

A Gift and a Curse: A Narrative Inquiry of Black Women Who Participated in Gifted Programs in
Southeast Georgia

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Curriculum & Instruction

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology
of the College of Education and Human Sciences

December 2025

TALMESHIA R. PARKER

M.A.T., Georgia Southern University, 2016
B.A., Valdosta State University, 2009

© Copyright 2025 Talmeshia R. Parker

All Rights Reserved

This dissertation, “A Gift and a Curse: A Narrative Inquiry on the Experiences of Black Females in Gifted Education Programs in Southeast Georgia,” by Talmeshia Parker, is approved by:

**Dissertation
Committee
Chair**

DocuSigned by:

Nicole Gunn

D4C8A6A504EA473...
Nicole Gunn, EdD

Assistant Professor, Adult and Career Education
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce
Development

**Dissertation
Research Member**

Signed by:

Shannon Perry

16B23130C4D1A18...
Shannon Perry, PhD

Assistant Professor, Adult and Career Education
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce
Development

**Committee
Members**

DocuSigned by:

Pamela Dobbins

F8EE047A8F342C...
Pamela Dobbins, EdD

Instructor, Adult and Career
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce
Development

**Committee
Members**

DocuSigned by:

April L. Strevig

88A3843A5D3746D...
April Strevig, EdD

Assistant Professor, Leadership
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce
Development

**Committee
Members**

DocuSigned by:

Regina Suriel

88FF46D891AA45B...
Regina Suriel, PhD

Professor, Science Education
Department of Teacher Education

**Associate
Provost for
Graduate
Studies and
Research**

Becky K. da Cruz

88FF46D891AA45B...
Becky A.K. da Cruz, Ph.D., J.D.
Professor of Criminal Justice

Defense Date

October 21, 2025

FAIR USE

This dissertation is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (public Law 94-533, revised in 1976). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of the material for financial gain without the author's expressed written permission is not allowed.

DUPLICATION

I authorize the Head of Interlibrary Loan or the Head of Archives at the Odum Library at Valdosta State University to arrange for duplication of this dissertation for educational or scholarly purposes when so requested by a library user. The duplication shall be at the user's expense.

Signature Talmeshia Parker

I refuse permission for this dissertation to be duplicated in whole or in part.

Signature _____

ABSTRACT

A pivotal voice is being overlooked in the academic discourse of disproportionate minority representation in gifted and advanced programs—the Black girl. This study explored the experiences of Black women who navigated giftedness in Southeast Georgia. Using Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought as a guiding framework, I conducted narrative inquiry study to capture the layered experiences of seven Black women who were identified as gifted or high-achieving in elementary school and had matriculated through the gifted or advanced programs of Young County, a small suburban county in Southeast Georgia. Through this study, I examined how the participants made meaning of their lived experiences as students in academically challenging environments and how these experiences influenced their sense of identity and how they continued to navigate society as young Black women. While honoring the voices of the participants, the intended goal of this study was to provide an inclusive understanding of the Black student experience in gifted education while strengthening support and equity in order to increase the access and retention of Black students in rigorous academic spaces. Semi-structured interviews were conducted along with a small focus group of two participants. In vivo and pattern coding were used to develop themes and patterns. Arts-based research guided the use of poetic analysis from the data. Participant narratives and found poems were constructed to highlight their experiences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION	1
Overview.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose Statement.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Significance.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	10
<i>Experiential Knowledge</i>	10
<i>Existing Theory</i>	13
Critical Race Theory	13
Intersectionality.....	15
Black Feminist Thought.....	15
Methodology.....	16
Limitations	21
Definitions of Terms	21
Chapter Summary	23
Chapter II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	25
Inequality of Educational Access.....	27
<i>History of Education for Black Americans</i>	29
<i>Black Women’s Access to Education</i>	32
<i>The Emergence of Critical Race Theory and Its Tenets</i>	34
Counternarratives.....	36
Intersectionality.....	37
<i>Racism in Education.</i>	38

Socioeconomic Factors	40
Gifted Education	42
<i>Historical Conception of Giftedness</i>	42
<i>Gifted Education in Georgia</i>	45
<i>Discriminatory Practices in Gifted Education</i>	46
Discriminatory Testing Practices	47
Teacher Perceptions	48
<i>Black Students' Experiences in Gifted Education</i>	49
A Call for Black Feminist Thought.....	52
The Power of Counter-storytelling.	54
The Art of Experience.....	54
Gifted Education Reform.....	56
Chapter Summary.....	58
Chapter III: METHODOLOGY.....	60
Philosophical View.....	61
Research Design.....	62
<i>Setting and Participants</i>	65
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i>	70
<i>Data Analysis</i>	71
<i>Data Presentation</i>	73
Validity.....	75
Chapter Summary	78
Chapter IV: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS	79
A Poetic Expression.....	82
Narrative Portraits.....	83
<i>Emoni: "The Gift of Solitude"</i>	84

Researcher’s Reflection	87
<i>Lauren: “The Gift of Perseverance”</i>	87
Researcher’s Reflection	91
<i>Lynn: “The Gift of Discernment”</i>	92
Researcher’s Reflection	95
<i>Sasha: “The Gift of Advocacy”</i>	96
Researcher’s Reflection	98
<i>Courtney: “The Gift of Resolve”</i>	99
Researcher’s Reflection	101
<i>Diana: “The Gift of Composure”</i>	102
Researcher’s Reflection	105
<i>Taylor: “The Gift of Ambition”</i>	106
Researcher’s Reflection	107
Focus Group Synthesis.	108
<i>A Meaningful Conversation with Emoni and Diana.</i>	109
<i>Taylor’s Reflection.</i>	113
<i>Researcher’s Reflection.</i>	114
Themes	115
<i>Family as the First Gifted Classroom.</i>	117
<i>Self-perceptions of the Complexity of Being a Gifted Black Girl.</i>	119
<i>Academic Duality of Giftedness.</i>	121
<i>Belonging in the Classroom.</i>	124
<i>Visions for Change and Representation.</i>	126
Chapter Summary.....	129
Chapter V: INTERPRETATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION	131
Interpretations of Findings	133

<i>Family as the First Gifted Classroom</i>	134
<i>Self-perceptions of the Complexity of Being a Gifted Black Girl</i>	136
<i>Academic Duality of Giftedness</i>	139
<i>Belonging in the Classroom</i>	142
<i>Visions for Change and Representation</i>	144
Limitations	147
Implications & Recommendations	149
<i>Implications for Practice</i>	151
For Teachers	151
For Schools	152
For Families	153
<i>Implications for Policy</i>	154
Recommendations	156
Conclusion	157
References	159
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter for Colleagues	178
Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letter	180
Appendix C: Participant Interview Guide	182
Appendix D: Focus Group Interview Guide	185
Appendix E: IRB Protocol Exemption Report	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Overview of Participants.....	69
Table 2: Transformation of Participants' Quotes to Poetic Expression.....	74
Table 3: Theme Development Chart.....	116

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I come as one, but I stand as 10,000.- Maya Angelou

This achievement would not have been possible without the keeping grace of God. His will placed me in a community of love, support, and encouragement. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to those who have supported me during this journey. Dr. Nicole Gunn, my mentor and chair, there are no words to truly express how appreciative I am for your support and guidance through this process. You were purposeful in your intent to understand and guide me in the vision of this study; our many conversations made me feel valued and encouraged. I am so grateful. Dr. Shannon Perry, my researcher, you are such a gem. Your warm yet eager spirit kept me uplifted and energized during the arduous process of research. I was gifted with your expertise, and you graciously offered a new lens that shaped my research and my growth as a scholar. Thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge and encouraging me to extend my thinking. Dr. Dobbins, Dr. Strevig, and Dr. Suriel, your feedback and dedication to scholarship as my readers helped strengthen my work and encouraged me to think more critically. Most importantly, I am forever indebted to the seven young women who were the cornerstone of this research: *Emoni, Lauren, Lynn, Sasha, Courtney, Diana, and Taylor*. Your intelligence, wisdom, and insight were gifts that enriched every aspect of this work. It is my hope that your gifts will make room for you and will be met with recognition and opportunity in spaces that will value all that you are.

This process was a true test of discipline, resolve, and determination. I am thankful for the deposits of my family that carried me during this laborious yet rewarding journey. My parents, you have always supported my dreams and cheered me on throughout every success and failure. You embody selfless love, and I carry your sacrifices as motivation to strive for excellence. Babe and Lou, you define giftedness. Your spirit, wit, and knowledge were poured into me at birth as the mothers of my parents. Learning from your teachings has allowed me to be in spaces that you were not afforded. As your granddaughter, I am blessed to be your legacy, and I will continue to honor you. To my cousin, Angelina, even while fighting your own battles, you still found ways to keep me encouraged and centered in God's word. Your daily devotions are proof that you are not just a testimony but a vessel using your gifts to uplift and carry out His work. To my siblings, nieces, and nephews, my love for you has always redefined my passion to be an example. I cherish my title as "Big Sister" and "Aunt MeMe" and will always aim to support and show you that through God all things are attainable if you remain steadfast. To all my family and friends, your continued guidance, support, and encouragement pushed me to the finish line. This achievement is for all of us: a testament of Jeremiah 29:11. God's plan was already written.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my two angels in heaven who continue to whisper affirmations of love, strength, and support: my grandfather, Talmadge Parker, and my mentor, Dr. Evelyn Gamble-Hilton. Daddy and “Doc,” I lost you both as I navigated this rigorous journey, but your nuggets of wisdom have kept me grounded in order to break this ceiling. It is my prayer that this work will serve as tangible restitution for the infinite ways you still continue to fill my cup.

Chapter I

Introduction

I entered the profession of education as an English educator in South Korean public schools. I was amazed by the amount of dedication and determination those students displayed when it came to their studies. In the eyes of many South Korean students, their entire future rested in the fate of how well they did in school, and academic excellence not only brought honor to their families but also ensured a successful future. When I returned to the United States (U.S.) to teach, I noticed major differences in the U.S. public school system. While the South Korean classrooms I worked in had homogenous groups based on their ability tracking system, the U.S. public school system appeared to have more diverse classrooms with various ability groups.

Unfortunately, I recognized this feature did not hold true in special education and gifted classrooms. Special education classrooms were largely populated by Black children; gifted classrooms were mainly represented with White students. Even in the predominately Black middle school where I first began teaching in Georgia, Black students were still underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. As a teacher of advanced content and a previously labeled “gifted” student, I became invested in the issue of the disproportionality of students of color in gifted and honors programs. As Black girl student who had been identified as gifted, I remember experiences in that program and the mixed feelings it created— pride and insecurity.

While reflecting on my own experiences and studying about this issue, I recognized that the same disparities in my own classroom also existed in the literature regarding representation and experiences of Black girls in gifted education. This injustice served as the stimulus for my dissertation study.

Because the Black girl perspective is limited in the conversation on the experiences in gifted programming, I conducted a narrative inquiry study to explore the lived experiences of Black women who participated the gifted program. With this study, I used interviews and the focus group approach to describe the perspectives of how seven Black women from Southeast Georgia interpreted their experiences as students in the gifted program. Because experiences influence how people understand themselves, the findings of the study revealed how the participants' experiences influenced how they saw themselves as Black students who were recognized as gifted learners. Through the theoretical viewpoints of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT), I hoped to give Black women a voice in educational discourse by sharing their experiences in the gifted program and how they made meaning of these experiences while highlighting the intersections of their identity: Black, gifted, and girl.

Overview

Despite the nation's mandated legislation to ensure equal opportunities for all children, students from culturally diverse backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in gifted programming (Allen, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Harmon, 2002; Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018; Sewell & Goings, 2019; Wright et al., 2017). The disproportionality of Black students in gifted education is a national issue of injustice in most current school districts (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Evans-Winters, 2014). Anderson and Martin (2018) reported that Black students

have been underrepresented in gifted programs by almost 50% in most years (p. 22). While Black boys are the most disproportionately represented in gifted education, Black girls are also largely underrepresented (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Evans-Winters, 2014). Evans-Winters (2014) pointed out that the Civil Rights Collection Data reported that approximately 5.2% of Blacks girls were identified as gifted and talented in comparison to the 35% of White girls (p. 22).

Statement of the Problem

U.S. schools have displayed significant race disparities in gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). The underrepresentation of Black girl students in gifted classrooms is a result of various components. Contributing factors to the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs have largely been credited to biased screening and referral measures during the identification process (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009; Wright et al., 2017). Additionally, Black parents are not thoroughly educated about gifted/talented programs to properly advocate for their children's access to these programs (Anderson, 2020; Ford et al., 2021; Grantham, 2003).

