non-white gifted students. I began implementing these measures.

Since I am immersed in a school setting that directly impacts students' plans after high school, I became intrigued to further study what programs are in place and what can be done to ensure all gifted learners have access to needed assistance. I want to know what students identify as programs, practices, or people in their educational experience that have assisted or impeded their progress to develop and reach their post-secondary goals. This became a mission for me. Human lives were in the balance.

Finally, for clarity sake, I would like to define terms I used that identify various racial and ethnic groups discussed in this research. For the purpose of this study, the term *non-white* students was used to indicate American students also identifying as African American, Latinx, Native American or mixed race (African American and White, African American and Latinx, African American and Native American, or African American and Asian. Latinx is defined as “a person who lives in the U.S. and who comes from, or whose family comes from, Latin America; used when you do not want to say that the person is a man or woman” (Salinas Jr. & Lozano, 2017).

Throughout this study I used the term *non-white*, however this term is synonymous with *people of color or students of color*, as these other terms frequently appear in the research literature. I have chosen the term non-white because I believe it is most accurate, least offensive, and the most understandable. This study focused on non-white students; however, many of the programs may have implications for all gifted students.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Gifted education programs have a long history in the United States dating from the early 1920's, when primary and secondary school populations were exploding, and schools, once devoted to educating the upper social strata, found their populations growing with working class kids. Educators and administrators sought to identify and segregate those kids destined for college from the remaining students, the great unwashed, who were more likely to end up in blue collar jobs. (Borman, Cahill and Cotner, 2006). Terman and Hollingsworth began the earliest study of gifted children as a subclass that deserved attention. The program evolved in the 1950's in response to Sputnik as the government quickly formulated a program to ensure the brightest students were receiving educational training. The program continued to evolve and grow with the funding of the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act and other government programs that were intended to make certain gifted education and specialized needs of these students were recognized at the national and state level. (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.). Experts recognize that gifted learners have specific needs both academically and social-emotionally (Baum, 1988; Bhatt, 2009; Card & Guiliano, 2015; Gavin, Casa, Adelson, Carroll, Jensen, & Spinelli, 2007; Briggs, Reis & Sullivan, 2008). Gifted programs are intended to provide support and specialized training for this identified population.

In current school settings throughout the nation, screening devices and teacher recommendations are the commonly employed methods used to decide which students will be tested and ultimately referred for admission into a gifted education program (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh & Holloway, 2005; Ford, 1998; Naglieri & Ford, 2003). But the development of our nation's gifted programs and the commensurate selection process did not

occur in a vacuum. Rather, it took place in the context of a history of racial and ethnic discrimination in our society and educational institutions. Not surprisingly, then, non-white students historically have been found to be disproportionately underrepresented in the gifted students selected for the nation's gifted programs (Ford, Moore & Milner, 2005).

Indeed, underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education programs is well documented (Callahan 2005; Ford, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Henfield, Woo & Bang, 2017), prompting Ford et al. (2005) to opine that “a litany of publications has focused on the persistent underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs” (p. 51). Dubbed the “quiet crisis” in 1993 by then Secretary of Education Richard Riley, the Department published its National Excellence report (U.S. Department of Education, 1993) raising concerns about the underrepresentation of the “economically disadvantaged and minority students who have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed” (p. 1). And the numbers are staggering. According to the most recent study by Ford (2014), “at least one half million African American and Hispanic students combined are not identified as gifted” (p. 145). Callahan (2005), reporting on this discrepancy, states “the underrepresentation of these groups continues to plague our educational system” (p. 98).

Henfield, Woo, and Bang (2017) relate that “the inequitable representation of African American and Hispanic/Latina(o) students ... in gifted education programs is a long-standing national concern” (p. 3), noting that “The Office for Civil Rights (2014), which monitors the composition of ... gifted education programs, has reported an array of statistics depicting the extent to which representation in gifted education programs is inequitable across the United States” (p. 3). Holzman (2006) reports a 2003 National Research Council study citing that “[i]n most American districts, African-American non-Hispanic students are placed in

Gifted/Talented programs at a rate half that as would be expected from their level of enrollment” (p. 12). Grissom and Redding (2016) observe that according to data from the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education, as of 2009, “African American students constitute 16.7% of the student population but just 9.8% of students in gifted programs. Similarly, Hispanic students constitute 22.3% of the student population but only 15.4% of students receiving gifted services” (p. 1).

Author Donna Ford (2011), in her book, *Multicultural Gifted Education*, citing U.S. Department of Education 2008 statistics, reports that black students are underrepresented by almost 50% in gifted education; in actual numbers, this represents Black males (153,000) and Black females (101,000), at least a quarter of a million students total who have not been identified. Similarly, Callahan reports that “Black and Hispanic students are less than half as likely to be in gifted programs as White students” (p. 98). In a 2014 publication, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) reported statistics from 2012 regarding the ongoing underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted education programs: “Latino and black students represent 26% of the students enrolled in gifted and talented education programs, compared to 40% of Latino and black student enrollment in schools offering gifted and talented programs” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, p. 1). In contrast, OCR reports, “[w]hite and Asian-American students make up 70% of the students enrolled in gifted and talented education programs, compared to 55% of white and Asian-American enrollment in schools offering gifted and talented programs” (p. 3).

Rachel Fish (2017) in her most recent study focusing on teacher referral found teachers were more often inclined to refer “white” students over “Black” or “Latina” students for gifted testing. She studied 70 third grade teachers in 14 different elementary schools. Fish told Science Daily, “if students are placed in special education and gifted programs

differentially because of racial bias among teachers, then students are likely receiving inappropriate educational services” (Rankin, 2016, p. 6). Further, the screening tools used to refer students to gifted education can also skew the population being referred. Ford, Wright, Washington, and Henfield (2016) recently studied testing referrals and processes used to identify students for the gifted program. In many instances, the school psychologist is the person doing the screening for the program. Ford et al., noted, “School psychologists must consider the most salient and relevant factors that will help create a defensible position and equitable recommendations regarding whether documentation and data are culturally responsive, fair and valid” (p. 275). Consequently, there are large numbers of underserved students that do not receive gifted services due to the screening tools used.

As a gifted education teacher with over twenty-four years of experience, I have had the opportunity to provide gifted education services to many students and I have witnessed the lack of representation of non-white students in the gifted program first hand. One glaring example involves annual selection of gifted sophomore students to attend the prestigious Scholars Academy. The Academy is dedicated to allowing all students equal opportunity to be represented at the camp. They allow districts to provide a general group of nominees and also specific nominees that are non-white. In the past seven years there have been many occasions when I could not nominate anyone for academy from my gifted population because I did not have a single candidate in the “African-American” or “Hispanic” category. Years of lack of testing, recognition, and referral of gifted middle school non-white students lead to a high school pool devoid of non-white students qualifying for the academy and other programs like it.

I began to explore how I could have so few students in my pool of gifted learners that are non-white and I came across the screening methods in our district. They mirror the

national phenomenon of teacher referral and screening tools which have been shown to exclude non-white students. The problem of underrepresentation of non-white students was a result of the inadequate screening and lack of referral of the non-white students in the program. Qualified, non-white students were being overlooked for the gifted program.

In my own experience, I specifically recall a chance encounter I had with Marcus (a pseudonym for the purpose of anonymity). He was a frequent visitor to the office and I saw him frequently getting reprimanded for his behavior. His crime was usually walking out of a class because he perceived the teacher was mean or he felt the class was “dumb.” I often heard administrators chastising him for not conforming to the school rules and disrespecting the teachers and students by his perceived behavior.

One day I was preparing materials for an upcoming testing day and I was spending a lot of time in the office next to the administrator. Marcus had been placed in the conference room to “chill out” from his latest transgression in the classroom. That is where I met Marcus face to face. He asked me what I was doing as I sorted through stacks of testing materials and endless lists of student rosters. I told him about the test I was preparing for students to take. He said he knew about that test but he missed it last time it was given because his grandma made him stay home to help at home that day.

This troublemaker turned out to be a very personable boy with an intriguing story of struggle and sadness. Marcus and I spent a fair amount of time together that day I worked sorting tests and he became my personal assistant. He was very efficient at sorting and preparing materials with me, but more importantly it became an opportunity to talk with him. He shared that his father was incarcerated and his mother left a long time ago. He was with his grandparents now but they were almost never around. His view was that they let him stay with them, but they didn't have much time to spend with him.

After our fortuitous meeting I checked on Marcus' claim that he missed testing and, sure enough, he did not have a test record and was absent on the last test day. Why he was never given a make-up test was baffling to me. I sought and received permission for Marcus to be tested out of sequence. I received some push back because I was testing someone the administrators were certain would end up either in an alternative high school program or dropping out. However, I suggested it could help their state testing reports if he did well, and so they acquiesced.

Marcus tested and he had one of the highest scores in math in the entire school. He tested so high in each area overall that it triggered my immediate referral for him to be tested for gifted education. Once more I received great pushback because in our district a referral from one of the student's regular teachers was required for a student to move on to the intelligence-testing phase, a pre-requisite for placement in gifted. The teachers did not want him tested and many refused to fill out a referral. I was able to get his ninth grade English teacher to complete it because he had written a biography about his life early in his high school career and that story had stayed with her. Even she assured me he probably would not qualify for gifted, but she would complete the referral nonetheless.

Marcus was finally tested and his IQ was listed at the superior range. He was immediately qualified for the gifted program. I was now able to adjust his schedule and place him in more appropriately challenging courses. I was also able to mitigate some of his behavior and classroom struggles by allowing him to have flextime in the gifted resource room as needed. It was a time-consuming process as Marcus had faced many obstacles and much animosity in his schooling, but he was able to slowly grow as a student. He progressed quickly and was soon enrolled in many Advanced Placement courses.

Ultimately, Marcus needed to make post-secondary plans. His school record his first year was hurting his GPA and he had no one in his family with any knowledge of the college process. His grandparents just wanted him to get out on his own so they no longer had to support him. As I do with all my gifted high school students, I made a plan with Marcus and we began the college application process. He impressed the Harvard interviewer so much that she wrote the university demanding they consider this boy for their program. Marcus was admitted to an Ivy League college with a full scholarship and was admitted to the pre-college summer program to assist him in filling in gaps he might have had due to his rocky start with his formal education.

Obviously, this anecdote involves only one student. But Marcus is emblematic of the problem of underrepresentation of non-white students and many thousands of other diamonds in the rough like him who deserve to be noticed, championed, and empowered to reach their full educational potential. Educators have an ongoing crisis on our hands. Deficient screening devices and teacher referral methods are limiting identification and selection of potential non-white applicants. Educational opportunities of the non-white gifted students are not being met. More of these students exist but they are not yet identified. Understanding the gatekeeping that is taking place in selecting students for participation in gifted programs is fundamental and essential to empowering district decision makers and other stakeholders to reflect on the practices in place and implement policies to remedy existing disproportionate representation (Ford, 2014, Frye & Vogt, 2010, Henfield, Wood & Bang, 2017). Real lives, lives that matter, are affected by our efforts to help these students.

My research is intended to bring attention to the deficiencies in the current system of selecting students for gifted. The system is flawed because non-whites are underrepresented in the program. Their percentages in the general school population should be reflected in the

pool of gifted students (Renzulli, Gubbins, McMillen, Eckert, & Little, 2009). Without the gifted program's support, many students will be denied access to courses, programs, and ultimately post-secondary opportunities. As will be shown below it is a problem of epidemic proportions. Hundreds of thousands of lives are affected—this is a national crisis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every student deserves the opportunity to fulfill his or her God-given potential. Gifted and talented education programs in the United States' public schools exist to serve our nation's brightest students and provide them with an appropriately challenging education. But for too long, non-white students, especially those with culturally diverse backgrounds, have been severely underrepresented in gifted programs in our nation's schools. This disproportionate underrepresentation is empirically demonstrable for the particular school district under consideration in this study. Data from one large, suburban integrated school district, the Motown School District (a pseudonym to preserve anonymity), reveal that non-white students are under-represented in gifted programs, compared to their percentage representation in the student population of the district. Specifically, the most recent data show that the district has 19,717 students enrolled in K-12 education. Of these, 2,726 (13.8%) are classified by district as "African American" and 2,973 (15.1%) "Hispanic" (DESE, 2017). There are a total of 1,488 students in the Motown gifted program. Of these, 41 (2.8%) are denominated as "African American" and 114 (7.7%) "Hispanic" (see Table 1). The gifted placement of these students does not reflect the demographics of the district; hence, non-whites are disproportionately underrepresented in the gifted program.

Table 1

*Motown District Demographics and Gifted Representation*

<u>Minority Represented in Motown School District</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent Gifted</u>
African Americans	13.8%	2.8%
Hispanic	15.1%	7.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>

Ford and Harmon (2001) advise that “[t]he persistent and pervasive underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted education is likely to have devastating, long-lasting effects” (p. 1). As a result of underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs, literally thousands of students will not have their unique needs met. These long-lasting effects begin early in their education and impact social-emotional aspects of their lives (Blass, 2014; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006; Leung, Conoley, & Scheel, 2011; Morawska & Sanders, 2009); teacher perceptions and academic interactions with students (Haensley & Lee, 2000; Swiatek, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 2005; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012); and post-secondary preparation and planning assistance (Gentry, 2006; Maruyama, Burke & Mariani, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Wiggan, 2008).

I must point out here that my rationale for presenting the disparities related to Gifted Programming at the national level with Motown District (pseudonym) situated within this broader context is to provide data that point to the severity of the problem. Supporting the existence of the problem with data also suggests that this is a problem worthy of studying that mirrors national data related to programming for non-white students. As a qualitative researcher, the design of my inquiry focuses on the experiences of the nonwhite students within a localized context; by sharing their stories educators can identify strategies to

increase the number of nonwhite students in gifted programs which will lead to improved access.

Gifted students face unique social-emotional issues, and exclusion from gifted programs means that they will not have access to teachers with specialized training to attend to these needs. (Horn & Nunez, 2000; Leung, Conoley, & Scheel, 2001; Ryan, 1999). As Morowska and Sanders (2009) advise, “If a child’s ability is not identified and supported, the child may become withdrawn, depressed, or exhibit behavioral problems, leading to a loss of potential for both the individual and society as a whole” (p. 165). The exclusion of these underserved students divests them of the benefits and advantages of improvements in such domains as “motivation, self-efficacy, engagement with learning, nonacademic self-concept, and overall stress” (Grissom & Redding, 2016, p. 1).

Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) conducted a quantitative study involving 234 gifted high school students to learn more about their emotional intelligence, moral judgment and leadership. They found the gifted students were lower on impulse control and stress management than the normative group of students. Their research also showed that gifted students were easily upset and not good at controlling their impulses toward anger. Findings also suggested that academically gifted students have a higher level of moral sensitivity and development than their peers, and they therefore need the additional support of a trained counselor to address these needs (p. 34).

Unidentified gifted students are also at risk for dealing with other issues facing gifted students such as depression and dropping out (Blass, 2014). Further, gifted students with one typical trait of giftedness, asynchrony development, referring to “the uneven intellectual, physical, social and emotional development of a gifted student” (Blass, 2014, p. 249), are at higher risk of social-emotional problems. They have difficulty relating to their peers, are

believed to be more isolated and have difficulty making friends, “which places them at higher risk of developing depression and committing suicide” (p. 249). Not surprisingly, these difficulties also translate into some students dropping out or reporting dissatisfaction with their school experiences.

While secondary students, in general, are more prone to depression related to their experiences in school which often leads to dropping out (Quiroga, Janosz, Bisset, & Morin, 2013) there has been concern expressed in the academic literature regarding gifted students’ disproportionately higher drop-out rates (Renzulli & Park, 2000). Early reports noted the gifted student drop-out rate at 18-25% compared to the national drop-out rate of 11.1% (Renzulli & Park), with Latinx gifted students being the most at risk of dropping out, followed by African Americans (Gonzales, 2003). Subsequently Matthews (2006) questioned the validity of these findings, arguing that dropout rates are relatively uncommon among gifted learners and may be as low as 1%. Irrespective of the discrepancy in the reported dropout rates, the fact remains that some gifted students drop out and social-emotional issues have been identified and discussed in the academic literature as potential causes (Cassady & Cross, 2006; Hanover Research, 2015; Hansen and Toso, 2007; Matthews, 2006; Perone, Perone, Perone & Ksiazak, 2007). Hansen and Toso studied the reasons gifted students drop out and found that gifted dropouts expressed, “signs of frustration with school as early as the elementary years, were frustrated with busy-work, and resented that teachers confused students who conformed with students who were gifted,” often grouping them with low achievers (2007, p. 33) Also noteworthy is their finding that students from underrepresented groups were of particular risk of dropping out (2007, p. 33). The Hanover Research group studied gifted dropouts in their 2015 study and reported that gifted students “grapple with instability, respect for authority, nonconformity, family problems, and behavioral challenges”

p. 7), and may even leave school “for alternative and potentially more challenging education opportunities” p. 8), underscoring the need to identify and involve gifted students in programs that keep them engaged at an appropriate academic level.

Gifted students excluded from gifted programs are often left with teachers who do not understand or appreciate their exceptional abilities and are likely to misinterpret their behavior and label them as troublemakers. In an early descriptive study, Haensley & Lee (2000) documented 14 early childhood teachers’ perceptions of gifted students. Teachers described gifted students as “immature, either socially or emotionally or both” (p. 194). More likely, the gifted students were acting out, exhibiting gifted characteristics, bored from an unchallenging curriculum. Haensley & Lee’s research underscores that working with gifted populations requires particular knowledge. More recently, Altintas and Ilgun (2016) studied 300 classroom teachers assessing what perceptions the teachers had of gifted students. Overall, teachers recognized that gifted students have unique academic requirements and needs. However, they also discovered that teachers have negative perceptions of gifted students, claiming that they ask too many questions, they are hyperactive, and, remarkably, are “physically different” (p. 964) from other students.

Further, VanTassel-Baska (2005) advises gifted students needs are so specialized they require teachers with “in-depth preparation through an endorsement or certification program of studies at a university” (p. 96). Zabloski and Milacci (2012) applied the method of phenomenology to study a case of seven high school gifted dropouts. Students expressed that they “loved learning and welcomed mental challenge” and “all of these individuals thrived on and yearned for deep meaningful relationships” (p. 187) with their teachers. In a more recent inquiry, Swiatek (2007) found that “the more gifted a student is, the greater the need for an individual array of services to meet his/her needs” (p. 322). As Ryan (1999) concurred,

working effectively with gifted students requires “having the necessary knowledge base of the particular issues and their unique effects on the gifted” (p. 15).

In addition to being deprived of teachers trained to identify and nurture their exceptional needs, underrepresentation also limits and negatively influences non-white students’ experiences in schools, limiting their access to post-secondary preparation and planning assistance, and adversely affecting their post-secondary educational opportunities (Gentry, 2006; Swanson, 2006; Wiggan, 2008). Helping gifted students understand the steps in career planning for the future can lead to significant improvements in their lives. Maruyama, Burke and Mariani (2005) conducted a longitudinal study of the pre-collegiate partnership Multicultural Excellence Program, over 13 years, to find out if the program resulted in more underrepresented students attending or completing college. They surveyed 158 underrepresented students and found “88% of the high-level participants attended or completed college” and “88% of the students ranked the program as important or very important.” This study points to the need for planning and supporting gifted students throughout their educational experiences. Non-white students excluded from gifted programs are deprived of these advantages making them at greater risk of not formulating and realizing college and career opportunities and goals.

The disadvantages from being denied a gifted education are well documented in the academic literature. Gifted students have special needs and exclusion from gifted programs adversely affects their social-emotional well-being, experiences in schools, and post-secondary planning and opportunities. Equally important to recognizing the impact of being an underserved gifted student is understanding the causes of underrepresentation in gifted programs.

Early on Ford (1998) observed that disproportionate underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs is “one of the most persistent, troubling, and controversial issues in education” (p. 4). Several studies have been undertaken to understand the underlying reasons for this crippling disparity in representation (Ford; 2014, Ford, et al., 2016; Grissom & Redding, 2016; McBee, 2006; Moon & Brighton, 2008). In my opinion, after years of working with these students and coupled with review of the literature that the primary reason whites are disproportionately underrepresented in gifted education is due to the manner in which gifted students are selected for the program. The selection process is faulty for two reasons. First, teachers who select the students often have unrecognized biases against non-white students (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008, McBee, 2006), and second, the screening tools that are employed to identify gifted students are inadequate and biased against non-white students. Baldwin, 2002; Castelleno & Frazier, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Ford, 2014; Ford, Trotman -Scott, 2013.).

Teachers’ perception of gifted students is a primary barrier to identifying and selecting non-white students for gifted programs. McBee (2006) analyzed referral methods and rates for a large Georgia school system with data from 705,074 students in grades 1-5 during the 2004 academic year. McBee reported that a “significant question remains regarding their ability to detect students with high academic potential who come from other backgrounds, especially those backgrounds that are underrepresented in programs for gifted students” (p. 104). McBee also reviewed the nomination procedures for all students that are recommended for gifted education, and identified several components that may validate the lack of minority representation in gifted nominations. “If one adopts the position that ability is evenly distributed across these lines, then these results can only indicate severe bias in the nomination and testing procedures” (p. 109). McBee found teachers were efficient and

accurate in nominating white students for gifted education but not as efficient or likely to nominate non-white students.

Teachers are undernominating non-white students for gifted programs. Grissom and Redding studied 21, 260 kindergarteners in which teachers were charged with recommending students for the gifted program (2016). They uncovered evidence that “Black students in classrooms with non-Black teachers are systematically less likely to receive gifted services in subsequent years” (p. 14). These researchers discovered that “teachers exercise discretion in student referral, diagnosis, or selection along racial/ethnic lines in ways that contribute to patterns of disproportionality in assignment” (p.14). Moon and Brighton (2008) also found that teachers who rely on traditional methods of student referral, including such factors as reading ability and comprehension, may be insensitive and inconsiderate of other cultures or a variety of intelligences in a mixed-methods study of 6,602 K-2 teachers (p. 452).

The second primary cause of underrepresentation of non-whites in our nation’s gifted programs is the screening tools that are being utilized to identify and select gifted students. There are a variety of screening tools adopted by school districts and they all have one thing in common: they perpetuate the underrepresentation of non-white students in the screening and placement process for gifted education (Ford, 2016; Grissom & Redding; 2016, McBee, 2006; Rothenbusch, Zettler, Voss, Losch, & Thomas, (2016). Appropriate screening tools are vital to identifying non-white gifted students. Card and Guiliano (2015) used a universal screening tool to identify gifted traits rather than the traditional teacher identification method in 140 diverse elementary schools with students mostly in the third grade; consisting of ethnic and racial diverse students, indicated as 35% white, 34 % Black, and 25% Hispanic. They found using this tool increased the odds of Black students being referred by 74% and Hispanics by 118%. Card & Guiliano (2015) found, “an alternative and complementary

explanation for the representation gap is that the referral processes by which students are nominated for gifted evaluation tend to systematically miss many qualified minorities and economically disadvantaged students” (p. 2). Innovative research of this kind can lead to programs that directly impact non-white gifted students’ vital access to gifted programs.

Given the longstanding, ongoing, and pervasive nature of underrepresentation in our nation’s schools, there is an urgent need for more research, analysis, and study to understand how and why educators are leaving many of our brightest students behind. This study is motivated by this overriding concern and attempts to recognize the issues leading to the disparity of representation and propose possible solutions that may mitigate the differences leading to more opportunities for our brightest non-white students.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this heuristic case study is to describe the experiences of non-white gifted students in a secondary gifted program in a large Midwest district through their stories and shared experiences. In this study, I hope to develop potential solutions focusing on the unit of analysis proposed: experiences of underrepresented non-white gifted students.

Within the context of this study, there are two central research questions that direct this study with sub-questions. The first research question is: What stories do non-white students tell about their experiences in a gifted suburban district? The sub questions are:

- When did you first learn you were gifted? (elementary, middle or high school?)
- Once you were identified what were your experiences like?
- What changes would you like to see in the program for gifted students?  
students?

The second research question is: What stories can you tell about your post-secondary experiences up to today? The sub questions are:

- What were your post-secondary goals?
- How did the Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) help you obtain your post-secondary goals?

These questions were answered using the case study design. Heuristics was used to “bring to fore the personal experiences and insights of the researcher” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). Narrative analysis was used to share the experiences of each student interviewed for this study. Patton describes narrative analysis as including, “in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs and creative nonfiction” (p. 115). Creswell further defines narrative as “personal narratives, family stories...and life histories [that] reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experience” (2007, p. 115). These two traditions and case study will be covered more in-depth in Chapter 3: Methodology. A discussion of the theoretical framework that was used in this study along with my own assumptions as they connect my research and to relevant research in the field will follow.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Historically, nonwhite students have been disproportionately underrepresented in gifted education programs. The intent of this research is to explore and report on the experiences of non-white gifted students in one suburban public high school gifted program. As described in the problem section of this proposal, current statistics have captured the magnitude of the problem and various studies have explored its causes. However, there is a gross deficiency in studies that explore the problem from the perspective of the underrepresented students themselves. And yet it is these students that bear most, if not all, of the severe impact of the adverse consequences of underrepresentation.

As with all academic research endeavors, there is a theoretical or conceptual framework underpinning this study. Maxwell (2013) explains that the theoretical framework

is “the systems of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs your research” (p. 33). For the theoretical framework of this study, I described my assumptions and beliefs underpinning my investigation as well as the theory, concepts, and several empirical studies to support this study. A more robust discussion of these areas is described in Chapter Two, the literature review. I begin with the assumptions and beliefs relevant to gifted education. Such an approach aligns with Patton’s (2015) notion that qualitative researchers are the instruments and what they bring to the research process is colored by their experiences. I then provide a rationale for the selection of each of the four topics of the theoretical framework, followed by a brief summary of theories, concepts, and empirical literature for each.

I bring several experiences, assumptions, and beliefs to this qualitative study. From an egalitarian perspective, I have always operated under the assumption that all students deserve equal opportunity and access to educational opportunities. I was surprised to find that non-white students were being marginalized and not recognized as qualifying for gifted programming. This was witnessed on an ongoing basis. Disadvantaged students, often gifted, were seen as disruptive by my colleagues, were discipline problems, often causing issues in the classroom because they were bored and found school unchallenging. When I intervened, I met gifted students that had not had their potential fulfilled. On many occasions, I have had these students, labeled as troublemakers, tested and later placed in the gifted program. These underserved students often went from entering high school at the bottom of their class to excelling in honors courses, graduating in the top ranks of their class, and entering colleges with

scholarships. I have witnessed first-hand the positive change that gifted programming can have on a student's education.

I believe all students have potential and gifts. Each and every student deserves to grow and learn in a nurturing and stimulating environment. Students' needs vary, and these needs can be identified and categorized with the intent to help them maximize their full potential. And students, across the spectrum, deserve to be appropriately challenged in their education so that they can be all that they can be. While scholars and academicians can debate the definition and parameters, I believe some students are truly gifted. Gifted students need and deserve special programs that appropriately challenge them in school. Without it they are at risk of getting bored and not achieving to their potential. Many of these gifted students are non-white. Unfortunately, and disgracefully, there are entrenched constructs, as well as decades-old procedures, that have excluded deserving non-white students from participation in gifted programs. I believe this is a harm of almost immeasurable proportions with devastating human consequences. Most importantly, I believe this is a problem that can and urgently must be fixed.

This research study will draw from four areas that will inform and support the information presented in this qualitative study of education: (1) Historical background of gifted programs, (2) Gatekeeping measures employed to identify and select gifted students, (3) Advocacy to ensure non-white students are represented in gifted programs, and (4) Implications of research to inform leaders for positive change for more inclusive programs. There is a rational basis for the selection of these four critical categories as it pertains to the problem of underrepresentation. First, significant to this

study is the historical background of gifted education, which has a long history filled with bias and controversy. Understanding this history is key to overcoming underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted programs. Examining the history of how gifted education developed and evolved will enable educators to identify past mistakes that continue to infect the modern selection process and will inform and empower teachers to be vigilant against their own biases and invalid assumptions that undermine an equitable selection process.

Second, this study examined gatekeeping measures that are utilized to select students for the gifted program. The current screening devices and teacher selection methods are inherently biased against non-whites, and they are perpetuating the disproportionate underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted programs. New and better selection methods can be employed that will select gifted students in a non-discriminatory manner. Identifying and correcting the flaws in the selection process is fundamental to solving the problem and creating a fair and equitable gifted education program.

Third, overcoming past and present discriminatory practices in selecting gifted students will require vigilant advocacy by educators on behalf of non-white gifted students. These students have been marginalized and underserved. To remedy this problem, they need teachers to advocate for them. They need champions. Advocacy means being informed of their needs and how to effectively address them. Advocacy begins with the very definition of giftedness and transcends to the many programs, tools, and methods employed to ensure every student receives an appropriately challenging education.

The fourth and final topic for review concerns leadership. This research is intended to inform leaders in the field of education and help them implement new policies and procedures to end underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted programs. Leadership is key to ending past discriminatory practices and creating more inclusive gifted programs. Once identified and included, leadership is necessary to ensure that adequate services are provided to help these underserved students reach their maximum potential. Without transformational leadership, change will not happen.

### **Gifted History and Background**

Gifted education is a specialized program offered to selected students in schools. The program provides socio-emotional support, advanced and unique class experiences and provides teachers with specific training to meet the needs of gifted students. Unfortunately, the program has specific requirements for admittance and historically this has excluded many non-white students in great numbers. (Callahan, 2002; Moore, Ford & Milner, 2005). To fully understand the issues with the lack of representation of non-whites in the program it is important to explore how the representative numbers of non-whites became so skewed in the first place and what benefits can be provided by ensuring that non-whites are represented in gifted programs.

The history of gifted education dates back to the 1800's and the spark of the Industrial Revolution. Immigrants and rural citizens were flocking to cities in large numbers and schools had to find a way to begin sorting workers and those destined for higher education. An intelligence test was developed by Terman that further allowed sorting of students based on their IQ scores (Borman, Cahill, & Cotner, 2006). Historically, the testing of students was an early sorting machine leaving non-white students underrepresented in advanced programs. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) notes that

underrepresentation of non-white students is widespread and estimates that non-white students are underrepresented by 50% in programs for the gifted (“National Association for Gifted Children,” n.d.). There have been many studies that demonstrate the history and causes of underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted education (Callahan, 2005; Ford, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016). Notably, these studies assist in understanding the significance and underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education. Ford (2014) studied the historic social inequity of non-white students in gifted programs and developed methods for calculating underrepresentation and inequity in gifted programs. Specifically, she analyzed the “composition (percentage) of African American or Hispanic students in gifted education compared to the composition of African American or Hispanic students in general education” (p. 145). With the longstanding historical issues allowing non-whites to be severely underrepresented in gifted programs it is no surprise that Ford found great disparity in the representation index she developed in her study. She found “African Americans should represent at a minimum 15.2% of the students in gifted education. Nationally, the percentage is 10%...Hispanic students should make up at least 20% of gifted programs nationally to be equitable yet they only represent 16%” (p.146).

### **Gatekeeping: Screening Methods**

The frequently used means of selecting students for inclusion in gifted programs are teacher nomination and testing. As studies have long shown, these gatekeeping methods, due to their bias, are also the primary reasons for the disproportionate underrepresentation of nonwhites in gifted programs (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Oakland & Rossen, 2005). Even now with the currently employed standardized testing, non-white students may underperform and be excluded from gifted programs due to testing bias (Frye & Vogt, 2010). Improvement in the selection methods is key to solving the problem of underrepresentation.

The notion that students should be sorted and placed based on test scores has become ingrained and institutionalized in our educational system, having a wide range of application across the educational spectrum. Admittance to advanced coursework, placement in special education programs, and college acceptance, for example, are all contingent on testing of students (Berry, Clark & McClure, 2011; Valencia, 2010). Not surprisingly then, testing has been integral to the student selection process in our nation's gifted programs (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Ford, 2011). However, these tests have been found to produce biased results contributing to the disproportionate underrepresentation of non-whites in these gifted programs (Ford & Helms, 2012; Warne, 2012). Not the least among these biases is cultural loading. As Joseph, et al. (2006) observed, "the degree of cultural loading represents the extent to which a given test requires specific knowledge of or experience within the mainstream U.S. culture" (p. 43). Such latent cultural bias in the testing serves to disadvantage non-whites.

Teacher bias in the selection process is another problem. Teachers bring to the classroom their own life experiences, prejudices, and biases, which may influence, consciously or subconsciously, judgments and decisions they make about students and students' abilities (Hernandez-Torrano, 2016; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). The teachers' perceptions and biases, in this regard, directly influence which students get nominated for gifted programs. Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh and Holloway (2005) studied 16 elementary schools and 207 teachers to determine if a student's ethnicity influenced teachers' decisions to refer students to gifted programs. They found that the student's ethnicity does make a difference in the teachers' referral decisions. "Stereotypical notions on the part of teachers about what an African American student is likely capable of may be effectively barring some

African American gifted youngsters from participating in gifted and talented programs” (p.29).

Identifying and correcting the flaws in the selection process is fundamental to creating a fair and equitable gifted education program. New and better, culturally relevant, methods for assessing ability and giftedness have been developed to help ensure students selected for gifted education will more accurately reflect actual school demographics. Jordan, Bain, McCallum and Bell (2012), for example, studied 47 students utilizing a multidimensional instrument, the Universal Multiple Abilities Scales (UMAS), developed to identify gifted students that had traditionally been underrepresented in gifted education using a series of six scales of aptitude: cognitive, creative arts, leadership, math, literacy, and science. The study found that this tool supports the UMAS tool for use in schools as an alternate way to ensure that schools overcome the lack of students of color’s representation in gifted due to deficient teacher nomination and gifted screening tests. These and other methods, including, for example, performance task assessments (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & de Brux, 2007) and nonverbal ability testing (Naglieri & Ford, 2003) are designed to overcome the testing bias and hopefully greatly increase the representation of non-white students in gifted education. This dissertation will also focus on advocacy that can improve the plight of non-white gifted students to ensure they have a place in gifted education and receive the services they deserve.