When students of color actually gain access into gifted education, understanding their experiences in these classrooms is vital for recruitment and retention purposes (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008; Sewell & Goings, 2019). Due to being underrepresented in gifted classrooms, students of color have experienced significantly different challenges from their White peers (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002). One challenge reported is the lack of cultural relevance in the academic content presented in gifted classrooms (Anderson, 2020; Ford et al., 2021). While Black students appreciate the academic rigor afforded in these gifted classrooms,

the curriculum lacks cultural relevance that helps the students strengthen their identity in the classroom (Sewell & Goings, 2019). Since teachers tend to hold deficit thinking about students of color in the gifted identification process, they consequently have those same ideals when students of color are in the gifted classrooms (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002). These views add another challenge gifted students of color are recognized as gifted (Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008). They largely believe that their White teachers hold low academic expectations due to their lack of understanding and appreciation for their culture (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008). Harmon (2002) reported that students of color noticed their teachers' preferential treatment of White students along with intentional placement in low ability groups. Results from Harmon (2002) and Anderson (2020) reported that students of color who were recognized as gifted experiencing feelings of scrutiny and prejudice when their talents were questioned by many of their teachers and peers.

Girls who are labeled gifted face additional challenges due to the stereotypical and traditional views of girl roles in society (Anderson, 2020; Anderson & Martin, 2018). Anderson and Martin (2018) argued that literature and empirical studies on gifted girls have largely been told through the "White, middle-class girls perspective" (p. 117) Additionally, most of the literature and current research related to the disparities in gifted education fall short of addressing the narrative of Black women as students (Anderson, 2020; Anderson & Martin, 2018). Despite Black women's dramatic increase in educational achievement, their experiences are still overshadowed by the experiences of Black men who participated in gifted programs (Anderson, 2020). Anderson (2020) and Ford and Grantham (2003) posited that Black women have to often

fight to be seen as talented and intelligent. Anderson (2020) noted that Black women face double oppression due to both their race and gender.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a more inclusive understanding of the experiences of Black students in gifted programs by describing the experiences of Black women who participated as students in gifted programs of Southeast Georgia and how the experiences in those classrooms influenced how they viewed themselves. The underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs is an ongoing issue damaging the equity of the United States' education system (Ford et al., 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). The intent of this study is to fill in a gap in the literature related to the experiences of these students. Much of the related literature is saturated with the perspective of Black boys' experiences. The stories of the Black girl experience are limited. By highlighting Black women's lived experiences, this research reveals how race and gender shape their experiences in advanced academic settings. Through their narratives, this study aims to disrupt inequitable educational practices and policies and promote transformative changes in education.

Maxwell (2013) asserted that "a clear understanding of goals motivating your work will help you avoid losing your way" (p. 23). In considering this affirmation, I outlined three specific goals driving my passion and work for this study. Maxwell (2013) described the utility in distinguishing among the three different kinds of goals for doing a study: personal, practical, and intellectual. When considering my personal goal for this study, my aspiration is rooted in much more than advancing my career; I want to advance my knowledge and practice as an educator devoted to creating equitable experiences for all of my students. As a Black woman, I have

experienced the pressures of being both Black and a woman in my home, my community, my school, and my job. These demands have affected how I navigate in certain environments and have created a range of conflicting emotions about how I see myself. By understanding the experiences of these participants, I want to make sure that I am serving as an ally in my classroom where my students feel appreciated and valued. My personal and practical goals are similar.

Maxwell (2013) asserted that practical goals are administrative or policy goals aimed at accomplishing something (p. 28). One intention of this study is to extend the scholarship related to the experiences of Black women who were labeled as gifted students. Research has heavily emphasized the Black boy perspective, while the Black girl perspective is scarce. It is my hope that educators and policymakers will use this research to not only better understand the effects of underrepresentation on Black students but also advance culturally responsive reform that will offer an inclusive environment of support for Black girls to celebrate themselves in these programs. Intellectually, my goal for this study is to provide a more comprehensive awareness for myself and others about the experiences of Black students in gifted programs by describing Black girls' experiences in these programs and how these experiences affect how they see themselves. The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted/talented programs is an ongoing issue damaging the equity of the United States' education system (Ford et al., 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017).

Research Questions

In considering the research questions for my study, I began to examine my research goals. Maxwell (2013) noted that research questions are intended to seek the answers of what you want

to understand. Through this study, I wanted to understand how the lack of representation in gifted classrooms affected how gifted Black girls navigated through the program and how they saw themselves based on the experiences in the classroom. When referring to the experiences in the classroom, I believe that the curriculum, teacher relationships, and peer interactions play a vital role in classroom experiences. Because Maxwell (2013) emphasized that qualitative researchers often do not construct final research questions until a considerable amount of data collection and analysis have been conducted. The following research questions (RQ) guided my study:

RQ1: How do Black women describe their experience as students who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms?

RQ2: How do Black women understand the ways their experiences as students in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms affected their sense of identity and connection with peers and teachers?

RQ3: What strategies do Black women who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms identify for increasing the support of Black girls in these classrooms?

Significance

Existing literature on the experiences of students of color in gifted programs largely focuses on the experiences of Black boys (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Evans-Winters, 2014; Ford et al., 2018). Additionally, the gifted Black girl experience has also been minimally discussed when examining the barriers of gifted females as the narrative of the White, middle-class girl has remained the central focus (Anderson & Martin, 2018). Ford et al. (2018) argued that Black girls are a “footnote in educational discourse of facing barriers” as their experiences are overshadowed by experiences of both Black boys and White girls (p. 253). Through this study, I

explore the experiences of Black women from Southeast Georgia who matriculated through gifted programs as students in the K-12 setting and how these experiences have affected their sense of identity and belonging in that environment. The findings from this study may prove to be significant to various stakeholders in the educational process. Recruiting, identification, and retention policies for minority students in gifted education have been criticized as bias and oppressive measures to deny Black students equal access to better learning opportunities (Card & Giuliano, 2016; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Harmon, 2002; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). For policyholders, this study promotes reform in understanding the different components of giftedness, setting inclusive criteria for gifted placement and selection, and revising curriculum for gifted programs. Tomlinson (2015) noted that gifted programs often resemble high track classes with largely homogenous demographics that have negative impacts on teacher expectations, self-concept, and social integration for students of color (p. 204). The findings of this study encourage gifted educators to be more aware of the experiences they provide in their classrooms by fostering supportive teacher/student relationships and inclusive peer interactions.

What people experience—at home, in school, through interactions with others—teaches them what is valued and who they can be. Positive experiences yield confidence and belonging while negative experiences lead to questioning and redefining identity. Experiences influence how people establish beliefs about their morals, their abilities, and their place in different environments. Before examining these educational experiences and their effect on Black girls' sense of identity, I believed it is important to first gain an understanding of how gifted Black girls gained a sense of identity through explicit and implicit messages communicated to them from sources outside of education (parents, friends, and community). Then, I explore how the

experiences in the classrooms of gifted programs influence their sense of identity and belonging. The interviews with these participants provide insight on how the curriculum, peer interactions, and teacher relationships affected how these Black women viewed themselves as girls and their presence in the gifted classroom. Understanding these aspects of the Black girl experience will help all stakeholders to provide better support for Black girls in all settings.

The findings from this study will help increase the understanding of the experiences of Black girls to not only provide a holistic view of the effects of underrepresentation on the mental psyche but also challenge educational policyholders to implement better policies to increase the presence and support of Black students in gifted education. Increasing equity in gifted programs not only benefits Black students but also students of all racial backgrounds. Wells et al. (2016) highlighted how diversity in all classrooms helps “improve cognitive skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving for all students” while also encouraging students to have “more open minds and engaging classroom conversations” (p. 8). This research aims to instill compassion, empathy, and respect in learners, so they may celebrate and benefit from the unique differences of their counterparts.

By interpreting the data from this study, I help communicate the barriers and obstacles Black girls face in our society. Evans-Winters (2014) reported that Black girls are more likely to report feeling unsafe in school settings (p. 22). Anderson (2020) emphasized that Black women experience “double oppression due to their occupation of space that rests between the intersections of race and gender” (p. 87). Data from this study will help all people empathize with the Black women in our society and hopefully create a society where all talents and differences are appreciated and valued.

Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) emphasized that the conceptual framework is the “superstructure” for a study rooted in the researcher’s personal interests and goals and supported by literature that argue the significance, appropriateness, and rigor of a topic (pp. 5-7). Maxwell (2013) added that a conceptual framework is a constructed scheme of “concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform research” (p. 39). Maxwell (2013) defined the following four elements useful in building a conceptual framework: experiential knowledge, existing theory, pilot and exploratory research, and thought experiments. With these philosophies in mind, I decided to build my conceptual framework on my experiential knowledge and existing theory. My conceptual framework was constructed through an examination of my experiential knowledge that not only exposed my researcher biases but also guided my goals. Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought served as the current bodies of existing theory relevant to my study.

Experiential Knowledge

My experiential knowledge about the experiences of Black girls who are identified as gifted is rooted in many layers of experience dating back to my own childhood. Maxwell (2013) noted Alan Peshkin’s ideals about the significance of examining one’s subjectivity and biases it provides for one’s study. Peshkin also suggested researchers monitor their subjectivity through examining our subjective “I’s” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 28). In reflecting on my childhood experiences, I recognized my first lens of subjectivity—gifted Black girl “I”. Growing up, my family set high expectations for me in school, and I was pushed for academic excellence at a very young age. I was identified as “gifted” at the end of my fourth-grade year and one of the

few Black students in the gifted program at my school. For my family, this meant something—I had proven to be “just as good as” the White students. I was included. I matriculated through the gifted program throughout middle school and later took advanced placement courses in high school. In middle school, there were a few more Black students who entered the gifted program; however, I began to feel a little more excluded in the classroom. Being a Black girl matriculating through a program predominately characterized by White students, I experienced a range of emotions and was confronted by significant racialized experiences. These experiences affected how I conducted myself in the classroom, who I interacted with in the classroom, and how I made decisions about my education. Because I conducted my study with young Black women who were identified as gifted students, I had to be mindful as not to project my experiences, beliefs, and thoughts onto my participants. While I suspected that the participants shared similar experiences and beliefs as I did, I understood that there were significant differences in what they articulated about their experiences. No matter what the data revealed from their interviews, I aimed to report it objectively.

Another lens of subjectivity I discovered is my gifted Black teacher “I”. After returning from South Korea, I began my teaching career in Georgia at a middle school in my hometown as an eighth-grade English teacher. I taught the advanced English class for eighth graders that focused on the ninth-grade curriculum. At the time, I was not gifted certified, but I was certified to teach English for grades 6-12. I did not become gifted certified until my sixth year of teaching when I moved over to the high school. Just as a student, I am one of few Black teachers teaching gifted and/or advanced courses in my county. During the gifted certification training, we discussed the disproportionality of students of color in gifted program. Our instructors—district-

level curriculum directors—aimed to emphasize the efforts implemented within our county to increase the representation of students of color in these programs. Due to my experience at the middle school and high school level, I recognized that the same demographic disparities that existed when I was a student continued to exist in the gifted program, so I am skeptical that the efforts to recruit and retain more students of color in these programs are carried out with fidelity. I still saw deficit-thinking about students of color in gifted programs which prevented Black students from receiving referrals into gifted programs thus diminishing their opportunities to advance. As a gifted teacher, I was aware of the opportunities students of color were not afforded by being in this program in my county. In middle school, for example, students enrolled in the advanced eighth grade English course could take the ninth-grade state assessment. If they passed the test, they had the opportunity to enroll in the tenth-grade course as ninth graders placing them ahead of their peers in terms of high school credits and earlier access to collegiate-level opportunities like dual-enrollment. Students were offered the same opportunity in two other content areas—math and science. This cohort of students also had the opportunity to take more field trips based on the curriculum of advanced courses allowing more opportunities to experience learning in new environments. Most of the students in the class were gifted, and the students who were not gifted gained access to the class by test scores, teacher referrals, or parental request. The ninth-grade honors courses were also structured in the same manner. Because my participants had different perspectives, I had to consider that some educators and officials may have been more intentional and diligent in their efforts in recruiting more gifted students of color. I could not allow the negative impressions of practice blind me of the progressive efforts that others took.

Existing Theory

Maxwell (2013) defined prior theory as a “set of concepts and ideas and the proposed relationships” posited by other people’s research and ideas (p. 48). Ravitch and Riggan (2017) provided a richer definition of prior theory and asserted that it ranged from informal concepts about why these concepts function in a specific manner to formal theories that have been generalized based on research focused on a specific subject. In explaining the uses of existing theory, Maxwell (2013) emphasized that a useful prior theory helps you make meaning of what you see. Considering these definitions and uses of prior theory, I have found two useful, formal theories that have helped me understand the relationships of my study: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought.

Critical Race Theory. Ladson-Billings (1998) described CRT as a philosophy developed in the mid-1970s by the works of legal scholars, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, who were “deeply distressed by the slow pace of racial reform” in the United States (p. 10). The hopeful outcomes of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Movement were not fulfilled unless reform actions served White people’s interest in what Derrick Bell coined as the interest convergence principle (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT continued to develop through ideals of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Cheryl Harris, and Charles Lawrence (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Reform efforts that served White interests continued to perpetuate into other areas, like education, of society promoting continued inequality (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT theorists question how the implementation of instructional strategies, assessments, student placement, and funding work to advance White students yet initiate unjust circumstances

for Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The beliefs of CRT that align with my framework are racial microaggressions, interest convergence, intersectionality, and whiteness as property.

Dixson and Rousseau-Anderson (2017) defined microaggressions as subtle, instinctive verbal and non-verbal onslaughts directed towards people of color based on race and other connections of identity (gender, class, sexuality, or language). Racial microaggressions in gifted education have manifested through curriculum, peer relationships, and teacher relationships (Anderson, 2020; Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017; Grantham, 2004). Bell's principle of interest convergence suggests that progress for marginalized groups only occur when it is in the interest of the dominant group in policy-making positions (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017, p. 39).

Thornton (2023) argued that the creation of gifted programs served as a way to re-segregate students after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. Dixson and Rousseau-Anderson (2017) also noted that interest convergence suggests that the affirmative measure will be revoked if it threatens the "superior status of Whites" (p. 39). The ongoing disproportionate representation of Black students in gifted programs is relative to the interest convergence principle. Kimberlé Crenshaw's principle of intersectionality "addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts" (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017, p. 44). For gifted Black girls, their identity is compounded by three different layers: Black, female, and gifted. The layers of their identity all carry specific expectations and stereotypes (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Ford et al., 2018; Stokes et al., 2020). Ladson-Billings (1998) outlined how Harris's concept of whiteness as property is applicable to education. Dixson and Rousseau-Anderson (2017) described property functions of Whiteness as the following: rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute

right to exclude (p. 41). With the disproportionate representation of Black students in gifted programs due to inequitable access to education, discriminatory testing practices, and teacher bias, whiteness as property is displayed in gifted programs (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998;).

Intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) posited that the principle of intersectionality refers to idea that race intersects with other factors (class, gender, sexuality) and should be explored when understanding the experiences of people of color. Bešić (2020) noted that intersectionality emphasizes that all facets of one’s identity should be examined as “simultaneously interacting with each other and affecting one’s perception” (p. 114). Bešić (2020) and Anderson (2020) both highlighted that intersectionality emphasizes that in order to genuinely understand one’s identity and experiences, one must acknowledge that each identity marker is woven together. Anderson (2020) argued that the intersectionality theory provides a basis for understanding the “unique experiences of Black girls in whose identities intersect on the basis of race, class, gender, and ability” (p. 87). When considering the experiences of Black women who participated in gifted programs, using the intersectionality theory allows the exploration of identity, educational structures and policy, and academic experiences.

Black Feminist Thought. Black feminist theory provides insight into the intricate, multifaceted history of Black women’s experiences (Alinia, 2015; Brady, 2022; Clemons, 2019). Collins (1990) defined Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as “theories of specialized thought produced by African-American women intellectuals designed to express Black women’s standpoint” (p. 388). Alinia (2015) emphasized that BFT uncovers the way that power is established, organized, and managed to impel oppression. Brady (2022) added that BFT awakens

the struggled path towards empowerment to stimulate social change. Habtamu (2024) contended that BFT represents the epitome of a “diverse set of observations and interpretations about the experiences of Black women and girls...described by Black women intellectuals” (p. 49).

Clemons (2019) outlined four components of BFT that shape the qualitative researcher’s role in understanding participants agency and history: a lived experience as a principle of meaning, the use of dialogue to evaluate knowledge, the moral belief of caring, and the conscience of accountability. Brady (2022) and Gist (2016) advocated that use of BFT could be an insightful and informative vehicle for educators to combat the reproduction of inequality in the classroom.

Methodology

In Chapter 5, Maxwell (2013) asserted that the methods of a qualitative study reflect what the researcher will actually do in carrying out a study. Maxwell (2013) outlined the following components of a methods section: research relationships design, selection of settings and participants, data collection, and data analysis (p. 90). For this study, I used the qualitative approach of narrative inquiry to interview seven Black women from Southeast Georgia who participated in gifted programs. Patton (2015) described this approach as a method that examines “human lives through the lens of a narrative, honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 128). Merriam (2002) posited that stories are a “basic communicative and meaning-making device pervasive in human experience” (p. 286). Because this study aimed to explore how Black women experienced gifted programs as students and how this experience affected their consciousness of their identity and belonging, the narrative inquiry design served as an appropriate method of inquiry.

The setting for the study took place in the southeastern, suburban county of Young, Georgia. I chose this setting because I grew up in this suburban community and was interested to see if the young Black women of today shared some of the similar experiences I faced growing up as a gifted Black girl matriculating through gifted and advanced classrooms many years ago. Young County (pseudonym), the small suburban county where I serve as an educator, enrolled 11,008 students with roughly 40% of their population being represented by Black students during the 2021-2022 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2022a, 2022c). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2022b), Black students only represent a mere 10% of Young County's gifted population while White students represent 75% of the gifted population. Young County is only one of many districts in Georgia that illustrate this representation disparity in gifted programs (Georgia Department of Education, 2022b). Because in-depth interviews were being conducted, I wanted the participants to be old enough to articulate their thoughts and ideas for rich data. Consequently, the preferred criteria for participants were the following: young Black women [18 years of age or older] who had recently graduated (three years or less) high school students, identified as gifted or high-achieving during elementary school, and had matriculated through the county's gifted or advanced course program from middle school into high school. Kim (2016) referenced an appropriate sample size range of "6 to 12 participants" depending on the "notion of saturation" (p. 161). In this case, the criteria were extended to young women who had graduated from the school system within the past five years as they too were closely connected to the experiences of the program.

Because gifted programs serve various populations, homogeneous purposeful sampling was used to collect the subgroup of participants. I consulted professional colleagues for the

names of previous high students who met the criteria identified for the study. I initiated contact with the participants through direct messages on social media introducing myself and the nature of my study. Interested participants provided emails which allowed me to follow-up with a detailed description of the study and invitation to interview. I allowed the women to respond in one week then followed-up with an additional email for participation.

After the participants had been identified, scheduled interviews took place with each participant. Kim (2016) promoted a two-phase (narration and conversation), in-depth interview process for each participant. The questions for the interview were semi-structured with some questions allowing me to serve as a “active listener and observer” while the participant narrated specific events (Kim, 2016, p. 168). Other questions characterized the conversation phase that required “clarifications on topics...presented in the narration phase” (Kim, 2016, p. 169). I adopted elements of Seidman’s three-part interview process to conduct interviews with the participants. Seidman (2013) suggested that the first interview focus on the life history of the participants by recreating their early experiences with family, friends, community, and education. The second interview will “concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience” as a gifted student (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). In order to protect the time of the participants, I combined these two ideals into one interview that averaged approximately 90 minutes per participant. This interview mainly focused on the participants’ life experiences prior to entering the gifted program and matriculating through the gifted program. The interview was structured for participants to narrate their early experiences with family, school, community, and friends that shaped their understanding of their identity and how they communicated that understanding at a young age. This phase of interviewing also allowed participants to describe

their experiences entering and matriculating through the gifted program while also reconstructing their experiences with the curriculum, peers, and teachers in the gifted program. Seidman (2013) suggested that the third interview focus on the “understanding of the experience...while making meaning” (p. 22). I chose to use a focus group and bring the participants together to carry out this task. Patton (2015) claimed that focus groups are especially valuable when examining the perspective of marginalized groups. This interview, a conversation phase, was a reflective meeting that allowed the participants to reflect on how their experiences in the gifted program and share their different perspectives on how they made meaning of their experience. Kim (2016) emphasized that this phase of narrative interviewing is “a period of semi-structured, in-depth questioning...when the interviewer wants clarification...and to introduce additional theoretical interests” (p. 169). Participants were able to deeply discuss their perspectives on their identity as gifted Black women and methods of support for younger Black girls navigating giftedness.

With most of the participants currently living outside of Young County, interviews took place via Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams as the virtual option was most convenient. A scheduled phone conference was initiated to set up the interview preference, day, and time. All succeeding interviews were organized using the same protocol. The initial one-on-one interview process took place within an eight-week time span. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and redelivered back to each participant within a week of the initial interview. Participants were initially given a week to review their interview transcripts. After one week, a follow-up contact by email was sent to confirm accurate reporting. The focus group was conducted after all individual interviews were transcribed. This interview was transcribed and redelivered within two weeks before the coding process began.

In order to appropriately analyze the participants' data, each interview series was audio recorded, labeled, and transcribed to ensure each participant's words were accurately presented. After each interview, memos were written to "not only capture analytic thinking about data but also facilitate such thinking" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). Each interview was transcribed using the Otter AI computer software. Profiles were crafted for each participant based on their interviews. Seidman (2013) encouraged profiles as an effective way of sharing interview data in qualitative research that is "most reliable with the process of interviewing" (p. 122). I began to facilitate my analytic thinking by reading each transcript and "making significant judgement about what the participant's experiences by marking what is of interest in the text" (Seidman, 2013, p.120). Patton (2015) asserted that "developing some manageable classification of or coding scheme is the first step to analysis" (p. 553). After profiles were created, common themes and concepts were identified to present the findings through manual In Vivo coding and Pattern coding in MAXQDA. Saldaña (2021) suggested in vivo coding as an appropriate coding method for narrative inquiry studies and "particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data (p. 137). In Vivo codes referred to "words or short phrases from the actual language found in the qualitative data from the participants themselves" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 137) I first analyzed the transcribed data using in vivo coding. These codes were then organized alphabetically and reexamined from common themes to "group the summarizes into smaller numbers of condensed categories" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 322).

Limitations

In Chapter 6, Maxwell (2013) provided a thorough discussion of validity and its significance in a qualitative study. Maxwell (2013) argued that qualitative researchers must be

aware of the threats that could discredit the trustworthiness of their study. Researcher bias and reactivity both served as validity threats in my study. Because of my previous experiences in gifted programs and much of the existing literature on the topic promoting deficit-thinking regarding the experiences of gifted Black girls, I had to ensure that these premature biases did not leak into my analysis of the data results. I naturally assumed that all of the participants would have negative experiences or that the experiences in the gifted program negatively impacted their sense of identity. In order to safeguard this threat, I collected rich data from the interviews and focus group participants. Maxwell (2013) suggested rich data as a useful strategy to increase the validity of data interpretation by collecting “detailed data and varied enough to provide and full picture of what is going on” (p. 126). Because I consulted with colleagues, some participants are previous students who attended my high school. Because I currently teach at the high school with many of my colleagues, the validity threat of reactivity also inflicts the authenticity of the study. Though I did not use my own students, my influence as a well-known teacher in the county may hinder the validity of the results. In order to test this validity threat, I employed member checking with the participants by sharing their individual narratives and profiles for feedback. I also triangulated the data through multiple data collection sources: individual interviews, focus group interviews, memos, and artifacts.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of clarity, the following significant terms have been defined:

Advanced Placement (A.P.) courses: college-level course that high schools offer to students with a corresponding exam that grants college credit depending on the student’s score (Georgia Department of Education, 2025)

African American: an ethnicity of United States Americans whose origins are in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (National Institutes of Health, 2025)

Black: a broader and more inclusive racial construct of people of African descent; can include persons born outside of the United States (i.e., Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean) (National Institutes of Health, 2025)

Creativity: divergent thinking that “builds on real world encounters and connections of the mind to create unique combinations” or representations (Matthews & Dai, 2014, p. 337)

De Facto Segregation: racially identifiable separation that is not a result of intentional acts to segregate (Black, 2023; Brown & Jackson, 2013)

De Jure Segregation: segregation developed from the intentional acts and mandates of government entities (Green, 1999)

Gifted Program: established education program that provides differentiated instruction and services for students who meet the state’s eligibility requirements for gifted education (Georgia Department of Education, 2025)

Gifted Student: a student who demonstrates a “high degree of intellectual and/or creative ability [and] an exceptionally high degree of motivation” needing special instruction or services to achieve at levels that support their abilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2025)

Honors/Advanced Courses: academically-challenging courses that cover specific content in a more detailed level and at a faster pace; designed for students who demonstrate high-academic achievement but does not grant college credit; can include students who are not labeled gifted (Georgia Department of Education, 2025)

Interest-Convergence: a principle that implies that social change for a minority group takes place when there is a shared interest with the majority group (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997).