### **Advocacy for Underserved Gifted Students**

Effectively identifying and selecting non-white gifted students for participation in gifted programs is a necessary condition to solving the problem of disproportionate underrepresentation, but it is not a sufficient condition. The first half of the formula for success is getting the students admitted, the second half is ensuring their success after admission. This

requires effective advocacy. Advocacy is imperative to ensure that non-white gifted students have their unique needs met so they will succeed in the program.

Non-white students entering a gifted program traditionally reserved for whites have a unique set of needs and circumstances that pose their own set of problems. Foremost, many non-white students often feel overwhelmed by the lack of non-white representation in the gifted program. “Specifically, many ethnic minorities report negative experiences in gifted programs for a variety of reasons, including lack of ethnically diverse representation” (Henfield, Woo, & Bang, 2017). Ford (1996) notes, “Once placed in gifted programs, Black students make numerous social sacrifices and take many risks” (p. 79), including “rejection from Black peers, who may perceive gifted Black students as being untrue to their cultural and racial group” (p. 79), “isolation and alienation from White peers in the gifted program who do not understand Black students” (p. 79), “teachers who do not understand them” (p. 79), and feelings of “isolation and alienation” resulting in a “forced choice between friendships and school” (p. 79). Ford then concludes, “In this emotional tug-of-war, the school and gifted program too often lose” (p. 79). These unique pressures underscore the critical need to have trained teachers and resource specialists advocating for these gifted students.

VanTassel-Baska, Feng, Swanson, Quek, & Chandler (2009) studied thirty-seven gifted learners in the seventh and eighth grade. The study explored the experiences of gifted students that had been admitted to the gifted program using one of the alternative methods of placement, in this case performance-based assessment was used. The study revealed that the placement of students in a gifted program does not solve all the issues. In particular, “African American low-income learners struggled with the loss of their social group by participating in the gifted program, still preferring to be a part of that original network” (p. 724).

Non-white students often face a social and cultural quandary. Culturally diverse gifted children often find themselves in a dilemma in which they must choose between academic success and social acceptance (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). As Levy and Plucker (2003) observed, “African American students face challenges due to a perceived lack of acceptance by peers, teachers, and parents by assimilating a value system regarding education held by the dominant culture” (p.20). It is imperative that educators remain diligent in assuring that gifted non-white students’ needs are met by ensuring they have an advocate that can recognize their experiences, unique needs and gifts so they can reach their full potential.

Ford (1996) points out that non-white students in gifted education have a sense of not belonging, which is a basis for psychological and socioemotional maladjustments among highly gifted students. Ford recommends that counselors “serve as advocates for gifted Black students by training all school personnel to become more culturally competent” (p. 113). Also, as part of the work advocates need to do with non-white gifted students, Ford points out that ultimately, we must teach gifted Black students “how to be bicultural - how to cope with cultural conflicts and differences, and how to live and learn in two cultures that may be dissimilar” (p. 115).

Competent counselors advocate for gifted and talented children by identifying institutional and educational policies and practices that may act as barriers to, discriminate against, or oppress gifted students (Sue & Sue, 2003). Levy and Plucker (2003) advises that a culturally competent counselor of the gifted “actively and continually attempts to avoid prejudices, biases, and stereotyping” (p. 9). In particular, Levy and Plucker suggest, they should “examine their beliefs about gifted girls and boys, gifted children of color, gifted sexual minority children, as well as other culturally diverse gifted populations” (p. 9).

Advocacy, then, is critical to the success of solving the problem of underrepresentation and ensuring the success of non-white students in gifted programs. These students need an understanding advocate to help them realize their full potential and maximize their gifted education experience. Advocates, culturally aware and sensitive to the unique needs of these underserved gifted students, are essential to the success of gifted programs.

### **Leadership to Affect Change**

Bass and Riggio (2006) explain that transformational leadership involves “inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers’ leadership capacity” (p. 6). Transformational leadership is required to address the serious problem of disproportionate underrepresentation in our nation’s gifted programs. Transformational leadership at the administrative and core institutional levels is necessary to identify the needed changes, create an inspired vision for change, and implement the changes in collaboration with gifted teachers committed to serving the underserved needs of this gifted student population. The entire gifted program benefits from ensuring that ongoing and updated training is implemented, innovative teaching methods are employed, and the demographics of the program are assessed to improve access for non-white gifted students (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Tomlinson, Bland, Moon, & Callahan, 1994; Van-Tassel-Baska, 2005).

Fundamentally, leadership is necessary to implement the needed changes in identifying and selecting underrepresented non-white gifted students. Michael-Chadwell (2011) states, “A paradigm shift in leadership and [gifted] program practices must occur to reduce identification and placement gaps” (p. 99). New screening and selection methods, policies, and procedures are being explored and tested to identify non-white gifted students

and include them in gifted programs (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Michael-Chadwell, 2010; Pfeiffer, Petscher, Kumptepe, 2008).

Another significant challenge facing the effectiveness and, in some cases, the very survival of gifted programs concerns funding. As supposedly Napoleon famously observed, an army marches on its stomach (Knowles, 2005). Financing is the food for gifted programs. The important advances achieved in identifying the causes of underrepresentation and development of new screening methods to include non-white gifted students will be but a pyrrhic victory, if there is no funding for resources, staff, and training to implement the needed changes, or, worse yet, if the programs wither and die due to lack of funding. This problem demands creative and pro-active leadership. No states currently receive federal funding for gifted education. Funding and program practices are largely, if not exclusively, a state and local matter. “This lack of support for programs or funds to operate them requires the organization of advocacy” (Milligan, Neal, and Singleton, 2012, p. 172). Leadership is needed to inform, inspire, and motivate stakeholders to garner support for funding of gifted programming in their local schools.

Leadership makes a difference. Leadership has been shown to make a positive impact on the success and effectiveness of gifted programs. Cotabish and Robinson (2012) studied 200 gifted program administrators. The researchers utilized peer coaching to see if the participants would increase in the areas of content knowledge of gifted education, which included programming for high-ability learners, and access for culturally diverse and/or low-income learners to gifted program services. The study found peer coaching allowed administrators to better define program evaluation and outcomes for gifted programs. Also, peer coaching increased progress toward meeting national gifted standards and improved underrepresented students access to gifted programs. Peer coaching positively affected

identification practices and policies and referral rates. In short, transformational leadership is integral to resolving the problem of underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted programs.

These four critical areas, *i.e.*, history, gatekeeping, advocacy, and leadership, concerning the underrepresentation of non-white gifted students in gifted programs, as presented in the theoretical framework, are more thoroughly examined and discussed in Chapter Two: The Literature Review. In the following section, Overview of Methodology, I will briefly describe the design of the study aimed to explore the experiences of nonwhite students in a high school gifted education program. Their experiences can help school leaders and gifted educators provide ways to identify, retain, and meet the needs of this population of gifted students.

### **Overview of Methodology**

My research is focused on thoroughly exploring and understanding the stories and experiences of underserved, non-white gifted students in one suburban, predominantly white, public school gifted education program. This type of study best lends itself to a qualitative research methodology. Merriam (2009) explains that qualitative research is designed to “uncover the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved” (p. 5), as opposed to, for example, a methodology designed to determine “cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population” (p. 5). That is, she further expounds, “[q]ualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). One important advantage, as Patton (2015) notes, is that “qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail” (p. 22). I chose this methodology because I am interested in studying, in depth and detail, the underserved needs of

underrepresented nonwhite students in gifted education, and understanding these students' perspectives on their experiences and the sense they make of their unique world.

I use the case study as the major tradition and I also incorporate heuristics and narrative to further provide insight into the experiences of these students. The case study format describes an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 201). I chose the case study format because it allows me to explore and reveal specific non-white gifted students' real-life experiences in their actual setting. The best way to understand the experiences of these underserved students, I believe, is to study them in the real-life setting in which the phenomenon occurred.

Hayes and Singh (2011) describes narratology as the “relaying of a client’s experience in the form of story to convey meaning” (para 4). The advantage of this methodology, Polkinghorne (2005) advises, is that studies of this type will “take account of the particular characteristics of human experience” (p. 138). This narrative tradition enables the students to share their stories and give meaning to their experiences. Further, the perceptions of non-white students regarding their experiences in the gifted program hopefully will enlighten gifted educators on ways to enhance and improve gifted programs, fulfilling an important goal of my research.

Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher (Patton, 2015, p. 118) Further, heuristics is important to ensure that each person’s experiences are depicted that “are at the heart and depths of a person's experience—depictions of situations, events, conversations, relationships, feelings, thoughts, values, and beliefs” (Moustakas, 1990). The heuristic tradition, then, enables me to dig deep and unearth the true life experiences of the subjects of my study. Further, as a teacher in gifted education, I share this experience intensely with

students and have an interest in their stories. Getting to the heart of the students' stories is critical to understanding their experiences so that educators may truly learn from them. My chosen methodology, qualitative research design and selected traditions of case study, narrative, and heuristics, are covered in greater depth in Chapter 3.

The site of the study is one mid-western suburban public high school district's gifted program. The participants of this study were non-white students that have graduated from the school's gifted program. I recruited these participants from graduates of the four public high schools in the district. Six nonwhite former gifted students were identified for the study. These students and this school district are particularly appropriate for this study because nonwhite students are grossly disproportionately underrepresented in the district's high school gifted education program. These few nonwhite gifted students are uniquely situated to share their experiences and inform researchers of the phenomenon under study here.

In selecting the particular students for this study, I utilized the purposeful sampling method. Patton (2015) explains, "The purpose of a purposeful sample is to focus case selection strategically in alignment with the inquiry's purpose, primary questions and data being collected" (p. 264). Specifically, I administered a survey from demographic data gathered on a potential pool of participants to begin selection of study participants. I then collected data from the participants, including (1) official documents and (2) semi structured interviews 3) demographic questionnaires (4) artifacts (5) personal narratives. I used demographic questionnaires to survey potential participants. The questionnaire was sent to non-white gifted students that graduated from the Midwestern suburban school district's gifted program. The survey explained the nature of the research and inquire as to whether the target students are willing to be a participant in the research study. From those that agree to

participate, six students, representative of the target population, were selected for further study.

Patton (2015) notes, “written communications are a rich source of data. Finding, studying, and analyzing documents of all kinds are a part of qualitative inquiry” (p.14). The official documents I collected included transcripts, attendance records, test scores and other articles that are part of the official school record. These personal documents provided insights into the experience of each student in high school. I used the demographic questionnaire for further insight into the participant background. I utilized the semi-structured one-on-one interview process in this study. The interviews allowed the students an opportunity to share their experiences and stories while in gifted programs and allow those experiences to be analyzed for common meanings and understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In addition, I used the personal narratives, provided by the participants, to add to the depth of information studied.

I used the documents collected, the demographic questionnaires, the personal narratives, the artifacts provided and transcribed interviews to help me understand the experiences of the participants in the gifted program. Once I collect the data I used narrative inquiry to restore the data, incorporating all data sources. Throughout the process, I kept a journal to capture my thoughts and perceptions about what is going on in the data. This task is supported by the nature of heuristic inquiry. It is crucial throughout the process that I am mindful of my experiences with the gifted program. Maxell (2013) notes, “Any view is a view from some perspective, and is therefore shaped by the location and lens of the observer” (p. 46).

Data analysis procedures were utilized to ensure all data and information was compiled. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) note that coding is a process that enables

the researcher to compile large amounts of data, while allowing for deep reflection and analysis. The data I gather was used to answer the research questions of this study using a process of coding to identify themes across the cases. Coding allowed me to look for patterns in the data for identifying emerging themes. “The ultimate power of field research lies in the researcher’s emerging map of what is happening and why” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 93). Details of the coding process will be fully developed and expanded upon in Chapter 3.

### **Significance of the Study**

As Ford (2014) advises, the underrepresentation of non-whites in gifted programs is prevalent and an ongoing concern. The issue of underrepresentation in school gifted programs is therefore of vital importance to gifted teachers, school policymakers, and administrators. The disproportionate underrepresentation of nonwhite students in school gifted programs is well documented and should be of concern to all school leadership who are genuinely invested in seeing that every child receives an appropriately challenging education and the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential. School districts across this country have large underserved populations of non-white gifted students whose needs must be addressed (Ford & Harmon, 2001, Horn & Nunez, 2000).

This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how non-white gifted students and their experiences will help to formulate and influence policies and practices within school districts to help retain students in the gifted programs and maximize the benefits these uniquely situated students receive from the programs. Non-white students, as discussed above, have unique needs and problems which this study is intended to help identify and gain a deeper understanding for the purpose of effective identification strategies and gifted programming (Lohman, 2009, Bonner, Jennings, Marbly & Brown, 2008) By studying non-

white students who have completed gifted programs, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and counselors can learn more about what factors were influential in helping them succeed in the programs and fulfill their post-secondary goals and career aspirations.

There are few qualitative studies that have ascertained the experiences of non-white students in these gifted programs (Ramos, 2010, Zhanova, Rulen & Stichter, 2015).

Callahan (2005) observed that, “The development of services and curriculum for gifted students of high school age has been relatively neglected...little research... on the few options that do exist” (p. 199). Therefore, this study provided needed insights and suggestions for educators to consider as they develop and shape their gifted programs.

In this chapter, I have introduced the study, including the problem, purpose, and theoretical framework. Chapter Two includes a review of relevant literature within the four strands of the theoretical framework. Chapter Three includes methods and designs including a more in-depth discussion of the project including the rationale for qualitative research, the basis for the use of a heuristic case-study. The chapter also reviews the sampling techniques that was used, the suggested participants, the setting, data sources and a plan for collecting and analyzing the information. Included also are the limitations, reliability, validity and ethical considerations of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is the basis for this literature review. The research for the literature review examines four areas to add to the study; they include: (1) the historical background of gifted programs including specifics as they apply to non-white gifted students; (2) gatekeeping measures employed to identify and select gifted students; (3) advocacy to ensure non-white students are represented in gifted programs; and (4) implications of research to inform leaders for positive change for a more inclusive program. Gifted education is a broad topic, encompassing a wide range of issues in the academic literature. This literature review is not a general review of every aspect of the topic, but instead is focused on the foregoing key areas of study that are particularly relevant to this project. The literature review is intended to add depth and breadth to the theoretical framework of this dissertation and provide a deeper understanding of the issues relevant to this particular study.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that a review of literature is “a thoughtful and insightful discussion of related literature builds a logical framework for the research that sets it within a tradition of inquiry and a context of related studies” (p. 28). This chapter includes research that expanded the knowledge pertaining to underrepresented non-white gifted high school students and provided in-depth understanding of various issues surrounding this topic that enriched this study. This literature review was used to begin making connections between the research questions posed for this study, and the literature and research that can assist in assumptions being formed relating to non-white gifted high school students. There are significant gaps in the academic literature concerning the topic under study. A google

scholar search of the broad topic of gifted education generated 873,000 results, whereas a search for articles pertaining to the underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs generated 21,000 results. An ERIC search for articles concerning underrepresentation in gifted education generated an even much smaller pool of only 4,028 articles. Similar gaps were demonstrable when searching specifically high school gifted information. ERIC generated 446,749 potential articles on the general topic of gifted education; however, when narrowed to high school gifted underrepresentation, only 3,920 articles were shown to be available. To be thorough then, the review of the literature utilized an extensive search of available literature that includes multiple databases including Ebsco, Google Scholar, ERIC, and others. Books, journals and any other resources that can add to this study through insights and data collection were utilized to provide an in-depth analysis. However, consideration of the gaps in potential information specific to non-white gifted high school students has broadened the scope of the search for information to include recently published dissertations, author interviews, and public meetings to discover any newly found information that might be relevant and helpful to this study.

There is a need for more published literature as it relates to this population of gifted students, especially the issues of under-representation, programming, and the consequences of excluding qualified non-white students from gifted programs. This literature review will attempt to identify these shortcomings as well as possible areas for future research endeavors.

### **Historical Background of Gifted Education**

So many people still judged by their race

For such there never ought to be a place

'A fair go' those untruthful words I do recall

There is no such a thing as a 'fair go for all' (Duggan, year, p. 1).

In his poem “Racism is Around Me Everywhere” Francis Duggan speaks to the struggle for equity that face people of color. Judgment, racism and ignorance are all a part of the world he describes. This is an exemplary stanza that also represents the history of gifted education for non-white students. From the very beginning of gifted education students face discrimination and an uneven playing field. This section of the literature review will discuss how some of these ideas came about and are perpetuated through practices and programs in our educational programs.

The current status of gifted education as it relates to non-white students is important to note in relationship to the history of gifted education. In this section, the history of gifted education will be reviewed and analyzed and with all the dedicated work and analysis the most recent research still does not show much progress in the effort to increase the underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education. The most recent report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights using the most current data, published in January 2018, notes the issue of the lack of diversity representation in gifted programs. The Commission cites a study by Grissom and Redding “While disparities in achievement exist among white students and some students of color, students of color are also underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. Black students are 66 percent less likely to be assigned to gifted programs than white students, and Hispanic students are 47 percent less likely to be assigned to such programs than white students” (Grissom & Redding, 2016, p. 64). Years of studies, acknowledgements, plans of action, and promise have resulted in little systemic change.

Rodney Smith, Ed.D., a professor at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, has noted the historical timeline of laws and practices that ensured racism and bias in education. He recently shared at a local school board meeting that racism has been practiced and institutionalized far longer than the laws dedicated to counteracting all the years of

persecution and prejudice. His timeline indicates that there have been 178 years of discrimination and oppression, and only 64 years of post-civil rights work. (Smith, 2018). This long history is clearly reflected in gifted education and the lack of representation of non-white students in gifted programs.

It is important for this study to acknowledge this historical journey of underrepresentation in order to study solutions and plans to assist non-white gifted students going forward. Stargardter (2016) notes that the history of gifted education has been heavily influenced by “landmark court cases, legislative initiatives and scientific breakthroughs that have influenced education policies and plans” (p. 3). Many times, under the guise of science, policies were implemented and systemic programs were implemented that gave no consideration to the racial inequality these policies would solidify.

Recognition of giftedness dates from some of the earliest writings in education. VanTassel-Baska (2010) notes the Greeks and Romans recognized the value of talent, as did the tribes of the Bible, responding to the parables told by Jesus. The Chinese dynasties saw value in educating according to talents. Plato recognized the development of giftedness to determine potential contributors to society (VanTassel-Baska, 2010, p. 1). As VanTassel-Baska aptly summarized: “The history of the world could be told through countless biographies, and these biographies undoubtedly would represent gifted individuals and their contributions at different times in different cultures of our world (2010, p. 1).

In more modern times, giftedness was essentially a by-product of the Industrial Revolution. With the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial economy came mass migration to the cities, as farm labor became obsolete and job opportunities arose in the cities with the spread of factories and mass production. Given the rising population of students in the cities, it became necessary to expand the school system to accommodate them. However,

given limited educational resources, educational opportunities were distributed inequitably, largely based on race. Glenn (2002) notes, “they therefore advocated special education for blacks geared to their supposedly limited capabilities and their place in the new industrial order. Thus, they made common cause with northern philanthropists in developing an educational system for blacks focused on industrial and vocational training” (p. 140). From the onset of the American education system, it was a biased and rigged system that allowed a disparity between the level of education received based on your race.

A review of gifted education’s earliest pioneers sheds light on how giftedness as a sub-class of study came about and ultimately how the definition of giftedness was derived. One of the earliest pioneers of gifted education, Sir Francis Galton based his work on his cousin, Charles Darwin’s work. Callahan and Hertberg-Davis (2018) note “Gifted education inherits from Galton the nature versus nurture debate, the concept of regression toward the mean, an interest in tests for exploring individual differences, and fascination with adult eminence” (p. 24). Following the mass influx of children into the school system, sorting systems began to be put in place to sort them and decide which educational path would be set out for them. Following this development, the first studies appeared in the academic literature that began to use measuring instruments on children. The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) confirms that “The early studies of giftedness evolved from research on mental inheritance, subnormal children, construction of instruments to measure both the sub and supernormal, and the realization that graded schools could not adequately meet the needs of all children” (NAGC, p. 1).

The idea of a test measuring mental process was first developed in France by Binet and Simon. Their test was originally designed to identify “mentally retarded” students. Goddard took the test developed by Binet and Simon and translated it into English. In 1916,

Terman revised this test and developed results that produced a mental quotient. This was known as the Stanford-Binet test that re-named “mental quotient” to the modern term, “intelligence quotient” (IQ). IQ was derived by dividing a person’s mental age by his chronological age (Sattler, 2001). This test was standardized and normed so it could be used for the general population, which made it attractive to schools to utilize (Lagemann, 2000). In rapid succession, schools suddenly had an instrument that they could use to test all students and categorize them and place them in programs.

Lewis Terman’s work was focused on psychology, specifically, intelligence testing, IQ and the traits that might be associated with gifted students. His work was based in Stanford, California and Terman published a longitudinal study testing the IQ of 1500 children and adolescents. His study concluded, “children of IQ 140 or higher are healthier, better-adjusted, and higher achievers in school subjects” (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008, p. 15). Terman’s work would serve as a basis for the research to follow that identified gifted students contradicting previous studies that labeled them as neurotic.

Although Terman provided groundbreaking work in assuring gifted students were not neurotic and flawed and his work sought to define gifted students in a new way, Robinson and Jolly (2013) note that, nonetheless, “during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many regarded gifted children as oddities. They were unnaturally sickly, weak individuals, even mentally unstable” (p. 70). Terman’s work provided value in the recognition of gifted traits but it also was biased. Terman only studied students from a certain race and socio-economic class, which skewed his results. Terman, for example, wrote that “the racial stock most prolific of gifted children are those for northern and western Europe, and the Jewish. The least prolific are the Mediterranean races, the Mexicans and the Negroes” (as quoted in Robinson & Jolly, Terman, 1924, p. 363). While advocating for the recognition of

giftedness, his racist belief system and bias ultimately laid the groundwork for excluding non-white students in the identification process and ultimately in their acceptance into gifted programs.

In a similar timeframe on the opposite coast in New York City in 1922, Leta Stetter Hollingsworth was working on the study of giftedness utilizing the case study approach. She first found a specialized classroom she called “the Special Opportunity class” (Sorenson, B, 2016, p. 6). She authored the founding textbook on gifted education titled “Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture” in 1926. She specifically worked with gifted students analyzing them in schools. In her psychological study of gifted learners, she made the important finding that there are achievement and adjustment patterns that discriminated what she termed “‘very high’ and ‘still higher’ levels of intelligence in gifted learners” (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008, p. 16). Identifying the specialized needs of gifted students was a hallmark of her work and set the stage for further study of this specialized group of learners.

Understanding the background of the gifted education movement requires understanding the narrow focus of these early studies. Particularly, non-white gifted students were excluded from the earlier works. That is why one particular historical figure in gifted education that studied gifted children in Kansas City, Missouri took a different approach when defining giftedness. It was his broader definition that influenced gifted education and also his particular notice of African-American learners that set the groundwork for a legacy of work focused on the underrepresentation of non-white gifted learners.

Paul Witty’s research took place in the 1930’s and 1940’s. He studied students with measured IQ above 140, but in his research he also focused on additional data sets beyond just the intelligence test. “He clearly believes that giftedness is a broader construct which includes drive and opportunity as well as ability” (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008, p. 17).

One further development with Witty's research that is particularly relevant to this study is his work with one of the early African-American researchers on gifted education, Martin Jenkins. Witty and Jenkins investigated "very high IQ children of color and published their work in this area" (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008, p. 18). At the time of their work public schools were segregated and Witty and Jenkins studied African-American students using aptitude and intelligence testing to identify them for the gifted education study. Their work was important because it was one of the first studies that focused on the African-American population in relation to gifted students. Through their work they also identified a now famous student recorded as "The case of 'B'-A Gifted Negro Girl" published in 1935. "For Jenkins and Witty, she was evidence that astonishing gifts existed in children who faced the challenges of racism and whose life experiences were substantially different from their white counterparts" (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008, p. 19). Jenkins research is one of the first spotlights on a societal issue that recognizes that non-white gifted students exist and are often overlooked. In addition, Jenkins notes "These children are nurtured in a culture in which racial inferiority of the Negro is a basic assumption. Consequently, they will experience throughout their lives, educational, social and occupation restriction which must inevitably affect achievement and motivation" (Witty & Jenkins, 1943, p. 165).

In the 1930's the earliest secondary gifted programs were beginning. These included "honors classes, special classes in foreign languages, and other extracurricular programs were offered to the gifted in secondary schools" (VanTassel-Baska, 2010, p. 1). This early recognition that gifted high school students needed specialized programs was also an important first step in the history of gifted education.

In reaction to the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in the 1950's, the United States focused on education as a tool to keep up with neighboring countries progress. "It was

not until the 1957 Soviet launching of Sputnik, the first Earth satellite, that there was a resurgence in the common concern for education of America's brightest students" (Colangelo & Davis, 1997, p. 77). Like a rocket, the US immediately focused on accelerating learning for our gifted students, especially in the field of science. Tannenbaum (1979) describes this revolution in education as "a total talent mobilization" (p. 12). Congress responded for this need to develop programs for gifted students by passing the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) which "allocated almost one billion dollars for research, training and curriculum development aimed at gifted students" (p. 549).

As gifted education became a focus and a recognized program around the nation, the inclusion of non-white children in the program was noticeably lacking. The explanation for this disparity lies in the notion of deficit thinking (Ford, 2003, Ford & Grantham, 2003, Milner & Ford, 2010). Ford (2010) describes it as

deficit thinking is grounded in the belief that culturally different students are genetically and culturally inferior to White students. It is a belief that their culture—beliefs, values, language, practices, customs, traditions, and more—are substandard, abnormal, and unacceptable. When deficit thinking exists, educators are unable to focus on the strengths and potential of Hispanic and African American students; they are blinded. p. 32.

Laws went into place, particularly the Jim Crow laws, prescribing separate but equal classrooms which added to the segregation in all education but particularly in gifted education. The country was interested in funding advanced training and educational practices for its brightest students, but not for non-white students. Borland notes, "Despite this work, and the coinciding of the post-Sputnik wave of gifted education programs with a crucial period in the struggle for civil rights by African- Americans, little cognizance was taken of issues of race and class in this period" (2004, p. 4).

Suddenly in 1954 the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the notion of "separate but equal," and the nation's focus shifted to implementing

desegregation, resulting in much of the funding for gifted programming being cut. Shortly after this court decision Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) in conjunction with President Johnson's "War on Poverty". Money for gifted programs were diverted to programs that focused on educationally disadvantaged and economically deprived students. (Siemer, 2009, p. 549). Most notable, the funding provided in this bill was increased for poor and minority children. "the centerpiece of the new law was is the Title I program for disadvantaged students" (Robelen, 2005, p. 2). As a result, incentives to study gifted education disappeared, and research and investigation in this important area diminished.

In 1988 a resurgence of interest in Gifted and Talented education came about with the passage of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Program, a component of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Act provided federal funding specifically for programs and practices focusing on gifted education. It was particularly innovative because it's funding specifically

focused resources on identifying and serving student groups who are underrepresented in gifted programs, particularly those who are socioeconomic status (SES) disadvantaged, limited-English proficient, and disabled students, to close gaps in achievement and to create equal educational opportunities for all students. (NAGC, 2008, p. 8 )

Of major significance, the funding from the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Program (JAVITS) grants provided some of the first groundbreaking research that identified the underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education. It also focused on the causes for this lack of representation, which will be further discussed later in this literature review

There were many ensuing landmark studies that focused on gifted education including a Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education) in 1983 which focused the nations' attention that gifted education had flown under the radar and new

accountability was needed. (Jolly & Kettler, 2008). In addition, in 1993, the National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent focused the attention of educators on the needs of gifted education and addressed the "quiet crisis" where the needs of gifted learners are either not addressed or fragmented at best (Roberts, 1999). Specifically, the 1993 study found that "the problems of squandered talent were even more evident among economically disadvantaged and minority students due to fewer advanced educational opportunities" (Jolly & Kettler, 2008, p. 430). In 2004, A Nation Deceived, was a study that specifically recommended acceleration policies be implemented to ensure gifted students were allowed to have their academic needs met. Specific guidelines were suggested that would establish a protocol for districts to implement acceleration. (Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, 2004). All of these studies, Borland notes, highlighted missed opportunities to identify and serve gifted students. "The studies reported on the advantages of acceleration for gifted children which illustrated America's inability to properly meet the needs of its most able students despite the overwhelming research supporting acceleration" (Borland, 2004, p. 4).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Education Reform Act passed in 2001. The legislation mandates accountability for all groups of students, and the funding for schools is tied to the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). The issue with this legislation was gifted education was not a recognized emphasis for gifted learners as a sub-group. Therefore, schools do not lose funding, and often do not fund gifted education because they have no financial incentive to do so (Seimer, 2009).

The most recent legislation concerning gifted education is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) of 2015. The Act specifically addresses gifted programs and guidelines for districts to follow when reporting information about gifted learners. One provision that is important for gifted educators is that local education plans may include

information specifically about identifying and serving gifted and talented students. In addition, the Act calls for districts to include provisions for improving the skills of teachers, principals, and other school leaders in identifying gifted students and providing instruction based on the needs of such students. Districts are directed to address the learning needs of all students including gifted and talented students. The Act specifically identifies methods to support gifted students including (1) early entrance to kindergarten, (2) enrichment, acceleration, and curriculum compacting activities, and (3) dual or concurrent enrollment programs in secondary school and postsecondary education (NAGC, 2017). This most recent legislation at the federal level is an encouraging development but only time will tell whether implementation of the Act will result in any meaningful change in the problem of underrepresentation.

Jolly and Kettler (2008) conducted a study to determine the focus of gifted education studies published in recognized gifted education journals. They were looking where the grants and funding were going, and what topics were the most frequently researched. They reviewed 725 articles that focused on the recommendations of the National Excellence report from the U.S. Department of Education published in 1993. They concluded that “the published research in gifted education has given significant attention to the topic of ethnicity and slight to economic disadvantage” (Jolly & Kettler, 2008, p. 441). Despite the overwhelming focus on the ethnicity and disadvantages of non-white students in gifted education, the numbers and the inclusion of this population in gifted education continues to lag disproportionately. This disparity begs the question, by what means are non-white students being excluded?

The literature review will now shift to the gatekeeping methods that keep non-white gifted students out of consideration for gifted classes. This examination is intended to shed

light on one of the main causes of the disproportionate underrepresentation of non-white students in our nation's gifted education programs.

### **Gatekeeping**

The mechanisms by which non-white students historically have been systematically excluded from gifted education occur in the process of identifying, testing, selecting, and nominating or referring students for gifted programs. Such gatekeeping measures, when designed or implemented unfairly by overly narrow definitions of giftedness, teacher referral bias, and inappropriate testing mechanisms, have resulted in, and continue to perpetuate, severely disproportionate underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education programs.

Historically, measures to determine who would be admitted to gifted programs relied heavily on procedures put in place by the school districts (Baker & McIntire, 2003; Moon, Brighton, 2008). "Almost every school district in the United States has its own way of identifying gifted children" (Hertzog and Bennett, 2008, p. 205). These procedures varied widely depending on state and federal guidelines. "State definitions at any given point in time represent a medley of current and previous definitions" (Bakker, Obiakor, and Rotatori, 2014, p. 3). Lohman (2008) studied identification procedures used throughout the country. He determined that identification of giftedness is dependent on the norms students are compared to when tested. Especially with students of color, Lohman (2009) advised, "those who do not understand the relativity of norms-especially on ability tests miss the easiest and most effective way to identify those minority students who are most likely to develop academic excellence" (p. 976).

Ford, Grantham & Whiting (2008) studied two school districts in Ohio, one a suburban and one an urban, inner-city district. The study surveyed 372 African American

gifted and high achieving students to explore perceptions of factors that affect their achievement. They note that deficit orientation plays a large role in the lack of non-white student's referral for gifted services. "Deficit orientation includes a heavy reliance on tests with little consideration of biases, low referral rates of culturally and linguistically diverse students for gifted education services and the adoption of policies and procedures that have a disparate impact on diverse students" (p. 293). And the identification and selection process has adversely impacted the Latinx community as well, with Mick (1982) observing that "there is general agreement that Hispanics are underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented. The major problem was one of identification instruments and procedures" (p. 44).

In addition to negative stereotypes, teacher attitudes, lack of referrals of non-white students to gifted education programs, and culturally biased tests are also reasons for this terrible inequity (Frye & Vogt, 2010). As Swanson (2006) observed, "Teachers often act as the gatekeepers for gifted programs, so their attitudes and view of children are key to why some gifted youngsters are not entering "the gate" (p. 11). Likewise, Payne (2010) emphasizes the importance of referral procedures that are inclusive:

There is a need for districts to develop safeguards and policies that ensure equity in gifted education. Districts that have traditionally been majority White, middle- to high-income, and suburban will need to have in place referral, assessment, and identification policies as well as talent development programs that provide this diverse student body access to gifted services and AP courses. (p. 54)

From the definition of what constitutes giftedness, through the selection and nomination process, and the ostensibly objective testing process, the mechanisms for identifying and selecting students for participation in gifted education is permeated with unfair bias against non-white students. Each of these areas are discussed in turn below.

Definition of giftedness as the first barrier

The label “gifted” or “giftedness” carries with it many connotations but most significantly it is a label that, once applied, allows these exceptional students access to select programs and important resources in school. However, as Worrell (2009) points out, educators in the field of gifted education have not been consistent in defining giftedness. “Despite the casual and ubiquitous use of the term gifted in the literature, the field has still not achieved a consensus definition of giftedness, nor is such a consensus evident in the near future” (p. 242). Part of the problem is that the notion of giftedness itself is evolving. As Escobedo (2008) explains, “Giftedness, intelligence, and talent are fluid concepts that may look different in diverse contexts and cultures” (p.87). Thus, the definition of giftedness has gone through many changes over the years with each attempt trying to capture a more inclusive picture of what a gifted student represents. However, invariably, defining giftedness also resulted in consequences that unfairly excluded many deserving students from gifted programs. With each refinement of the definition over time, though, efforts have been made to be more inclusive and aware of the undue adverse impact on non-white students.