Intersectionality Theory: understanding and considering that one's experience of discrimination is characterized by multiple factors (race, gender, class ability, etc.) (Crenshaw, 1991).

Microaggressions: subtle, automatic, or unconscious forms of verbal or non-verbal assaults directed towards People of Color based on race and its intersections with constructs such as gender, class, sexuality, or language (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2017)

Motivation: "internal process that initiates and sustains goal-directed behavior" (Matthews & Dai, 2014, p. 337)

"Separate but Equal": a doctrine that considers racial segregation constitutional as long as facilities are deemed equal (Kauper, 1954; Noltemeyer et al., 2012).

Underrepresentation: disproportionately low representation (Evans-Winter, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016)

Chapter Summary

The disproportionate representation of Black students in gifted education is a continued issue in the United States education system (Allen, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Harmon, 2002; Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018; Sewell & Goings, 2019; Wright et al., 2017). While Black boys are the most disproportionately represented, Black girls are largely represented as well (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Evans-Winter, 2014). Most of the literature centered around underrepresentation in gifted education focuses on Black boys. Research on the disparities in gifted education have highlighted White girls and Black boys with little attention to Black girls (Anderson, 2020; Anderson & Martin, 2018).

I conducted a narrative inquiry study to explore the experiences and highlight the voices of seven Black women who participated in gifted programs in Southeast Georgia to fill the gap in literature while giving an inclusive understanding to the Black student experience in advanced academic environments and its effect on identity. The purpose of this study was to articulate their experiences to increase understanding of how their access and presence to gifted education affected their perception of themselves and their sense of belonging . The significance of this study is powered by the essence of informing educational practices and policies that will support Black students in gaining access to quality educational experiences. Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought provided an anchor for the development of the research questions that guided the study along with the interpretations of findings. The following chapter will address the existing literature that helped frame and inform the study.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

The U.S. education system has promised equitable learning experiences to all citizens; however, research has indicated that the country has withheld its promise (Allen, 2017; Ford et al., 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). Monumental legal efforts, such as *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* and the Jacob Javits Gifted & Talented Student Education Act of 1988, outlined rulings that supported equitable educational opportunities for students of color (Allen, 2017; Harmon, 2002; Sewell & Goings, 2019). U.S. schools have displayed significant race disparities in enrollment for gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). Anderson and Martin (2018) reported that Black students have been underrepresented in gifted programs by almost 50% in most years (p. 22). According to the *Civil Rights Data Collection* (2024) and *National Center of Education Statistics* (2023), African American students only accounted for roughly 13% of the total enrollment of students receiving gifted services nationally and merely 10% in the state of Georgia during the 2020-2021 school year. White and Asian students have consistently dominated enrollment in these programs (National Center of Education Statistics, 2023).

Despite the nation's mandated legislation to ensure equal opportunities for all children, students from culturally diverse backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in gifted programming (Allen, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Harmon, 2002; Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018; Sewell & Goings, 2019; Wright et al., 2017). As gifted programs have yielded favorable results in academic achievement, quality instruction, and future success, research in student performance on state and national assessments show a widened achievement gap between the

country's gifted White students and students of color (Anderson, 2020; Grantham, 2004; Henfield et al., 2008). Since African American and Hispanic students have been underserved in education, their educational experiences have been less inequitable (Allen, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016).

The goal of this literature review is to provide an analysis of the underlying factors that contribute to disproportionate representation of Black students in gifted education while highlighting helpful reform efforts to enhance equitable access for Black students to gifted education and rigorous instructional experiences. Recruitment. Racial disparities in the gifted programs imitate ongoing U.S. systems that have historically stifled Black students from educational access and income opportunities (Ford et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2019). The U.S. education system needs effective interventions and policies that recruit and retain more students of color in gifted programming (Allen, 2017; Grantham, 2003; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Henfield et al., 2008; Peters et al., 2019). Bias identification and referral practices for gifted students yield more favorable results for White students which means Black students are deprived of exposure to rigorous opportunities that can strengthen their talents and gifts (Allen, 2017; Barnard-Brak et al., 2015; Card & Giuliano, 2016; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). Consequently, Black students who participate in gifted programs experience challenges that affect their motivation to continue in these programs as they feel criticized and undervalued (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008; Sewell & Goings, 2019). When discriminatory practices are replaced with progressive efforts of cultural awareness, advocacy, and support, high-achieving Black students have positive experiences that produce

promising academic outcomes (Chadwell et al., 2009; Grantham, 2004; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Sewell & Goings, 2019).

Inequality of Educational Access

In reviewing the literature, a vital factor attributing to the underrepresentation of high-achieving Black students in gifted programs is the large inequality to educational access (Allen, 2017; Peters et al., 2019). Equitable educational access is described as “equal exposure to learning opportunities for all students” (Peters et al., 2019, p. 274). Countries have created systems that mobilize how citizens access better opportunities (Allen, 2017; Peters et al., 2019). Peters et al. (2019) argued that the disparities in educational opportunity play an even greater role in the underrepresentation of minority students than biased identification methods and asserted that income-related achievement gaps are largely displayed in the United States. The United States’s systems that yield unjust outcomes for non-White adults, such as inadequate job opportunities, harsher legal punishments, and insufficient healthcare, ultimately affect their children’s access to education as “exposure to learning opportunities influences achievement” (Peters et al., 2019, p. 274). The education system, in return, imitates the societal systems that perpetuate structural injustices (Allen, 2017; Howard, 2018). Allen (2017) and Hurt (2018) showed that students who come from higher-income families tend to have access to quality educational opportunities. These children tend to have early access to educational opportunities and outside resources that help enhance their learning experiences (Allen, 2017; Peters et al., 2019).

Children from lower-income communities unfortunately are unable to benefit from these privileges (Allen, 2017; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Howard, 2018; Lewis & Boswell, 2020).

Hébert and Beardsley (2001) and Lewis and Boswell (2020) highlighted how low-income communities affect educational opportunities for children creating disproportionate representation in gifted classrooms. Adults navigating through the struggles of poverty tend to merely focus on their children attending, passing, and finishing school (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Lewis & Boswell, 2020). They lack awareness and concern for the purpose of gifted education and its value to students (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Henfield et al., 2008; Lewis & Boswell, 2020). Henfield et al. (2008) reported gifted program's academic rigor, highly skilled teachers, and increased future opportunities as a benefit of gifted education participation. When parents are unaware of these benefits, they are not likely to advocate for these opportunities for their children (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Lewis & Boswell, 2020; Peters et al., 2019). Peters et al. (2019) emphasized that Black American, Native American, and Hispanic children were twice as likely to live in poverty in comparison to their White peers. Historically, these same subgroups are disproportionately represented in gifted programs (Allen, 2017; Anderson, 2020; Barnard-Brak et al., 2015; Ford et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2019).

Income gaps are not the sole underpinning for inequality to educational access (Peters et al., 2019). Being an African American, Hispanic, or Native American not only means one is more likely to be poor but also face race-related institutional barriers, such as racism (Harmon, 2002; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Peters et al., 2019). These inequalities seep into education (Allen, 2017; Harmon, 2002; Peters et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017). Racial disparities in the gifted classroom have been one way that the U.S. education system functions to diminish opportunities for minorities (Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018). Harboring an crippling history of slavery and Jim Crow, Howard (2018) and Hurt (2018) asserted that these disparities mimic the historical value

of White supremacy in the U.S. by allowing White students better opportunities. The alarming disproportionate numbers in gifted programs have dishonored the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *McFadden vs. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46* that ruled against intentional and unjust educational practices (Allen, 2017; Harmon, 2002; Wright et al., 2017). The researchers in the literature revealed how racism and income gaps work to decrease the learning opportunities for Black students to gifted programming (Allen, 2017; Harmon, 2002; Peters et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017).

History of Education for Black Americans

The inequality of access to education is no new phenomenon in the plight of ensuring that all students are granted equal opportunities; it is an issue that has plagued United States' education since the birth of public schools in the U.S. (Brisport, 2013; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). For decades, United States' legislation and case law have emphasized the value this country places on education as it is the "most profitable investment society can make" (Noltemeyer et al., 2012, p.3). Brisport (2013) emphasized that the founding fathers of this country understood the profit of education in "creating a functioning democracy" (p.18). While this significant piece of the democratic puzzle was revered by many of this country's first law-making stakeholders, the Constitution does not cite education as a protected right leaving state and local governments to determine the structure of their individual school systems (Black, 2023; Brisport, 2013). In return, the education system has historical underpinnings where Whites have been rewarded more access and opportunity than any other ethnicity in this country (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2020; Brisport, 2013; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001).

The inequitable treatment of Black students in the U.S. educational system dates back to Africans unwillingly working as indentured servants or slaves in the U.S. (Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Noltemeyer et al. (2012) noted that during the early years most Whites prevented Blacks in the U.S.- freed or enslaved- from receiving an education. Noltemeyer et al. (2012) highlighted that some individuals and organizations, such as the Quakers, educated Blacks with private funds but faced scrutiny and lack of support from the community. By the 1800s, most state legislature, especially in the South, posited that it was illegal for Black students to be taught to read and write in fear that it would encourage uprisings among the slaves. (Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Walters (2001) posited that any education for Blacks promoted what Whites wanted Blacks to know with the objective of teaching specific behavioral, moral, and religious practices.

After the Civil War's end, access to education for Blacks seemed promising during the Reconstruction Period (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2020; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). The Reconstruction Period (1865-1877) brought the development of schools for newly freed Black slaves, but this progress was short-lived as the implementation of Jim Crow laws spread throughout the country (Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation on the "separate but equal" ideology (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2020; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). Kauper (1954) and Noltemeyer et al. (2012) described "separate but equal" as a doctrine that deemed racial segregation as constitutional as long as the facilities and services were considered equal. The U.S. Supreme Court's support of separate-but-equal facilities on intrastate railroads in its ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) strengthened racial segregation in the U.S. (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2020; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Despite popular

criticism, Morris and Morris (2005) noted the presence of valued segregated schools during this time that consisted of highly qualified teachers, engaging curriculum and extracurricular activities, strong parental support, and effective leadership. Noltemeyer et al. (2012) however criticized this policy as “flawed with sufficient evidence that schools for Black children remained inferior in quality and funding” (p. 6). Poor facilities, inadequate educational resources, and insufficient funding were issues that affected the quality of education in segregated schools for Black students (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2012; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001).

While the advances in educating Blacks in literacy had evolved since their appearance in the U.S., critical disparities existed in the quality of education for Black students in comparison to White students (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2020; Brisport, 2013; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). The Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* repealed *Plessy v. Ferguson* proclaiming that “separate” was not “equal” and insisted schools integrate (Morris & Morris, 2005; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). *Brown v. Board of Education* was a monumental effort at dismantling *de jure* segregation. Green (1999) defined *de jure* segregation in schools as segregation developed from the “intentional actions and mandates of government entities” to separate racial groups (p. 138). The progress to integrate schools was slow and even volatile particularly in the South (Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Instances of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse pierced Black children attempting to desegregate schools (Ashford-Hanserd et al., 2020; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Because education was not considered a protected right under the U.S. Constitution, many states, especially in the South, made little effort to desegregate schools (Morris & Morris, 2005; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). The synergy of organizations and departments, such as the National Advancement Association for

Colored People (NAACP) and the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, produced court cases, laws, and policies that increased the integration of schools from the 1960s to 1980s (Morris & Morris, 2005; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). Noltemeyer et al. (2012) affirmed that this trend has declined. Racial resegregation in schools has resurfaced (Brisport, 2013; Morris & Morris, 2005; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Walters, 2001). Residential patterns affected by socioeconomic status, school choice, and identification for gifted and special education have been credited as contributing factors for the current rise of resegregation (Ford & King, 2014; Fudge, 2017; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). This literature exposes the history of discrimination for Black people in the U.S. Understanding the educational history of Black Americans is pertinent to this study as it begins to reveal the beginning stages of how discrimination in education limited Black American's access to certain educational resources and opportunities, such as gifted education.