The government-recognized definition of gifted has also evolved over time reflecting research and input from experts in the field. Samuels (2007) observed that “there are competing definitions of what makes a student gifted. And, unlike in special education, there is not a federal policy that oversees how states should handle gifted education” (p. 2). One of the earliest definitions of giftedness proposed by the Federal government occurred within the Education Amendments of 1969 (U.S. Congress, 1970). Soon thereafter, in 1972, the U.S. Department of Education expanded the federal definition of giftedness in the Marland report to be more inclusive:

Gifted and Talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those

normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society (1971, p. 2)

Twenty years later, the definition of giftedness was updated in the 1993 report *National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent*, by the U.S. Department of Education Research and Improvement. It expanded the definition of giftedness beyond IQ, reflecting a more modern-day definition:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (1993, p. 3)

Courville and DeRouen (2009) confirmed this 1993 definition gave states “an ample mandate to balance the proportions of children in our gifted education programs,” shifting the focus “from prior achievement to potential” (p. 12). Unfortunately, Colangelo & Davis (1997) reported that, notwithstanding this mandate, “Many districts and states still use elitist definitions of giftedness that result in the inclusion of only certain kinds of gifted students, most often those who are white, middle class and academically achieving” (p. 76).

In the never-ending pursuit of a definition that will address the inclusion of all eligible gifted learners, the definition of gifted was further updated in 2012 by the United States Department of Education identifying gifted and talented students as “Children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience or environment” (p. 4).

Renzulli (2005) recognized the potential limitations that the definition of gifted had up to this point and he developed three areas to define giftedness hoping to broaden the scope

of those identified. These relied less on standardized testing and more on behavior. “The three areas are above average ability, a high level of task commitment, and a high level of creativity” (p. 11). Renzulli reasoned that utilizing this definition of gifted and talented would serve more students as opposed to limiting admittance based on a standardized test. Gardner (2006) also tried to broaden the definition of giftedness to include multiple intelligences. “Gardner moves the focus of identifying giftedness from a single-faceted approach to a multi-category concept. The term intelligence refers to a special ability, talent, or skill which allows a person to maximize their potential by building on the particular strength they demonstrate” (p. 13).

Notwithstanding the updated definitions and modifications suggested by experts, however, Bonner, Jennings, Marbly and Brown (2008) reported that “despite our efforts at expanding the definition of giftedness to include several categories and criteria in the identification process, we continue to see a high degree of underrepresentation among African American male cohorts” (p. 93). Expanding the definition did not address the needs of identification of non-white students that may not exhibit this potential in the eyes of the observer, most commonly their teacher. In the next section I will review the shortcomings of the teacher referral and nomination process in identifying and selecting non-white students for gifted programs.

### **Teacher Referrals and Nomination**

Teacher involvement in referring and nominating students for gifted programs has played a major gatekeeping role in causing the grossly disproportionate underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs. Callahan, Hunsaker, Adams, Moore, and Bland (1995) indicate the frequency of teacher nomination as the main source of student recommendation for the gifted program. “According to a national survey, 86.5% of districts

use teacher nominations and 80.5% use parent nominations as some part of their identification system” (p. 99). And the subjective component of teacher involvement cannot be understated. “Teachers and school personnel frequently emphasize behaviors such as cooperation, independence, motivation, task commitment, high grades, and strong language skills when referring and/or personally identifying gifted students” (Ford, 2013, p. 88). Racial and cultural differences between teacher and student, and biased cultural perceptions, disadvantage non-white students in such a subjective selection process. Blanchard & Muller (2015) studied teachers’ roles in the academic outcome of 16,000 tenth grade high school students from a nationwide sample. The researchers used surveys of high school English and math teachers to analyze teacher perceptions and how they shape students’ courses and grades. They used transcripts to compare with student course selection and course progress to assess the likelihood of a student progressing to the next level. The researchers concluded that “teachers have the potential to facilitate students’ upward mobility, or alternatively, to act as gatekeepers and reproduce inequality” (p. 264).

In this vein, Carman (2011) conducted a study to identify different areas of stereotypical thinking about gifted people, using questionnaires and descriptive paragraphs, surveying 91 undergraduate pre-education students and 20 graduated education students in a large Midwestern university. The study asked the participants to identify traits of giftedness including ethnicity, physical appearance, personality, interpersonal relationships, and interests. The study found that 85% of the pre-service teachers imagined a gifted person as white. Carman concludes, “this suggests that the underrepresentation of gifted students from nonmajority populations could be related to the nominations given by the teachers” (p. 804). The study was limited to one geographic region and the participants were not selected at random but rather from a convenience sample. In addition, the instrument used to measure

stereotypes has not been given extensive use to check for validity and reliability. Nonetheless the results give cause for concern since teachers often serve as the first nominators of students for gifted programs. “As the first step in the identification process, teachers rendering biased decisions could eliminate many nonmajority individuals from the pool of potentially gifted” (Carman, p. 805).

Compounding the problem of potential teacher bias is the fact that most schoolteachers are white. Hargrove and Seay (2011) confirm “minority teachers are few in number within the teaching profession” (p. 458). In fact, the most recent U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals, shows that 82% of public school teachers identified themselves as white (2016). Gershenson, Holt and Papageorge (2016) studied the educational expectation and attainment gap analyzing high school English and Math teacher responses using nationally representative survey data. They studied 15,520 teachers’ responses and reported:

Specifically, we find that non-black teachers have significantly lower educational expectations for black students than do black teachers. For example, relative to teachers of the same race and sex as the student, other-race teachers were 12 percentage points less likely to expect black students to complete a four-year college degree. (2016, p. 212)

Although the authors note that the study was limited to tenth graders they did note this study was an important first step in analyzing teacher bias in expectations.

Similar findings have been reported with respect to Latin(x) students. Escobedo (2008) studied 175 seventh and eighth graders from a pool of 1,530 potentially gifted students. They used questionnaires, a creativity test, a Mexican revised Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-RM) and interviews to evaluate students for giftedness and to identify teachers’ understanding regarding the concept of giftedness. The researchers found that only 21 students were identified as gifted. The author advises, “teachers’ perceptions are

not altogether reliable as a main criterion to identify gifted children in this region” (p. 93). It should be noted that the instruments used in this study limited its scope, as the participants had no prior experience with standardized tests, possibly putting them at a disadvantage. But, the author fairly concludes that teachers would benefit from “specific training” and “increased knowledge in the concept of giftedness” (p. 93). It is noteworthy that Escobedo’s admonition is not a new revelation. Gear (1978) advised that “without training, teachers were not nominating students with high potential; they were merely selecting well-behaved students with good grades” (p. 96).

A myopic view of giftedness results per force in a narrow pool of individuals recommended for gifted programs. Sanchez-Escobedo & Schuman (2007) confirm that “biases in teachers’ nominations can significantly skew results” (p. 73). Decisions concerning who will be recommended for gifted testing cannot be left to the teachers. The result can be devastating for those that do not fit the individual teacher’s perception of giftedness. Tucker notes “students whose cultural orientation or economic status differ from mainstream society require consideration when assessing potential for these students to achieve at their highest possible level (2008, p. 21).

Teachers’ backgrounds and cultural sensitivities often make it difficult for the identification of certain populations of students to get recognized and nominated, resulting in exclusion of qualified non-white gifted students. Hargrove and Seay (2011) surveyed 370 third through fifth grade teachers in North Carolina analyzing what barriers teachers perceive that limit specifically non-white males from participating in gifted programs. They found that the underrepresentation was best explained by “the actions of schoolteachers who often serve as gatekeepers into gifted programs” (p. 440). The researchers conclude, “the inability of some teachers to recognize gifted characteristics in Black male children has been related to

racist predispositions and socioeconomic biases” (p. 440). This study did not involve a random sample, which could have skewed the responses to the survey. This limitation notwithstanding, the nominating teacher’s background and bias is of major concern in selecting non-white students for gifted programs.

### **Intelligence Tests**

As noted earlier in the literature review, intelligence testing has a sordid past replete with demonstrable bias against non-white gifted students. But since it is a cost-effective measure that can be easily administered to large groups of school children, it remains a persistent measure widely used to identify students for gifted and talented programs across the country. Bain, Choate and Bliss (2006) point out that “many school programs continue to depend on global IQ scores from standardized intelligence tests to identify the vast majority of children who are gifted, accompanied by commensurate achievement scores, and behavioral checklists for qualification” (p. 8). And use of the tests directly contribute to the problem of underrepresentation: “This assessment approach grows primarily out of **perceptions** of gifted children as a homogeneous group, making it difficult or impossible to identify children from at risk subpopulations (e.g., minority groups, children with disabilities)” (p. 8).

Given the absence of a national definition of giftedness, or national guidelines for gifted programs, states and districts are left to develop their own nomination procedures, and therefore are often free to rely on the standardized IQ test as the gatekeeper for gifted programs. Renzulli (2004) explains, “In practice, a single gatekeeper, often in the form of a test of intelligence becomes the ‘linchpin’ in deciding whether a student qualified or not” (p. 83). And unfortunately, overuse of test scores as the tool for identifying gifted students has

led to “omission of a number of African American children from gifted programs” (Bonner, Jennings, Marbley & Brown, 2008 p. 93).

In addition, a rigid test, such as the intelligence test, currently in use can impede non-white populations from fully being represented in gifted programs, because they may not score well on those measures due to cultural norms. Louis, Subotnik, Breland & Lewis (2000) explain the problem with using intelligence testing as a single gatekeeper and the devastating impact it can have on non-white students. “When a general criterion is applied, they often do not qualify for gifted programs. Gifted children from minority cultures are disadvantaged by the cultural bias inherent in most standardized measures” (p. 299).

In most school districts the selection into a gifted program relies on the results of one written test. But this may not be the best way for all students to demonstrate their ability. Worrell (2009) explains “there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that test scores, although not biased in the traditional sense, may be operating differently in different cultural groups” (p. 242). Also, Ford (2006) reports a specific deterrent that an IQ test can have on African American students, “an African American student may perform better if assessed orally and could be exasperated by paper-and-pencil assessments. Like-wise, some African Americans value their unique expressiveness and therefore might select the more creative and imaginative response option over the less-imaginative correct response” (p. 3).

The use of more inclusive tools in the admission to gifted programs, of course, is more time consuming, which explains why many districts eschew such alternatives in favor of the cost-effective, time saving intelligence tests for admission to gifted programs. Ford, Grantham, & Whiting (2008) remind us, however, that “we must be conscientious in seeking to interpret and use test scores sensibly, to explore various explanations for the differential test scores, and to consider alternative instruments and assessment practices” (p. 295).

Matthews (2001) encourages that there are other measures that can assist educators in utilizing a broader identification method of selecting students for gifted programs. She explains, “In the case of gifted screening, I’d look for something you already have - students’ scores on state or national assessments, as well as their grades, by subject area - and supplement it with teacher and parents’ questionnaires to try to find students not previously recognized” (p. 159). These innovative approaches are important alternatives to biased testing and necessary to overcoming the problem of underrepresentation.

The next section of the literature review will focus on advocacy, specifically the methods and programs being utilized to address the problem of non-white students being denied admission to gifted programs. Alternative methods for admission, and programs that work with non-white students once admitted to ensure student success, will be reviewed.

### **Advocacy**

The issue of advocacy for non-white gifted students is a significant problem. There has been historical evidence that non-white students have years of bias and issues with equal representation. In addition, systematic gatekeeping limits opportunities for these students. It will take a strong system of advocacy to make headway in ensuring that non-white students are provided the opportunity to participate and succeed in gifted programs. Castellano (2003) concedes there are three basic tenants that apply to advocating for desegregating gifted education. These include, “access, support and the opportunity to learn” (p. 54). Investigating what measures can be taken to ensure that non-white students are placed in gifted programs at a more equitable rate and then providing support once they are admitted are keys to ensuring the success of these students.

### **Advocacy: Admission Solutions**

The identification process for gifted education as outlined earlier has served as a gatekeeper to exclude non-white students from gifted programs. There are many suggestions for possible innovations and solutions that can mitigate these circumstances. The first part of the non-white gifted student advocacy includes increased diligence in methods that could provide more opportunities for non-white students to enter the gifted program. Castellano (2003) insists that identification processes have historically failed to factor in ethnicities, genders and economic conditions resulting in underrepresentation. It is important then that the identification processes “must be ‘renormed’ to better represent the diversity in the population” (p. 57).

Currently teachers play a large role in the nomination and placement of students in gifted programs. However, there are very few non-white teachers and this in itself has been shown to be an issue impacting upon the process. Johnson (2002) conducted interviews with six white classroom teachers in the Pacific Northwest to develop narratives about their pre-training influences on racial awareness and to investigate their concepts of race over time. Three themes emerged from the narratives as important to the ability of white teachers to relate to non-white students: (1) the role of relationships and the importance of personal experiences in the development of insider’s perspectives on race and racism, (2) the significance of working for social justice in interracial organizations, and (3) common experiences of marginalization helped teachers empathize with marginalized racial groups. Quite significantly, however, the researchers concluded that “because of the small percentage of students of color in teacher education programs and the population growth in racially diverse communities, there is reason to believe that the racial and cultural divide between teachers and their students will continue to increase in the future” (p.154).

Teacher judgments and nominations can be skewed based on the teachers' experiences and views toward the race of a student. Elhoweris, Muta, Alsheik and Holloway (2005) studied 207 school teachers in a large Midwestern city to determine the effect of students' ethnicity on teachers' educational decision making. The researchers recorded teacher responses after reading vignettes describing students of different ethnicities. They found that students' ethnicity does make a difference in teachers' referral decisions, specifically noting that, "teachers were relying on informal information (i.e. the child's ethnicity) when making referral decisions for gifted and talented programs" (p. 29)." The findings were especially troubling for non-white gifted students. The researchers found, "stereotypical notions on the part of teachers about what an African American student is likely to be capable of may be effectively barring some African American youngsters from participating in the gifted and talented programs" (p. 29). Limitations identified by the authors were that the subjects were only elementary teachers in one Midwestern city, comprised mostly of European American teachers. In order to make progress in ensuring that non-white students are indeed identified as potential gifted students, certain adjustments must be made. For the process of identification children from culturally diverse backgrounds to be supported, "knowledge about giftedness must be gained and attitudes toward these students must be adjusted. Teachers and school counselors, on the other hand, also need to have knowledge about giftedness as well as a nonprejudiced attitude toward students of color" (Baldwin, 2002, p. 107). It is a two-fold need for staff development. First, recognizing giftedness in non-white students, and second, recognizing that teachers may bring implicit biases to their identification processes.

To address this issue of potential bias in the identification process, teacher training in multicultural gifted education is needed. Without proper teacher training, Castellano (2003)

notes that the teacher referrals for gifted programs are suspect. In fact, Castellán recommends, “do not place high priority on teacher information, unless teachers have been trained and demonstrate high levels of cultural competence” (p. 59). One remedy to address the teacher bias issue was reviewed by Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2006) in a study where 92 white pre-service teachers from middle to upper class socio-economic backgrounds were given questionnaires to estimate their beliefs about awareness of culture, diverse families, and cultural communications. All the teachers in the study had completed a practicum in teaching and two courses in multi-cultural education. The researchers found that multi-cultural courses and field experiences are needed to prepare teachers. Teachers offered the coursework and practicum were more positive in working with families from different ethnicities. As a result of such education and training, the study found “White pre-service teachers will be culturally aware and sensitive to the needs of their future students” (p. 76).

Therefore, encouraging colleges and universities to implement course requirements that include cultural awareness training would be an important first step in ensuring that the systemic problem of teacher bias and lack of teacher awareness of the identification and needs of non-white gifted students are addressed. Fortunately, many colleges and universities do already require multi-cultural course requirements of their students. Columbia College requires all students to take a course “which explores other cultures or cultivates an appreciation of cultural diversity” (Columbia College, n.d.). Utilizing this requirement-based approach will ensure that teachers are trained and ready to work with and nominate all students for gifted education, including non-white students.

Wright and Ford (2017) recommend equity-based changes so that many stakeholders may have a role in ensuring that non-white students are considered for gifted programs. This includes the legal community informing parents of their rights and raising awareness of the

disparity and underrepresentation of non-white students. School counselors need to address the social-emotional needs of gifted but they must be “viewed with culture and class in mind to be responsive to students” (Wright & Ford, 2017, p. 114). School psychologists have a vital role in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students. Wright and Ford (2017) suggest, for example, that psychologists develop “a multidimensional assessment approach that considers diverse learning styles and examines multiple and specific areas of ability and talent” (p. 114). Multiple stakeholders can play a key role in ensuring that there are more non-white students considered and placed in the gifted programs and ensuring they receive proper training could be instrumental in ensuring all eligible students are nominated.

Information as a collection process that provides more inclusive information would be another important factor in ensuring a comprehensive nomination process. Rather than limiting data to just test score nomination would make a vast difference in who is screened. Multiple data sources should be used in the referral process. These should be received from various sources such as parents, self, community, teachers and tests. Colangelo & Davis (1997) advise that multiple data sources are important to ensure many variables are considered when identifying students for gifted programs. “The purpose is to have a variety of measures complement each other in order to discover gifted potential that a single measure might not indicate” (p. 82).

Haag (2016) conducted a longitudinal study using data on 40,603 students in a Miami-Dade County school readiness project to assess a variety of factors associated with predicting elementary student selection for a gifted program. Miami-Dade County is the fourth largest district in the nation and has a highly ethnically diverse population. Haag (2016) analyzed the screening methods utilized to ensure all students could be identified for the gifted program beyond the usual IQ and achievement test screener. The study noted that

Miami-Dade county recognized the use of other standards to initiate the screening process “including above average work in artistic, literary, scientific, or mathematic accomplishments, and/or very rapid learning rate or unusually insightful conclusions to ensure that members of underrepresented groups had opportunities for gifted screening” (p. 18). One indicator for gifted testing the authors analyzed was the pre-school program each of the students attended as a forecaster of gifted nomination potential. School readiness and pre-school attended were two factors that the author noted were substantial indicators of nomination and placement for gifted programs. The findings did suggest that students from private versus public pre-schools had a higher likelihood of being nominated for gifted programs. However, it is questionable whether these efforts increased screening in Miami Dade; the authors found that the pattern of non-white students in the gifted program was the same in this county as across the country despite more inclusive measures. “Black students are underrepresented in gifted and talented education in MDCPS (Miami Date County Public Schools) p. 41). The author noted that the study was limited by the lack of qualitative data, which limited information about personal choice and experiences of the students. One other notable limitation was that the student subjects typically had low socio-economic status, which may limit generalizing the results of the study to other communities.

Cultural bias can also play a role in which screening tools are utilized and how the responses of the students nominated are analyzed. Laundra and Sutton (2008) note strong evidence suggests that “typically lower scores by racial minorities (particularly African Americans and Latinos) can be at least partially attributed to the testing construct itself as well as to other cultural and environmental factors inherent in traditional test taking” (p. 367). Ensuring the screening information is sensitive to the cultural needs of the group is important. “Measures of academic achievement that are most often used by schools to

identify gifted students including teacher recommendations, grades, and especially standardized tests, have been amply demonstrated to have cultural biases” (Geisinger, 2005, pp. 150-151). Fagan and Holland (2007) using multiple experiments studied 223 college students using a variety of tests including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised (PPVT-R) and a sayings test that included 58 sayings to test comprehension of commonly used sayings. They were interested in discovering if a score on an IQ test could be tied to exposure to certain words and phrases and if these phrases might have a cultural bias. They found, “problems were solvable on the basis of specific previous knowledge, knowledge such as that tested on conventional IQ tests. Such specific knowledge did vary with race and was shown to be subject to test bias” (p. 327). Castellano includes African American characteristics of intelligence that should be incorporated in any screening tool. The characteristics include “preference for relational, holistic, and visually stimulating activities and environments; social, cooperative, interactive grouping and opportunities for kinesthetic and tactile expression” (p. 57).

Early referral and testing at preschool or kindergarten age can also limit the cultural bias that exists when testing students for gifted programs, thereby improving advocacy for underrepresented students. Testing the students early has been proven to be a method to minimize cultural bias in the testing process. Pfeiffer, Petscher and Jarosewich (2007) studied 375 four to six year olds using a rating scale screening tool that was designed specifically for pre-school and kindergarten students. The Gifted Rating Scale-Preschool (GRS-P) utilizes a multidimensional model of giftedness, developed to address the underrepresentation of non-white students being screened for giftedness. They note in the study “GRS-P’s low cultural loading provides greater opportunity for typically underrepresented minority group children to be identified with a moderate-to-high probability of giftedness” (Pfeiffer, Petscher and

Jarosewich 2007, p. 208). They also suggest that, to achieve the maximum allowance of underrepresented students of color accepted into the gifted program, the GRS-P screening tool must be used “in conjunction with other measures, such as IQ tests, auditions, portfolio samples and nonverbal tests, as part of a comprehensive test battery” (p. 210). Limitations identified by the author were the limited sample size in each of the independent variables; age, race/ethnicity and gender. The author also noted there is a need to examine the interaction between parent education level and ethnicity.

Recognizing the limitations that teacher nominations and traditional methods of screening can have in ensuring non-white gifted students are selected for gifted testing, Pfeiffer, Petscher and Kumtepe (2008) studied a new rating scale, the Gifted Rating Scales School Form (GRS-S) developed for all ages. They studied one hundred two students in first to eighth grade from elementary and middle schools in the southeastern United States. The GRS-S tool utilizes a multidimensional model to identify giftedness and could be used at any age. It uses a rating scale with six categories; intellectual ability, academic ability, creativity, artistic talent, leadership ability, and motivation. They acknowledge in their study the history of underrepresentation of African and Hispanic students in gifted programs. They found when using the GRS-S tool “the GRS holds great promise in identifying any student who has a high or very high likelihood of being gifted” (p. 145). The author did identify limitations with the study that include the small sample of Asian American, Hispanic and African American students. Also, the correlation between ratings came from teacher nominations based on achievement-level which might have influenced the data. This promising tool addresses many of the concerns found in the research that underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted can be attributed to a single achievement score/IQ test screening tool or teacher bias.

Sometimes new tests and matrices have been developed which will allow students to be included in the screening for gifted that might not have been selected previously. Baldwin (2002) notes, “The last 2 decades have seen an increased use of nonverbal tests for the identification of students from culturally diverse backgrounds who might not have been identified using the traditional methods for identifying exceptionality” (p. 111). The Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT2) is a screening instrument that is used to screen students for possible inclusion in gifted programs. The test is designed to be more culturally neutral in evaluating potential gifted students. This test is described as using progressive matrices to allow for a culturally neutral evaluation of a student’s nonverbal reasoning and general problem-solving ability, irrespective of the student’s primary language, education, culture or socioeconomic background. Giessman, Gambrell and Stebbins (2013) studied 5,833 second graders that took the CogAT6 and 4,037 kindergartners that took the NNAT2 in a Midwestern school district as part of a grade-wide screening for gifted. They analyzed district data in a qualitative study. The CogAT6 is a group ability test given frequently as a screening tool for gifted programs. In this study, the district switched to the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT2) in hopes to yield a more diverse pool of students for the gifted program. The results found the two measures yielded similar outcomes and neither test produced a significantly larger pool of non-white students for the gifted program. However, the limitations of the study recognize that it may have impacted the outcomes and the results are inconclusive. One limitation was the study was limited to one district, the NNAT2 was administered online so it may have disadvantaged students not familiar with computers, and it compared different age groups taking different screening devices. Overall, the authors conclude that any screening measure should be one component of a screening protocol and “ideally one would administer multiple measures to all students” (p. 107).

Another innovative assessment that can be utilized as an alternate choice for placement decisions into a program for gifted students is the Discover program. Sarouphin (1999) conducted an assessment using the Discover assessment tool. The study of 257 kindergartners, second, fourth and fifth graders who were predominantly Navajo Indians and Mexican Americans was conducted using the Raven Progressive and the Raven Coloured Progressive matrixes and correlating it with the Discover tool. This study utilized measures of non-verbal reasoning abilities and the results were effective for selecting non-white gifted students. “The Discover assessment seems to be a promising tool for the identification of gifted minority students” (Sarouphin, 1999, p. 250). Limitations identified by the authors were the need for the Discover assessment to be used on other minority and nonminority populations and studies that report evidence of the effectiveness of performance-based assessments.

Briggs, Reis and Sullivan (2009) conducted a case study using questionnaires, document review and in-depth interviews and observations to gather data from program coordinators and teachers from five districts in the Midwest, Northeast and West coast. They identified several innovative programs and practices across the country that show promise in ensuring non-white students are considered for gifted programming. Specifically, the alternative pathway identification method replaced the formal identification procedures. The alternative assessment placed an emphasis on student performance. One specific example of the utilization of this alternative was in an innovative program known as the Treasures (To Recruit, Educate and Service Under-Represented Exceptional Students). “This program helps find, identify and serve underrepresented gifted students in the district. The end result is an increased number of diverse students identified for, and participating in, the gifted program” (p. 137). Limitations identified by the author included the accuracy of descriptions of the

participants, the biases of the researcher, and how the research has addressed the biases in the study.

Zhabanova, Rule and Stichter (2013) focused on a unique curriculum study that included an identification component for non-white gifted students. Using a case study, they identified eight African-American students from a first and second grade multi-age classroom in an elementary school in Iowa. The study followed Renzulli's Enrichment Traid Model and included an enrichment curriculum. The study used a pre and post test to determine content knowledge and a sociogram using the Alpha Project Peer Nomination Simulation. The sociogram screened for student observation of the following roles they observed; leadership, fixer, organizer, fixer, artist, writer, inventor, judge, entertainer, animal expert, supporter, math expert. Their study concluded that this method was beneficial in recognizing giftedness in students not traditionally selected by the teacher. Notably, "two of the three African American students were identified as gifted through their leadership, creativity and academic performance in the project" (p. 143). The results were also impressive in the inclusion of specialized curriculum that benefited the non-white students. "This infusion of multicultural content into the curriculum allowed Black students to feel more connected to what was being taught; the Black leaders unit encouraged all students in the class to address social issues at their school" (p. 154). The study was limited by the small sample size and the age limitations of the participants, but the author suggested classroom teachers may want to implement the enrichment model.

Ramos (2010) explains there are unique considerations relevant to Latinix students and their underrepresentation in gifted education:

In Latino cultures, it is unseemly for an individual to draw attention to himself. The culture norm is that one is expected to be humble and not show-off one's competencies. Obviously, therefore, it would be quite unusual for a Latino child to actively demonstrate his or her giftedness (Ramos, 2010, p. 152).

To address this issue, Ramos suggests some specific methods educators could use to allow potential gifted students to demonstrate their talents, including such things as group performance projects, small group interviews, the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability test, and the Cooper classroom Observation instrument. All of these measures would improve advocacy for under-represented students and would be excellent measures to ensure this group of learners receives the proper screening for inclusion in gifted education programs.

Ouyang and Conoley (2007) conducted case studies with three school districts in Texas and California focusing on the consultation approach to increase the number of Latino English Language learners in gifted and talented education (GATE). The study involved working with schools and families using a consultation approach to identify students that might not be selected using traditional screening tools such as IQ and achievement tests. The study showed an increase of 20% in the identification and retention of Hispanic families in the GATE gifted program. The program did note that trained consulting psychologists had highly honed consultation skills which might limit implementation at districts without this level of personnel.

It is important to realize though that, even with all the suggestions and innovations put forward to address the lack of non-white students in gifted education, “concrete solutions remain elusive because it will require not only an extensive knowledge base but also the opening of hearts among a preponderance of individuals dedicated to a just and fair world” (Castellano, 2003, p. 61).

#### Advocacy: Placement Satisfaction

The second component of advocacy involves putting systems in place that will ensure non-white students who are admitted to gifted programs find satisfaction and success as gifted students. Ford (1996) succinctly summarizes the issue: “more concentrated efforts

must be aimed at the retention of these students once they are placed” (p. 200). One important consideration that ensures Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students are successful once placed is to ensure they have “high quality curriculum and instruction that are sensitive and responsive to their cultural heritage” (Obi, Obikar, Obi, Banks, Warner, & Spencer, 2014, p. 77).

Utilizing new and innovative instruments and programs that identify gifted non-white students might solve some of the underrepresentation problems. However, these new tools might also identify students using curriculum and information that are not customarily included in gifted programs. The students may need curriculum development that might address their unique needs. Sarouphim (1999) cautions that we “need to warn educators who use the Discover tool for identification purposes of a potential mismatch” (p. 250). Gifted educators may need to utilize a curriculum that addresses the unique learning styles of gifted students that the new measurement identifies.

Kaplan in Callahan (2005) found that some non-white gifted student need transitional gifted programs to ensure their success in gifted programs:

Gifted students from traditionally underrepresented groups may need a curriculum that provides for sophisticated, complex and deep thinking, but that also provides the bridge and scaffolding that student need to learn the language, lingo, the insider knowledge, and the keys to success to make the transition from the regular curriculum to the gifted. (Callahan,2005, p. 103).

The success of students, not traditionally identified as gifted, can be greatly impacted when programs are put in place that recognize each student’s unique needs allowing for orientation and activities that will ensure they can be successful.

Many times, non-white students are placed in gifted programs and choose not to participate. Grantham (2004) notes “this is often based on social or external influences, particularly peer pressure, as well as internal or psychological issues, namely racial identify

status” (p. 242). Rowley and Moore (2002) state that much of the research has been built on the idea that students have a false dichotomous choice between having a “pro-Black, anti-achievement identity” or the opposite, ‘pro-White, pro-achievement identity” (p. 64). To address this issue and encourage non-white students to remain in the gifted program once identified, the researchers employed the Participation Motivation-Racial Identify Choice Model. The model uses a multicultural mentoring approach. This program was found to “help gifted Black males overcome barriers that distance them from fully embracing academic excellence and maximizing their full potential as part of their Black heritage” (Grantham, 2004, p. 242). Tools like this will assist educators to meet the academic needs of their new diverse gifted population.

A notable solution to ensure CLED (Culturally, Linguistically, and Ethnically Diverse) gifted and talented students find success once they are placed in advanced programs are highlighted in a study by Briggs, Reis & Sullivan (2008). They studied twenty-five districts throughout the United States using qualitative data collection including a questionnaire, program information sheets, interviews and observation site visits. Their purpose was to identify methods to increase representation of CLED students in gifted programs and to identify program changes that can increase representation of CLED students. The study identified five categories that ensured the needs of CLED gifted students were being met. The first category recognized modified identification procedures including alternative pathways for identification, early identification and inclusion of information about broader prospective of student performance. Second, the authors recognized the need for front-loading curriculum, preparing students in advance, to ensure success of students in advanced content. One example is the Project Excite where CLED students were offered eight-week sessions, student role models, and a positive peer culture to bridge the gap and

ensure CLED students would be successful in advanced courses. The study found that 44% of participants went on to participate in high ability or advanced-level classes. The researchers advised, “nurturing talents and interests has the potential to improve the representation of CLED students in advanced placement math and science programming” (p. 138). Third, the study identified curriculum changes and modifications that addressed the needs of CLED students. The curriculum changes included linking real-world applications to student learning and addressing achievement gaps in a direct way addressing specific needs for specific populations. The fourth component of the study involved parent-home connection, comprised of parent volunteers, disseminating program information, and making family and culture connections. The fifth component of this study was the use of program evaluation components that included reporting on the increase of CLED students in gifted programs. All of these components of the study were intended to ensure more CLED students were included in gifted education and, once admitted, had the necessary support to succeed. “It is often difficult to identify academically talented students, and without some of the conscious decisions to modify program and practices too few CLED student will be identified and served” (p. 143).

Social-emotional needs of non-white gifted students also can be a cause of lack of participation in gifted programs. One solution to ensure non-white gifted students have specialized needs addressed may be the use and training of the school counselor. Goldsmith notes, “gifted students bring with them a unique set of characteristics that require attention, and school counselors are in a position to meet the needs of gifted students through counseling, collaboration/consultation, leadership and advocacy. Counselors can advocate for the inclusion of identified gifted and talented students in activities that address their personal/social and academic needs.” (Goldsmith, p. 60).

Effective advocating for the inclusion of non-white students in gifted programs will require implementing advocacy in the screening tools used and the curriculum adjustments made to ensure these deserving underrepresented students find success in the programs. The next section of the review of literature will address the importance of leadership to ensure that the advocates for these changes can be heard, empowered, and reforms implemented.

### **Leadership**

“Where there is no vision, there is no hope.” – *George Washington Carver*

Documenting the fact of underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs, investigating its various causes, and developing solutions are necessary conditions to remedying the problem, but not sufficient conditions. Without visionary leadership in this important area of education, there will be no hope of solving the problem. Leadership is essential to bringing awareness to this important issue and implementing change in the lives of these underserved students. Leadership at every level is necessary to ensure gifted education is made available to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, and socio-economic status.

Even at the building level, it is imperative that a vision and mission for change is implemented for all-inclusive gifted education. Shaw in Simpson reminds leaders that “the mission typically defines the scope of what you do, while the vision should be a vibrant and compelling image of the organization’s future purpose” (Simpson, 1994. p. 9). Leaders that develop a vision and mission for their school will be able to identify clearly how gifted education fits into their goals for the future. It will also require a leader that understands the steps necessary to implement change in order to make a difference for those not usually represented in gifted education. Brown and Rinko-Gay (2016) recognize that “leadership skills in gifted education are similar to the characteristics cited in the leadership literature

such as problem solver, visionary, and the ability to build capacity” (p. 124). The issues of leadership may be similar for leaders of gifted programs, but they have many pressures and competing causes often working to undermine the needed growth and change in gifted education programs. School leaders need to advance a climate and culture that develops quality programs for gifted learners. Lewis, Cruzeuro, and Hall (2007) conducted interviews with principals of two schools in remote and rural areas of a Midwestern state to determine the characteristics and skills of principals known for providing strong programs for gifted learners. The state director of gifted education had even put their schools on a list of the state’s best elementary programs. Themes emerged that accounted for the principal’s effectiveness include (1) instructional leadership and strong support for teachers through mentoring; (2) differentiated supervision, and (3) support based on the readiness of individual teachers. The study was limited in scope, being confined to two schools, though they varied widely in demographics, size, and cultural diversity.