Black Women's Access to Education

Hutson (2022) reported that Black women are “one of the most highly educated groups in the United States (p. 1). Despite this esteemed accolade, there are few scholars who have worked to provide a comprehensive account of women's access to education, more specifically as it relates to Black women (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Dentith, 2016; Hutson, 2022). Historically women were taught to be caretakers (Eisenmann, 2001; Hutson, 2022; Madigan, 2009). Arao (2016) emphasize how the “gendered division of roles amongst slaves shaped the roles Black women played in educational efforts” (p. 138). Arao (2016) commented on how literate Whites assisted in advancing Black literacy during slavery. Black women who worked in their slaveowners' homes were accessible to information and news that they were able to share and

teach to other slaves, mostly at night (Arao, 2016; Hutson, 2022). Hutson (2022) described Black women slaves as “teachers in the slave quarters, due to their proximity to literacy” in addition to upholding their “traditional gender responsibilities” (pp. 3-4). This task came with severe consequences as slaves were “severely beaten and in some cases had appendages or limbs removed for teaching other slaves to read or write” (p. 3).

The Civil War and abolition of slavery cultivated a shift in education for all students (Arao, 2016; Collier-Thomas, 1982; Hutson, 2022; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Collier-Thomas (1982) identified how southern states made fewer provisions than northern states for freed Blacks. Arao (2016) pointed out how equal enrollment of Black boys and girls as students and teachers in Black schools showed their dedication to uplifting their community. This principle contradicted schooling practices among White Americans, who valued education for boys over girls despite having mostly women teachers (Anderson-Faithful & Goodman, 2020; Arao, 2016; Hutson, 2022; Madigan, 2009). Eisenmann (2001) recommended “institution building” as a framework to examine women’s educational needs in order to “provide the basics of education to women, support women’s career needs, and advanced social reform” (p. 457). Thomas and Jackson (2007) emphasized the work of Black women pioneers, such as Nannie Helen Burroughs and Mary McLeod Bethune, who employed institution building specifically for Black American girls to be educated and build their community.

Arao (2016) acknowledged that as time progressed “sexism, division of domestic labor, and school segregation arrayed particular challenges” for Black women” (p. 139). The infamous ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* illustrated how Black girls had to challenge legislature for equal access (Arao, 2016; Brooks & Muhammad, 2024; Hutson, 2022). Brooks and

Muhammad (2024) commented on how “radical educators” criticized this revered decision that “purported to integrate schools under the guise of equality” that would function to “reproduce dominant ideology” (p. 1003). Hutson (2022) also discussed how desegregation of schools led to “tracking...based on often subjective and biased perceptions of ability” (p. 6). Integrated schools caused many Black educators, mostly women, to lose their jobs as Black teachers became replaced with White teachers in Black schools (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Hutson, 2022; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Thomas and Jackson (2007) and Hutson (2022) stressed the dramatic disparities in current learning opportunities for Black students in terms of access to qualified educators, high-quality curriculum, and technology. Arao (2016) highlighted how Black women are outperforming their men counterparts in test scores, postsecondary degrees, and career opportunities despite the modern issues in education. Hutson (2022) asserted that Black women have been “historically compelled to overcome obstacles to earn an education” (p. 2). This literature provides a historical foundation of the systematic barriers Black women worked to combat to gain access to education. Positioning the participants’ stories within the Black girl struggle to access quality education highlights how their presence in gifted education challenges discriminatory educational traditions.

The Emergence of Critical Race Theory and Its Tenets

The history of education for Black Americans exposes systemic racism in the United States (Brisport, 2013; Brown & Jackson, 2013; Morris & Morris, 2005). Despite the progressive legislation of 1950s and 1960s, Brown and Jackson (2013) emphasized that Richard Nixon’s inauguration in 1969 and his appointment of four new, conservative Supreme Court justices stifled the progress for Black Americans in the 1970s. These judges were “less sympathetic to the

concerns and interests of underrepresented minorities” and “the Court began to halt and then reverse many legal victories” gained for minorities (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 10). Supreme Court decisions in cases, such as *Keyes v. School District No 1* (1973) and *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), as cited in Black (2013) and Brown and Jackson (2013) ruled that *de facto* segregated schools were not unconstitutionally segregated. Brown and Jackson (2013) and Green (1999) both termed *de facto* segregation as separation when racially identifiable schools were not a result of intentional acts to segregate.

The Court’s support of *de facto* segregation helped birth the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement of the late 1970s (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Tate, 1997). Tate (1997) asserted that CLS scholars aimed to dispute the idea that legal reasoning was unbiased, objective, and removed from social, economic, and political influences while revealing how laws reinforce, reflect, and reproduce the dominating oppressive social order. Brown and Jackson (2013) added that CLS advocates revealed how legal decisions were acutely buried in political and personal biases of governing officials. While the CLS movement cultivated important awareness about how the legal process worked, the campaign insufficiently confronted the struggles of minorities—specifically Blacks (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023; Tate, 1997). CLS’s inability to adequately address the challenges of Blacks in the U.S. sparked the development of a new set of thinkers who introduced a different philosophy—critical race theory (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023; Moffat, 2022).

While the literature links various scholars to critical race theory (CRT), Campbell (2023) credited Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Gloria Ladson-Billings as the originators of CRT. Brown and Jackson (2013) emphasized that these scholars were stimulated

by the need to understand how “the regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color had been created and maintained in the U.S...and develop the understandings to change it” (p. 14). Moffat (2022) and Morgan (2022) pointed out that CRT scholars argued that revolutionary legislation intended to advance racial equality, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, had neglected to provide justice for Black Americans. Campbell (2023) outlined the following five central tenets of CRT framework: “race as a social construct, racism is native in the United States, interest convergence, legitimizing racial narratives and experiences, and intersectionality” (p. 46). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) previously included Whiteness as property and the critique of liberalism as additional principles. This study uses the counternarratives of Black women who participated in gifted programs as students to uncover the intersectionality of their experiences and how racism is a pervasive vice of the United States.

Counternarratives. CRT creates an appreciation for the worth and validity of including racial experiences, stories, and voices in history and education (Campbell, 2023; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Williams, 2004). Campbell (2023) argued that the voices, lived experiences, and perspectives of people of color are often omitted from the conversations of history, literature, and research. Williams (2004) noted that Richard Delgado, a founding father of CRT, believed that the powerful tradition of storytelling was an effective approach to challenging the dominant cultural constructions of race. Brown and Jackson (2013) added that many dominant group members push the narrative that racial inequality is the result of the cultural problems of the minority group or lack of execution of existing discriminatory laws. CRT scholars use storytelling and counternarratives to “undermine the claims of racial neutrality of traditional legal discourse” (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 19).

Counternarratives have been used as a tool in qualitative research to reveal the experiences of marginalized groups (Hubain et al., 2016; Jones, 2023; Morton, 2021) The counternarratives of the graduate students in Hubain et al. (2016) revealed how the lack of inclusion and support in higher education uncover the systemic nature of racism in graduate programs. The stories of the Black women in Jones' (2023) study suggested that Black women who attend historically white institutions choose to remain silent in fear of being unsupported and criticized for being angry. The Black women graduate students in Morton's (2021) study reflected more positives experiences as these participates established their own spaces of support and authenticity. The counternarratives in this study will add to the literature through the voices of Black women while elevating their lived experiences as a constructive means of replacing biased narratives.

Intersectionality. The principle of intersectionality proposes that the intertwining of social identities, such as race, gender, and class, must be examined to fully understand racial and social discrimination (Campbell, 2023; Harrison, 2017; Ludvig, 2006). CRT promotes the use of intersectionality in analyzing systems of authority and injustice (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Campbell, 2023). Brown and Jackson (2013) noted that CRT theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw credited identity-based politics as an asset in propelling community, power, and intellectual progress, but it overlooked “intragroup differences” and the multiple identities that characterize individuals. Harrison (2017) and Brown and Jackson (2013) added to Ludvig (2006) that Crenshaw posited that the experiences of women of color are a product of the intersecting patterns of racism and sexism.

Ludvig (2006) mentioned the insurmountable complexity of intersectionality as it can account for an exhaustive axes of differences in one's identity. McCall (2005) described the different approaches in analyzing categories: intracategorical (examining intersections of an identity in a single social category), intercategorical (examining intersections of identity between multiple social categories), and anticategorical (rejecting the use of categories). Misra (2021) asserted the use of the intracategorical or intercategorical approaches as beneficial structures when appropriately examining the experiences of minorities and structures of inequality. For this study, the intracategorical approach examines the intersections of one single group—Black women participated in gifted programs. McCall (2005) further described the intracategorical approach as beginning with one “unified, intersectional core...works outward to analytically unravel one by one the [categorical] influences” (p.1787). While examining the experiences of Black women who were labeled gifted or high-achieving as students, this study assesses how the participants perceived the influences of race, gender, and giftedness in their experiences.

Racism in Education

The literature suggests that public schools currently serve as a caste of institutional racism despite past strides to propel Black students' access to education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Kohli et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2016). The historical policies that worked to keep Black students from being educated have manifested into discriminatory practices and behaviors that overtly subject present-day Black students to educational environments that oppose their interests and their identity (Kohli et al., 2017). Alhumam (2015) posited that White dominance is the “most important” variable in education that creates “disconnections between races and

cultures that are not even noticed, questioned, or challenged” (p. 160). Shields (2019) added that the dominance of the White population helps to attribute to the fact that educational issues and policies are commonly structured within the perspective of White cultural ideologies and perspectives. Alhumam (2015) and Joseph et al. (2016) argued that much of the White population has taken a “colorblind” approach when addressing racial issues in U.S. institutions like education. Kohli et al. (2017) criticized colorblindness for its “silence around race that maintains and legitimates racism” (p.189). Joseph et al. (2016) described colorblindness as “racism without racists” and asserted that this ideology of “not seeing color” hinders the needed conversations regarding race and its part in educational equity (p. 5). Joseph et al. (2016) clearly outlined the following examples of inequity in education: school funding, distribution of qualified teachers, racial and economic segregation, overrepresentation of Black and Latinx in special education identification, and access to challenging curriculum.

Tikly (2021) argued that this institutional racism must be considered when discussing the cause of underachievement in schools. Critical Race Theory (CRT) works to propel these conversations through its tenets that place race as the target of examination (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Joseph et al., 2016; Robertson & Chaney, 2017). The goal of CRT is to examine and change the connection between race, racism, and power by calling attention to the innate racism in the U.S. and advancing racial progress (Joseph et al., 2016; Robertson & Chaney, 2017). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) criticized educational researchers and their inability to fully use CRT to its full capacity as they primarily focus on counter-storytelling and the permanence of racism. By examining the inequity of the experiences of Black women who participated in gifted

programs, this study highlights the CRT tenet of “whiteness as property” as high quality, gifted curriculum is mostly enjoyed by White students.

Socioeconomic Factors

The racial divide of accessing quality education consisted of historical tactics, such as segregation and integration, to reconstruct and reinforce inequalities (Roets et al., 2023). The economic divide, grounded in the component of socioeconomic status (SES), is another agent that has perpetuated past patterns of inequitable access to education (Black, 2023; Roets et al., 2023). Socioeconomic status is a complex construct measured by multiple layers: income, education, and occupation. Education has shown to be a significant approach to reduce poverty and improve an individual’s and communities’ living conditions (Bellibaş, 2016). Quality education helps promote social mobility as it provides skills to make workers productive and knowledgeable thus reflecting their income (Fudge, 2017; Rouse & Barrow, 2006). Bellibaş (2016) affirmed that the U.S. has the largest achievement gap between students with differing SES. This disparity in academic achievement is rooted in the U.S. government’s role in monumental, historical cases that have affected the equitable access to education (Black, 2023; Fudge, 2017; Rouse & Barrow, 2006).

Brisport (2013) and Fudge (2017) noted that the Supreme Court’s decision of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing which diversified neighborhoods. As neighborhoods became more diverse, White families who lived in urban areas used federally funded programs, such as Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Authority loans, from the thriving economy to move to surrounding suburbs (Brisport, 2013; Fudge, 2017). The “White flight” of families to suburban areas not only created racially

segregated neighborhoods but also socioeconomic segregation (Brisport, 2013, p.23). Epps (1995) added that segregated neighborhoods stifled progress towards economic mobility for minorities as the higher-paying jobs relocated out of central cities. These neighborhoods had limited access to quality education, employment opportunities, and healthcare (Bellibaş, 2016; Brisport, 2013; Fudge, 2017). Black (2023) and Fudge (2017) criticized the U.S. Supreme Court's complicity in funding systems that resulted in socioeconomic segregation through its rulings in cases like *San Antonion ISD v Rodriguez* and *Milliken v. Bradley*. Black (2023) asserted that the ruling for these two cases gave the “ideological lynchpin holding educational inequality—localism—its seal of approval” (p.23). The Supreme Court traditionally has supported the idea of local control over school operations despite the magnitude and depth of racial segregation and funding inequality between districts (Black, 2023; Fudge, 2017; Roets et al., 2023). Under Supreme Court ruling, local districts determine how tax dollars are spent and consequently how these dollars are used to fund schools (Black, 2023).

Wei and Broome (2022) concluded that students from lower SES households experience a lack of exposure to academic resources, quality schools, and qualified teachers. Bellibaş (2016) asserted that children from lower SES households are less likely to attend early education programs which correlates to the low probability of their attendance in higher education institutions. Rouse and Barrow (2006) reported that children from higher SES households have higher test scores, are more likely to never be retained at any grade level, and are less likely to drop out of school. Children from lower SES households are also less likely to have access to advanced educational opportunities. Wei and Broome (2022) revealed in their comparative study that a school in a higher SES neighborhood received more external support to fund enrichment

opportunities than a school in a lower SES neighborhood. Hodges and Gentry (2021) examined identification of students for gifted services in Florida and revealed that students from higher SES households are more likely to be identified for gifted services. Roets et al. (2023) noted that economic disparities promote educational inequality and often highlight differences in racial and ethnic categories. Epps (1995) highlighted earlier literature that posits race as the strong determinant is inequitable access to education. More recent studies asserted that socioeconomic status is more important than race in predicting educational outcomes for children (Battle & Lewis, 2002; Bellibaş, 2016).

Gifted Education

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the issue of underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted education, reviewing the literature also called to explore the origins of gifted education in the U.S. The literature aims to review not only the origins of gifted education but the underpinnings that characterize this educational policy: conceptions and identification. The literature shows that the origins, ideologies, and identification practices for gifted education are rooted in philosophies that create unequal opportunities for Black children.

Historical Conception of Giftedness

The literature highlighted an evolving ideology of giftedness and what characteristics qualifies one to be considered gifted (Dai, 2020; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Sternberg et al., 2021). Dai (2020) outlined the emerging, objective philosophy of giftedness as a unitary quality modeling “essentialism” in late 19th century to a diverse construct of “pluralistic” qualities in the mid-20th century. Historically, giftedness correlated with exceptional intelligence or achievement ability (Dai, 2020; Nevo, 1994; Smedsrud, 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021). Sternberg et al. (2021)

critiqued the early philosophies of “giftedness” as racialized and discriminatory and emulated the anti-Black bias of the Reconstruction period. The early roots of “giftedness” were credited to the philosophies of British eugenicist Sir Francis Galton who proposed and tested that giftedness was a heritable trait and relied on IQ testing as his basis for quantifying giftedness (Dai, 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021). Feldhusen and Hoover (1986) posited that this form of testing birthed the idea that gifted and/or talent could be assessed by measurable points.

Sternberg et al. (2021) noted that Galton also wrote that the Chinese “a superior race...should move to Africa and displace Black people...an intellectually inferior race” (p. 227). This example of Galton’s writing support Dai (2020) assertion that Galton believed giftedness was possessed by only a select group of non-Black people. Galton’s ideology on giftedness was further supported by Lewis Terman, the “founder of the gifted movement” (Sternberg et al., 2021). Terman shared Galton’s beliefs that the gifted were a static, homogenous group and developed testing tools, like Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, to support his thinking (Dai, 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021; Thornton, 2023). Dai (2020) described how changes in giftedness emerged in the 1950s when researchers, like Paul Witty, Howard Gardner, and Joseph Renzulli, launched studies to show giftedness outside of IQ-based identification. Factors, such as motivation, special talents, and multiple intelligences, began to expand the definition of giftedness (Dai, 2020; Feldhusen & Hoover, 1986; Smedsrud, 2020).

The early testing of intelligence and giftedness was not used for identification purposes. VanTassel-Baska (2018) clarified that some schools implemented “acceleration policies and advanced coursework, but these practices were not typical or widespread” (p.98). The Soviet Union’s launching of Sputnik in 1957 exposed the United States’ lack of advancement in science

and technology thus serving as the match that ignited the fire of the federal government's financial support of developing gifted talents (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Thornton, 2023; VanTassel-Baska, 2018). McClain and Pfeiffer (2012) pointed out this attention helped develop gifted education practices and beliefs in U.S. schools. VanTassel-Baska (2018) added that schools began offering more advanced courses, acceleration practices for early college entrance, and integrated more innovative courses in technology and science. Congress's push to provide guidance to states for assessing and educating high-ability learners prompted the development of Sidney Marland's document—the Marland Report of 1972—which served as the first national report on gifted education. McClain and Pfeiffer (2012) argued that using only IQ scores limited the identification of gifted students, so the multiple criteria (general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts aptitude, psychomotor ability) outlined in the Marland Report helped expand the numbers of the gifted population in schools. Dai (2020) asserted that the Marland Report's multiple criteria created unforeseen issues as it was “a convenient list” and not “rigorously or consensually defined” (p. 1518). The Marland Report, however, served as the catalyst for states to develop official policies to identify and service gifted and talented students (Dai, 2020; VanTassel-Baska, 2018). Results from McClain and Pfeiffer's (2012) study on state definitions, policies, and practices for gifted students in the United States revealed that there are significant variations in how states identify and classify gifted students.

While the definition of giftedness became vaster and more inclusive, the diversity of who made up gifted and talented classrooms did not change. Results from the Marland Report and Javits act pushed Congress to spend more money in gifted education. Margaret Thornton

conducted a study evaluating how the implementation of a gifted program in Charlottesville, Virginia evaded the goal of desegregating schools. Thornton (2023) remarked that Congress's generous funding of gifted education in the 1970s "re-defined segregation" (p.131). Hopkins and Garrett (2010) emphasized the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education programs as the new "separate but equal". Chapman (2013) noted how interest-convergence is one lens for explaining how districts made certain decisions around the implementation of *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. programs After this pivotal case, the expansion of gifted programs in U.S. schools, especially in the South, used merit-based standards as a means to preserve White access to quality education under the guise of advancing national excellence (Thornton, 2023).

Gifted Education in Georgia

Georgia was the first state to pass legislation requiring all public-school systems in the state to offer programs for gifted students in the 1950s (Georgia Department of Education, 2025). The state implemented legislation in 1994 and 1995 for a multi-criteria rule that enables districts to assess students in four categories: mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation (Georgia Department of Education, 2025; Griffin, 2023). Identification begins in a process initiated by reported referrals from specific stakeholders (school personnel, parents, or students) or automatic referrals from norm-referenced test scores (Griffin, 2023). Referred students are further evaluated with parental consent using nationally norm-referenced measures for the four categories (Georgia Department of Education, 2025; Griffin, 2023). Griffin (2023) noted that eligibility for gifted services is based on high percentile scores in mental and achievement or three of the four categories. The *Georgia Department of Education Gifted Education Resource*

Manual outlined delivery models for gifted services that include the following: gifted resource classrooms, advanced content courses, Advanced Placement(AP)/International Baccalaureate (I.B.)/Cambridge courses, cluster grouping, collaborative teaching, internship/mentorship, and direct study (Georgia Department of Education, 2025). Griffin (2023) reported that the gifted resource class was the commonly used delivery model in the state for grades K-5 while the advanced content model was generally used in grades 6-8. Griffin's (2023) audit of Georgia's gifted education indicated that AP courses are the predominate model for serving gifted high school students.

Discriminatory Practices in Gifted Education

The literature revealed that despite the inclusive definition of giftedness, Black students are starved with denied access to P-12 school's most promising programs for high-achieving students—gifted and talented education, AP and IB courses, dual enrollment, and STEM programs (Ford et al., 2020; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hines et al., 2022). Peters et al. (2019) and Morgan (2020) criticized the intelligence assessments commonly used to identify gifted students as flawed and culturally biased. Non-traditional and nonverbal assessments emerged to alleviate biased testing practices; however, teacher recommendations have also worked to gatekeep minorities from accessing gifted and talented services (Hines et al., 2022; Morgan, 2020; Peters, 2022; Peters et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017). Even when minority students earned high or comparable scores on intelligence tests, the literature asserted that teachers still under-referred Black students for gifted services (Ford et al., 2020; Hines et al., 2022; Morgan, 2020; Peters, 2022).

Discriminatory Testing Practices. Most researchers have defined discriminatory testing practices as a significant component of the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). Discriminatory testing practices are defined as assessments that only account for a student’s cognitive and mental ability and not the cultural intelligence and talents (Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). Standardized assessments and ability tests, like the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), have offered valid and reliable scores that help teachers justify their recommendations (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). Students who have produced exemplary test scores have been labeled as gifted (De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). De Wet and Gubbins (2011) argued that these tests’ data paired with “inflexible critical scores and cut-off points, result in track-like identification” (p. 98). Pendarvis and Wood (2009) similarly noted that these rigid tests do not accurately assess the unique talents of underrepresented students; therefore, the academic promise of these students goes unnoticed. Professionals have used test scores to drive student assignment decisions for educational programs (De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). Giftedness has been reflected through intelligence and achievement scores (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). Allen (2017) outlined that two of the four criteria to meet gifted qualification included mental and achievement ability with CogAT being heavily used as an assessment for many states providing gifted services.

Wright et al. (2017) argued that giftedness denotes multi-faceted qualities and using culture to display gifts and talents defines giftedness. Hurt (2018) and Wright et al. (2017) criticized standardized and mental abilities tests’, like CogAT, cultural bias favoring privileged students who have more educational and life opportunities. Consequently, these tests are more

likely to identify students from high-income families (Peters et al., 2019). Black students are more likely to suffer from low-income communities which means they are less likely to be identified as gifted under bias testing conditions (Hurt, 2018; Peters et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017). Because these tests do not access the cultural intelligences that many high-achieving minority students possess, the underrepresentation of Black students will continue until more culturally-response testing measures are implemented (Allen, 2017; Wright et al., 2017).

Teacher Perceptions. Teacher referrals have held significant power in identifying gifted students (De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Peters et al., 2019). Allen (2017) defined teacher referrals as recommendation letters or checklists initiated and completed by teachers to determine which students should be evaluated to determine gifted eligibility (p.78). Peters et al. (2019) supported teacher recommendations as a suitable tool for identifying gifted students yet argued that these referrals could be a critical problem if solely used before any other data is considered in the identification process. Teachers' perceptions have been an integral component of understanding the disparities in gifted programs (Allen, 2017; Anderson, 2020; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018; Wright et al., 2017). Allen (2017) revealed that teachers view the distinct communication and cultural characteristics mostly seen in students of color as challenges that overshadow their gifts and talents. This misconception prevents teachers from recommending ethnic or linguistically diverse students for gifted testing (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011). In return, stereotypes and academic labels (i.e. English language learner) are developed in education that carry negative perceptions that produce underrepresentation (Allen, 2017; Anderson, 2020; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018; Wright et al., 2017).

Deficit thinking has created these negative perceptions and caused teachers to overlook students encouraging remediation over enrichment (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). Allen (2017) and De Wet and Gubbins (2011) investigated teachers' perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students and noted that participants believed that these students carried unique talents and abilities reflective of gifted characteristics. Allen (2017) also commented that teachers' beliefs ultimately influence their practice in the classroom suggesting that positive beliefs may be reflected in identification practices. There has been little evidence to support this notion as both Allen (2017) and De Wet and Gubbins (2011) reported a discrepancy between the teachers' beliefs and their practices. Additionally, Hurt (2018) highlighted that students who display strong communication skills, have two-parent homes, experience family trips, or have home libraries are generally recommended for gifted programs while students who may be shy, disruptive, or economically disadvantaged are ignored (p. 122). White women teachers have highly populated the profession, and their perceptions have strongly dictated the minority presence in gifted programs (Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018). Peters et al. (2019) noted that gifted students are more likely to be identified for services by teachers who look like them; therefore, the lack of teachers of color in education inadvertently affects who is represented in gifted classrooms.