The issues identified in this study could impact many students that deserve learning that meets their particular needs when the gifted education becomes a low priority in the school planning process. “In the role of instructional leader, the principal, can build into the school culture the expectation that all children will be taught at their developmental level, even when some of them are working far in advance of the general student body” (Lewis, Cruzeiro & Hall, 2007, p. 61). Building principals must address this by ensuring gifted education is prioritized in the planning of the school, and information sharing about the specialized needs of gifted students is a part of professional development. And it is important that school leaders educate themselves on gifted education specifically. McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, and Terry (2010) found that principals who have a broader understanding of

exceptional student education can foster an environment more conducive to improving outcomes for these students. Principals are learning leaders” (p. 16).

### **Plans for Change**

One of the first steps essential to effective leadership in this area of education is for leaders to recognize that underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs is a serious and ongoing issue. Aleman (2009) conducted a case study in the Mountain West school district of an elementary school serving 510 pre-K-6<sup>th</sup> grade students and facing low numbers of non-white students in gifted programs. The case study specifically addresses how conflict can lead to social justice. In this instance, a parent and a district personnel representative confronted the leader to explain lack of inclusion of non-whites in the gifted program. Aleman notes that sometimes leaders are “thrust into making change. Research indicates that school culture very much impacts the experiences of historically marginalized students and parents” (Aleman, 2009, p. 1). Aleman describes these opportunities where conflict develops into positive plans for change as “leadable” moments. “Some of these issues may include tense or uncomfortable discussion where the direction of the school, its culture and the experiences of its students could be positively affected (2009, p. 14).

Although this study was limited to one school administrator’s experience it provided valuable insight into how school conflict can lead to transformational practices. Administrators must work with staff to ensure the school is addressing the needs of all gifted students. Milligan, Neal and Singleton (2012) note that “effective leadership by specialists in both areas of special education is essential to the operation of programs.

It is the responsibility of the program leaders to plan, prepare and deliver professional development to classroom teachers and other school administrators so they may be informed” (p. 171). This can be a challenge for school leaders as they may have had inadequate

preparation themselves and not be trained in gifted education. McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, Terry and Farmer (2010) conducted surveys of 61 principals in a large metropolitan district in the southeastern United States regarding the degree to which administrator preparation programs addressed necessary skills to work with educators of gifted children. The theme that emerged from their study was that without proper training in gifted education, administrators struggle to provide the professional development needed to effectively address the needs of exceptional students. They found “lack of exceptional education content may lead principals to begin their careers without the ability to effectively oversee concerns related to students with exceptionalities” (p. 3). In those circumstances principals focused professional development on legal issues and funding. Very few administrators provided professional development on characteristics of students or modifications and accommodations for gifted students. While limited by the small size of one single district studied and possible confusion over the type of preparation courses administrators reported, this study significantly confirmed that formally educating future leaders on the specialized needs of gifted students is an important step to ensuring that non-white gifted students are included as a priority for school leaders.

### **Funding for Change**

“A budget is a moral document.” – *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Effective leadership also involves obtaining the necessary funding for positive change. It is a major concern for gifted programs across the country. Unfortunately, Brown and Rinko-Gay (2016) note that funding for gifted education has been greatly, negatively impacted by a lack of a federal mandate for gifted programs. Also, recent legislative mandates for school improvement have put multiple demands on the limited resources available to schools. Decades of national reports “have all shed light on how the development

of talented students has been curbed by lack of state and federal mandates and shortage of resources such as trained teachers, specialized schools and programs and funding” (Brown & Rinko-Gay, 2016, p. 121). Lewis, Cruzeuro, and Hall (2007) conducted interviews with two principals in remote and rural areas of a Midwestern state and found they struggled with funding issues that have been dwindling in their state since 2001. The study used interviews to analyze school principals’ leadership skills in their various schools, specifically focusing on gifted education and funding. In this study, funding was noted as a particular problem. “Paying for special programs such as services for gifted, learners appeared to be a challenge when there were no federal dollars targeted specifically for them, unlike special education” (p. 59).

Indeed, lack of funding for gifted programs can unfairly impact non-white gifted students in particular because limited resources may not allow for the necessary expanded testing methods or teacher training that leads to more inclusive gifted programs. Callahan, Moon and Oh (2017) collected data using questionnaires of 1,566 district personnel in elementary, middle and secondary schools nationwide relating to various topics in gifted education including screening, curriculum, delivery models, professional development, teacher qualifications and financing of gifted programs. The researchers wanted to discern if these factors impacted gifted education and the delivery of services. They found “factors such as state regulations, funding levels, student demographics and teaching faculty all play a significant role in the context of the gifted program and also have a significant impact on the quality of the program” (p.41). If funding is not specifically earmarked for gifted education, then the program’s impact on students will be diminished. In one state, it was observed that in “the past 14 years the state has lost 110 gifted programs. Schools in the state aren’t required to have a gifted program, and with no money allocated directly to gifted programs,

there's no financial incentive to have one" (Ahern, 2015, para. 5). Only effective leadership will overcome these financial funding challenges to making gifted education all-inclusive.

Indeed, Bakken, Obiaker and Rotari (2014) note that leadership is critical in the face of insufficient funding. "Without a legal mandate or related federal money, advocacy for this unique sub-group of students is imperative, as is promoting an organization or institutional culture that is rooted in inclusive policies, practices and procedures" (p. 15). And more specifically, leaders are needed who see the value in advocating for *all* students, not just the majority. "Culturally competent leaders view diversity as a strength and work from a belief system that embraces principles of inclusion, equity and access" (Rotatori, 2014, p. 12). It is not a matter of us versus them. Yeung (2014) analyzed funding for gifted programs and the role they play in ensuring district leaders have the funds they need to maximize the potential of gifted students. As Yeung poignantly observed, "the paradigm of maximizing potential does not mean redistributing resources from disadvantaged children to gifted children; it simply means ensuring that each child, at any level of intelligence is provided the opportunity to be all he/she can be" (Yeung, 2014, p. 818).

With the ever-increasing pressure on schools to fund programs that raise test scores and improve yearly state progress reports, gifted funding is often overlooked. When there is just not enough money to go around, a viable alternative to mitigate the lack of funding is to pursue outside resources for financial support. Lewis, Cruzeiro, and Hall (2007) comment with respect to their study, discussed above, that they utilized grant money to make their programs possible (p. 59). Many districts have education foundations that provide grant funding. School leaders should provide training to teachers to apply for these grants to help bridge the gap in funding for gifted programs. Gallagher (2015) also makes note of some professional efforts that have established programs that enhance gifted programs outside of

legislative initiatives. These include, “Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMBY) at John Hopkins University, The Duke Talent Identification Project at Duke University, the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University and the Rocky Mountain Talent Search at the University of Denver” (Gallagher, 2015, p. 85). All of these programs can serve as models for leaders to consider when seeking outside sources for financial support for their gifted programs when funding is limited.

### **Legislative Initiatives for Change**

Advocates and leaders can have a tremendous influence on gifted education at the legislative level. Gallagher (2015) studied many approaches at the local, state and federal level that can impact change for legislation and funding of gifted programs. Gallagher found, for example, that a common form of policy change that has been implemented at every level is an “assembly of distinguished panel of experts who seek to identify what need to be done to address a particular problem or challenge” (Gallagher, 2015, p. 79). The effectiveness of leadership at the legislative level in implementing these kinds of policy changes are critical to bringing about equity and diversity in gifted education.

Locally working for change in gifted programs is usually a collaborative process among school board, superintendents, administrators, teachers and parents. This is often reflected in differentiated instruction, special programs or courses including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureates classes among others. However, even including provisions in these programs for gifted learners, there often remains insufficient funding available to address the specific problem of underrepresentation (Gallagher, 2015, p. 82). In these circumstances a transformational leader, who acknowledges the unique needs of non-white gifted students, can be a powerful agent for change, ensuring that even with limited funding the problem of underrepresentation will not be ignored.

A variety of positive measures can be taken at the state level. In the Midwest state where this study is conducted, for example, administrators and district leaders could follow the advice of the Council of Gifted for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2017) concerning their recommended training requirements for educators. Recommendation No. 8 advises: “DESE should require all districts to provide teachers ongoing professional development addressing the nature and needs of gifted students and designing curriculum and instruction to meet those needs” (DESE 2018). If implemented by DESE and fully embraced by school leadership, this is one recommendation that would significantly improve gifted education in general and the problem of underrepresentation of non-white gifted students in particular.

Aside from advisory councils, there is of course a much larger group of policy makers at the state level who have significant, often determinative impact on gifted education; these include the Governor, legislature, lobbyists, and state school board members. Legislative leaders obviously have significant power to affect gifted education in their state. Again, by way of further example, the State Gifted Advisory Council made specific recommendations outlined in their 2017 report. Specifically, these recommendations address non-white gifted students’ underrepresentation in gifted programs. One specific recommendation was noted throughout the literature, the repeated suggestion that teachers need specialized cultural awareness training specific to gifted students. If this change was implemented as recommended by the Council on Gifted, this could drastically improve the plight for non-white gifted students. In one state a gifted association even employs a lobbyist to advise legislatures on specific needs of gifted students. District leaders could work with such lobbyists, who have specialized training in the needs of gifted students, to craft legislative

initiatives and policy papers to be sure the needs of all gifted students are addressed by the legislature.

One state gifted advisory board focused on specific steps that could be implemented if leaders would work together for changes to benefit non-white gifted students. These changes would all ensure that the underrepresentation of non-white gifted students would be addressed.

Specifically, the advisory board made recommendations that the state:

- Include the scores of gifted students as a separate subgroup on the state and local report cards;
- Encourage local districts to take advantage of the allowable use of Title I funds to help better identify and provide gifted services for the traditionally underrepresented populations;
- Include explicit language requiring the use of Title II funds to provide professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to better understand the nature and needs of gifted students and how to provide these students with appropriate curriculum and instruction;
- Include grants that provide for the explicit use of Title IV funds to pay for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exam fees of low-income students

(DESE, 2017).

These are all important measures for state legislative leaders and gifted advocates to incorporate when recommending new laws and regulations that affect gifted education programs.

At the federal level, most gifted funding historically came from the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Act of 1988, at least until that funding was effectively reduced to zero some

years ago. Gallagher (2015) notes the discrepancy in funding for special education for students with disabilities and special education for students in gifted: “only a few million dollars of federal support are allocated each year for federal support of education programs and research in the field of gifted education while over 11 billion dollars are invested yearly for children with disabilities” (p. 84). This inequitable discrepancy in federal funding should be remedied, and lobbyists and legislators concerned about underrepresentation of our nation’s underserved, non-white gifted students advocated to fix it. Improved funding could change gifted programs and ensure that finally non-white gifted students have a path to acceptance into the program. Callahan et al. (2013) in their study, discussed above, conclude that leaders must speak up about the need for gifted funding. “We would argue that to do nothing is to put generations of gifted students at risk for not realizing their full potential. Rather, we are at a time when national conversations are needed” (p. 42).

Involvement at the local, state, and federal level by our school leaders can ensure that legislators are informed of the importance of gifted programs and the urgent need for more inclusiveness to address the underserved and overlooked population of non-white gifted students. Gallagher (2015) admirably calls on “key leaders who recognize what is at stake in our failure to adapt to the needs and forces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 87). We need to provide leadership that would serve the next generation of gifted and talented students.

### **Leadership results in Change: Transformational Leaders**

Transformational leadership is absolutely necessary to address disproportionate underrepresentation in gifted programs. Transformational leadership is a model of leadership developed by Bass in 1985. Its premise allows school administrators to empower their staff to work together to fulfill the school vision and mission. Bass wants leaders to “stimulate followers to perform beyond the level of expectations” (Bass, 1985, p. 32). Transformational

leadership in the context of gifted education allows innovative ideas to be expressed. Boerner, Eisenbeiss, and Griesser (2007), for example, interviewed 91 leaders in German companies to measure transactional and transformational leadership and its impact on boosting follower performance and innovation. They used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and analyzed the role transformational leadership had on stimulating innovation in the workplace. Their study was limited in scope to German companies, but they found “transformational leadership will strengthen debate among followers and this communication style again will stimulate follower innovation” (p. 15).

In the case of non-white gifted students their place in the program is uncertain and often not recognized. By recognizing and implementing innovative solutions, transformational leaders can work toward realizing a more equitable representation of non-white students in gifted programs. Conger (1999) summarized the power of transformational leadership in schools. “Transformational leaders motivate their followers to commit to and to realize performance outcomes that exceed their expectations” (p. 151).

Another important component of positive change to address the lack of non-white students in gifted education begins with the teaching staff of an organization. Transformational leaders are encouraged to embrace ideas from all stakeholders when making decisions. Robinson (2003) recommends that gifted teachers and advocates “should offer assistance in locating and nurturing talents in culturally diverse and low-income youth and developing rigorous and challenging curricula. Also, they should weigh in with principals when school-wide efforts in diversity and curricula were discussed in the context of general education” (p. 24). Transformational leaders should motivate teachers to receive cultural awareness training and encourage a school to embrace its various cultures. This important step forward to achieving a more inclusive gifted program requires a school leader

who values inclusiveness and acceptance. In one qualitative study, Okcu (2014) utilized the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire scale and the Questionnaire for Diversity management with 735 secondary school teachers in the Provence of Siirt. Okcu found that leadership styles and diversity in the workforce are highly correlated. Specifically, when transformational leadership was adopted there was a sense of democracy among the participants. Okcu (2014) advised “an organizational climate approaching diversity with tolerance and allowing employees to protect their ethical and cultural heritage should be established” (p. 2171). There were some limitations to this study, including a narrow grade level focus, use of only a single qualitative method, and limited data collection. Working with staff to ensure they are trained and that everyone embraces a culturally aware environment will benefit all students, including underserved non-white gifted students.

In addition to transformational leadership, administrators need to recognize that moral decision-making plays a key role in their effectiveness as well. Specifically, there are social constructs and gifted program policies that have traditionally allowed non-white students to be marginalized in gifted education. Brown & Rinco-Gay (2016) note that leadership in gifted education has a unique set of needs, and they advise that “taking social context into consideration when solving ethical dilemma is extremely important for a leader in gifted education” (p. 128). The transformational leadership necessary to resolve the problem of underrepresentation requires awareness of the pervasiveness of the problem and the need for it to be addressed at every level. “At a practical level, leading gifted programs and schools as moral stewardship means seeing the ethical and justice implications of thousands of daily decisions” (Brown & Rinco-Gay 2016, p. 129).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Overview

In Chapter One, I discussed the persistent and pernicious problem of underrepresentation of non-white students in public school gifted programs. There is an urgent need for further examination of gifted programs and the disproportionate underrepresentation of non-white students (Ford, 2014; Ford and Harmon, 2001; McBee, 2006; Moon & Brighton, 2008). Grissom and Redding (2016) confirm “substantial race disparities exist in student receipt of gifted education services in American schools” (p. 1). Gifted education’s historical background is mired in belief systems and bias that exclude non-white students (Porter, 2017). Gifted programs in public high schools have traditionally been populated predominantly by white students, with non-white students being disproportionately underrepresented for decades. This problem persists, as Ford (2010) reports the most recent data, “Black students are underrepresented by 48% and Hispanic students are underrepresented by 38%” (p. 33). Non-white students who defy the odds and find themselves accepted into gifted programs, while facing unique challenges of their own, reap tremendous benefits and advantages that further their post-secondary educational and career goals. Their experiences as non-white gifted students were explored in my research.

This study describes the experiences of non-white gifted students who have graduated from one suburban Midwestern school district gifted program. Much research has been done on underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted programs, but there is limited research that has explored the experiences of non-white students, who have participated in such programs, from their own perspectives. These students’ unique insights and experiences served to inform teachers and administrators and help improve the provision and

effectiveness of gifted services to this underserved population. We may never fully understand the problem of another person, as the Native American proverb advises, unless we walk a mile in their moccasins. To this end, I chose the qualitative method of research for this proposed research.

The qualitative research approach “collect[s] data through observations, interviews, and document analysis and summarize[s] the finding primarily through narrative or verbal means” (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2006, p. 15) Springer relates the goal of qualitative research is to “...provide comprehensive descriptions of people’ experiences and meanings they construct for interactions with other people and things in their environments” (p. 20). This qualitative research study utilized the stories of non-white gifted students to discover how their experiences in a gifted program influenced their education.

This study used theoretical traditions of case study, heuristics and narrative to investigate the perspectives of students. There are two central research questions that direct this study with sub-questions. The first research question is: What stories do non-white students tell about their experiences in a gifted suburban program? The sub questions are;

- When did you first learn you were gifted? (elementary, middle or high school?)
- Once you were identified what were your experiences like?
- What changes would you like to see in the program for gifted students?

The second research question is: What stories can you tell about your post-secondary experiences up to today? The sub questions are:

- What were your post-secondary goals?
- How did the GRS help you obtain your post-secondary goals?

Unlike quantitative research that is based solely on finite numbers and details, qualitative research allowed the focus to be deeper and more experiential, revealing the students' thoughts and feelings. This study is significant in that it provided insight into the benefits that non-white gifted students have as participants in gifted education and what problems they encounter as gifted students. By studying the experiences of the non-white high school gifted students, educators can isolate experiences and practices that can inform decisions to ensure that non-white students are included in gifted education and reap actual benefits from the program.

In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology and associated traditions for this study. I explain the design of the research study specifically as it relates to the demographics and the setting in which it took place to ensure the data obtained are relevant to the research questions posed. I explain the types of data gathered, and the procedures and steps I took to analyze the data. Finally, I address the limitations, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations that are important part of this study to ensure validity.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research and Traditions**

Patton (2015) notes that choosing a method for a research study requires the researcher to know the “study’s purpose, agreed-on uses and intended audiences” (p. 17). With these considerations in mind, I chose qualitative research as the research technique for this study. The qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to gather data in a natural setting rather than a laboratory, allowing the researcher to collect data first hand and fully describe the experiences of the participants. Merriam (2009) explains “qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.14). This research paradigm seeks to generate a “thick description” (Merriam, 2009) of the stories of non-white gifted

students as they reflect on and share their experiences with gifted programs. Merriam (2009) explains, “thick description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (p. 43). That is, the research needs to “provide rich, in-depth descriptions, often referred to as thick descriptions, of the experiences, perspectives and physical settings represented in the data” (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2006, p. 307).

To garner a thick description, the research is deep and descriptive. One of the characteristics of qualitative research that lends itself to this study is best described by Patton (2015), “Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context and nuance that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories” (p. 257). Further, qualitative research uses theoretical traditions as a basis to form research questions, study design and methods. Patton (2015) notes the choice of traditions/frameworks in qualitative research that frameworks focus on and prioritize different questions and draw on different philosophical and epistemological traditions to inform the inquiry (p. 158).

Qualitative research begins with the focus on a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) notes, “Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for an investigation” (p. 26). In this case, the phenomenon under study is the stories of non-white gifted students in a gifted program in one, predominantly white, Midwestern school district. The focus on the students and their real-life experiences provided this study with information that directly related through the eyes of the participants, using their own unique voices. Moustakas aptly terms this “the first method of knowledge because it begins with the ‘things themselves’” (p. 41).

Additionally, to create in-depth descriptions this qualitative study used multiple theoretical traditions (Springer, 2010) as design elements. I used case study tradition as the

main tradition, considered both a process and method (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2006; Merriam, 2009, Stake, 1995, Yin, 2014) heuristic inquiry, and narrative to support the design of this research study. The focus of the research is on the underrepresentation of non-white gifted students. An additional important component of this study was the experiences of non-white students in a high school setting.

The following discussion provides an overview of each tradition including a rationale for how each tradition was chosen for this study.

### **Case Study**

Flyvbjerg notes that case history “has been around as long as recorded history” (2011, p. 302). Yin (2014) poignantly observes that “the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 4). Consequently, the theoretical tradition of case study has been utilized in many social science disciplines. Historically, case study began in earnest after the first World War when sociologists began studying such things as life histories and personal documents for their empirical studies (Platt, 1996). In the 1960’s and 1970’s case study was spread widely as a major research method in academic research in diverse fields, including anthropology, sociology and psychology (Merriam, 2009).

“Case study is an examination of a particular group or event or program” (Lichtman, 2001, p. 108). Stake (2005) adds that case study is “both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 444). In this instance, the particular group is non-white gifted students who participated in a public school gifted program. As Patton (2015) points out, “evaluation case studies have all the elements of a good story. They tell what happened, when, to whom and with what consequences” (p. 18). The compilation of the individual

personal stories and uncommon experiences of these underserved students constitutes this important case study.

Case study as a tradition of qualitative research seeks to “discover meaning, to investigate processes, and to gain insight into and in-depth understanding of an individual, group or situation” (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtler, 2006). Thus, case study allows the researcher to ask important questions of the participants to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena being studied. As Merriam (2009) advised, “The uniqueness of case study lies not so much in the methods employed (although these are important) as in the questions asked and their relationship to the end product” (p. 44). The questions I asked of the participants in this study were designed to gain insight into, and an in-depth understanding of, the unique experiences of non-white gifted students who participated in a gifted program in a predominantly white, school district. As Patton (2015) notes “The case study should take the reader into the case situation and experience - a person’s life, a group’s life, or a program’s life” (p. 538). In this case, by utilizing the case study method, I was able to delve into the rarely seen life experiences, thoughts, and feelings of these underserved students.

Case study requires that the cases are part of a bounded research system. “For this to be a case study, one particular program or one particular classroom of learners (a bounded system) would be the unit of analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 41). The boundary of this study is non-white gifted high school students in a single Midwest public school district. The unit of analysis, experiences of non-white gifted students, aligns with the boundary of this study.

In the case study tradition, the researcher sets the parameters. Lichtman (2011) explains, “All the decisions regarding what to study - what time span will be covered, what documents or individuals will be studied, and so on - rest with the researcher” (p. 109). In my research, I interviewed qualifying students and reviewed their autobiographical statements,

demographic questionnaires, artifacts and other documents provided by the school district and participants, encompassing their four-year high school experience in the gifted programs. Their experiences in the program was fully explored in this manner.

Case studies also must provide sufficient details and be thorough enough to allow for a complete inquiry. Springer (2010) notes, “case studies, including approaches to sampling, measurements analysis, and interpretation, draw on methods and assumptions that are shared by ethnographic research and other qualitative approaches” (p. 406). My research employed extensive data and detailed information from participants with ample detail to inform a thorough and complete inquiry of the research problem.

Finally, using the case study approach has advantages and disadvantages. A primary advantage, Springer (2010) notes, is the “richness of the information that results from intensive focus on a single case” (p. 407). In this instance, the study is hyper-focused on the issue of non-white students in a gifted program. Extraneous issues and details were not studied allowing the case to be the central focus for all discussion. The primary disadvantage is that “it may be difficult to generalize from the results of a case study, since there is no comparison group” (Springer, 2010, p. 407). Although this is certainly a limitation in the instant study, the data gathered may ultimately be analyzed and compared, and even validated, with scholarly findings in other similar studies, to the extent they exist or eventually come to light as a result of future research. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages, overall the case study method, along with other traditions discussed below, is best suited for the ultimate purpose of this study which is to learn and fully understand the personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participating non-white gifted students.

## **Heuristic Inquiry**

Heuristics is used in qualitative inquiry to discover “the nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself and to illuminate it from direct first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38). Patton (2015) further talks about the historical development of heuristics as “a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher” (p. 118). Moustakas explores the heuristic tradition that traces back to the Greek word *heuriskein* which means to discover or find. In the 1960’s and 1970’s heuristic research was launched as a systematic form for investigating human experience (Moustakas, 1994). Heuristic research is autobiographical but as the research unfolds it may have social and even universal significance (Richards & Morse, 2007).

The heuristic tradition is appropriate for this study because, as a Gifted Resource Teacher (GRT) in a predominantly white public high school, I am involved on a daily basis with identifying, teaching, and counseling non-white gifted students. These gifted students have directly experienced what it is like to be a non-white student in a mainly white high school gifted program. Patton (2015) describes heuristic inquiry as “a somewhat different, highly personal analytical process” (p.577). And, Moustakas (1990) sagely advises, “one must begin with oneself. One’s own self-discoveries, awarenesses, and understandings are the initial steps of the process” (p. 16). Based on my unique experience and qualifications, I bring to this study a unique and personal interest in the phenomenon under study that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the relevant experiences of the non-white gifted students in this study.

“Heuristics means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 44) The non-white gifted student’s personal

experiences were the focus of this research. Heuristics allowed the researcher, a gifted teacher, to gather, record, analyze, and share the experiences of underserved gifted students. This research conformed to Moustakas's (1990) dictates that the focus in a heuristic quest be "on recreation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person" (p. 39).

Heuristics is a form of subjective inquiry. Grbrich (2013) notes, "subjective approaches are defined as those where there is a focus on you the researcher and on what takes place within your own thoughts and actions in a specified context" (p. 17). Because this study relied in part on my thoughts and observations as I collect data, it was important for me to carefully journal my experiences and reflect on them with a colleague to ensure I am accurately accounting for the stories the students share with me before I analyze the data collected. Also, the challenge to share the experiences of the students was fulfilled through multiple data sources. Moustakas (1990) describes some heuristic examples, "narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories, poems, artwork, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs, and other personal documents" (p. 39). This study utilized documents, interviews, demographic questionnaires and autobiographical reports to satisfy this important criterion.

I used Heuristic inquiry as a framework to begin my data analysis of the interviews, documents and artifacts, demographic questionnaires and personal narratives. Moustakas notes heuristic research begins with a question or phenomenon that needs illumination (Moustakas, 1990) There are six phases of heuristic research that guide this study. The six phases include; initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

In this instance I have been a gifted teacher for many years and the plight of the non-white gifted student has come to my attention through my own observations and experience.

The importance of non-white students being admitted to the gifted program and the importance of their representation in this program initiated and motivated my research into this topic.

Initial engagement is the initial phase as the researcher discovers a problem or question that is of great interest. Moustakas describes this as “within each researcher exists a topic, theme, problem or question that represents a critical interest and area of search” (p. 27). Initial engagement began long ago when I became interested in gifted learners. I was struck by the clear underrepresentation, and sometimes total absence, of non-white students in the gifted program. I became actively involved in their recruitment. When my lifelong journey as a gifted educator brought me to high school students, I was particularly interested in involving nonwhite gifted students and helping them navigate the gifted program in secondary education. This brought about the interest and initial engagement that developed into the research focus and questions of this study.

Next in heuristic research is the immersion phase. The researcher must live the question at all times. “The researcher is alert to all possibilities for meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). Every opportunity to interact with the research questions adds to the immersion phase as all possibilities for the research are open and analyzed. “People, places, meetings, and nature all offer us possible understanding of the phenomenon we are researching” (West, 2001, p. 101). In this instance my daily encounter with gifted students over many years and each students’ exploration of their post-secondary plans and the specialized needs added to my exploration of the research topic of study. Moustakas further clarifies that during this phase the researcher used “spontaneous self-dialogue, self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues and hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy” (1990, p. 28). I utilized logs, field notes and daily reflections to ensure I was allowing all the interactions and

experiences with gifted students to become part of my immersion into the research topic and to help eliminate bias or judgments. The incubation phase allowed me as a researcher to step away from the data collected and detach myself from the research. It was during this time I was able to retreat from the data and allow myself to think of the students and their journeys with a fresh lens. Moustakas aptly describes this process. “The period of incubation allows the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” (1990, p. 29). By allowing my thoughts to be removed from the intense data collection phase I could see beyond the prescriptive data information and form new ideas and thoughts about my research.

Moustakas further explains, “in the explication process, the heuristic researcher utilizes focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference” (p. 31). It was particularly helpful during this phase to focus on family events and other events unrelated to the research. I found this was particularly conducive to allowing me to shine light upon new thoughts and insights about this topic.

Illumination is the next phase of the heuristic research of analysis. This phase allows all the data to be reviewed as new insights emerge. Moustakas explains, “each data set is coded to ensure that the themes that develop relating to the research questions emerge rather than being forced” (1990, p.29). I coded each data set as a separate entity focusing on new understandings that emerged from each piece of data collected. Specifically, as I coded the interviews, personal narratives and documents and artifacts, many thoughts came to mind. As a gifted teacher, I was able to relate to many of the circumstances and examples provided by the participants. Moustakas observed, “in this phase, the researcher illuminates themes from within. This phase requires a certain level of reflection but still allows for mysterious

workings of the tacit knowledge and in that foster the new awareness” (1990, p. 29). My interactions and years of working with gifted students was brought to bear as the data was coded. I kept journals and notes to record my thoughts and inform the coding process.

The next step in my heuristic process was explication. This phase allowed me to organize core themes to develop as I reflected on each piece of the data that was coded. Moustakas explains that “in the explication phase, the researcher engages in focusing, indwelling, self-exploration and self-disclosure...to recognize the uniqueness of experiences” (1990, p. 30). This process provided me the opportunity to look at each data set and form a more comprehensive picture to begin the development of themes from all the data sets I coded. Djuraskovic & Arthur describe this as “new views, alternative explanations and new patterns are identified. In addition, final corrections and modifications are made and a comprehensive picture is painted” (2010, p. 1579). As I analyzed all the data sets and their codes certain patterns began to emerge. Moustakas explains, “these data are then organized into clusters or themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). Many of the themes began to come together, but others did not form together in meaningful ways that were relevant to the research. I was able to group the themes as they made sense to me from the data I had collected.

Creative Synthesis is the final step in heuristic analysis that brings all the research together. “It represents the final integration of the data, qualities and themes discovered in the explication phase” (1990, p. 30). It is in this phase that the responses of the participants and my analysis of the data came together in a form to make meaning. In this instance it was used to develop narrative analyses to ensure the findings are representative of the students’ shared information. Moustakas notes, “we use narrative description using quotes and examples to truly convey the research findings” (1990, p. 31). As the student’s voice is developed into

narrative cases using the developed themes and codes, each case was enriched using descriptive language and examples the participants shared. This ensured the participants, as co-researchers, are honored in the process.

All of these phases allowed the students' shared experiences to emerge in a meaningful way. Patton (2017) emphasizes, "the purpose of this kind of disciplined analysis is to elucidate the essence of the experience of a phenomenon for an individual or group" (p. 577). This heuristic tradition brought my data to life, and shed needed light on the important experiences of these students.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Finally, with respect to the tradition of narrative inquiry, Patton (2015) relates that this approach to qualitative inquiry "focuses on stories" (p. 128). Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that narrative inquiry is relatively new as a qualitative research method in social science but has a long tradition in the humanities. Some of the earliest uses of narrative inquiry in the field of education came from Goodson's historical account of teacher life histories, studies of adult and second language learning classroom, and feminist studies of women's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Chase characterizes narrative inquiry as an "amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both tradition and innovative methods-all revolving around an interest in biographic particulars" (2005, p. 651). One example of narrative inquiry was Creswell's study; he used the narrative inquiry to study teachers' experiences and to give them a voice (2002). The stories of the non-white gifted students are the central focus of this research. The students have lived the experiences of being gifted in a Midwest, mainly white, school district, and it is their precise stories that are critical to this research. "Stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with

others, and through which we understand the world around us” (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). They are, from this researcher’s perspective, part and parcel of the human condition. The use of narrative analysis here, that is, the focus on the important stories of these non-white gifted students, provided meaning and understanding of their unique experiences in a predominantly white gifted program. The narrative approach then is key to the ultimate goal of this study, to better understand and remedy the problem of underrepresentation in gifted programs.

The next section of this chapter describes the specific details of the study including the location, the sampling technique, procedures that were followed when conducting research, data collection and the analysis of the data, limitations of the study, including any issues of validity and ethical considerations.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As a White female born in the Midwest, I used heuristic case study narrative as a method to present the stories of gifted education for non-white gifted students; Kim, Socrates, Jeff, C’asia, Alexa, and Federico. I remained aware through journaling of my reactions and peer debriefings my thoughts, feelings, and biases as I interacted with the data. I realize that I do not share the cultural positionalities of these students. England (1994) has helped me understand my positionality as a White female entering the lives of these non-white students; yet, I carry my own history and realities as a gifted teacher in a larger suburban district in my struggles to give access to these students. England pointed out” we are differently positioned subjects with different biographies; we are not dematerialized, disembodied entities” (p. 248).

Establishing trust with the participants is of vital importance to ensure that the stories shared are an open and honest representation of the student experience. Through meetings,

discussions, and other interactions I was able to establish trust with all the participants. Reflexivity is also an important part of this study. Reflexivity is the degree of influence on the findings that the researchers exert, either intentionally or unintentionally (Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009, p. 42). Throughout the research process I was very careful that this source of bias did not impact the statements and stories of the participants. I was careful to constantly be aware of the importance of staying true to the statements of the participants, so I could maintain the integrity of what they were sharing. I used many opportunities throughout the research process, including participant review of the data, to ensure I was accurately representing their voice. However, I as the researcher, did have to use reflexivity in deciding which parts of the data were used in the study. Reactivity is another important strategy in qualitative research. Reactivity is the influence the researcher has on the participants of the study. (Patton, 2015, p. 332). My extensive background in gifted education allowed me to understand the experiences of gifted students but as the researcher it was important to be aware of my background so it did not interfere with the stories of the participants. One other vital part of narrative research is mutual trust. The participants must trust the researcher to accurately represent their stories in the re-storying process.

There is another important component to consider when using narrative analysis, the socio-cultural approach. Grbich (2013) explains that the socio-cultural approach “looks at the broader interpretive frameworks that people use to make sense of particular incidents in individuals’ lives” (p. 216). As the participants share their stories, I allowed for the stories to be told and ensured that they remained intact and accurate to their experiences during analysis. It is important to recognize that the stories “reflect not only culture, ideology, and socialization, they also provide insights to the political and historical climates impacting on the storyteller’s lives” (Grbich, 2013, p. 221). Using the socio-cultural approach allows the

stories to be shared so that the intended meaning is held in context. In this study, each participant's story was related exactly as it was told. Member checking allowed for me to verify that the story I shared was true to their experience and the context was kept intact.

### **Design of the Study**

The design of this heuristic case study is driven by the purpose of the study which is to investigate the experiences of non-white gifted students in one public school district's high school gifted program. The study participants were interviewed and their experiences analyzed to ascertain the effectiveness of the program and the student's perceptions of the program and its impact on their lives, including career and higher education goals. This research design involved accessing and utilizing the research site, collecting and sampling data, and employing a method for assembling and evaluating the data. Consideration was given to the limitations of the study and ethical issues that may be implicated by this study. The data collected and analyzed was guided by the selection of theoretical traditions. In this study, I used the guidelines of case study, heuristics, and narrative to inform the procedures for the research collection and analysis. Each of the foregoing criteria for the design of this study is discussed in detail below.

### **Setting and Participants**

The participants of this study are non-white gifted students that were enrolled in the gifted program while attending an accredited public high school in a large, suburban district in a Midwest city. The name of the district and participants are kept confidential for privacy reasons. I developed a pseudonym for the district. There are four public high schools in the school district which will be known in this study as the Motown School District. The entire district population is approximately 20,000 students. The Motown School District has 1,488 students identified and enrolled in gifted education. 13.8% of the students enrolled in the

district are identified as “African American,” 2% of which are identified as gifted. 15% of the students enrolled in the district are identified as “Hispanic,” .005% of which are identified as gifted (Motown School District, 2017).

I began the research collection by gaining access to relevant, essential school district records and resources. Patton (2015) notes, as a researcher entering the field of research, there are two parts to consider; “(1) negotiations with gatekeepers, whoever they may be, about the nature of the fieldwork to be done, and (2) actual physical entry into the field setting to begin collecting data” (p. 394). I contacted the district representative that allows doctoral candidates permission to conduct research using district records. Once I obtained permission to access records, I gathered data to formulate a list of potential students that fit the research design for the study.

I utilized the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The IRB website states that the IRB board must evaluate and give permission for the study if the research involves a “Human subject,” which means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: (1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) Identifiable private information. Since this study involves interaction with students and included private information, utilizing the guidelines of the IRB ensured the participants’ privacy was protected. Specifically, I gained the permission of the IRB to conduct research with six non-white gifted students that graduated from the gifted program in one Midwestern public school district. The subjects were all be of legal age to give consent without the need for parental involvement.

Once I was given the approval of the IRB for the study to proceed, I contacted eligible students and invited them to be considered for participation in the study. Seventy-nine students were in the initial pool of students contacted from a range of 2012-2017. I

reviewed the responses from those potential participants and I selected the subjects for the study based on the sampling criteria outlined below. I received responses from twenty-nine participants that fit the criteria. To ensure the study had maximum variation based on the criteria outlined, I organized the respondents based on the criteria of date of graduation, Latinx and African-American identification, and gender. From the pool I randomly selected the six cases to ensure that the criteria were widely represented. Once selected and the participant agreed to participate, I then had each selected participant choose a pseudonym to ensure his/her privacy is protected throughout the study. Allen and Wiles (2015) note that pseudonyms are “renaming participants—the common practice of allocating pseudonyms to confer anonymity” (p. 149). I allowed each participant to choose their own pseudonym to ensure that they have chosen a pseudonym agreeable for their use. Further, allowing the participants to choose their own pseudonym allows them to have some say in how they see themselves in the study. This pseudonym reassured the participants that their information remained confidential and also satisfied compliance with the SS-IRB guidelines.

### **Sampling Techniques**

Sampling techniques in qualitative research are needed to ensure the appropriate subjects are studied using the phenomenon identified for this study as a guide. Springer notes, “In qualitative research, sampling is informed by the ultimate goal of obtaining rich descriptions of peoples’ beliefs, behaviors and experiences” (p. 109). The research for this qualitative study involved a small number of participants, six cases, that are “nested in their context and studied in-depth” (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 31).

### **Purposeful sampling.**

Purposeful sampling in qualitative research allows the study of small samples for a specific purpose. Patton (2015) notes, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in

selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study” (p. 264). Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) share further insight into the use of purposeful sampling in a qualitative case study: “the goal of purposeful sampling is not to obtain a large representative sample; the goal is to select person, places, or things that can provide the richest and most detailed information to help us answer our research questions” (p. 134). Purposeful sampling provided the specific cases that were used for this study. Purposeful sampling proved a powerful tool in this qualitative study because it “focuses on selection information-rich cases whose study illuminated the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). In this case the non-white gifted students that have graduated from the program provided a unique perspective and insight into the program of interest for this study.

Wallen and Fraenkel (2001) note that purposeful sampling was used by the researcher using personal judgment to select a sample: “The researcher assumes that personal knowledge of the population can be used to judge whether a particular sample will be representative” (p. 139). In this instance, the students were all enrolled in the district in which I am employed, so my experience and knowledge of the participants ensured they meet the criterion for selection. In addition, the selection of the participants was contingent on their background and knowledge of the program under study. Lodico, Spaulding, et al. (2010) note “she or he might identify key informants: persons who have some specific knowledge about the topic being investigated” (p. 134). In this study, the participants specific knowledge relied upon their participation in the high school gifted program. Specifically, I searched for students from the pool and take into consideration: (1) gender variety and (2) inclusion of Latinix and African-American representation.

This study utilized two elements of purposeful sampling, maximum variation and criterion-based sampling. Maximum variation is used first to select a sample that reflects a

diverse set of participants. The goal of this study is to ensure a maximum variation among the cases to include a well-developed and rich overview of the participants' experiences in their high school gifted program. The Criterion based sampling was used to determine specific elements for inclusion in the study providing the pool of potential participants. Patton (2015) notes that criterion-based sampling is "based on an important criterion, all cases that meet the criterion are studied" (p. 267). Each case was selected from a pool of students assuring they represent gifted non-white students through their experiences, the unit of analysis in this study.

Maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling yielded "detailed descriptions of each case, identifying shared patterns that cut across cases" (Hoepfil, 1996, p. 2). This type of purposeful sampling allows the researcher to represent the studied population using cases that characterize a variety of participants. As units of study, maximum variation sampling allowed the small group to represent the broader population of non-white gifted students. This required a careful analysis of the responses on the demographic survey to ensure the cases represent a varied sample inclusive of multiple perspectives within the criterion identified.

Criterion-based sampling. The criterion-based sampling technique followed maximum variation sampling to select a pool of possible participants for this study. "Criterion-based sampling relies on all cases that meet some criterion" (Creswell, 1998, p. 119). The reason this sampling technique was identified as useful for this study is that it provided a method to select participants for this study that meet the criteria being studied. Criterion sampling is used to ensure that individuals are selected "based on the assumption that they possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015, p. 3). Springer (2010) describes this

process as homogeneous sampling because the individuals selected had a similar background, experience and/or other characteristics. The specific criteria that was used through criterion based sampling to identify the pool of potential participants for this study included that each participant must be: (1) identified as a gifted and talented student by the school district criteria, (2) a non-white student, and (3) a graduate of the gifted program in the district under study. I utilized district demographic data to determine which participants fit the criterion. I then invited a number of eligible participants to generate a pool of applicants to be considered as subjects for this case study. Once I received the demographic survey data from the participants that agreed to be a part of the study I proceeded in selecting the participants. Once participants agreed to participate in the study and complete consent forms as part of the Institutional Review Board approval process, I then proceeded with data collection.

### **Data Collection**

This research study used the case study tradition. Lichtman (2011) notes, “case study is a form of research that focuses on interpreting a particular phenomenon” (p. 111). Patton (2015) notes that case study’s purpose “is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (p. 536). In this instance, the case study format allowed a rich thick description of the experiences and stories of the non-white students that graduated from a high school gifted program.

This study utilized multiple methods of data collection. Merriam (2009) notes “case studies include as many variables as possible and portray their interaction, often over a period of time” (p. 43). In this study, multiple methods were utilized to ensure the information gathered is comprehensive and representative of the participants’ experiences. Maxwell recommends using various methods of data collection “as a check on one another,

seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion” (p 103).

The data sources that were used in this study included (1) demographic questionnaires, (2) official documents and school records including transcripts, ACT scores, awards, and acceptance letters (3) semi-structured interviews, (4) artifacts and (5) participant narratives.

### **Open-ended Surveys and Questionnaires**

In this research study, I used demographic questionnaires first as a sampling strategy to select the pool of potential participants and then I used the responses as part of my data sources.

The surveys were emailed to the selected pool of potential participants in the form of a google doc using an assigned number to ensure confidentiality of responses. For those without internet accessibility, the survey was mailed to them. Springer (2010) notes that the use of the questionnaire in some respects is more preferable than an interview in research gathering because:

- (1) Questionnaires can reach a larger number of participants more quickly, easily, and cheaply than personal interviews;
- (2) Questionnaires are less susceptible than personal interview to experimenter effects; and
- (3) Participants may respond more openly to questionnaires than to an interviewer, given the sense of greater confidentiality. (p.251).

There are also some disadvantages to using a questionnaire. Springer (2010) describes them as problematic: “Because the researcher may not be present when the questionnaire is completed, there is a greater likelihood that participants failed to understand questions or follow directions properly” (p. 251). Fortunately, in this study the use of a demographic

questionnaire was only be one portion of the data collected. Any ambiguous or unclear answers can be clarified in the semi-structured interview portion of the data collection.

### **Official Documents**

I used official documents as one of the tools in data collection on the participants. This type of data allows me to augment the qualitative picture of the participants. Examples of official documents I collected and utilized included transcripts of grades, gifted student profiles, and any other documents available through the school district record collection system that assisted me in creating a full profile of the participants. In addition, I collected student records that may include awards, diplomas, and autobiographical narratives.

Documents provide the researcher with a supplement to the other methods of data collection. Marshall & Rossman note “review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of the participants in the setting” (2006, p.107). However, Yin (2014) notes that the archival records also must be viewed in the context they were produced, “most archival records were produced for a specific purpose and specific audience rather than your case study, and these conditions must be fully appreciated in interpreting the usefulness and accuracy of the records” (p. 110). This researcher utilized the assistance of the registrar of records to assist in obtaining records and ascertaining the purpose and context of the records being retrieved for use in this study. In addition to interviews and autobiographies of the participants this study utilized personal documents. This provides an “unobtrusive method, one rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.85). The documents that were collected for this study included transcripts, awards, ACT/SAT scores, and other artifacts provided by the participant that they deemed relevant to the study. This archival data was examined utilizing a content analysis approach. Collecting the raw forms of data allowed the artifacts to be analyzed using content analysis.

This ensured “the systematic examination of forms of communication to document patterns objectively” (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.85).

## **Interviews**

This research aims to explore the phenomenon that non-white gifted high school students experienced during their public high school experience in grades 9-12. This research relied greatly on the process of the interview to gather data for this study. Merriam (2009) notes that “interviewing is also the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (p. 88). The construction of the semi-structured interviews was guided by the problem and the purpose of this research study. Yin (2014) characterizes the interview in case study as resembling “guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 110).

Marshall and Rossman (1995) note that there are limitations and weaknesses associated with interviewing. These include that (1) the interviewee may be unwilling to share or uncomfortable in sharing information, (2) the questions are too confining or close-ended and fail to evoke long narratives, and (3) the questions may not be properly comprehended. Thus, to ensure that the interviews are conducted to effectively elicit the most rich and in-depth information possible from the participants I used interview protocols.

Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle (2010) suggest the importance of using an interview protocol to ensure the interview produces the most descriptive and informative information provided by the interviewee possible. Further Patton explains there are several considerations that should be taken into account when forming interview questions and conducting interviews. Patton (2015) suggests the interview begin with non-controversial present behavior, activities and experiences. These questions allow the respondent to answer descriptively. Utilize probes to elicit greater detail. Opinions and feelings are solicited after

the experience of the interviewee has been shared. Questions about the present should be followed with questions about the past. And, finally questions about the future should be asked last because they are less reliable than questions about the present and past. (p.446). Semi-structured interviews were used in this research study. Richards and Morse (2007), describing semi-structured interviews, advise “open-ended questions are developed in advance, along with prepared probes. Unplanned, unanticipated probes may also be used” (p. 111). As the participants are interviewed it is important that the researcher follow the protocol established for the interview. However, the semi-structured interview does allow for some variation and additions to fully probe the participants knowledge and experiences. Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler (2010) note, “the semi-structured interview can change the order of questions, omit questions or vary the wording of questions depending on what happens in the interview. The interviewer also might add questions during the interview to probe unexpected issues that emerge” (p. 124).

I used the semi-structured interview format as my guide. Merriam (2009) notes that an interview guide or schedule can assist the researcher that is new to the interview process. “Working from an interview schedule allows the new researcher to gain experiences and confidence needed to conduct more open-ended questioning” (Merriam, 2009, p.103). Patton (2015) notes that in qualitative inquiry “one of the things the inquiry is trying to determine is what dimensions, themes and images/words people use among themselves to describe their feelings, thoughts and experiences” (p.447). I utilized a semi-structured interview guide that allowed me to ask questions of each participant while allowing space for the person being interviewed to expand on their knowledge and experiences (see Appendix – Interview Guide)

## **Narrative**

Stories interest me, people interest me, and disenfranchised people in particular have a special place in my heart. The compelling experiences of non-white students in gifted programs are unique, exceptional, and deserved to be conveyed in the most authentic way possible. The narrative approach, as a method of sharing experiences, achieves this end.

Narrative inquiry is particularly important to this study because non-white gifted kids are underrepresented. Their stories are often overlooked and unheard. Narrative stories of the participants were utilized in this research project to shed light on their unique journey in gifted education and the benefits they derived from it.

Narrative inquiry has a long history in qualitative research. Clandinin and Connelly describe the role of the researcher in the narrative process “narrative inquirers tend to begin with experiences as lived and told in stories” (2000, p. 128). Narrative inquiry has been utilized in many different genres including sociology, anthropology, history and other social sciences (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003). In this instance, narrative inquiry was appropriate because the students had important stories to be shared. Clandinin and Connelly explain that “the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms” (1990, p. 2). Muylaert, Sarubbi, Gallo, Neto & Reis (2014) summarize the importance of narrative research, “the use of narrative is an advantageous investigative resource in qualitative research, in which the narrative is a traditional form of communication on whose purpose is to serve content from which the subjective experiences can be transmitted (p. 184).” Each non-white gifted student has a unique and individual story to share and the narrative methodology allows them to share those experiences in an authentic way.

In preparing to collect the stories of the participants it is important to recognize how the stories would be captured. Plummer (1983) describes the autobiography as a source of information that is gathered in qualitative research. He describes the act of writing down his or her history in the form of journaling. In this study, each participant was asked to share their story in the form of a journal or autobiographical narrative. I provided participants with a narrative prompt to share their stories. The narrative prompt was: share your stories as a gifted student. Polkinghorne (1988) defines narrative as “the kind of organizational scheme expressed in story form” (p. 13). Each participant has a unique story to share about their experiences in the gifted program. The autobiographical story allows the participants to fully share their experiences. Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that “Narrative allows the participant to construct their realities through narrating their stories” (p.117). Further, narrative research allows a special relationship between the participant and the researcher in the telling of each participant’s unique story, becoming a “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Connelly& Clandinin, 2000, p. 20).

I used multiple sources, including demographic questionnaires, autobiographical stories, official documents, artifacts and interviews, in order to thoroughly and fully chronicle the experiences of the selected non-white students in the gifted program. I explored different features of the phenomenon using all available data. Maxwell (2013) notes that the use of multiple methods of data collection “is to gain information about different *aspects* of the phenomena you are studying” (p.102). The gathering of a variety of relevant data utilizing multiple methods was instrumental in constructing a meaningful study that fully shared the experiences of the participants.

## **Analysis of the Data**

I used a three-dimensional process in analyzing the data. Each component of the narrative process allowed the stories of the participants to be told in a meaningful way. The narrative process allows the participants to share their experiences and highlight what they feel is most important. This allows for each case to stand alone in case analysis. “[A]s narrative inquirers, we understand experiences as storied phenomenon. Lives are composed, recomposed, told, retold and lives out in storied ways on storied landscapes” (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, Murray & Orr, 2009, p. 82). Following each case analysis, the cases were put together through cross-case analysis. I used the socio-cultural approach to ensure that the data I gathered was rich and accurately reflected the experiences of the participants.

The documents and personal narratives in this study were an important component of the research and added a unique dimension to the research. The documents included school records and artifacts. This important data added to the process of crafting the narratives. These data sets were coded to add to the depth of the stories. The personal narratives were written documents provided by each participant, adding a unique layer to the data analysis. The personal narratives contain the independent thoughts and reflections of each participant, composed entirely by the participants. This allowed for a more personal reflection of their experiences, unadulterated by the researcher. These were also coded to be added to each participant’s narrative case.

The interview process allowed each participant to share their unique experience. In narrative analysis it is important to let the stories come through. Using in-depth interviews allowed the participants to share their stories and the researcher to probe with follow up questions. The data was analyzed for themes and sub-themes. This data was added to the other data collected in this study to make for a thick, rich case analysis.

The collective data for each individual case was then analyzed, prior to performing the cross case analysis. “Analysis of individual cases enables the researcher to understand those aspects of experience that occur not as individual ‘units of meaning’ but as part of the pattern formed by the confluence of meanings within individual accounts” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, Knafl, 2003, p. 873). In each instance, after analyzing the case as a whole, I identified themes and sub-themes. Following the analysis of individual cases I shifted analysis to cross case analysis. “Across case analysis allows analytic comparison across participants” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, Knafl, 2003, p. 873). Next, I identified general themes and sub-themes across all the cases that emphasized commonalities. This allowed me to answer the research questions.

The data collected was analyzed for the purpose of “illuminating the question and providing a basis for analysis of constituents, themes and essences of the experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p.49). All interviews were recorded digitally, with notification given to all participants prior to the session. Interviews and field notes required transcription. They were transcribed and analyzed as soon as possible after the interview so that the information and “essences” were freshest and can be accurately recorded. I analyzed the data as it was transcribed so I could evaluate whether follow up information was needed or if additional data should have been gathered. Research analysis including descriptive coding took place using Microsoft excel. Microsoft excel allowed storage of large amounts of information and allows sorting and categorizing of the information that was used for this research project.

I kept all electronic data including excel files in a password protected document on a personal laptop and I kept all written documents and records in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

The other data analyzed in this research, documents, demographic questionnaires, artifacts and personal narratives, were analyzed using a coding process. The analysis of the documents, artifacts and narratives through coding allowed me to use these data sets as further documentation to be added to the semi-structured interview data.

Research analysis including descriptive coding took place using Microsoft excel. Microsoft excel allows storage of large amounts of information and allows sorting and categorizing of the information that was used for this research project. I kept all electronic data including excel files in a password protected document on a personal laptop and I have kept all written documents and records in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

Coding is a process described by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) as “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71).

Following the coding of the documents, demographic surveys, artifacts, interviews and autobiographies I began with a first cycle of coding using descriptive coding to begin to organize the data. Miles, et al. (2014) explain that “a descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize a word or phrase” (p. 74). Since the data gathered come from a variety of sources, descriptive coding allowed the data to be organized in a meaningful way. The codes changed and developed as the coding process continued. Miles, et al. (2014) advise that “several codes will change and develop as field experience continues” (p. 82). It is important as each document was analyzed that I remained open to the developing codes and allowed the research itself to form the codes.

The second cycle of coding used were pattern codes. Miles, et al. (2014) explain, “second cycle coding is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes or constructs” (p. 86). I was looking for common threads that linked the

data together. This allowed me to look for leads or variables that I could investigate, or observations I could make about behaviors or perceptions. (Miles, et al., 2014).

The process of data collection and coding to identify emerging themes is an essential part of the research process. After I analyzed the data sets, I allowed the participants to view the findings to ensure their stories are accurately reported, honoring their words and honestly presenting their perspectives. The next section includes the limitations of this study, including validity and reliability and the strategies employed to address the limitations and ethical considerations when working with human subjects.

### **Limitations including Validity, Reliability and Crystallization, and Ethical Issues**

Qualitative researchers seek to construct meaning from experiences. Merriam (2004) notes, “researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.” (p. 14). In this study, I utilized the experiences of the participants to form meanings. As part of this overall endeavor, it is crucial to acknowledge limitations that may impact the validity and reliability of the study, as well as address ethical issues that are implicated in the course of the study.

### **Limitations**

Maxwell (2013) points out, “Qualitative researchers typically study a relatively small number of individuals or situations and preserve the individuality of each of those in their analyses” (p. 30). While size is used in quantitative research to generalize to a larger population, it is not a limitation in qualitative research. I mention size only to emphasize the importance of transferability (Maxwell, 2013) in qualitative research, not generalizability. Can the research be applied in another setting? I only studied six cases in this study. I used the sampling techniques defined above to ensure each of the cases are representative of the

theoretical framework and research cases thereby ensuring the research, though limited in quantity of cases, is representative of the unit of study.

Further limitations I must address include time frame limitations, particularly the ability to spend an adequate amount of time with the respondents. It is imperative that the researcher be aware of these limitations and take measures to minimize their effects on the study. Merriam (2009) notes, “The best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must feel saturated” (p. 219). Since this research is focused on six cases, I made sure that each experience is depicted in a thorough, accurate, and valid way. I allowed extra time after the data are collected and analyzed to further study the data and interact with the participants as needed to ensure their complete story was correctly told.

Another limitation of this study may be my bias as the researcher. I took precautions to ensure the data collected are not reported based on pre-conceived notions. Merriam (2009) notes, “since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, data have been filtered through his or her particular theoretical position and biases” (p. 233). My personal experience as a teacher of gifted students in the district I am evaluating includes an intimate knowledge and awareness of the gifted program. I have beliefs and ideas that have formed over the many years working in the field of gifted education, and I was cognizant of those in this study. With my positionality in mind as a white female novice researcher, born and raised in the Midwest, I maintained an awareness of the bias I bring to the study. I kept a journal of my thoughts and reactions during data collection and analysis. I also had a critical friend, who shares the background of the students in the proposed study, that was used to question and review my interpretation of the data.

I am a stakeholder in the program and this study can have an impact on my current teaching position. Because I am intimately involved with the topic, maintaining an objective

perspective as the data are collected and interpreted were important factors. Recognizing this bias exists, I needed to utilize measures of validity to support my findings. To assure validity of the data and avoid bias I plan to utilize safeguards and follow the research procedures outlined below

### **Validity**

Validity is a critical part of a research study because it ensures the data reported has been analyzed through specified techniques and procedures. Procedures were put in place to ensure validity of the data in this study. Creswell (1998) notes the importance of this process, “both dependability and confirmability are established through an auditing of the research process” (p. 198). Creswell (1998) outlines procedures that utilized to ensure the validity of the study. These include: (1) Using thick-rich descriptions, (2) member checking, (3) acknowledging researcher bias, (4) negative case analysis, and (5) employing peer debriefing (p. 201-203).

Specifically, I first ensured that thick-rich descriptions of each case are included, and I used peer debriefing of the data. I used a critical friend to review my interview questions, my transcripts and my data analysis, ensuring my interpretation of the data is logical and representative of the data collected. The critical friend also served as a “devil’s advocate” to review the research and ask difficult, probing questions about the process, methods, meanings and interpretations (Creswell, 1998).

Next, I used member checking. Creswell (1998) notes, “this involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (p. 203). Moustakas (1994) advises allowing the subjects to review the research so each participant can “review and confirm or alter the research data to correspond to her or his perception of the experience” (p. 110). Accordingly,

I took all the data sets and any interpretations and conclusions back to the participants to ensure that my accounting fully and accurately represents their stories.

In my validity check, I considered acknowledgement of my bias as a researcher. In previous portions of this research study I have acknowledged my bias and my background in gifted education. When reporting my results, I included an explanation and outline of my possible bias. Creswell (1998) notes that “the researcher comments on past experiences, prejudices, and orientation that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to this study” (p. 202). This transparency and acknowledgement of potential bias ensures the validity of the data being reported.

I used negative case analysis to further ensure the validity of my research. I followed the advice of Miles, et al. (2014), who note that “making a good guess is a function of weighing the odds for one outcome against another” (p. 259). I evaluated all the evidence and was mindful of any data that may not fit the case as initially reported. As an objective researcher, I acknowledge that I cannot disregard unexpected or seemingly errant findings; I must report them as I would any other data collected. Since this research study made use of multiple and diverse types of data and collection methods, one more critical step was employed in this research process: crystallization of the data.

### **Crystallization**

Richardson (2000) introduced crystallization as a process to produce knowledge about a particular phenomenon through a deepened, complex interpretation. Richardson explains, “the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes substances stranutations” (as cited in Patton, 2014, p. 690). Using crystallization ensured that all the data produce a description that fully illuminates the information provided by the participants.

Ellingson (2008) further describes crystallization as “a way of achieving depth, through the compilation, not only of many details but of different forms of representing, organizing and analyzing those details” (p. 10). The varied data sets and the thick rich descriptions ensured that many viewpoints are represented in this study, providing a complex and complete picture of the stories of the participants. However, crystallization allowed me to go deeper into my analysis of the research. Ellingson (2008) also notes that crystallization allows the research to be viewed across more than one point on the qualitative continuum. “You must encounter and make sense of your data through more than one way of knowing” (Ellingson, 2008, p. 11). The process of crystallization allowed me to portray the stories of the non-white students more effectively, yielding deeper and more meaningful insights into their experiences.

### **Ethical Issues**

Finally, concern must be given to the ethical issues endemic to my research endeavor. This study involves the private stories of human subjects. As a researcher, I made a conscious effort to preserve the anonymity of the participants under study at all time. Using pseudonyms, removing specific identifying data names and numbers and carefully shielding the identity of the participants were some of the steps taken to ensure the privacy of the school district and each person involved in the study.

To further ensure ethical considerations have been considered throughout my research the Belmont Report was used as a guideline for this research. The Belmont Report was published by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research in 1979. This study summarizes several points of consideration every researcher must take into account while working with human subjects. Specifically, this includes the following ethical principles, 1) respect for persons 2) beneficence and 3)

justice. With respect to persons the researcher must give informed consent to participants, and ensure the participants are fully aware of the purpose and procedures of the study. The participants also must be given a disclosure of all the components of the study to ensure they are voluntarily participating. (Bui, Craig, & Imbeman, 2014) In this study all considerations for the respect for person were utilized. In addition to the informed consent participants had thorough understandings of their role in the study and all facets of the study were explained. Their voluntary participation was assured and each participant was informed at every stage of the research.

The second consideration the Belmont Report refers to that was utilized in this study is beneficence. Two principles of beneficence include 1) do not harm and 2) maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms. (USDHSS, 1979, Part B, para 7). Framing research questions carefully and analyzing the research to ensure it does not harm the subjects are key elements to consider. (Bui, 2014). Through the design of my study I carefully ensured that the focus of the study was informative but was not harmful to the participants.

The third consideration the Belmont Report refers to is justice. (USDHSS, 1979, Part B, para 9). Bui notes, “researchers must first consider if they are recruiting the participants for their study in a fair and equitable manner, making sure not to exploit any one segment of the population” (Bui, 2014). This research study used sampling to ensure the selection of participants is equitable among the potential pool of non-white gifted students.

I also utilized the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines in my research ensuring all subjects selected for this study are aware of the IRB, and I reviewed the steps I plan took to ensure their anonymity was preserved throughout the research process. The IRB also requires all applicants to complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

(CITI) exam and receive a certificate acknowledging completion of the course and certification completion in the area of research relevant to the research project. I have completed the CITI requirements for this research project and have the proper certification completed.

Remaining cognizant of the processes I have put in place and the regulations and safeguards that are needed I ensured that the data collected and reported honestly represented the non-white gifted students in a meaningful way.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### **Overview of the Study**

Non-white gifted students have been underrepresented in gifted programs for decades. A specific negative outcome of the underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education is that the secondary non-white gifted student misses out on critical support in the areas of college and career planning. Conversely, incorporating these students into gifted programs has a positive influence on their education and post-education experiences. This heuristic case study seeks to relate the stories of non-white gifted students in a secondary gifted program of a large Midwest school district as they portray their high school experience and post-secondary planning. The setting for this study was the Motown school district. I have worked in this district for over 14 years and this experience allowed me access to the necessary student records with the FERPA consent of the participants. The participants all volunteered their time for the study.

The narrative approach is an important component of this study because it allows the voices of the non-white secondary gifted students to be directly captured and shared. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding participants' experiences through collaboration between researcher and participants, while allowing them to tell their own stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). These narratives allow for the students' voices to be heard and evaluated in the specific context of the gifted programs at issue.

The findings of this study attempt to answer two central research questions with sub-questions. The first research question was: *What stories do non-white students tell about their experiences in a gifted program in a suburban district?* The sub-questions that developed the first central question were: *1) When did you first learn you were gifted? (elementary, middle*

or high school?) 2) *Once you were identified what were your experiences like?* 3) *What would you recommend the district do to improve the program for gifted students?* The second research question answered was: *What stories can you tell about your post-secondary experiences through today?* The sub questions used to elaborate the second central question were: 1) *What were your post-secondary goals?* 2) *How did the GRS help you obtain your post-secondary goals?* 3) *What more do you wish the program would have done to help you?*

### **Exploring their Stories**

Interviews were conducted with six non-white students who participated in their schools' gifted programs before graduating from the Motown School District. I used a criterion-based sampling approach to ensure the participants were best matched for this study. Criterion sampling is used to ensure that individuals are selected "based on the assumption that they possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2016, p. 3). The criteria that was utilized for participation in this study included: (1) identified as a gifted and talented student by the school district criteria, (2) a non-white student (African American, Latinx, Native American or mixed race (African American and White, African American and Latinx, African American and Native American, or African American and Asian), and (3) a graduate of the gifted program in the Motown district within ten years immediately preceding this study. A maximum variation sampling strategy was utilized to ensure a broad range of schools within the district were represented in the study. Also, when selecting participants, I included a sampling of multiple ethnicities when identified. The participant group represented a multi-year span of graduation years to add to the breadth of participants selected. I knew two of the six participants prior to the study. The six students in the participant group were composed of the two students I had previous exposure to and four

additional students from the other three schools in the district. Together these students provided a comprehensive and extensive perspective of the program. This allowed for an all-inclusive perspective that represented the district while ensuring the experiences and stories from each school were represented in this study.

The protocol outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Midwest university was followed in approaching participants and securing their participation in this study. A demographic questionnaire was given to potential participants as outlined by the IRB. Once the participant group was selected, the six students were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The participants were contacted to schedule their interviews at a time and location that was prearranged. I allowed the participants to choose the location to ensure they were comfortable, and they would be free to share their stories in a familiar and stress-free environment. The interviews were held in a public location of the participant's choosing. In most instances, this was a local restaurant. After the interviews, the participants were asked to complete a personal narrative about their experience in the gifted program, which supported thick description and crystallization of findings. The participants also signed FERPA waivers which allowed their school records to become data sets as part of their data for this study. Some participants also provided school awards, records and other artifacts to add to their data sets.

The data collection phase lasted over a course of six months. I spent an average of three hours with each participant including time used to follow-up on specific questions or seek additional information to clarify the data. This process included visiting their work, additional public meetings, and talking to them over the phone. This allowed me to establish rapport with the participants and to ensure I had adequate information and time to develop rich descriptions of their experiences. Using all the data sources, demographic

questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, school records, awards, and artifacts, and personal narratives, I was able to crystallize the data to provide comprehensive and complete stories.

### **Establishing Truth and Trustworthiness**

It was important to be sure the stories reflected the insights, thoughts, and experiences held by the participants and that the stories described reflected their voices, not mine. By using multiple data, I was able to ensure their stories were accurately represented which led to their truths, not mine and help to establish trust between me and the participants. Once the stories were developed, the participants were invited to review them for accuracy. This allowed validity and reliability threats to be addressed. The participants were proud of their stories and volunteered that they were also proud to be a part of this project.

The initial reason for this study was to listen to the stories of non-white secondary gifted students and discover their journey through their high school gifted program. I also wanted to discover if the students had any insights or guidance that might improve the secondary gifted program for non-white students. Over the course of this study, this intent did not change. I have been a gifted high school teacher for many years and constantly work to improve the experiences of my students; however, allowing the students to reflect on their experiences provided me with greater insight into the program. By creating these open forms of communication about their experiences, the participants were able to discuss the topics most important to them. Many of the gifted students even shared stories of facing implicit bias by their teachers during the nomination process as well as following their admission into the gifted program.

My relationship with four of the participants was limited prior to the study and this was the first time I had met them. They were students in the Motown district, but I did not

know them or work with them prior to their involvement in this research. I did have an ongoing relationship with the other two participants in the study. I had been their Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) for their four years in high school and had contact with them as they navigated their post-secondary education. All the respondents expressed interest in the topic and many followed up to express their enthusiasm for working on the project. Many said they thought this topic was “important and often neglected.” Even though I did not personally know most of the participants, throughout our work together we were able to develop an open relationship. I think my long history with secondary gifted students and my professional work in the district allowed the participants to trust me and allow themselves to be transparent and even vulnerable as they shared their stories. During the process, I happened to encounter some of the participants in public places and they would invite me to have additional conversations with them to discuss their stories or share additional details they recalled after initially speaking with me. I even visited one participant at his place of employment, at his request, for follow up conversation. I was honored that the participants felt comfortable enough with me throughout the study to reach out when they had a question or wished to share additional information. At this same time, through apprehending their stories, it was important for me to be aware of reflexivity

### **Reflexivity**

In a qualitative study the role of the researcher is an integral part of the research collected, and therefore it was important to recognize and address the notion of reflexivity in this study. Reflexivity is the degree of influence on the findings that the researchers exert, either intentionally or unintentionally (Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009, p. 42). Being keenly aware of this important source of bias, I was very careful to ensure that I stayed true to the statements provided by the participants in the interview process. The narratives that

were written by the participants allowed them to share without any expectations or influence on their responses. Both Seidman (2013) and Yow (2015) have noted that involving participants in these steps helps to strengthen accurate representation of participants' experiences and increases empowerment by giving them control of their stories. I used follow-up meetings and participant review of their demographic questionnaires, transcripts and artifacts, stories and narratives as an opportunity to ensure I maintained accurate depictions of the stories they shared.