Black Students' Experiences in Gifted Education Programs

When students of color gain access into gifted education, understanding their experiences in these classrooms is vital for recruitment and retention purposes (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008; Sewell & Goings, 2019). Due to being underrepresented in gifted classrooms, Black students have experienced significantly different challenges from their White

peers (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002). Davis (2018) noted that many high-achieving Black girls feel alienated in predominately White academic spaces due to interactions with faculty, peers, and curriculum. Ford et al. (2013) discussed how Black students in gifted education experience are confronted with microaggressions that may cause them to underperform due to the negative messages presented about their identity. These microaggressions also produce feelings of tokenism and perfectionism as Black students struggle with the sense of belonging in gifted or advanced courses (Ford et al., 2013; Raymundo, 2021). One challenge reported is the lack of cultural relevance in the academic content presented in gifted classrooms (Anderson, 2020; Ford et al., 2021). While the gifted students appreciate the academic rigor afforded in these classrooms, the curriculum lacks cultural relevance that helps the students strengthen their identity in the classroom (Sewell & Goings, 2019).

Since teachers tend to hold deficit thinking about students of color in the gifted identification process, they consequently have those same ideals when students of color are in the gifted classroom (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002). These views add another challenge for Black students (Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008). They largely believe that their White gifted teachers hold low academic expectations due to their lack of understanding and appreciation for their culture (Anderson, 2020; Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008). Harmon (2002) reported that Black students who participated in gifted programs noticed their teachers' preferential treatment of White students along with intentional placement in low ability groups. Results from Harmon (2002) and Anderson (2020) reported students of color who were labeled gifted experiencing feelings of scrutiny and prejudice where their talents were questioned by many of their teachers.

The challenges of being a Black student in gifted classrooms not only lies in the student's interaction with the curriculum and teachers but also with their peers (Harmon, 2002; Henfield et al., 2008; Sewell & Goings, 2019). Anderson and Martin (2018) commented that Black girls are more susceptible to negative, stereotypical messages from peers and teachers due to the lack of representation causing pressure to perform perfectly in fear of fulfilling stereotypical behavior. Participants in Harmon's (2002) study felt unwelcomed by their White peers who used harassing and derogatory name calling with little intervention from teachers or administration. The students also noticed their White peers' reluctance to develop friendships which resulted in the gifted students of color forming their own community within the gifted classroom. Black students also experience difficult interactions with their Non-White peers by being accused of "acting White" and "sounding White" due to being labeled as gifted or speaking Standard English (Henfield et al., 2008, p. 440). These feelings of isolation cause Black students to seek out ways to gain acceptance. Joining extracurricular activities, like sports and clubs, were used as means to gain acceptance from their peers (Henfield et al., 2008; Sewell & Goings, 2019).

Although most of the researchers described negative experiences for Black students in gifted programming, Chadwell et al. (2009) and Grantham (2004) revealed contradictory results from traditional literature. The results from these studies revealed that effective teachers created positive experiences for Black students in gifted classrooms (Chadwell et al., 2009; Grantham, 2004; Harmon, 2002). Harmon (2002) described effective teachers as holding high expectations for students while building cultural competence by using a multicultural curriculum that celebrates diverse cultures while teaching life skills (p. 72). Effective teachers were reported for

all races, but gifted students of color saw more effective teaching practices from teachers of color (Anderson, 2020; Chadwell et al., 2009; Grantham, 2004; Harmon, 2002; Morgan, 2019).

A Call for Black Feminist Thought. The literature also revealed a significant gap in the experiences of high-achieving girls in gifted talented programs (Hardaway et al., 2019; Jones, 2023; Mayes et al., 2023). Hardaway et al. (2019) argued that Black boys have been the focal point of educational conversations around disproportionate representation in school practices like gifted services. Gist (2016) purported Black girls are an “eclectic and diverse group...differently positioned in an interlocking system of power relations” (p. 247). The omission of the Black girl experience from this discourse debases the experiences of Black girls and fails to depict a holistic picture of the Black child experience in education (Clemons, 2019; Hardaway et al., 2019; Mayes et al., 2023). Collins (1990), architect of Black Feminist Thought (BFT), maintained that placing Black women’s experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on prevailing concepts, organizations, and theories of the Eurocentric, masculine worldview. Collins (2000) described how Black women’s experiences of mothers extend beyond blood ties and how this role challenges and reconceptualizes the Eurocentric view of family, community, and power. BFT shows Black women’s growing power as agents of knowledge and offers insight to a complex history of Black women’s work and activism (Alinia, 2015; Brady, 2022; Clemons, 2019; Collins, 2000; Hardaway et al., 2019).

Collins (2000) defined Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as “theories of specialized thought produced by African American women intellectuals designed to express Black women’s standpoint” (p. 388). Clemons (2019) outlined four components of BFT that shape the qualitative researcher’s role in understanding participants’ agency and history: a lived experience as a

principle of meaning, the use of dialogue to evaluate knowledge, the moral belief of caring, and the conscience of accountability. Brady (2022) and Clemons (2019) applauded that act of sharing one's story and connecting with other Black women with parallel experiences as poignant and helpful in understanding the challenges people face. Collins (2000) affirmed the significant role that Black women played in advocating for women's rights in the movement of feminism. Clemons (2019) added that while feminism aims to give a voice to all women, the experiences of women of color are disregarded. BFT operates to produce a medium where Black women can share their lived experiences and influences as educators and change agents (Brady, 2022; Clemons, 2019; Hardaway et al., 2019). Brady (2022) noted that BFT challenges objectivity by "recentering Blackness and women across multiple spaces" and provides a framework to disrupt "racist, capitalist, and patriarchal structures that disenfranchise Black students..." (p. 397-398).

Implications of Mayes et al. (2023) revealed a need to add more research about high achieving Black girls as results proved that they experience ostracism in the classroom. The experiences of Black students in education commonly overlooks the experiences of Black girls due to the overwhelming concern to address the needs for Black boys (Jones, 2023). Mayes et al. (2023) criticized researchers, administrators, teachers, and policymakers for neglecting the needs of Black girls. Hardaway et al. (2019) contended that administrators and educators at all levels must understand the "racially-gendered realities" of Black girls in order to support, preserve, and improve their unique experiences in education (p. 33) This study uses the dimensions of BFT to add to the knowledge of Black women by examining their experiences as girls in gifted programs and how those experiences affected their perception of themselves.

The Power of Counter-storytelling. Hubain et al. (2016) defined counter-storytelling as a “form of resistance to standard or majoritarian-stories” (p.949). Counter-storytelling provides a means to expose gaps in the narratives and ideologies of the dominant culture (Hubain et al., 2016; Williams, 2004). Campbell (2023) noted that Critical Race Theory confirms the significance and relevance of using “racial experiences, stories, and voices in history and education” (p. 50). While these stories offer a different perspective to dominant culture, they also provide a holistic view of the experiences of all (Campbell, 2023; Hubain et al., 2016; Williams, 2004). These contrasting perspectives from these stories add “new dialogue” (Williams, 2004, p. 167). This study uses counter-storytelling as medium to give a voice to the often-silenced voice of Black women.

The Art of Experience. Morris and Paris (2022) described arts-based researcher (ABR) as a collaborative research practice that uses art forms to “generate, interpret, and communicate research knowledge (p. 99) Bhattacharya (2013) added that ABR has the capacity to expand the idea of social science research knowledge as “transformative for those engaged in it as researchers, researched or audience members” (p. 612). ABR researchers allow to interpret and share understandings and experiences in a meaningful way that are not easily assessed through traditional modes of research (Bhattacharya, 2013; Flint et al., 2025; Morris & Paris, 2022). Flint et al. (2025) asserted that artful inquiry pushes against conventional ideologies that resonate in “white supremacy culture” by challenging that there is “one right way to engaged in research” (p. 7). Theoretically, ABR aligns with elements of CRT as a nontraditional presentation of counternarratives through the use of art. This innovative research method “fundamentally disrupts dominant assumptions about truth, knowledge, and methodology (Flint et al., 2025,

p.11). Morris and Paris (2022) and Wright (2019) pointed out the critiques of subjectivity in ABR researchers as they construct their understanding of an experience through various resources. Sanders and Lamm (2022) suggested using commonplace modes of reporting data along with artistic representation can help enhance and confirm the impact of research findings.

Flint et al. (2025) and Sanders and Lamm (2022) listed poetry as one of many mediums to employ arts-based inquiry. Sanders and Lamm (2022) posited poetic thinking as an “alternative to linear modes of thinking” as it offers a “multidimensional and insightful of social science writing to engage more diverse audiences (p. 1). Bhattacharya (2013) and Yi and Mackey (2024) illustrated how poetic thinking served as a powerful way to represent the lived experiences of their participants. Sanders and Lamm (2022) advocated that poetic writing and analysis allows researchers to become “entangled with equity and access to capital” while enhancing research practices and language by creating more “complex images of human life” (p. 3-4). Bhattacharya (2013) created found poems from her participants’ words, photos, and conversations describe their first year of education in the United States from India. Yi and Mackey (2024) used poetic transcriptions from their participants’ findings to highlight and “(re)present” their racialized lived experiences (p. 1853). Wright (2019) noted that using participants words through poetry and transcriptions allows the researcher to “recognize and respect the words the participants used to represent themselves” (p. 289). This study incorporates ABR through poetry to enrich the communication of the lived experiences of Black girls navigating giftedness.

Gifted Education Reform

The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education is still an ongoing issue in education, but studies have shown promising reform efforts that have resulted in more minority students being identified for gifted programming (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Grantham, 2003; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). In an effort to rebut the biased results of intelligence and mental ability tests, alternative assessment measures have identified more students of color for gifted education. Pendarvis and Wood (2009) offered additional testing practices for students from historically underrepresented populations who scored at least one standard deviation above the locally mandated intelligence test with a review of classroom performance. Additional testing included the use of a non-verbal assessment; the use of the non-verbal assessment allowed more historically underrepresented students to be identified for the gifted program. Non-verbal assessments, like the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT) have shown favorable results in identifying more underrepresented students for gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009).

In conjunction with the use of alternative testing methods, early professional development for teachers and testing have also shown promising results in identifying more gifted students of color. Ford et al. (2021) and Pendarvis and Wood (2009) advocated for an early need for teacher training in advancing equity in gifted education. Ford et al. (2021) emphasized that a child's early stages of life are marked by "exponential growth and development cognitively...and we should reach them early" (p. 48-49). Pendarvis and Wood (2009) reported that gifted students of color were more likely to be found in earlier grades than later. When

aiming to identify more students of color for gifted programming, Peters et al. (2019) affirmed that more students should be evaluated.

Card and Giuliano (2016) uncovered the benefits of using universal screening as an effort to promote equitable representation in gifted classrooms. Universal screening requires all students to be screened at least once in their academic career for gifted eligibility (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Griffin, 2023). Through use of both parent and teacher referrals combined with the NNAT, students scoring one standard deviation above the mean score on the NNAT, like Pendarvis and Wood (2009), were referred for full evaluation. This new method of reform yielded an increase of gifted African American and Hispanic students being identified at 78% and 118%, respectively (Card & Giuliano, 2016). Card and Giuliano's (2016) study and Pendarvis and Wood's (2009) study reveal the benefit of using universal screening to increase the representation of minority students in gifted programs. Griffin (2023) added that universal screening is the most important tool in identifying traditionally underrepresented populations for gifted education. Peters et al. (2019) discussed that using national norm scores to identify eligibility for gifted programming is a significant reason for underrepresentation as they favor more advantaged backgrounds by comparing students to a broad, nationwide sample. Using local and group-specific norm scores instead of national norm scores allows for students to be compared to only those with similar resources and opportunities opens the window for more access (Peters et al., 2019).

Despite growing diversity, U.S. schools have suffered from disproportionate numbers in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). Researchers have shown how these school practices perpetuate White privilege (Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018;

Peters et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017). Academic and achievement testing have created cultural bias while misguided teacher perceptions have stifled the minority presence (Allen, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Howard, 2018; Hurt, 2018; Wright et al., 2017). The education system has underserved high-achieving Black students hindering probability of success (Allen, 2017; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Howard, 2018; Lewis & Boswell, 2020). Policy makers and educators need a transparent discussion that addresses the identification process and establishes equity goals (Grantham, 2003; Howard, 2018; Wright et al., 2017). Nonverbal assessments, like the NNAT, can replace biased cognitive assessments identifying more underrepresented populations (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Hurt, 2018; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). Culturally responsive pre-service and professional training can allow culturally inept teachers to recognize their biases to better identify and serve high-achieving minority students (Allen, 2017; Grantham, 2003; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). Grissom and Redding (2016) and Peters et al. (2019) emphasized that Black students need teachers who look like them and called for a need to diversify the teaching workforce. Peters (2022) also argued for major societal changes such as early access to advanced learning opportunities for all students as well as a decrease in poverty to increase access to learning opportunities and alleviate life stressors.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the scholarly literature relevant to the experiences of gifted Black girls. The discussion on the inequality to educational access for Black Americans and women outlined the historical context of the study that influenced the challenges of isolation and stereotypes for minorities. Research on the concept of giftedness and discriminatory practices in gifted education were also examined to highlight additional contributing factors of

disproportionate representation. With limited existing scholarship, a brief overview of Black students' experience in gifted education and gifted reform was provided to add insight to the study's findings and interpretations. CRT and BFT provided the framework to advocate a need for more literature on the experiences of gifted Black girls as their voices are commonly overlooked in academic discourse. As this chapter reviewed existing research to establish the layered context of the experience of Black girls navigating giftedness, the following chapter will outline the methodological approach implemented to obtain, analyze, and construct the narratives of the participants.