The focus of this study was to capture the students' stories regarding their participation in the secondary gifted program. It was important that their voices were accurately reflected and the essence of what they reported be shared in this study. Participants must trust and have confidence that the researcher would restory their experiences accurately and within appropriate contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). To nurture this trust, I asked the participants to review the documents, including their demographic questionnaires, interview transcripts, their narratives and their school transcripts and documents, for accuracy and use of voice. This allowed me to address any possible validity and reliability threats. Participants were excited with their stories and many expressed their appreciation and satisfaction that their opinions and thoughts were being valued and shared.

As the primary investigator, I was able to analyze many sources, ask questions and review the data collected. I was pleasantly surprised at the depth of stories the students shared and the many experiences they related to me. My experience in this process underscored my belief in the importance of this issue. Because national statistics reveal that non-white students are seriously underrepresented in gifted education, it is urgent that school

leaders, teachers, and policy makers understand the importance of gifted education in the lives of these students and the positive impact it has on them.

### **Student Narratives about Experiences as a Non-White Gifted Student**

Narratives provide an opportunity for participants to share their stories in a meaningful way. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that “narrative is the study of how humans experience the world” (p. 2). The narrative process allows the participants to emphasize what aspects of their story they feel are important. It allows them to reflect on their experiences and share their stories, inviting others to share their world views. The following narratives were constructed from the initial demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, personal narratives provided by the participants and school records and artifacts. The initial demographic questionnaire provided demographic data, i.e. year of graduation, name of school graduated from, ethnicity of participant, etc. This information provided a basis to begin the process of sharing the experiences of each participant. Further, the school records allowed school achievements, awards and courses to be reviewed and included to further detail their experiences in the gifted program. The interviews allowed the participants to share their stories including their thoughts, insights, perceptions and general information they wanted to share. The thick descriptions they provided allowed their stories to be formed in their own words and their experiences to be shared firsthand. Their written personal narratives following the in-depth interviews added to their stories providing additional information that they felt was important and not mentioned during the initial interview process. All of this additional information enhanced the narratives of the six non-white gifted students, including three African American and three Latinx students.

I used the heuristic inquiry framework to analyze the data at the illumination and explication phases. Coding allowed the data to be analyzed to find narrative meanings

(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The analysis of documents and artifacts, demographic questionnaires, and interviews were conducted through coding. This is described by Miles and Huberman (2014) who state: “Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71). By analyzing each of these data sets, I was able to determine the essence of my participants’ experiences.

Two categories of codes were used in developing this research study: in vivo and pattern codes. In the first cycle, in vivo codes were developed. In vivo codes use “words or short phrases from the participant’s own language” (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 1994, p. 502). In the second cycle, pattern codes were developed. Pattern codes allow themes and patterns to be developed using inference. They are usually developed in a later part of the study after the descriptive and interpretive codes have been developed. Miles and Huberman note, “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (Miles and Huberman, 2014, p. 86). The method of coding and identifying themes is a critical part of the analysis used in this study. Each of these identified themes and their meanings were a result of the researcher answering the research questions for this study.

In addition to the coding, special consideration was given in developing the narratives to ensure the stories of each participant were being honored. Using the three analytic tools of broadening, burrowing, and storying/restorying as suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), I was able to form narratives that represented the stories of each participant, through the lens of heuristic inquiry storying/restorying which also represented the “culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (Moustakes (1990, p. 27). I used broadening to allow the description of the participant’s full character to be explored in a more general sense. Next, I used the tool of burrowing. This allowed me to pay particular attention to the participant’s

feelings, problems, issues or general issues they discussed. “Burrowing relates to the details that are experienced by our participants from their points of view” (p. 206). The next step of data analysis involved using storying and restorying. I was careful to pay attention to the socio-cultural context of the lived experiences of each participant using sociocultural analysis, which “looks at the broader interpretive frameworks that people use to make sense of particular incidents in individuals’ lives” (Grbich, 2013, p.216). This allowed the significance of each participant’s story to come to light (Kim, 2016, p. 207). I did not want to fragment their stories; hence, the focus was on a holistic telling of the stories. As their stories unfolded throughout the research process, the process of restorying allowed me to represent the truths of non-white gifted students.

### **Secondary Non-White Gifted Students’ Stories**

Let the students speak was the impetus of this story. Allowing the students to share their experiences, thoughts, and recollections provides an opportunity to examine the experiences of non-white gifted secondary students. Narratives offer opportunities for people to reflect and make meaning of lived experiences. “[A] narrative ... provides a robust way of integrating past experience into meaningful learning, locating oneself and others in the account, and foreshadowing the future” (McAlpine, 2016, p. 33). As noted previously, the following narratives were constructed from the demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, narrative statements and school records and documents.

As the data were analyzed, themes emerged in each case, some the same and others different, which represented within-case analysis. The themes allowed the stories to be told formed by subthemes, also reference as interpretive codes or codes. Themes and subthemes, using cross-case analysis of individual stories, allowed me to distinguish similarities and differences among the cases as depicted in Table 2 with frequencies labelled (strong

presence, moderate presence and nominal presence). The nominal presence data generally were not included due to very limited information and/or nonexistent information.

Table 2

*Themes and Interpretive Codes*

S = Strong Presence

M = Moderate Presence

N = Nominal Presence

<b>Questionnaire/Interviews/ Journals/Demographic Questionnaires</b>	Kim.	Socrates.	Jeff.	C'asia	Alexa.	Federico
<i>Theme: Giftedness</i>						
Interpretive Codes:						
Identification	S	S	S	S	S	S
Underrepresentation	S	S	S	S	S	S
Non-whites	S	M	M	S	N	M
Gifted programming	N	M	N	N	S	N
<i>Theme: Stereotypes</i>						
Interpretive Code:						
Gifted Punished	N	N	S	N	N	S
Micro-aggression	N	N	S	S	S	N
<i>Theme: Support</i>						
Interpretive Code:						
Parents	S	S	N	S	N	S
<i>Theme: Resources</i>						
Interpretive Codes:						
Opportunities	S	S	S	S	S	S
Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)	S	S	S	S	S	S
Financial Aid	N	M	N	S	N	N

To protect identities, I have used participant selected pseudonyms. The following cases were constructed of non-white gifted students; Kim, Socrates, Jeff, C'asia, Alexa, and Federico, their stories follow.

## **Kim**

Kim is an African-American female gifted student that graduated from the Motown district gifted program six years ago. Following high school graduation, she matriculated and graduated from an Ivy League University and currently attends a prestigious Law School.

One of the main themes in Kim's interviews, narrative, demographic survey and school records was *giftedness*. I define *giftedness* as the process of selection for the gifted program and the non-white representation in the gifted program. This theme was developed through phenomena constructed throughout the data and codes identified as *underrepresentation* and *non-whites in gifted*. *Non-white* was a significant phenomenon that develop and is defined for this study as African-American or Latinx. Latinx is defined as "a person who lives in the U.S. and who comes from, or whose family comes from, Latin America; used when you do not want to say that the person is a man or woman" (Salinas and Lozano, 2017). Frequently throughout the data Kim identified the theme as minority, I identified this theme as non-white students. She was identified as a gifted student in the fourth grade. It was through this identification process that Kim began feeling positive about school and her education. Kim explained in her interview,

I got good grades on tests and quizzes. So, the teacher had me take a little test. You go in a room and do some puzzles and stuff. I felt like I was just being singled out for being really smart.

This attention for her intelligence was empowering and started a positive trend in Kim's life. Girls that are labeled as gifted are often reluctant to be identified as such. Gifted girls realize early on that there are few expectations for them to succeed academically and social rewards tend to favor girls that hide their giftedness, concealing their potential (Kerr 1985; Fox 1976). Kim's acceptance in the gifted program was a very positive experience for her. In her interview she states,

It definitely made me feel special in a good way, almost like they liked us more. It was more, we actually have needs and we need them met. They were going to try to help us meet those needs.

Kim acknowledges that the gifted program provided her with a positive academic experience and helped her perform well academically.

Kim's acceptance in the gifted program also made her realize there was a definite underrepresentation of non-white students in the program. She recognized right away that being a non-white gifted girl was unique-in the program. It also caused Kim some angst as she felt she had to choose between her "true" friends, outside of the gifted program, and her gifted peers. Black students experience cultural conflict and gifted Black students are especially vulnerable to problems if they feel less accepted by peers (Ford, 1996, p. 106). Kim often struggled with these conflicts in dealing with these complex relationships, as well as limited role models within the gifted program. During the interview, Kim expressed her frustration,

That is something I was aware of from an early age, I mean, there are less people like me for sure. Sometimes I felt isolated from others. The gifted program did not provide me with many role models. It hits you really soon that you are in the program and you are different because there aren't many like me.

Kim did not just experience this feeling of being different in her classes. She encountered this issue of feeling different with her friends as well.

Kim's choices of college and career later in life also magnified the theme of underrepresentation, the same theme she noted during her high school experience. Kim talks about her excitement of being accepted to an Ivy league college and a prestigious law school. However, she noticed something about non-white students and the continued pattern of underrepresentation. She states,

I was isolated. When I got to college things changed and I understood what racism was really like. I wanted to do extra things, but I didn't have the support and I had to figure out how to do it myself. Each level of my life there are less and less people that

look like me that are my colleagues. I think part of it is there are no opportunities and resources for the others. There aren't many people who do look like you and can offer mentorships which helps you think you can do that too. You just have to figure it out yourself.

Kim's thoughts on *underrepresentation* emphasize the importance of non-white role models in the gifted program and in higher education. Reflecting on Kim's experience with her Gifted Resource Specialist and her lack of support in her post-secondary schools is a clear example of the benefits that trained personnel can have on the lives of non-white gifted students. Career exploration for gifted students can also be affected by uncontrollable factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, value conflicts, or chance events (Greene, 2002). Kim noted there were particular experiences she was afforded based on her college choice, such as her ability to study abroad and attain certain internships. In her interview she explains,

I was able to travel abroad. I could have never done this without the assistance of my school program. I even got to do an excavation in Spain. I also was able to do an internship with the top law firm in our town. I like to say I've been riding the diversity trend since high school. Look around, there aren't any others around that look like me.

Kim was able to navigate the top tier levels of education by utilizing the support services and personal guidance she had received prior to her post-graduation work. She acknowledges that these opportunities are outstanding experiences but at the same time they highlight the lack of diversity in higher education advanced programs.

Kim also identified the theme of *support* defined as interactions between parent and student that may include discussing, encouraging, limiting and other behaviors that provide guidance. This included the subtheme of *parents*. This is defined as the individuals providing the support of the student. Kim shared her view of the level of *support* her *parents* provided

throughout her gifted program especially as she navigated the post-secondary planning phase of her school. Kim explains her parents support,

I wanted to do extra things but I didn't have their support and I had to figure it out by myself, how am I going to get a ride to this activity and things like that.

When it came to college planning Kim describes a similar low level of parental support.

She shares,

My parents wanted me to attend a state college and they would buy me a dog. they were so mad when I chose the Ivy league school they took back the dog. We're not going to help you pay for this, we don't have money to pay for your education like you are 18 now, it's on you to figure it out.

Perna and Titus (2005) describe the parental support described similar to Kim's, "the perceived barriers to the college enrollment of African Americans suggests that many African American students are not encouraged to pursue college by their parents or other adults" (p. 491). Just as parenting styles vary widely, so does parental support of a student's college goals vary widely. Many parents value education and college attendance as a high priority in their family but, lacking a secondary education themselves, are hesitant to offer advice or direction to their children. Other parents may have little personal experience navigating the college admission process, but still be dedicated to providing *support*. Sometimes this comes at great parental sacrifice. Auerbac (2007) found "parents may regard, for example, working long hours at multiple jobs to be the most significant thing they do for their children's education" (p. 252). There are also many parents, of course, who elevate the need for furthering their child's education, even when it is difficult for them to provide this support.

The next theme that was discovered in this research process with Kim was *resources* which suggests that gifted students need to have specific guidance complete with particular resources that are precise to their needs. Baykoc, Aydemir and Uyaroglu (2014) note that

gifted students should be a priority to ensure their developmental needs are met and that appropriate opportunities are provided in their educational environment. This theme is illuminated by *opportunities* which is defined as exposure to and information about that would allow gifted students to take advantage of programs and courses to meet their needs. The other sub-theme identified was *gifted resource specialists (GRS)*; specialized teachers that have been trained to provide guidance to meet the needs of gifted students. Kim noticed right away in her gifted program she was receiving *resources* that were specific to gifted students. In her interview, Kim explained,

In elementary school gifted students had alternative classes for certain subjects. We would all meet around the table or on couches and listen to lectures, play games, do projects and study together.

These additional resources provided Kim with special *opportunities* she would not have received outside of the gifted program. Things changed for Kim, as they do for many high school gifted students, when they are ready to begin their secondary college and career planning. It is common for exceptional talent or high ability in the gifted program to not translate to success in college and career planning. Thus, many gifted students may also require special assistance in these areas (Colangelo, 2002; Silverman, 2000). Kim acknowledged gifted education helped her in high school through the connection of the specialized teachers, such as the *Gifted Resource Specialists (GRS)*. She stated in her interview,

In high school, things were very different. Being a gifted student came down to getting into the best college possible. The GRS helped me figure out what I wanted to do with my life. The Ivy League was my goal. My GRS was like you know you gotta do what's best for your future and not what your parents expect of you.

Through the aid of her *GRS* Kim was able to succeed. Kim's school records reflect the benefit of her college preparatory work as her transcripts show a student with a high GPA, a 99% score on her ACT test and her graduation from high school as an honor roll student with

a selective honor diploma. In addition, Kim reports that her college preparatory work helped her reach her ultimate goal.

Kim also was able to utilize her *Gifted Resource Specialist* to gain *opportunities* and locate resources that would assist her in her college path goal. “Gifted secondary students need assistance, they need an understanding of the bureaucracy and value system of the educational system” (Smutney, 2003, p. 57). She reflected on this in her interview and in her personal narrative. Kim discussed *opportunities* in her interview:

Many times non-white students like me don't have the experiences that get them in the place they need to be. They can't afford the best prep class for the ACT. You can't increase your score if you can't figure it out. My GRS helped me in figuring it out. Giving me practice stuff and making sure I had signed up on time and making time for me to practice for exams and stuff. I was in the National Honors Society and the A+ program because my GRS told me about it. I was involved in journalism and became the editor in chief of my school paper. I was in the honors program in high school and it involved a huge research project.

Kim further specified *opportunities* she utilized in her personal narrative, she wrote:

My GRS helped me navigate a more elite school including helping me figure out I should take the SAT and the ACT as well. She guided me through the entire college process throughout high school.

These additional *resources* provided Kim with the ability to succeed in the college application process. However, Kim notes that the gifted program did not just focus on her academics, the *Gifted Resource Specialist* also helped her navigate the social emotional part of high school as well. Through encouragement and support the specially trained gifted advocate was able to provide Kim with selective guidance and encouragement.

### **Socrates**

Socrates is a non-white gifted student that has a unique perspective on the path and pitfalls of his educational experiences. He had a very transient home life, moving to more than a dozen schools, supported by his single parent while his other parent was incarcerated. Socrates came from a family that moved so much that over a three -year period he missed

244 days of school. Despite these many obstacles and hardships he was able to find his passion for academics and his voice as a gifted learner. He went on to attend and graduate from an Ivy League school and worked several years abroad for a major international corporation. Socrates's demographic questionnaire identifies him as a male, African-American student that graduated from the Motown school district ten years ago. His school records indicate he graduated with a 4.1 GPA and that he achieved a top 1% score on the ACT and SAT subject tests. He is a student that found success in his post-secondary planning despite the many difficulties and setbacks in his personal life.

Socrates has several major themes throughout his interview, personal narrative, school records and his demographic questionnaire. One theme that developed was *giftedness* and *Identification* and *underrepresentation*, frequently represented in Socrates's narrative and interview, illuminated the theme of *giftedness* for this student. Socrates, in his interview, describes the *identification* process as something that did not happen right away despite his curiosity about his personal *giftedness*.

Obviously growing up I knew I was always different from kids that were my age. I kinda bounced around in the school system a lot, just coming up I guess being different from kids in a lot of different ways. I think it wasn't until sophomore year at high school that I thought, oh, I'm actually, I'm not dumb. I know when I was growing up I actually thought the opposite. And then one day, sophomore year I was tested for gifted and I realized those feelings of being dumb were feelings of different.

In his narrative, Socrates reflects on his experience and his recognition of the *underrepresentation* of non-white students in gifted education.

I think about the people that I interacted with in the gifted program, yeah it was definitely a majority of white students. And I don't necessarily think that's just because. I don't think that it's a failing of the gifted education, failing to spot or to help minority students succeed. I also think it's that the overall, you know, institutionalized education as a whole is failing non-white students. Especially students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Socrates dealt with issues common to the experiences of non-white students when they first enter the gifted program, including, in particular, lack of representation. Non-white students are underrepresented and are thrust into a group that does not reflect their culture. Patton and Townsend (1997) note, “increasingly, African American learners with gifts and talents are being educated in general class settings. For these settings to be genuinely inclusive, the sociocultural and psychosocial needs of African American children and youth should be addressed” (p. 2). Socrates was searching for a program that recognized his gifts and talents, but the program would not embody his culture given the problem of underrepresentation of non-white students.

Socrates describes in his narrative his opinion of the rationale for *underrepresentation* of non-white students in gifted programs.

I think kind of our problem is probably the way that giftedness is defined under that educational system in general. Which is probably why you're getting selection of certain types of individuals in the system and not others. That is why I didn't see anyone that looked like me in the gifted program. They aren't looking for kids like me. I didn't notice it back then but it makes a lot of sense and now that I think about the people that I interacted with, yeah it was definitely a majority of white students. I don't recall any African-American students or teachers at all.

Ford (2010) notes the *underrepresentation* that Socrates witnessed is not unique to his situation. She states, “the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education is meaningful and statistically significant. In 2006, the most recent data available, Black students are underrepresented by 48%” (p. 32.).

Socrates's experience as a non-white gifted student reveals through his narrative statement and interview the theme of *resources*. The theme of resources includes the development of the themes of *gifted resource specialist (GRS)* and the *opportunities* provided throughout high school. Socrates relates his recognition of the role of the *Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)* as he describes the relationship he had with his *GRS* in his interview:

But yeah, even still to this day and I really do mean this. I tell everyone when I talk about the GRS that I feel like she was the first mentor that I've ever really had in my life. Maybe one of the only ones that I've had in my life. I think it wasn't just being there for me and like helping me get through classes or whatever but kind of helping me understand who the hell that I am and what my place is in the world and, you know, recognizing me as different but different in a good way.

In his personal narrative Socrates further elaborates on his *GRS*, with these descriptions:

My GRS provided me with that community of support and guided me on my next steps. It gave me a new found sense of empowerment. This taught me the importance of building a strong sense of community around me, something I still do to this day.

Ford (2012) notes the importance of working with non-white gifted students and helping them believe in themselves and elevating their expectations. She notes, "Promote a scholar identify among Black and Hispanic students. Students learn to believe and accept low expectations and negative stereotypes about them" (p. 75). In this instance, the *gifted resource specialist* was instrumental in working with Socrates so he knew he could achieve his goals.

In addition to the inter-personal *support* provided by the *gifted resource specialist*, Socrates during the interview talked about the quality of guidance and *support* provided to him during the college planning process.

I especially needed help during high school figuring out what I wanted to do. Figuring out what I wanted to be when I grew up and how to get there. I had never heard of an Ivy League school or the common application. I had no idea how to fix my transcript or any of that stuff. The GRS helped me figure all that out and even contact this lady from one school that interviewed me to show support for me. I think these things are the reason I was able to attend and afford the school that I did go to.

Exum (1979) notes that "economically disadvantaged minority students who are gifted are at risk for attending college. They may be poorly prepared for college because their schools often fail to recognize their abilities" (p. 126). In this instance, Socrates was able to utilize his *gifted resource specialist* that provided this assistance and ultimately enabled him to reach his post-secondary goals. In addition to recognizing the non-white gifted students' potential the non-white gifted student needs specific guidance for college planning.

“Encouragement from teachers and counselors for students from traditionally disenfranchised populations has been found to be very important in the process of college preparation”

(Farmer- Hinton and Adams, 2006, p. 48).

Socrates’s journey in high school was filled with *opportunities* that he attributes to his participation in the gifted program. He shares in his interview the many *opportunities* including the information he received about clubs and activities that also enhanced his friendships and enjoyment of high school.

I was a strong science student. I was never like a team kind of guy and being an extreme introvert it was difficult for me. My gifted resource specialist actually took me to the Science Olympiad coach and introduced him to me. I was an introvert and would never have done this on my own. I met the majority of my friends in Science Olympiad and most, the majority of my positive memories of high school came from here. I was also in the FBLA, Future Business Leaders of America which was a group to help me with my interest in computers.

Socrates was able to find satisfaction and encouragement through his pursuit of activities in high school. Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee (2004) reinforce this idea. “Some adolescents experience such emotional satisfaction and enjoyment from the activity that it becomes central to their identity and they pursue the area as a career. Adolescents use extracurricular activities to find friends and feel connected to their school” (p. 108). Socrates benefited from the gifted program which provided him with *opportunities* that enhanced his high school experience and lead to very successful post-secondary planning.

### **Jeff**

Jeff began his schooling as a non-white gifted student early in his educational career. He describes a clash of cultures because he represents the Latinx culture demographically but he feels his appearance as a white male provides some benefits and less discrimination than he might otherwise encounter as someone that “looks Hispanic.” Jeff’s demographic questionnaire identifies him as a Latinx male that graduated from the honors program in the

Motown school district five years ago. His school records and artifacts identify his ACT score in the top 2% of the state and his GPA (grade point average) was a 4.0. Jeff was a high performing gifted student from educated parents, both having advanced degrees. Jeff shares his journey in gifted education, which was filled with success and struggles as he had to learn to work around the many ordeals facing gifted students.

Jeff's interview and narrative uncovered a theme of *giftedness through the codes of identification* and *underrepresentation* which occurred for him at an early age for the gifted program. This was certainly in stark contrast to the identification of the other students. He recalls in his interview:

I remember that they pulled me out of class one day in Kindergarten and they, someone who I didn't know said, You know, we're gonna be, you know, just doing some tests on you, we have some memory games and sort of fun activities that we want you to do for us, if that's okay. And me being a Kindergartener, I said, sure, that's fine, yeah, I guess. Just like any other day as long as I still get my nap so. They said, well we'd like to, you know, put you in the gifted education program here at the school. And that was my main memory of it.

Jeff's identification at such a young age is highly unusual and proved to be very beneficial for him. The National Association for Gifted Children (2008) notes that when standardized tests are not administered until third grade, they eliminate the possibility of identifying younger students and may needlessly delay nurturing of their potential. Fortunately for Jeff, his trajectory of *identification* was aided by what Tolan describes "as gifted identification during childhood years when their abilities overshadow those of their peers" (1994, p. 135). Jeff recalls in his interview the benefits he felt right away by *identification* and his gifted placement.

It was absolutely fun. I enjoyed it more so than I did my regular classes. I felt it was more engaging, that I was actually learning useful materials and concepts, and I thought that it was actually disappointing that it was only once a week. I thought I would benefit much more if that was my regular day-to-day class environment, if my gifted teachers were my actual day-to-day teachers.

Peterson and Lorimer (2012) confirms that identification of giftedness can be beneficial.

“With regard to giftedness as an asset, a gifted student’s cognitive strengths may help with problem solving, making sense of complex situations and feeling in control and garnering positive responses from teachers” (p. 159).

In his interview Jeff did discuss his recognition that he felt there were not others like him. He talks about himself as a “Hispanic male” and that non-white students were noticeably *underrepresented* in the gifted program.

All the gifted instructors and all the students were most often just Caucasian and so a lot of the times, yeah it was, not like horribly ridiculously jarring or anything, it wasn’t like you know I felt uncomfortable or unwelcome or anything but I was definitely the only Hispanic boy all through school in gifted.

Jeff shared some insight in his narrative about how he navigated *underrepresentation* in the gifted program.

I mean I sort of benefit from the fact that I’m Hispanic but I’m also Caucasian so, I don’t really get perceived as Hispanic because I look white. Until I said my name I could cover as white.

Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaetner (2002) affirm that bias can become an issue, “activated by situational cues (e.g., a person’s skin color), implicit bias can quickly and un- knowingly exert its influence on perception, memory, and behavior” (p, 64). Jeff worked to find ways to navigate his education using any tools necessary to avoid judgment and bias including occasionally what he described as “acting white.”

Jeff also expressed frustration at *underrepresentation* that lead to some stereotypes and judgments made about him and his presumed cultural identification.

Sometimes there are teachers or other students would ask me what my opinion was or what my perspective was on any sort of issue in Latin America and I’d say, I don’t know, I don’t know, why are you asking me? I’m not an expert. I was born here and I don’t know, why are you asking me?

Jeff was a product of implicit bias that often occurs when there is a lack of cultural training.

Banaji and Greenwald (2013) claimed “that individuals hold stereotypes or biases as a result of the accumulated past experiences stored in the human brain” (p. 95).

From Jeff’s discussion of the gifted program a theme of *gifted stereotypes* developed. This is defined when judgments are made about gifted students based on prior information that is not grounded in research or the specific student’s ability or advancement. The sub-theme developed was that of *gifted punished*. Jeff recalls several instances where he felt that being a gifted student was a *punishment* that resulted in negative behavior against him. He expressed in his interview:

Teachers would absolutely think that I was being snarky or that other gifted students were being snarky when, or if we were too inquisitive about something that maybe we were being disrespectful or trying to veer the class off course when honestly for me, personally, I’d felt like I just couldn’t help it, to ask questions or to just say “well no that’s wrong or if a teacher would say, oh this is what happened on this date or here’s this fact.” I would say, “actually no, that’s wrong.” And they’d be very upset and they’d say “sit down, I’m the teacher, you’re the student.” And I’d just say, “well I just don’t want you teaching incorrect things to people, I’m sorry.”

Even his punishment for perceived indiscretions in class did not seem to fit the needs of a gifted student and is identified as *gifted punishment*.

If a teacher thought I was being rude or misbehaving, when I was just bored out of my mind so I might be off task, I would get told, you can’t go out for recess-you have to stay inside or you can’t go to your special class. And I’d be like, alright, I get to read, that’s cool. I’ll just read here. And I always thought it’ll just be worse for you, you have to waste time watching me. But, it was also annoying to be punished for the teacher not allowing me to learn and holding me back.

In most cases, gifted students are more intense in emotion, performance, and pursuit of knowledge, even though their interests are not always part of the school curriculum or in sync with a school’s scope and sequence” (Stambaugh & Ford, 2014, p. 193). Jeff recognized early that his academic goals were not always in line with what the teacher had in mind for him.

Jeff further identified another sub-theme under stereotypes, micro-aggression. This is defined as negative treatment or comments by others based on race or ethnicity. Jeff frequently spoke about suspect treatment he received from peers and teachers due to his Latinx background. He shared in his narrative,

I felt like I was constantly switching between being the Mexican boy to the white boy in my class. If I acted white, then I was seen as a know it all. It was hard for me to find my way sometimes and figure out how I was supposed to act.

Stambaugh & Ford (2014) explained, “microaggressions are brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial/ethnic slights and insults toward others - most often Blacks, Hispanics, and insults toward others” (p. 193).

Jeff did find a positive place he could flourish and grow as a non-white gifted student. His interview uncovered the final theme of *gifted resources*. This included gifted *opportunities* and the *gifted resource specialist (GRS)*.

The *gifted resource specialist* in Jeff’s case represented a source of support and understanding for him as he navigated high school. Jeff described his interaction with his Gifted Resource Specialist in his interview:

If I’d ever be like stressed or like anxious that I didn’t really know anyone, that I wasn’t making a whole lot of friends, I would go into her office and more often than not there were a lot of other gifted kids. Some from my school and some from other schools and we’d just immediately, just all started kinda clicking together.

Perone, Perone, and Ksiazak (2007) acknowledge the role of the GRS in ensuring that gifted students are supported and have a reliable source to confide in, “knowing the factors that impact adults’ self-perceptions of giftedness may allow counselors to develop interventions that help...to correct misconceptions and maintain accurate self-perceptions” (p. 259).

Jeff described the many *opportunities* he took part in during high school that ultimately benefited his post-secondary planning.

At first I wasn't sure what to do in high school that I could do. So my gifted resource specialist recommended I play tennis since another gifted student she knew played tennis. That worked out great, that introduction helped me find out about that. Looking back I definitely did do a lot of things while I was there. At the time it didn't feel like I was multi-tasking or juggling too much. So I volunteered at the hospital to help get into medical school, I took on leadership roles in many clubs including Science Olympiad and health science club. I was definitely stressed but looking back, I'm better for it.

VanTassel-Baska (1998) writes, "schools need differentiated practices at all levels for gifted learners.... Access to advanced opportunities outside of school is a facilitative role for schools to perform on behalf of their...gifted learners" (p. 91).

Jeff also refers to his *gifted resource specialist* as being instrumental in his college planning and acceptance. Although his parents expected him to attend college he attributes his college admissions and acceptances to the assistance of the *gifted resource specialist*. He recalls specific assistance provided from his GRS in his narrative:

I definitely did have a lot of support in terms of choosing, you know, what would be good schools to apply to and filling out information like my FAFSA and definitely looking at schools that she thought would be most supportive of me as a gifted student. I applied to eight schools and got into almost, most of all the schools that I applied to including the six-year medical program.

Renzulli and Park (2000) reported on ways to support gifted youth, asserting that "the presence of a caring adult, a supportive peer group, alternative educational program, academic success, motivation to attend postsecondary educational institutions, kept them from dropping out" (p. 263).

Jeff, like so many other gifted students, needed specially trained personnel to navigate his educational experiences. It is noteworthy that aside from the problems encountered due to non-white student status, gifted students often face additional obstacles and judgments made simply because they are gifted and it is helpful to have a support system in place to ensure

they can get the most of their school experience. Jeff clearly benefited from his gifted experience and he sums it up,

It was very supportive and there were hardly any issues of racism or bigotry in the program. Everyone was very open minded and allowed everyone to share ideas and find common ground. It was a very open approach that helped me very much.

### **C'asia**

C'asia's interview begins with a quote that summarizes her view of giftedness, "I think it's the ability to see the world in a different way." C'asia's journey through gifted education reveals some poignant moments represented in her interviews, documents, demographic survey and her personal narrative. As C'asia navigated the system as a non-white gifted student in a program with limited diversity she faced obstacles but found new possibilities. C'asia's demographic survey reveals she is an African-American female gifted student that graduated from the Motown district gifted program in 2017. At the time of her interview, she was attending a four-year college with a full ride scholarship. C'asia shares her story of her journey, speaking to her challenges as a diverse student in a non-diverse program and her trials and successes from being involved in the gifted program.

Through analyses of C'asia's interviews, narrative demographic survey and school records, several dominant themes were identified. One theme that developed was *giftedness*. This theme emerged through phenomena constructed related to *underrepresentation* and *non-whites* in gifted. *Underrepresentation* in this study was a prevalent term in that few non-white students have been selected to be in the gifted program. The phenomenon of non-white, identified as a subtheme of giftedness for these participants, posed significant social issues and struggles for C'asia.

C'asia shares her initial recognition as a gifted student was a rocky one full of roadblocks and delays. She initially recognized her abilities early in school but was not recognized for them. These struggles and frustrations were expressed in her initial interview:

To me it was obvious that I was kind of ahead of everyone, at least in math, because I'm very good at it. Teachers kind of never saw that. I thought it was kind of weird because I knew that the gifted program existed, and I just knew throughout elementary school that I wasn't smart enough for it.

In fact, C'asia speaks to her frustration at the extended time it took to get her recognized and tested.

So it kind of sucked that I didn't get to go in second grade, or Kindergarten or first grade like everybody else because no teacher ever saw me as gifted, even when I was at a school for two plus years.

Ford notes that this issue of identification is ongoing "the subjectivity of nomination forms and teacher biases represents a threat to the successful identification of gifted, potentially gifted, and underachieving Black students" (1996, p. 27). C'asia consistently faced such roadblocks in her journey as a gifted student.

So when I was in elementary school I knew I was ahead of everybody else but no teacher would ever tell me that I'm gifted or that I'm ahead of anyone else.

Hansford, (2003) notes that this bias is not uncommon, "Bias limits our ability to recognize potential and giftedness in children, and as a result, reinforces underachievement among gifted children from nonmainstream populations" (p. 304). Finally, at the insistence of a family member, C'asia was tested and entered the gifted program in the fourth grade.

Another phenomenon that developed under the theme of *giftedness* is the lack of non-white representation in gifted programs and its impact on non-white students. C'asia continued this discussion in her interview:

There was another, I believe, one other person of color in my group that went, she was actually in my class. And it didn't make me feel more included or more a part of like a community at all. It did allow me to leave class for a day and study something that I liked which was nice, but it felt like everybody else already knew each other

and that I wasn't necessarily someone that they wanted to be a part of their experience.

C'asia further describes her interactions in the gifted program as a social issue that had strong racial overtones.

It was hard for me to connect with people in general because I had a lot of issues with race and identity and things like that in a majority white environment.

Fries-Britt explains, "an interest in academics and being identified as high ability are characteristics usually identified with Euro-Americans. Often, Blacks who exhibit these behaviors are viewed as not being Black enough or trying to be White" (1998, p. 558).

C'asia further explains her concerns about the lack of non-white students in gifted education.

With my experience it's definitely psychological. I know lots of very gifted people who purposely do not show that giftedness so I think in order to change the amount of people of color in the program you have to be able to revamp the community's interest in education. And that's gonna be a huge battle, huge battle

C'asia faced difficulties in her gifted classes with peer acceptance. She also encountered these same issues with her friends that were not in the gifted program. She describes the lack of acceptance and loss of friendships she had based on her academic success in the classroom.

So, any time I'm in a group with only black people I feel very out of place. I was never around people of color that talked like me, so I feel like when I speak, they automatically know that I was an outsider before. It feels like that is what's going to come about in college as well.

The tensions that C'asia expressed in her interview regarding racial overtones are apparent in her narrative as well. She further describes her difficulties with being a non-white gifted student in the program.

I was further away from those who shared my experiences when it came to race. For a long time, I buried the negative impacts of being surrounded by white people constantly. I had very low self-esteem and buried myself in school organizations. I lost almost every black girl-friend that I had by the age of 14. I didn't recover these

friendships until my senior year of high school when I stopped being afraid of being around people who had always said I wasn't black enough for them.

Ford, Grantham, Whiting (2008) relates that many see *giftedness* as a cultural betrayal:

Regardless of the issue being focused on (grades vs. friendships), the student who is accused of acting White is viewed as someone who has betrayed his or her racial group, has given up his or her racial or cultural ties, and has adopted the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the oppressor or enemy. (p. 222)

C'asia commented about the ongoing disconnect she felt between her racial identification and her feelings related to intellect.

And I don't belong with like African-Americans and so it's really hard balancing intelligence like outward intelligence with the color of your skin when it's not valued.

A theme that did develop throughout the data with C'asia's experiences was that of *support*. *Support* is defined as those support systems that allowed C'asia to prosper in her educational path and supported her journey as a gifted learner. The theme was developed through phenomena constructed throughout the interpretations identified the interpretive code of *parents*.

When C'asia spoke of her *parents* and parental support, a sub-theme that developed was *limited education-first generation*. C'asia relates specific instances of how her journey in secondary education was dependent on her parental support even though they may not have been equipped to provide the support.

I was finally friends with people in my community that introduced me to HBCU's [Historical Black Colleges and Universities] and so did my father because he's very Afrocentric. So he introduced me to HCBU's and it was the first time I really considered that I've never been part of the majority in a community, ever.

The desire and support of C'asia's *parents* was helpful, she felt, even though their experience and involvement with the post-secondary process was limited. It is not uncommon for students to rely on parents for support even though they may be unfamiliar with the college planning process. Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) state, "parents of the first-

generation college students lack first-hand knowledge of the college experience and may pose an obstacle for those students (p. 223). C'asia points out,

“It was hard because my mother was the first person in her family to go to college.”

C'asia notes that her father was supportive and was someone that insisted on her seeking educational opportunities.

My father was a little more persistent but that's because he's around my family and they're not very good at succeeding and getting out of the generational poverty that comes with being in that community and the hard mindset of it. So he's very proud but at the same time he really pushes me towards success.

The next theme that was identified through the research process with C'asia was *resources*. This theme includes *opportunities*, specifically those in high school, *Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)* and *financial aid guidance*. Through the research C'asia identified specific *school opportunities*, *the GRS and financial aid* information as particularly useful in her secondary education path. *School opportunities* included the clubs and course choices provided to D'asia. *Gifted Resource Specialist* was the specifically trained personnel that aided C'asia in her secondary journey, also, *financial aid information* and monetary advice she was given were significant *resources*.

C'asia felt like she started to become more comfortable as a gifted high school student once she found opportunities that matched her interests. In her interview she expresses,

I was very highly involved in activities especially my freshman and sophomore year. I was in two sports so I was in cross country and track. To help me broaden my activities for college my GRS introduced me to robotics and ACE mentoring which were STEM activities. I was also in student government and key club. I also was in orchestra.

Catalano (2005) studied non-white high school students. They found that “providing prosocial opportunities can lead to prosocial bonds that cause adolescents to engage in positive behaviors, while antisocial opportunities and relationships may lead to antisocial

behaviors” (p. 113). C’asia was able to find many activities and clubs that allowed her to form bonds with new friend groups and contributed to her positive high school experience.

*Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)*, which is a specially trained educator for gifted secondary students, and *parents*, as the family members that informed and supported C’asia to make decisions regarding her secondary school journey and path to college.

C’asia speaks often of the support and guidance she received from her Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) in high school. She stated in her interview,

I think that a lot of gifted kids, I mean, have a lot social struggles and I think it really helps to have a counselor, someone there who’s there to talk to you and not there to be a disciplinary figure. It definitely helped, and I have a better relationship with her than any of my other teachers definitely.

*Financial aid* and funding of college was another issue C’asia expressed concern about. She specifically noted that she had to find a way to pay for college as she did not have any assistance financing her education, which many of her White gifted friends did not experience. In her narrative she further elaborated her view of *financial aid*,

It’s so weird because a lot of people who aren’t minorities don’t understand the paying for it by yourself aspect, like for example, my boyfriend has lived in an elite neighborhood his entire life and his parents make probably collectively \$120,000 a year.

C’asia was a focused student that knew academic achievement was her only path to college. Navigating the world of *financial aid* is something she had to learn with the assistance of her *GRS*. In her interview, she described keen awareness of her financial challenges and the importance of scholarships in her post-secondary college planning.

No one understands really what that meant. Only my friends of color understand. I was like well I have to save up. I have to save up for my college applications. And I was like, I also have to keep getting straight A’s, I can’t slack off my last semester because I have to get scholarships.

Long & Riley, (2007), note, “Students' unmet financial need has risen over the past decade, demonstrating that low-income and minority students are especially likely to face substantial unmet need even after taking into account family contributions and all available grants and loans” (p. 52). Ultimately, C’asia chose her college based on affordability, but she was fortunate in that she believes that the college turned out to be a good match for her.

I chose to go to the college that gave me the most aid but it was also perfect for me. I am going to study abroad and they had the major I wanted. When I visited they made me feel like I was a part of things and that was so important. I may be paying off my loans forever but I am going to get this done.

### **Alexa**

Alexa found great success in her high school gifted program, overcoming obstacles that sometimes impeded her progress and challenged her perception of herself as a non-white gifted student. Alexa’s demographic survey identifies her as an African-American gifted student that graduated from the Motown school district in 2016. She graduated with an honors diploma and received a full-ride scholarship to the top Aerospace Engineering school in the nation. Alexa reached her impressive college goal. Her journey is a model of persistence and perseverance that provides insight into non-white gifted students’ experiences in secondary education.

From her initial interview and through her personal narrative, Alexa valued *giftedness* as a significant theme in her data. This theme was supported by the emerging interpretive codes of *identification and gifted programming*.

When discussing *identification*, Alexa spoke to her procedure of entering the gifted program as a pleasant surprise. Unlike the experience of many non-white gifted students, she was very fortunate to have supportive teachers that seemed to recognize her abilities early in her educational program. She recalls,

I was in second grade. I was eight years old and I was recommended to get tested by my teacher. I was going to take the test so as of third grade I was introduced at the beginning of the year into the program for gifted students.

When asked about her teacher's role in her *identification* and ultimately her nomination for the gifted program, Alexa was not sure why she was selected, although not surprisingly given her age at the time. As she explains,

I think it was the questions I asked, it showed like a bit of a deeper understanding of what we were learning. I think I just grasped onto concepts a bit quicker than the other students but I mean, at the time I didn't see myself any different from my peers. It was just something that the teacher saw, I guess.

Alexa's teacher, to her credit, recognized the unique needs of a gifted learner. Baykoc, Aydemir & Uyaroglu, (2014) note the importance of gifted identification. "Due to the fact that they are in the same environment with other normal developed children, their needs and potentials are not fulfilled in these regular classroom environments" (p. 1134). Alexa was fortunate that she had avoided the usual path encountered by non-white gifted students and was instead recognized and tested for a program that could meet her specialized needs at a very early age.

Alexa speaks to her understanding of *gifted programming* in relating her experience of when she first entered the specialized gifted class. Specifically, the differentiated instruction of a *gifted program* became apparent through her interview.

I thought it was really cool. I had heard about gifted before and I had like heard about the things you got to do about like independent studies and you got to do your own little project. I was really excited, and it made me feel good about myself; it was an accomplishment.

Scager, Akkerman, Pilot and Wubbels, (2014) note that, "Students' perceived learning was at its peak in the period in which the challenge level most exceeded the ability level" (p. 675). Alexa noted in her personal narrative the benefit she derived from gifted

instruction, acknowledging the power of having a specially trained teacher to allow her to prosper and her learning to flourish.

I worked with that gifted class for a bit and it was just a very different learning style than like anything else I've ever been like exposed to. Our teachers trust in us and gave us a bit of academic freedom to prioritize our work and complete it in a pace and manner that was best suited to us.

Acknowledging the pace of learning and breadth of learning that a gifted student needs are especially valuable reasons that gifted learners benefit from specialized instructors.

Alexa also identified in her narrative and interview some areas that were a negative side of gifted identification for her. The theme of *gifted stereotypes* developed in Alexa's case. This is defined as expectations placed on a student based on pre-conceived ideas of a person's race. She described in her personal narrative, the struggle she faced when her teacher had placed standards on her abilities and actually punished her for not meeting the inflated standards the teacher imposed on her as a gifted learner.

In high school being what is deemed as "gifted" was a blessing and a curse. It has its drawbacks and the biggest one here was the utmost faith that our teachers believed we would succeed no matter what because we were the "smart kids". This was excruciatingly aggravating because help was skimp, and at times denied because we were smart and should be able to figure anything out.

This level of expectation and judgment by teachers that Alexa experienced is characterized by Hallinan, "Scholars find that teachers' perceptions can shape student learning and social development, largely through their influence on teacher-student interaction" (2008, p. 280).

Alexa also discussed how sometimes she felt as if she were being chastised for being a gifted student. Alexa recalls in her narrative one of her teachers becoming upset because Alexa already knew curriculum being taught in her high school class.

She said that my teacher, my gifted teacher, was in the wrong because she shouldn't have been teaching that material to eighth graders. I told her we did cover it and she was upset and said they shouldn't be teaching it cause we weren't ready for it.

Perrone, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane and Vannatter (2010) point to the importance of specialized instruction for gifted learners. “Overall, the results of these studies suggest that special educational accommodations for the gifted, including early school entrance, acceleration, enrichment, and full- time homogeneous gifted classes, are associated with a variety of positive outcomes in gifted students and their families” (p. 130).

Alexa further discovered that the *giftedness stereotypes* impacted her ability to receive assistance in her studies and *gifted punished* was a reality for her.

My teachers, like they didn't want to recognize my work ethic because they thought things came easy to me. And they like held a very high standard of expectations of what the work I should be producing, which wasn't like too much of a hassle because I like working hard and seeing that outcome. The teachers got lazy and they would just like assume that I'm like doing well even if I like would ask for help and they're like, “oh you're a smart kid you can handle this.” But I'm like, “no, I really need help.”

Reis and Renzulli (2004) found similar results to Alexa's experience when they reported, “research on the experiences of gifted students at secondary school level indicates that they do not feel challenged by ‘jumping through the hoops’ in the pre-structured courses that dominate most of education “ (p. 1050).

Alexa also had the sub-theme under *stereotypes* develop of *micro-aggression*. She specifically noted in her narrative an occasion that stood out where she felt slighted and it impacted her for a long time.

When it was time to sign up for a Women in Science expo I was the first to sign up. At first my teacher told me the list might be full. I told her to put me on the waiting list. Later I found out she was still signing other girls up. I had to speak to my GRS and she helped me get on the list. I really feel like it was not my ability keeping me off that list.

Alexa faced an unspoken bias that is a *micro-aggression*. Through no fault of her own, Alexa was nearly deprived of an opportunity due to patent bias against her. Stampbaugh & Ford (2014) explain, “students who are gifted and culturally different or poor are at even greater

risk for encountering microaggressions and the consequences with these microaggressions compared with their White or affluent counterparts” (p. 193). Thanks to Alexa’s persistence and the aid of her GRS, she was able to participate in the program. But such microaggressions leave their mark on their targets. Alexa still remembers what happened.

Alexa’s strong work ethic and commitment to education connected to her third theme of *gifted resources*. Two phenomena developed from Alexa’s narrative and interview, *opportunities* and the *Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)*.

Alexa spoke about the level of coursework afforded her as an honor student and honor diploma candidate. In her narrative she describes the benefit afforded her by this *opportunity*:

The peak of my honors career were the courses I took and especially my senior capstone exhibition. I spent a full semester conducting self-lead research and I had a very innovative, developed and advanced presentation thanks to the opportunity to work with college professors and other experts in the field. I think this was a core development of my personality and my interests. My high school experience would not have been the same without it.

Kerr, Colangelo, & Gaeth (1988) note the importance that gifted students have *gifted resources* provided to them. “Gifted adolescents viewed giftedness as having a positive effect on self .... Giftedness was perceived as an advantage in terms of personal growth and academics” (p. 245).

Alexa also spoke to the *opportunities* she was afforded and the importance of using those *gifted resources* to benefit post-secondary planning in her personal narrative,

I would recommend to any student to get involved and to find your niche and your interest because it does, it definitely makes the whole experience much better and a bit lighter because you’ll meet new friends and you’ll find new activities and new opportunities and networking and you’ll find new experiences to just make it a bit more fun.

Alexa spoke highly of the *opportunities* she was involved in during her high school that assisted her in making decisions about her future. In her interview she shared,

I was in Soccer mostly and I also managed basketball. I did STUCO or student council and leadership. I did diversity club and Key club. I was involved in science Olympiad and robotics for a little bit. My GRS stressed I needed to try new things and find out what I liked. Each of the things helped me learn about myself and what I might like to do with my life. They sure helped me know what I did not want to do.

In her interview, Alexa also discussed the activities and *opportunities* afforded her as a gifted student in high school because of the involvement and influence of her *Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)*.

It made a huge difference in my courses and my life. I don't think I've ever taken a regular course in high school, if an honors course was offered I took it. My GRS was assisting in my picking classes at every step. She always knew what I needed and sometimes suggested things I had never tried. Especially, with activities. She knew that trying different things helped me and would help my college applications as well.

Moon, Kelly, and Feldhausen (1997) communicated the importance of the role of the *Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)* in the lives of students, "Professionals in gifted education might serve students better if they begin to consider lifelong career counseling as a logical extension of talent development, a process that demands accurate perceptions of ability, potential, and achievement" (p. 18).

### **Federico**

Frederico found success in academics and pursuit of his passion for theater and film. In interviews and narratives, he shared some insights and discoveries he made about his high school program. Federico's demographic questionnaire identified him as Latinx male student who graduated from the Motown school district six years ago. He attended and graduated from a prestigious college. His school records indicate he had the highest ACT of any Latinx student in the district and this, along with his outstanding school

accomplishments, afforded him the opportunity to attend college on a full scholarship.

Frederico is the first in his family to graduate from high school and attend college.

From Frederico's discussion in his interview of his time as a gifted student developed the theme of *giftedness*, through the phenomena of *identification* and *underrepresentation*.

Frederico describes in his interview how he was identified as a non-white gifted student.

I was in the third or fourth grade. We would play games and things and I would always beat people. It was pretty clear that I was always winning and finally the teacher announced nobody could beat me. That was my first signal I was gifted. But it was my fifth-grade teacher that was my mom's friend that finally got me tested for the program. I'm not sure why it didn't happen earlier on if my abilities were progressed; perhaps I just didn't have a teacher that was looking for it earlier on.

At first, *identification* as a gifted student was something Frederico was unsure of, possibly due to peer pressure. Peers become very important components in the educational progress of students, especially in high school. Shin, Daly & Vera (2007) advise that "peers represent a key context for the development of school engagement and academic attainment. Positive emotional support from friends and others is related to the increased levels of academic engagement" (p.381).

The impact of peers on non-white students who are often underrepresented in gifted programs can be even more significant. Ford & Whiting (2010) specifically studied the issue of student peer pressure and found specifically that "African American students may choose to not be in gifted programs and AP classes due to the negative peer pressures and concerns about being isolated from their African American peers" (p. 136). Frederico described a similar concern about his peers in his interview:

Initially I was like, not ashamed, but I was almost embarrassed to have been recognized as gifted because none of my friends were.

Frederico describes his first suspicion that the gifted program was *underrepresented* with non-white students during the first week he entered the gifted education program.

Definitely the fact that most of my friends have never been, there were some non-white students but even then it wasn't like Hispanic students per se. I think in all of my gifted classes like through elementary and middle school I might have been the only Hispanic person. And I think at times I didn't notice because I was always around white people anyway and so I just took it as the norm where like I sort of inherited an Americanized version of my like identity through going to school and so I started to take it as normal, but there weren't many Hispanics around.

Luria, O'Brien, & Kaufman (2016) recognize this as a common problem in gifted programs.

“When schools identify students for gifted programs, minority and culturally diverse students have traditionally been underrepresented” (p. 45). Frederico recalls that his culture was not represented in his classes and even his ability to speak Spanish made him stand out. He describes his feelings as he recognized he was *underrepresented* especially with his bilingualism.

And like I remember that pretty vividly just like not only was I not getting to like interact with a Hispanic person in a building, because there were none, there weren't many other Hispanic kids and there were no Hispanic teachers.

Ford (2010) points out this absence and the price that many students of color pay for often feeling that they have to leave their communities behind. Ford described the pain in this manner:

Although many gifted students who are culturally different or poor feel the pull between their culture, home, and intelligence, it may not be in their best interest to be forced to choose between these, nor should one assume that their home or community culture is not appropriate or is substandard. In addition, when gifted programs are composed predominantly of highly affluent White students, it is more difficult for students of different cultures or of poverty to feel accepted in the gifted classroom and retention is difficult. (p. 33)

Frederico's realization that he was isolated as a Latinx male in the gifted program was difficult for him. He recalls one specific example where his *underrepresentation* stood out,

I realized already knowing Spanish and realizing that like everyone else was like trying to learn Spanish was something. Just being like being bilingual in general made me stand out. Sometimes it was helpful as others were learning Spanish but it also made me feel isolated. There wasn't anyone that understood my first language or my family, my heritage.

Brulles, Castellano, and Laing (2010) remark, “first-generation gifted Hispanic students who are learning English have a strong desire to understand and speak the second language, demonstrate cultural sensitivity, want to share their culture, have pride in both their native language and English, and are fluent in both nonverbal and oral expression” (p. 808). Frederico was willing to share his language and his culture with classmates but with the *underrepresentation* in gifted programs it did not provide him an opportunity to do so.

Frederico also discussed the theme of *support* he received in his post-secondary journey with the interpretive code of *parents* being frequently discussed. The sub-theme of *limited education-first time college bound* described his parents. His parents did not attend college and did not understand the educational system very well. He described in his interview his early schooling which was dramatically different from his experience in high school

My parents worked the farm and I was expected to do the same. We had chores and jobs and there was not time for study or learning. It was only when we moved from the city that I learned the basics of reading and writing. We moved so I could go to school but it was hard at first since that is not what I was used to.

While Frederico describes his *parents* as interested in his schooling, they were just not knowledgeable about how to navigate the educational system. In his narrative, he describes what sacrifices his parents made to ensure he had the help he needed, and how his *parents* encouraged him to go to college.

My parents moved to provide a public-school background for me. They tried to find the best school they could including the International Baccalaureate school. They sometimes worked multiple jobs to help me with things I needed. They may not know what I was learning but they made sure I was able to get what I needed to get to college.

Frederico discussed the many facets of high school he was involved in and the courses he took as a gifted student. From his discussion the theme of *resources* was revealed.

His interview and narrative revealed two codes to support the theme, *opportunities* and *gifted resource specialist (GRS)*.

Frederico recalls in his narrative specific *opportunities* afforded him by being in the gifted program. He speaks about the specialized instruction that was an *opportunity* he did not have prior to the gifted program.

I liked getting to decide what I wanted to learn about I think was really exciting because it was like getting an open project, it wasn't something that we got in other classes. It was like investigating our curiosity almost and like we were encouraged to explore the things that we were doing research on in ways that were more than just like reading about them and regurgitating what we learned about it.

Little (2012) observed the importance of specialized curriculum and instruction for gifted learners.

Moreover, if schools are to promote world-class levels of achievement, they must provide opportunities for students to encounter material that is consistently challenging and that promotes ongoing growth...Educators responsible for working with gifted learners—and with learners in general—must focus on ensuring learning opportunities that are appropriately challenging and meaningful for students. (p. 695)

Frederico's interview further identifies the *opportunities* that were given him in secondary gifted education. He talks about his *Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS)* as someone that guided his course planning, his college planning and allowed him to explore various career paths.

My Gifted Resource teacher, I think she just knew how to like teach more individually. She said, Ricardo you're gonna go to Harvard some day. And I didn't even like, I didn't even have college, much less Ivy League schools on my radar. I think I hardly knew what Harvard was beyond like that popular culture meme that it's become. And so I think her telling me that always like stood out in my mind because I really trusted her opinion and the fact that she was telling me something like that and no one before that or after until like it became obvious that I was doing well.

Frederico also discussed in his interview the role of his *Gifted Resource Specialist* in his college and career planning. His parents' lack of education and experience with higher education limited their ability to provide guidance. He found the *opportunities* that his *Gifted*

*Resource Specialist* outlined for him immensely impacted his college planning and ultimately his college placement.

It was nice to have someone beside the regular counselor. She was able to address my plans with me with my giftedness in mind because I think often regular counselors have a generalized perspective. One example is the day I got into college my GRS paraded me around the school making a big deal about my acceptance. It was a pivotal moment for me. It made me realize I could strive and achieve those successes that I had not thought possible. Especially since I am a student with parents that did not even go to middle school much less understanding the college process.

Frederico's experience with college planning mirror expectations well documented in the academic literature. Olszewski-Kubilius & Scott (1992) found:

The gifted disadvantaged students feel less informed about the steps necessary to implement a career choice. They express anxiety at the thought of making a career decision and desire more support to do so. To compensate disadvantaged youngsters will need early exposure to careers through mentorships and internships and early contact with adult professionals. (p. 141)

Frederico's story confirms the advantages of a gifted program particularly for disadvantaged non-white students. And his success is exemplary of the difference a well-implemented gifted program can make in the lives of these under-represented, deserving students.

As a White female born in the Midwest, I used heuristic case study narrative as a method to present the stories of gifted education for non-white gifted students; Kim, Socrates, Jeff, C'asia, Alexa, and Federico. I remained aware through journaling of my reactions and peer debriefings my thoughts, feelings, and biases as I interacted with the data. I realize that I do not share the cultural positionalities of these students. England (1994) has helped me understand my positionality as a White female entering the lives of these non-white students; yet, I carry my own history and realities as a gifted teacher in a larger suburban district in my struggles to give access to these students. England pointed out" we are differently positioned subjects with different biographies; we are not dematerialized,

disembodied entities” (p. 248). In the following section, I bring their stories together to answer the research questions, which is the major research focus of this study.

### **Answering the Research Questions**

In this study, each separate case was analyzed individually, and themes and subthemes or interpretive codes emerged from the data, which constituted within case analysis. In exploring the findings of the research, this section attempted to review the data in a cross-case analysis approach. Cross case analysis allows the search of “patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 57). This analysis looks for commonalities that might exist to answer the research questions and sub-questions of this study by summarizing and reflecting on the data collected.

The themes that emerged in this study were: *giftedness, stereotypes, support and resources*. The degree to which each theme and subthemes/interpretive codes was present in the participants’ data (see Table 2) are labelled with the following codes: S = Strong Presence; M = Moderate Presence; and N = Nominal Presence. Below is a brief discussion of each theme with subthemes or interpretive codes as they appear throughout the six cases using a cross-case analysis of the themes and data, illuminating the research questions of this study.

#### **Giftedness**

This study’s purpose was to understand and detail non-white student experiences in the gifted program. And in all cases *giftedness* consistently appeared as a theme. The literature is replete with examples of giftedness and definitions of gifted. The participants identified several topics that supported their view of *giftedness*. This is represented by four interpretive codes: *identification, underrepresentation, non-whites* and *gifted programming*.

Each participant had slightly different views on what they defined as *giftedness*. Through analysis and comparison of the data some commonalities developed. They all arrived at the theme through slightly different descriptions in their stories. Many participants, for example, were very young when they were identified as gifted, potentially influencing their perceptions of *giftedness*. However, all the participants were able to discuss *giftedness* in terms and examples of what they understood the theme to mean. The participants crafted their definition of *giftedness* using their own descriptors but ultimately, they were able to identify many components of giftedness as referenced in the literature of Ford, Grisson and Redding (2016), Matthews and Kirsch (2011), and Reis and Renzulli (2004).

Specifically, in the area of giftedness, the sub-theme *underrepresentation* was a common issue facing the non-white students in this study.

### **Stereotypes**

As the participants discussed their navigation of the gifted program a theme of stereotypes developed strongly several cases. Although this was not found in all cases it was strong enough to be construed as significant to this study. Within this theme the interpretive code of *gifted punished* developed from the data. Several cases discussed specific instances of examples of negative treatment they faced from being a non-white student navigating a predominantly white gifted program. However, they shared common language regarding feeling singled out and selectively discriminated against because they were non-white gifted students. The literature of Attintas and Ilgun (2016), Fish (2017), and McCoach and Siegele (2002) reflect the sentiments felt by the participants. Although they were admitted to the gifted program through legitimate methods, they faced instances of discrimination because of their non-white status.

Another sub-theme that developed under stereotypes was *micro-aggression*. Several cases discussed the subtle treatment they received from peers and teachers implying that they did not deserve to be in the gifted program. Many times these statements were made based on a racial generalization or judgment. Jeff specifically shared how he changed his behavior because he was afraid to face the judgment of others:

I don't want you going to school speaking in broken English because you'll just get bullied for it.

Most of the participants often shared examples of how they were facing treatment by peers and teachers that they identified as racially motivated. For example, Essence shared a particularly relevant example about how she faced ridicule no matter what she did because of how she talked.

I would get the same ridicule from white people that I got from black people. They couldn't fit me into a category of "smart black person" or "smart black woman. I just wasn't really black to them. Other blacks used the n-word but I didn't. I never let go of my obvious education by lowering my vocabulary because I couldn't fit in.

The way that many of the students purposefully changed their behavior or their speech to match an expectation of others is a strong indicator of the *microaggression* they faced throughout school.

### **Support**

The theme of *support*, formed by parents was developed after analysis of the participants' multiple data sets. Within this theme the interpretive code of *parents* developed. Many of the participants presented conflicting information regarding the role of their parents' support and involvement in their navigation through the secondary school gifted program and post-secondary planning. It was important to acknowledge the strong impact, positive or negative, that parental support, or the lack thereof, had on the choices and progress of these students. Parents' views and aspirations for their non-white gifted students affect the

decisions and sometimes the outcomes of the student's decisions concerning post-secondary education. The importance of the parental role in non-white gifted students' post-secondary planning is well documented in the literature of Koshy, Smith & Brown (2017), Grantham (2004), & Olszewski-Kubilius (2010).

Within the interpretive code of parents two sub-themes developed, *limited-educated parents including first generation* and *non-educational background parents desiring more*. These sub-themes highlighted the parental involvement that was important in each instance but also was a different experience based on parental background. It is also important to recognize that *parents* may have aspirations and goals for their child but many times it is their educational background or the meager resources available to them that limit their support and involvement. This came through in several cases as *parents* were dealing with a child who is the first in their family to attend college or where *parents* were providing as much support as they could but had limited knowledge. Brooks-Terry note, "The fact that the parents of first-generation college students lack first-hand knowledge of the college experience may pose another obstacle for these students. Their parents typically cannot help them directly with college tasks (1988, p. 124)."

One example of parental support from first generation college bound students is depicted in Jeff's narrative when he spoke about his parent's willingness to provide as much support as possible despite their limited educational background.

My parents were people that cared about me. But when I asked them questions or told them about my plans for college they would say they wanted me to go to college, but that was pretty much the extent of what they knew. They had never been to college and neither had any of my aunts, uncles, cousins or anybody and they just knew they wanted it to happen for me, but did not know how to make it happen.

## Resources

Each participant had a story to tell pertaining to the many services, assistance, and advice they were given as students in the gifted program. From their stories the theme of resources emerged. The subthemes/interpretive codes that formed within this theme were *opportunities, Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS), financial aid, and future programs.*

Analyzing all the cases, the participants unanimously discussed, with appreciation, the many resources made available to them and how they made use of them. When discussing opportunities multiple participants focused on the rich experiences that were provided in support of their interests and talents. Within the academic literature, Olszewski-Kubilius (2004), Swiatek (2007), Sarouhim (2002), discuss the role of participation in activities and specific curriculum in the talent development of gifted students. In addition, the role of the specially trained Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) was a commonality found in the data. The participants discussed the strong bond they had with their GRS and the impact on the participant's post-secondary plans. Kim summarized this in her narrative when she said,

My Gifted Resource Specialist definitely helped me identify my career path and college goals. Those basic skills I learned in the program are prevalent in my academic and professional setting.

The import of the GRS is substantiated in the literature of Leung, Conoley, and Scheel (2011), Peterson (2006), Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow (2008), which outlines the role of advocacy for high school gifted students.

The future of gifted programs and the need to ensure that secondary non-white gifted students have access to the resources they need was discussed by all of the participants. The participants revealed many initiatives they believe would positively impact gifted students' education. Callahan, Moon & Oh (2017), Hertberg -Davis & Callahan (2018), Hertzog and Bennett (2004) discuss these initiatives which included early non-biased identification,

culturally responsive teaching development for teachers, and curriculum decisions and considerations.

**The first research question is: *What stories do non-white students tell about their experiences in a gifted suburban district?***

Each participant had unique stories to share regarding their experiences in the gifted program. And their use of descriptors throughout their stories indicated their experiences and understanding of giftedness sometimes varied. In comparing the cases there was commonality in the participants' real experiences of giftedness, which they described as identification, underrepresentation, non-whites, and gifted programming. The stories of the participants reveal they all highly valued their participation in the gifted program. Most shared experiences with identification as an important milestone in their journey as gifted students. Each had the time frame and circumstance of their acceptance as a gifted student seared in their memory. The cross-case analysis also revealed the issue of underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education, with many participants reflecting on being the sole non-white student in their programs.

***Sub-question 1; When did you first learn you were gifted? (elementary, middle or high school?).*** Each participant had a vivid recollection of the exact year and circumstance of their identification as a gifted student. Although their experiences are unique in time, place and circumstance, the six participants had precise memories of the test they took, sometimes the room they were in, and the circumstances surrounding their identification and nomination. One example was Alexa's incredibly detailed description of the day she was tested that she still recalls vividly

There was a lady with big glasses. We went in a room I had never been before. She said I was going to take a test but it was mostly playing with blocks. The test was easy but it was fun. After that my teacher said I was going to be with gifted kids. I don't know why I remember that but I do.

The commonality of their experiences indicates the importance that the gifted label had on each of the participants as a milestone in their journey as a gifted student. The significance of this experience is also referenced and documented in the literature of Cross & Bugaj and Mammadov (2016), Karadag, Karabey & Pfeiffer (2016), and McBee, Peters, Waterman (2013).

***Sub-question 2: Once you were identified what were your experiences like?***

This question covered a variety of programs within one school district, the Motown school district. As anticipated, there were varying experiences described in the stories of the participants depending on which schools and teachers they interacted with in their gifted program. However, the cross-case analysis did reveal many students had clear memories of specific common experiences within their gifted program. They shared the bond they made with fellow students, teachers and the interest they had in the unique nature of the gifted program and curriculum. Most participants described their friendships that developed from the program as a source of support for them in gifted education. Many shared the teacher's role in assisting them with understanding of advanced curriculum or, conversely, instances where they felt teachers were holding them back from progressing at the pace they needed. The role of the gifted teacher as a facilitator of their unique learning needs was prevalent in all of the cases. The participants all shared they had an advocate in their gifted instructor that ensured they were getting specialized instruction. The literature of Kitsantas, Bland Chirinos (2017), Jolly (2015), Niehaus, Irvin, Rogelberg (2016) and VanTassel-Baska (2014) highlights the importance of gifted education and specially trained instructors who value the development of specialized curriculum decisions that impact gifted learners.

***Sub-question 3: What changes would you like to see in the program for gifted students?*** The participants did share some insights into changes and the future of gifted

education through their unique experiences. They were especially open about the need to include more non-white students in the program. The participants did not have specific language to describe methods that could be utilized to increase non-white representation, but they expressed the need to do so in reflecting on the lack of non-white students in the program. The literature of Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017), Peters and Engerrand(2016), has many examples of methods that could be utilized to advance more non-white students into the program.

**The second research question is: What stories can you tell about your post-secondary experiences up to today?** As the cases were analyzed together, the stories of the participants were a vital and important voice that allowed the experiences of non-white gifted students to be heard. Non-white gifted students are underrepresented in gifted programs and the importance of their stories was made self-evident by the experiences they shared. They had a passion in their voices as they shared the promise that gifted education provided to them, the barriers they still felt they had to overcome, and their pride and success in obtaining their post-secondary goals. All of these experiences were integral to the research and together their stories provided an important voice for non-white gifted students. The literature of Bain and Bell (2002), Ladson-Billings (2009) informs about the importance of non-white gifted students' voices in informing others of their specialized needs.

***Sub-question 1: What were your post-secondary goals?***

Each participant's post-secondary goals were unique to their individual case but what bound them all together was the fact that they had defined goals and had assistance in determining and developing their goals. Many participants described the changing landscape and decisions made concerning their post-secondary goals, but they consistently shared the same aspiration to attend college and pursue their chosen major. In comparing cases they all spoke

to the importance of goal setting and the need to understand the planning process for post-secondary education in order to reach their goal. Harris, Mayes, Vega, and Hines (2016), Means, Wang, Young, and Peters (2016) all speak to the needs of gifted students and the importance of guidance in post-secondary planning.

***Sub-question 2: How did the Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) help you obtain your post-secondary goals?***

The role of the Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) as an advocate and source of support for the participants was a consistent idea that developed in every case. The participants all discussed varying degrees of assistance provided by various others, including parents and teachers, but they unanimously singled out the role of their Gifted Resource Specialist and the impact it had on their post-secondary goal planning and attainment. Many expressed that their GRS provided them with specialized knowledge and specific information that assisted them in attaining their goals. The necessity of specialized personnel to attend to the specific needs of gifted students is supported and discussed extensively in the literature of Head (2016), Peterson and Lorimer (2012), and Wright & Ford (2017).

**Conclusion**

Data were collected from six non-white gifted students using demographic questionnaires, artifacts, semi-structured interviews and personal narratives. The data were coded to reveal themes and to answer the research questions. The stories, findings and outcomes of the data were the focus of chapter four.

Chapter four opened with a review of the research questions and the design and methodology of this study. This was followed by descriptions of the setting of this study. A description of the six participants was provided. An analysis of the data was offered followed

by constructed cases of each participant. After the individual cases were developed, a cross-case analysis was utilized to address the research questions.

The participants' concept of *giftedness* was formed by their experiences they shared as non-white students in the gifted program. Their description of giftedness lead to an overview of the gifted program from their first exposure to gifted education and their exposure as non-white students in a predominantly white program, including their view of the particular programs in which they participated. This can be summarized as identification and programming that takes place with non-white students in schools.

The theme of *stereotypes* was an unexpected theme that developed in this study. Although the participants were all non-white gifted students, it was something that emerged as the stories were told of negative experiences they faced as a consequence of being gifted. The backlash and misunderstandings by others can negatively impact the educational progress of gifted students. Sharing their stories of stereotypes allowed the students to make this issue known so it can be addressed.

The theme of *support* developed as the students discussed their parents' roles in their post-secondary schooling. Across the cases, the role of parents in the students' post-secondary planning varied. What was apparent, was that many parents were providing as much support as possible. These parents valued their students reaching their post-secondary goals, many times at great personal sacrifice to themselves.

The sacrifices several parents made for their children were similar to the patterns of "institutional caring" Walker (1996, 2000, 2001) identified in her research of characteristics of segregated schools in the South that contributed to positive affective and academic outcomes for Black students. "Interpersonal caring defines a state in which the person who is caring is concerned about, and willing to attempt to meet, the physical, psychological, and

academic needs of the individual for that person is caring” (Walker and Tompkins, 2004, p. 79). In these segregated setting, parents were involved in advocacy roles for their children, engaged in the financial support of the school, and promoted cultural programs.

However, supportive parents or not, each participant expressed the need for other knowledgeable support personnel to help them in their goal setting and educational planning. Many times the parents wanted to assist but needed their students to be supported by personnel with more specialized knowledge, training and experience.

The final theme that emerged was *resources*. Participants used this as a descriptor of the many opportunities and services made available to them by virtue of being students in the gifted program. How students perceive school or classroom environments and the resources available to them may predict learning outcomes and serve to “explain their achievement” (Van Houtte, 2005, p. 76). The stories of all participants included the importance of resources to their post-secondary success. The success of any gifted program is to take note of the specialized needs of their students and the resources provided by trained personnel. The call to action by the participants to increase non-white students in gifted education so they could benefit from *resources* was viewed as important to the development of the future of gifted education.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of this study for current and future non-white secondary gifted students. I conclude with recommendations for further research

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This heuristic case study explored the stories of six non-white gifted secondary students who graduated from a Midwest school district (“Motown”). I looked to the purpose of this research study for guidance in developing the research questions which in turn guided the research. The purpose was to describe the experiences of non-white gifted students in a secondary gifted program through their stories and shared experiences, with the hope of illuminating the impact such programs have on these students’ education and secondary planning, and ultimately help discern the worthiness of such programs.

In chapter four, I reported the findings of the research questions and sub-questions. The first research question was: *What stories do non-white students tell about their experiences in a gifted program in a suburban district?* The sub-questions that addressed the first central question were: 1) *When did you first learn you were gifted? (elementary, middle or high school?)* 2) *Once you were identified what were your experiences like?* 3) *What would you recommend the district do to improve the program for gifted students?* The second research question answered was: *What stories can you tell about your post-secondary experiences through today?* The sub questions used to explore the second central question were: 1) *What were your post-secondary goals?* 2) *How did the GRS help you obtain your post-secondary goals?* 3) *What more do you wish the program would have done to help you?* Analysis of the data allowed for each case to be individually represented and the collective effect of their stories provided insight into the overall experiences of non-white secondary gifted students.

In this chapter, I discuss the current conditions of the secondary gifted program and the implications for change, especially as it pertains to non-white gifted secondary students. I conclude with recommendations for future research. In this study, each of the participants

generously and candidly shared their perceptions and experiences of their journey through their secondary gifted program. Their important and personal stories inform the discussion below.

The ultimate goal of this study was to provide decision makers with an accurate picture of the needs and benefits received by non-white gifted students as they navigate their high school years in a gifted education program. Every eligible student, regardless of race, nationality, or ethnicity, should be able to gain entrance into a gifted program and access the special services and advantages that such programs provide. Hopefully, this research will assist teachers, administrators and policy makers to view the needs of non-white gifted students with new insights and help bring about improvements in providing appropriate educational services to these students.

Improvements in the provision of gifted education services are important to me because it has been my life's work to ensure every gifted student is provided with the needed resources, support, and encouragement to allow them the opportunity to achieve their full potential. As I analyzed the stories of the participants, I understood more clearly the urgency and the importance of ensuring that these deserving students have their specific educational needs met. It also became clearer that institutional hurdles and roadblocks continue to impede or impair non-white students from getting their gifted needs met.

When I first gathered the demographic information from the Motown school district, I realized how few non-white gifted students would be in the initial participant pool, as the district had an extremely low percentage of non-white students in gifted education relative to the population of non-white students overall. Once I obtained a list of potential participants and reached out to them, I was overwhelmed with the response and the enthusiasm I received from the students I contacted. Their passion and eagerness was my first insight into the

critical need for this study. The initial contact I made was followed up by emails and requests from the potential participants asking me to please include them as they found this study important and something that they felt was sorely needed. Selecting six participants was difficult because of the large response to the initial questionnaire. The large response highlighted the importance of the voices of these gifted students as so many wanted to share their stories. These students had something to say and wanted to be heard. As I selected the actual subjects for this study I was mindful of an untapped reserve of students' stories that deserved and needed to be shared.

As I began to interview the participants and read their personal narratives I realized they were sharing very personal details of their journey as a gifted student. Over time, I built a rapport and a bond with them allowing them to candidly share their strong opinions and experiences of what it was like to be a non-white gifted student navigating a program that can be limiting and non-accepting. Many of the students asked to stay in touch and to follow up with me. They wanted to share their future plans with me and continue to share their life journey. I already have been invited to attend a play directed by one of the participants, and I have received various email updates on progress related to their current studies. The nature of qualitative research is very personal, and the students' ongoing desire to maintain contact highlights the relationships formed that are important to ensuring success in the high school gifted program. All of the participants had the benefit of gifted services through the Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) in secondary school. The GRS plays a vital role in providing social, emotional and academic support for high school gifted students. It is important for school districts to look at practices that can ensure that every student has the benefit of this specialized instruction without unfair obstacles to receiving gifted services.

My final observation was the huge untapped human potential that will be missed if we continue to underserve our non-white gifted students. The interviews and narratives of the participants touched upon so many aspects of high school gifted programming. Some of the important components that were discussed include: (1) notification of school activities that can lead to leadership opportunities; (2) financial aid advice and available scholarships, including specialized areas for students of color and first-generation college students; (3) course selections; (4) emotional support pertaining to gifted students' specialized needs; and (5) college planning and college decisions. By continuing to allow underrepresentation in these programs, we are excluding deserving students from receiving vital services that can benefit their high school education, post-secondary goals, and ultimately their course in life.

### **Implications for Gifted Programming**

“If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.” – Wayne

Dyer

After completing the data collection and analysis of this study, I reflected on the themes that developed through each participant's story and the implications that came about when analyzing them together. I took this data and compared it to several exemplary models that can be used to illuminate the needs expressed by the participants and hopefully bring about ideas for change. The areas of discussion include underrepresentation and entrance barriers, guidance and support, and change agents.

I believe that model teachers are visionaries who are constantly working for what is best for their students. Especially in gifted education, teachers play a critical role in their students' lives. Although gifted teachers do receive specialized training in order to work with students in the gifted program, they do not always have the necessary tools in place to create an ideal program for all students. Often, because of program limitations, they do not even have

the appropriate students placed in their classroom. In this study, participants described positive experiences and obstacles they faced as gifted students. I reviewed recommendations and implications for non-white secondary gifted students to inform future gifted program development.

Tamra Stambaugh is the director of Programs for Talented Youth at Vanderbilt University. She has used a research-based approach to describe an exemplary gifted program. Stambaugh portrays a program that is comprehensive and inclusive. By reviewing this program, it can help inform decision makers on the needs for their own gifted program.

Stambaugh (2011) describes the components that exemplify an outstanding identification process in a gifted program. Imagine a program that uses inclusive practices, where every non-white student knows that his/her potential can be met because the usual gatekeepers will not be in the way. Stambaugh envisions such a program in this descriptive list of identification measures that are especially sensitive to inclusivity: 1) multiple criteria for assessment, 2) two-stage process of screening, 3) use of measures relevant to the program, 4) equitable process for selection, validation and placement, 5) placement of students based on individual profile data considerations, and 6) use of varied assessments at varied times. All of the participants in my study clearly identified the process they encountered when they were identified as a gifted student

The extremely low number of non-white students in the Motown gifted program also tells a story of inadequate identification procedures. Frederico in his narrative relates his experience and concerns with the identification process:

My lack of identification as a gifted student early on could be explained by a number of things. I was immersed in an only Spanish speaking world until I was five years old. Perhaps it could have been bias on the part of my teachers, but from what I remember I was a likeable student but was not someone they recognized as gifted right off.

Utilizing these initiatives could mitigate against the underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education.

In addition to an identification program that is innovative and inclusive, Stambaugh describes the need for a gifted program that provides guidance and support to students. Stambaugh used the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education standards as her basis for instructional planning suggestions for gifted programs. Some particularly important suggestions she made for an ideal secondary gifted program include: 1) provide systematic options for services K-12, 2) articulate curriculum emphases for learners with gifts and talents within cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and social domains, and 3) integrate academic and career guidance experiences into the learning plan for learners with gifts and talents, including those from diverse backgrounds. Stambaugh outlines some critical areas that must be in place to ensure the success of gifted students in their post-secondary planning.

All the participants in this study relied on the guidance and support of their gifted resource specialist to help them navigate high school and manage their post-secondary planning. Incorporating the use of a gifted teacher K-12 could ensure gifted children continue to receive the guidance and support they need. Socrates notes in his narrative the need for gifted students to be identified early in their school career and the benefits that early identification can provide.

I would of course encourage the program to work to discover intellectually gifted students as early as possible, as the gifted program provided me with a community that was invaluable to my sense of belonging and groundedness in life at the time. But more than that, I would strongly encourage the program to also help students discover what exactly they want to use their gifts for and what sort of life's work they might like to pursue.

Stambaugh further identifies goals for districts to help their gifted programs attain exemplary status. She suggests that such programs be (1) timeless (incorporate all years of schooling), (2) visionary, (3) broad, and (4) representative of all areas of development. As the

participants in my study described their experiences in the gifted programs, it became clear that there is not a uniform set of goals for gifted education. Building by building programs can differ, and sometimes that results in inadequate programs being provided to some students.

Stambaugh's work empowers educators, administrators, and policy makers to visualize and implement exemplary gifted programs. Changes incorporating her proposals would serve to reverse decades of underrepresentation, improving the prospects and lives of many gifted nonwhite students. The students in my research voiced the positive impact that a selective gifted educational program can have on a person's life. My research implicated particular topics of concern, from my perspective, that warrant further exploration and discussion. The following matters and their import to this area of study are discussed below: underrepresentation and entrance barriers, guidance and support in high school gifted programs, and goals for program change agents in gifted education.

### **Underrepresentation and Entrance Barriers**

The first area of discussion focuses on the underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education. The participants in my study each expressed, directly or indirectly, appreciation for having been identified as gifted and allowed to participate in a gifted program, while at the same time, awareness of their unique status as a nonwhite in a program dominated by whites. Often, in fact, the participants described a system where they were the only non-white student in the program. They were aware or at least suspect of the exclusion of other unidentified, deserving nonwhite gifted students who were missing out on the many advantages and benefits my participants had received from inclusion. The low number of non-white

students in the Motown district's gifted program is evidence that there are flaws in the identification process.

In the most recent study of underrepresentation of non-white students in gifted education Hodges, Tay, Maeda and Gentry (2018) note that the gold standard of equal representation must take into account several measures and considerations.

For equitable representation to exist, definitions of giftedness and identification methods must be congruent and concerned with equity. Should the definition focus only on measurable achievements or should it also take into consideration a student's potential for growth? (p. 150)

In my study the definition of giftedness is not defined in the Motown school district's gifted protocol. So, a universal definition of giftedness for all schools in the district is a first step. Further, the testing methods clearly lead to discriminatory gatekeeping, since they rely on unreliable teacher recommendations and intelligence testing. The participants in my study explained that the only mechanisms for their identification as gifted involved either their teacher telling them they were going to be tested or a teacher took it upon himself/herself to advocate for the student. There is little regard for a more equitable nomination process.

C'asia expresses in her interview the frustration and struggle she experienced as a non-white student in getting into the gifted program:

I knew I was way ahead of everyone else but no teacher would ever tell me or test me for gifted. It was only after my grandma intervened that I got tested.

The use of portfolio reviews of student work, more equitable screening tools and other measures that recognize the potential of a student have been proven to assist in closing the equity gap in gifted education. Such measures should be a consideration for schools looking to bridge the equity gap in gifted education. The state of Georgia, for example, has implemented these suggestions to help close the gap in identification of gifted students and address disproportionality in representation of nonwhites. Georgia implemented a multiple

method identification system to ensure all students have the opportunity to be identified as eligible for the gifted program. Krisel and Cowan explain:

First, the rule represents a true multiple-criteria identification system because no student can qualify on the basis of a single assessment. Second, the system has been widely implemented. Third, the requirements are linked to specific performance cutoffs. Fourth, the system provides multiple pathways to identification. The “multiple-criteria” qualification process was designed to “cast a wide net”— to search for students with diverse combinations of abilities. (1997, p. A2).

And Georgia’s implementation was effective. “Figures indicate that more students from underrepresented populations [were] are being identified” (Krisel & Cowan, 1997, A1).

Using this model can bring about the change that my participants spoke of when they aspired for a gifted program that was more inclusive and representative of the district population.

District policy makers must embrace these practices to better serve all their students.

### **Guidance and Support in High School Gifted Programs**

The second area of discussion relates to guidance and support of gifted students. The benefits provided by a Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) in the secondary school gifted program for the students are a vital component of success for non-white gifted secondary students. Restricting access to these support systems is inequitable and has adverse consequences for nonwhite gifted students. The GRS was one of the concepts that was widely discussed in the data collected. The participants shared many examples of their positive experiences with the GRS and the impact they had on their gifted high school experience. These relationships were described as vital to their measure of success. The GRS also provided an emotional bond that the participants discussed as a needed component of support for them as they navigated high school. The GRS provided guidance in selection of courses and activities and specific college admission guidance that proved invaluable to the students. Frederico shared his thoughts about the GRS in his interview,

Perhaps it was the amount of time I got to spend with her that really allowed her to dig into my brain and recognize how to push and challenge me to achieve my potential as an individual. If not for my GRS I would not have achieved what I wanted to do.

Unfortunately, as the numbers show, districts that limit non-white student access to gifted programs are denying them the services that the participants describe as vital to their success.

Recognizing the specialized needs of non-white high school gifted students is important to ensure they can reach their goals. Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik and Worrell (2014) outline the importance of developing the talents of gifted students and the role that specialized personnel can play. Specifically, they note various supportive measures that are important to provide to gifted students:

This work could include advocating for special provisions, both inside and outside of school, that develop talent and psychosocial skills or mitigate psychological risks for vulnerable students; providing one-on-one counseling to address issues of underachievement, anxiety, or perfectionism; and developing special programming to help gifted children acquire the psychosocial skills that support their talents and talent development. (p. 150)

These demonstratively vital services are key to enabling gifted students realize their full potential. And specialized gifted teachers in particular are pivotal to the progress of gifted students, given their unique and varied needs.

### **Goals for Program Change Agents**

The importance of inclusion of all potential students in gifted education is critical to ensuring that non-white gifted students receive the services they need to achieve their goals. The goals for gifted programs are even loftier than the immediate needs of gifted students. Recognizing that gifted education provides long term benefits that can positively affect the students for the rest of their lives is vital to a comprehensive gifted program. Renzulli (2016) describes this higher purpose: “our gifted programs should produce the next generation of leaders, problem solvers, and persons who will make important contributions to all areas of

human productivity” (p. 140). Gifted programming does not just impact students while in school, it is an important component of their growth and development throughout their life.

As with all specialized programs, gifted education is constantly challenged with funding issues. Without a state mandate, the allotted amount of how much will be spent on gifted education constantly changes. However, if districts adopt the goals for establishing an exemplary gifted education as a priority, non-white gifted students in the future can be assured they will have the services they need. The personnel are in place to establish a comprehensive K-12 gifted program that will incorporate all gifted learners; it is up to the stakeholders to act as change agents and put gifted education development as a top priority to accomplish this end.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study assessed the experiences of non-white secondary gifted students in the Motown school district. The current state of the union for gifted programming for non-white students is in disarray. There are effective components I have highlighted. This study is a call to action to unify these ideas to form a program that is cohesive and comprehensive for non-white gifted students.

This study consisted of only six non-white gifted students. But their stories are compelling, with universal import, illuminating the need for specific gifted programs for non-white gifted students navigating high school. There are several areas that lend themselves to future research. These include, innovative identification procedures, comprehensive gifted programs K-12, and culturally responsive teaching staff development.

An important next step in gifted research is identifying innovative identification procedures that are more inclusive and equitable. In this study, many of the participants discussed their experiences with identification procedures. The identification process was not

at all standardized and many participants felt they were inequitable. Encouraging district leaders to adopt improved identification procedures aligned with research in this area will ensure that the current gatekeeping system of only allowing primarily white students to be selected for gifted programs would end. In order for a program to ensure every student has the potential to enter the gifted program, measures must be put in place to identify all gifted students, regardless of their race, nationality or ethnicity. District leaders must be transformational leaders and recognize the value of serving the needs of every student, with equitable identification measures for gifted students being one of them. This includes ensuring the tools needed for identification are accessible, staff and personnel are properly trained on inclusionary methods of gifted identification, and funding is available to implement these changes for the benefit of every student. Such leadership will ensure a gifted program that is exemplary in its identification process.

The second area of future research should include addressing giftedness from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Although this study focused on non-white secondary gifted students, not all schools even have programs for gifted high school students. Hopefully, this research highlighted the experiences of high school gifted students and the special needs they must have addressed as they navigate high school. But future research should include assessment of gifted programs as comprehensive programs that meet the needs of gifted learners in *all* grades. Students do not suddenly become gifted in high school. Their needs begin when their formal education begins and continues until they graduate. Future research should include expanding state regulations to ensure that K-12 gifted education is the targeted suggestions for every district, not just selected grades. If state funding reimbursement requires gifted programming for all grades, 9-12 grade curriculum will *per force* be included in gifted programs.

The final area identified for future research is culturally responsive training for teachers. Throughout this study the participants noted a plethora of examples of stereotypes and discrimination. They often describe the insensitivity of personnel they encountered and the difficulties it caused. Many times they felt it negatively impacted their learning.

Encouraging leaders to utilize staff development training in culturally responsive teaching would help ensure that all staff are respectful of all students. This is particularly important for non-white gifted students as they already face obstacles attendant to their underrepresentation in gifted programs. C'asia shared her heartfelt insights into her experience in this regard and the important need for meaningful change:

So it took me a long time to come to the realization that I am beautiful, that I am black, and that I don't need to become a stereotype in order to be those things. I wish those around me believed these things though. In order to have true success in helping black people succeed in the gifted program, we need to change the attitude towards what it means to be black, first in the minds of those around us, and then move this positivity to our surrounding communities, and lastly, to the nation that suppressed black education for centuries.

Minimizing cultural bias by means of appropriate sensitivity training for teachers is an important step to mitigating the challenges that nonwhite students already face in the gifted programs.

### **Final Reflections**

In closing, I would like to express my admiration for and appreciation to the students that were generous enough to share their time and, more importantly, brave enough to share their stories for this study. Kim, Socrates, Jeff, C'asia, Alexa and Frederico all brought their unique backgrounds, experiences, and insights to bear for this study. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to capture their experiences and that they were trusting of me to share them. It is sometimes difficult to discuss problems and issues, especially inequities, but each student bravely bared their souls for this research. As I listened to their stories, reviewed their

histories, and analyzed their collective voices, I felt the urgency of the need to share my findings so that others may appreciate the significant difference a gifted program made in the lives of these deserving, underrepresented students. Their descriptions of the many opportunities afforded them, their journey in the college planning process, and their success in their post-secondary lives were important in putting a human face on the issue of underrepresentation. And my fervent hope is that in sharing their important stories, educators, administrators, and policy makers will see the beneficent power of gifted programs and be moved and motivated to solve the problem of underrepresentation of non-white gifted students.

As a white middle-class female, I entered this study recognizing there were definite problems with the Motown district's lack of non-white gifted students from my unique position as a long-time educator of gifted children. My position further allowed me to recognize the complex issues facing non-white students trying to navigate the world of gifted education and with this study I hope to add impetus to the call for change. As a teacher of gifted students, I witness firsthand the peaks and valleys that non-white gifted students go through. I know the importance of advocacy for this group of underserved students. I recognize the value and need for someone who will listen to their goals and aspirations, and more importantly, guide these students and help make their dreams a reality. Their voices individually and collectively add to the research and help make necessary reforms to address the needs of non-white gifted students. The time is right for change. Alexa, one of the participants of this study, said it best. "If gifted kids are ready for acceleration, why put on the brakes?" Ensuring that inclusive, equitable gifted programs are in place will empower these students to accelerate at full throttle.

APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of graduations: \_\_\_\_\_

High School you graduated from: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

*Lori Dameron, Ed.S.*

#### **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

1. Think about yourself while in high school, how would you describe yourself?
2. How do you define giftedness?
3. When did you learn you were “gifted”?
4. When did you first think you were gifted even though not yet identified?
5. Were there any experiences that stand out to you that make you sure you were gifted?
6. How do you feel about being identified as “gifted”?
7. In what school level (elem., middle, high) and what grade level (K-12) were you admitted to the gifted program?
8. What level did you get the most support for being gifted?
9. Do you recall any specific experiences in your gifted education specifically that you found helpful as a gifted student?
10. Do you recall your gifted resource specialist?
11. Did you utilize any assistance provided by the GRS? If so, what specifically?
12. Did you attend college?
13. Do you recall if you attended your first choice of college?
14. Do you recall the college application process?
15. Was the GRS involved in your college admissions work?
16. Did you take the ACT or SAT?
17. Did you have any assistance in preparation for the ACT/SAT?

18. Did the GRS assist you in the preparation for the ACT/SAT?
19. Did you take any honors, Advanced Placement or dual credit classes?
20. Do you recall any conversations you had with your GRS regarding rigorous coursework and if that had any impact on your course decision?
21. Did your parents attend college?
22. Did your parents want you to attend college?
23. Do you recall any specific assistance your parents provided as you planned your college admissions work?
24. Tell me about your high school experience.
25. Can you recall a teacher that stood out to you? Describe that teacher to me.
26. Can you recall a teacher that you did not enjoy? Describe that experience to me?
27. Do you recall your building principal playing a role in your education? If so, can you share any experiences you recall that involved the principal interacting with you about your post-secondary plans?
28. What were some of the extra-curricular activities you participated in?
29. Did you feel like the activities made high school a better experience?
30. Have you ever had anyone treat you differently for being gifted?
31. Has being gifted ever caused a teacher to treat you differently?

APPENDIX C  
FERPA RELEASE

FILE: JO-AF1  
Critical

**STUDENT RECORDS**  
*(FERPA Release)*

Pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the district is not able to disclose personally identifiable information from student records unless a specific consent exemption applies or unless written consent is obtained from the parent or eligible student. Because this request is not covered by a specific consent exemption, the following form must be completed and submitted by the parent or eligible student before the district will disclose student records. An "eligible student" means a student who has reached 18 years of age or who is attending an institution of postsecondary education.

Records will be provided in the format and by the method requested if available. The requestor will be contacted if the requested format is unavailable. The district will charge reasonable fees for record duplication and mailing costs and may require these costs to be paid prior to providing the records, in accordance with law.

Name of Student Whose Records Are Requested: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Disclosure:  Inspection  Copy

I consent to the disclosure of the following records: *[List the specific records to be disclosed and include dates if the disclosure is to be limited to records covering a specific date or date range.]*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that these records will be used by: *[List those persons or entities to which the records are to be disclosed and provide information regarding where copies, if applicable, are to be mailed, e-mailed or faxed.]* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The above-named persons or entities DO NOT have permission to further disclose the records.

or

FILE: JO-AF1  
Critical

- The following persons or entities may further disclose the records: *[List the persons or entities that may further disclose the records and persons or entities to which the records may be further disclosed.]*

Entities that may further disclose records: \_\_\_\_\_ Entities to which records may be further disclosed: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I am consenting to disclosure of the records for the following purpose(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- A copy of the disclosed records should be sent to the parent or eligible student. Please provide information regarding where and to whom copies are to be mailed, faxed or e-mailed:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This consent is valid *[check one]*:

- For the 20\_\_\_\_ - 20\_\_\_\_ school year.
- Until revoked by the parent or eligible student.
- Between \_\_\_\_\_ *[month/day/year]* and \_\_\_\_\_ *[month/day/year]*.
- For the following period of time *[specify]*: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Eligible Student

Date

This consent is provided for in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, 34 C.F.R. § 99.30.

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

IRB # 18-091

#### **Consent for Participation in a Research Study**

##### UNDERREPRESENTATION OF NON-WHITE STUDENTS IN A SECONDARY GIFTED PROGRAM: THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

Student Investigator:  
Lori Dameron, Ed.S.

#### Request to Participate

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is being conducted at **the** University of Missouri-Kansas City.

The researcher in charge of this study is Lori Dameron.  
My faculty advisor is Loyce Caruthers, Associate professor of Education.

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you have been a non-white secondary gifted student. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The researcher will go over this consent form with you. Ask me to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

#### Background

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research study "*Underrepresentation of Non-white Students in a Secondary Gifted Program: The Students' Experience*" which will explore your knowledge and experiences as a student in gifted education. I am excited to have you share your story and I value greatly the unique contribution you can make to this study.

#### Purpose

In the study, I will be asking you to share descriptions and understandings of your experiences as a non-white gifted student in a public-school setting. Specifically, I will be trying to gain information to help me answer my research questions: 1) What stories do non-white students tell about their experiences in a gifted suburban district? 2) What stories can you tell about your post-secondary experiences up to today?

I hope the information you share with me will help me to do three things:

- 1) Help school leaders and school decision makers gain insight into what it is like to be a gifted student to further help them make decisions for gifted programs including training and funding.
- 2) Help teachers and others to have more knowledge about what it is like to be a non-white gifted student and help develop ideas and solutions to ensure that non-

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white students are represented in gifted programs through recruitment and retention.

- 3) Help teachers and others gain information that can assist them in planning for the specialized needs of non-white gifted students in their post-secondary planning.

Your participation in this study is important as it is your experiences that will help provide insights to inform this study. You will be asked to share specific events, information and stories you may have experienced as a non-white gifted student. I am asking for you to share your complete and comprehensive stories including your thoughts, your feelings and any places, events, situations, and people connected to your experiences. You will also be asked to share a personal biography that you will write recalling your experiences. If you have any, you will be asked to share any records you kept including honors, tests scores, etc.

### Procedures

There will be six participants chosen to participate in this case study research component. If chosen to participate in the study you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (a name that someone uses instead of his or her real name) for the research study to ensure your responses are kept confidential.

You will be asked to:

- 1) If you are selected to go forward with the study, you will be asked to collect any documents you may have from your participation in the gifted program. (30 minutes).
- 2) You will be asked to sign a FERPA release for the school you attended allowing the researcher to access your school records if they are still available.
- 3) You will be asked to construct a brief autobiography about your experiences in the gifted program. (45 minutes to 1 hour)
- 4) You will participate in an interview session that will last from 45 minutes to 1 hour. This will take place at a public place or over the telephone. You will be audio-recorded during the interview sessions so that I can accurately capture your experiences as you provide them to me.
- 5) You will be asked to review your information with me to ensure that it is represented in the study the way you described it. (30 minutes).

The audio recording of your interview will be kept on a secure, password protected hard drive. Your pseudonym you selected will be used to ensure confidentiality in your responses. The audio-recordings will be deleted once transcribed.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UMKC IRB</b> <b>Approved</b> from: 06/08/2018 to:06/07/2019 IRB #:18-091 Version: 06/05/2018</p>
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### Risks and Inconveniences

This research is considered to be minimal risk. As a subject in this study, you may feel uncomfortable in sharing your story about your involvement in the gifted education program. Your information will be transcribed and the transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement. Every precaution will be taken to ensure your privacy is protected throughout this study however there is a minimal risk of breach of confidentiality.

### Benefits

This study may provide an indirect benefit through the stories you share. The reflection they provide may lead to a better understanding of oneself. Also, the study may benefit others through the information provided that may illuminate the needs of non-white gifted students. This research may also inform others about changes that can be considered in gifted programs.

### Fees and Expenses

There are no monetary costs involved in participation of this study.

### Compensation

There is no payment for taking part in this study.

Alternatives to Study Participation

The alternative is not to take part in this study.

Confidentiality

While we will do our best to keep the information you share with us confidential, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe research and protecting human subjects. The information you shared will be kept in a locked cabinet and the audio-recordings will be erased immediately after they are transcribed, All data will be kept on a secure hard drive that only I have access to. They will be destroyed after seven years once the study is published. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the results.

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<p><b>UMKC IRB Approved</b> from: 06/08/2018 to:06/07/2019 IRB #:18-091 Version: 06/05/2018</p>
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Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the Office of UMKC’s Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher Lori Dameron at 816-213-5674 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call me if any problems come up.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. The researchers may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time if they decide that it is in your best interest to do so. You will be told of any important findings developed during the course of this research.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Lori Dameron at 816-213-5674. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. I will give you a copy of this consent form.

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**Signature (Volunteer Subject) Date**

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**Printed Name (Volunteer Subject)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent**

APPENDIX E  
SS-IRB APPROVAL



**UMKC**  
5319 Rockhill Road  
Kansas City, MO 64110  
TEL: (816) 235-5927  
FAX: (816) 235-5602

**NOTICE OF NEW APPROVAL**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Loyce Caruthers  
615 E. 52nd St.  
Kansas City, MO 64110

Protocol Number: 18-091

Protocol Title: Underrepresentation of Non-White Students in A Secondary Gifted Program: The Students' Experience

Type of Review: Designated Review

Expedited Category #: 5, 6, 7

**Date of Approval: 06/08/2018**

**Date of Expiration: 06/07/2019**

Dear Dr. Caruthers,

The above referenced study, and your participation as a principal investigator, was reviewed and approved, under the applicable IRB regulations at 21 CFR 50 and 56 (FDA) or 45 CFR 46 (OHRP), by the UMKC IRB. You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application.

- Your protocol was approved under Expedited Review Regulatory Criteria at 45 CFR 46.110 or 21 CFT 56.110 under Category #5 as follows: Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

- Your protocol was approved under Expedited Review Regulatory Criteria at 45 CFR 46.110 or 21 CFT 56.110 under Category #6 as follows: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

- Your protocol was approved under Expedited Review Regulatory Criteria at 45 CFR 46.110 or 21 CFT 56.110 under Category #7 as follows: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

- Your protocol was approved for a waiver of documentation of consent under regulatory criteria at 45 CFR 46.117(c) having met either of the following criteria:

1. That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or
2. That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

In cases in which the documentation requirement is waived, you may be required to provide subjects with a written statement regarding the research.

This approval includes the following documents:



## **Attachments**

Consent for phone or skype participants Dameron Semi-Structured Interview Guide Schools FERPA release

transcript permission Dameron District Approval Contact Information Sheet

Eligibility Confirmation Questions Information Sheet

Invitation Script for email revised version 6.7.18 Invitation Script for phone contact revised 6.7.18

18-091 Consent Final Approved Version Date 06.05.18

If a consent is being used in this research study you may find the stamped version in section 16 of your application.

The ability to conduct this study will expire on or before 06/07/2019 unless a request for continuing review is received and approved. If you intend to continue conduct of this study, it is your responsibility to provide a Continuing Review form prior to the expiration of approval or a final report if you plan to close the study.

This approval is issued under the University of Missouri - Kansas City's Federal Wide Assurance FWA00005427 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the Board's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

There are 5 stipulations of approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date. (PIs and sponsors are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings).
2. All unanticipated or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB.
3. All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk. This includes any change of investigator.
4. All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB.
5. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.

Please contact the Research Compliance Office (email: [umkcirb@umkc.edu](mailto:umkcirb@umkc.edu); phone: (816)235-5927) if you have questions or require further information. Thank you,

Cynthia Thompson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

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## VITA

Lori Dameron was born on May 6, 1960, in Kansas City, Missouri. She was educated in public schools in the area and has resided in Kansas City, Missouri her entire life. She graduated from Oak Park High School as an early grad. She attended the University of Missouri-Kansas City where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education. She began teaching in the Shawnee Mission School District and began working with gifted students in the summer program. She earned a Master of Science degree from the University of Kansas in Educational Psychology with a focus on gifted education. Her next teaching assignment was in gifted education at the secondary level in a high school in the Kansas City area. She earned an Education Specialist degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She continues to work with students in secondary gifted education.