Chapter III

Methodology

Maxwell (2013) noted that the decisions about research methods are contingent upon the issues being studied. Selecting a research design not only relies on the topic of study but also who is conducting the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that the philosophical assumptions and personal experiences of the researcher also inform the decision of methodology along with the audience of the study. The research design of a study collectively addresses the topic of the study, the individual facilitating the study, and the desired outcome(s) of the study. This chapter serves as a justification and overview of the methodology used to conduct this study to address the following questions:

RQ1: How do Black women describe their experience as students who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms?

RQ2: How do Black women understand the ways their experiences as students in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms affected their sense of identity and connection with peers and teachers?

RQ3: What strategies do Black women who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms identify for increasing the support of Black girls in these classrooms?

In order to effectively answer these questions, I used a qualitative research approach. Merriam (2002) emphasized that qualitative research lies in the idea that “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). The research questions that drove this study

were meant to capture how Black women described their experience as students in gifted/honors classrooms and how they have made meaning of their experiences' effect on their sense of identity and relationships in those classrooms. As a Black woman who had been labeled gifted as a young girl, I aimed to “understand the meaning [other Black gifted girls] have constructed about their world and their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 4-5). In Chapter 5, Maxwell (2013) asserted that the methods of a qualitative study reflect what the researcher will actually do in carrying out study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) outlined the framework as an interconnection of philosophical worldviews, research design, and methods while Maxwell (2013) described the following components of a methods section: research relationships design, selection of settings and participants, data collection, and data analysis (p. 90). This section will address those components of this study.

Philosophical Worldview

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that individuals preparing for research explicitly define the philosophical ideas they embrace as these views influence the practice of research. When examining my personal beliefs and goals for this study, I determined that this study is a synergy of the constructivism and transformative worldviews. Although I have my own experience as a Black girl labeled gifted in Southeast Georgia, I understand that other Black girls may have had a seemingly different perspective than my own, and that perspective is not wrong as it captures that participant's reality. Constructivist researchers believe that individuals develop meaning based on their interactions with the world in which they live and work, and these meanings are varied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that humans use historical and social perspectives to engage and make sense of their

world. By investigating the experiences of Black women who participated in gifted programs as girls, I aspired to gain an understanding of how the participants perceived their interactions in academically-challenging classrooms and how these exchanges defined their experiences and influenced their perceptions of themselves and their abilities. I also aimed to learn how the participants engaged not only with their peers and teachers but also the curriculum in and outside those classrooms. Interviewing the participants allowed me to capture the complex gamut of this experience.

One goal of this study was to educate other stakeholders on the construction of the gifted program and the experience it provided for gifted Black girls. The underrepresentation of Black students—both boys and girls— in gifted programs still continues to be an ongoing trend despite progressive efforts. I want the results of this study to serve as a change agent. The findings of this study call on policymakers to dismantle barriers and implement strategies that foster inclusivity and positivity in these educational spaces for all students. The outcome-driven goals of this study are nurtured in the transformative worldview. Transformative researchers advocate helping marginalized groups be heard by dominant culture (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The counternarratives that the Black women provided challenge the central narrative of Whites. Creswell and Creswell (2018) delineated that transformative research focuses on “inequities based on gender, race, ethnicity...” (p. 10).

Research Design

Merriam (2002) contended that the world is not a uniform, static, or quantifiable situation. Reality morphs, changes, and evolves over time. The world is defined by various, ever-changing interpretations made by different individuals. Qualitative researchers appreciate what

those diverse understandings are and the context in which they are made (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) posited that qualitative inquiry is a personal research design. As a Black woman who received the label of gifted at the age of 10, the experiences of other Black women who received this label personally piqued my interest. I can vividly recall many of the experiences I endured in school as I interacted with my teachers, peers, and curriculum in the gifted and honors classrooms. These encounters played an integral role in how I viewed myself, how I maneuvered through life after high school, and how I viewed education as a current high school educator.

After examining the different methods of qualitative research, I decided to use narrative inquiry to carry out this study. As a researcher and avid reader, I believe in the power of in-depth storytelling and its ability to capture the essence of an experience without being physically present. Patton (2015) described this approach as a method that “focuses on stories” (p. 128). Kim (2016) affirmed that narrative inquiry uses these stories to understand and make meaning of human actions and experiences. The researcher uses the stories of the participants as data and constructs the narrative as the analysis of the researcher’s interpretation of these stories based on how the story is told (Kim, 2016; Patton, 2015). Creswell (2018) noted that this analysis merges the views from the participant’s life with those of the researcher’s life. Prasad (2018) highlighted Lyotard’s support of narrative knowledge as means of cultivating our perceptive awareness as it offers “a completely different language game in dealing in myths, fables, fantasies, and legends” (p. 251). Aligning to CRT’s tenet of counternarratives disrupting dominant discourse, Kim (2016) advocated that narrative inquiry is ideal to challenge dominant perception on educational issues and reshape educational views as it emphasizes the participants’ lived experiences

providing insight to educators and policymakers that support change. Evans-Winters (2019) added that this critical qualitative inquiry helps to engage in candid yet meaningful conversations on race.

Narrative inquiry moves beyond the “definitions, statements of fact, and generalized rules” of scientific knowledge as it provides “explanatory knowledge” that captures “rich nuances” not expressed in traditional research (Kim, 2016, p. 11). Evans-Winters (2019) criticized scientific knowledge’s use of “objective science” as a tool in “education systems perpetuating racialized myths of inherited deficiency” about Black people (p. 47). Because this study explored Black women’s experiences in gifted programs, the effects of their experiences, and how their experiences can support or change the views of gifted programs, the narrative inquiry design served as an appropriate method of inquiry to create oppositional knowledge from traditional narratives.

Evans-Winters (2019) argued that Black women scholars’ voices are marginalized in qualitative discourse and advocated for the need of more diverse representation in qualitative work. In outlining BFT and its tenets, Collins (2000) posited that Black women have collective knowledge of shared experiences, reflections, and conversations within their communities. Suriel et al. (2017) demonstrated how co-constructive narrative approaches support marginalized participants in articulating racialized experiences in their own voices. Their findings reinforce narrative inquiry as a valuable method for examining the personal, cultural, and institutional forces that shape Black women's experiences. Narrative inquiry created a medium to center the shared knowledge of the participants through their counter narratives of how they made meaning of their experiences in gifted programs. In alignment with CRT and BFT, the use of this

methodology to explore the experiences of these participants not only amplified the voices of Black women in qualitative research but also highlighted their voices to honor their collective knowledge.

Setting and Participants

The setting for the study took place a suburban county in Southeast Georgia: Young County (pseudonym). According to Carl Vinson Institute of Government's (2022) *Population and Economic Data Files*, Young County contained roughly 85,000 people with a median income of approximately \$53,000. Georgia's recent demographic data reported Young County being made up of predominately White citizens ($\approx 60\%$) while Black citizens constituted for roughly 30% (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2022a). Young County enrolled 11,008 students with roughly 40% of their population being represented by Black students during the 2021-2022 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2022a, 2022c). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2022b), Black students only represented a mere 10% of Young County's gifted population while White students represented 78% of the gifted population. Young County was only one of many districts in Georgia that illustrated this representation disparity in gifted programs (Georgia Department of Education, 2022b). This disparity reflects a trend across Georgia, but it is quite pronounced in Southeast Georgia in relationship to other regions in the state (Georgia Department of Education, 2022b). Young County served as a compelling site for this study due to the evident underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs in comparison to their overall school enrollment. Because I grew up and worked in this county, I had insider knowledge with the school community and cultural dynamics which is key in understanding the experiences of the participants. Given the disproportionately low

representation of Black students in gifted programs in the region, my connection to the community made it easier to identify and recruit participants who willing to share their experiences. Additionally, I was interested to see if the participants shared some of the similar experiences I faced growing up as a gifted Black girl matriculating through advanced courses in a socioeconomically diverse community.

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2022b), only 40 high school students represented the Black gifted population in Young County; therefore, the sample for Black women were limited. The literature noted that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research yet advised that sample sizes remain small due to intensive labor and in-depth collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kim, 2016; Patton, 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2018) estimated one or two individuals for a narrative inquiry sample size. Kim (2016) noted an appropriate sample size “could range from 6 to 12 participants” when interviewing each participant multiple times in a narrative inquiry (p. 161). Patton (2015) noted that “narrative inquiry examines human lives...honoring a lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p.128). Patton (2015) affirmed that in-depth, information-rich cases promote depth and can be valuable. My goal was to obtain at least seven to eight participants for this study to allow rich, in-depth exploration of the participants’ experiences in gifted programs while also providing diverse perspectives. In this case, criteria were extended to young women who had graduated from the school system within the past five years as they were not largely detached from the experiences of the program. An additional alternative to obtaining the desired sample size was to interview participants who were not traditionally labeled gifted but matriculating through advanced coursework from elementary through high school.

Because gifted programs serve various populations, homogeneous purposeful sampling was used to collect the subgroup of participants. Patton (2015) professed that qualitative researchers prefer purposeful sampling and defined purposeful sampling as “selecting information-rich cases to study [that] will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 264). Because this study explored the experience of one subgroup (Black women who participated in gifted program), homogeneous sampling ensured that the sample size is reflective of the intended participants for this study. Because I taught gifted and accelerated courses in Young County, I created a small list of two to three students who had graduated from the high schools in the county who could serve as participants. Because in-depth interviews were conducted, I wanted the participants to be old enough to articulate their thoughts and ideas for rich data. I solicited a request for recommendations from colleagues of the county’s high schools via a recruitment letter (see Appendix A). I also posted a recruitment flyer in an educational group to obtain potential participants (see Appendix B). I initiated contact with them through social media requests, such as Facebook or LinkedIn, by sharing my recruitment flyer. Once the interested participants responded, I obtained telephone and email information to confirm interview dates and times. Seven participants—all 18 years of age or older— were purposefully selected to share their experiences in this study, and three of the girls met the preferred criteria:

- graduated in the past three years from Young County
- had been identified as gifted
- matriculated through the county’s gifted and/or advanced courses through middle and high school.

One participant tested multiple times for gifted classes in elementary but never received the formal label; however, she participated in advanced courses from late elementary through high school. Existing literature emphasized that discriminatory testing practices attributed to the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009; Wright et al., 2017). I considered it valuable to include this participant's narrative in the story given the historical disparity of gifted minority representation; excluding her voice would perpetuate biases of who is represented as gifted. Due to the limited sample size, I expanded the criteria to girls who graduated within the past five years to obtain four more participants.

All participants were identified as gifted or high-achieving in elementary school and participated in the gifted program or advanced courses in Young County. One participant did relocate for high school, but most of her educational experience took place in Young County. To avoid using real names and maintain confidentiality, the participants created their own pseudonyms. Demographic information regarding each participant is included in Table 1. The table outlines the following: each participants' age, whether they were labeled gifted, received gifted services, their participation in AP or Honors high school courses, and current occupation or college major. To protect the participant's privacy, each participant selected their own pseudonym to ensure anonymity. These pseudonyms are also included in the chart.

Table 1*Demographic Overview of Participants*

Participant	Age	Tested for Gifted Services	Grade Identified as Gifted	Received Gifted Services	Participated in AP or Honors HS Courses	Current Occupation; College Major
Emoni	23	Yes	3rd	Yes	Yes	Graduate Student
Lauren	23	Yes	3rd	Yes	Yes	Customer Service Worker
Lynn	23	Yes	2nd	Yes	Yes	Marketing Specialist
Sasha	22	Yes	2nd	Yes	Yes	Graduate Student
Courtney	20	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	College Student
Diana	20	Yes	4th	Yes	Yes	College Student
Taylor	18	Yes	2nd	Yes	Yes	College Student

The age range of the participants at the time of interview was 18-23. Five of the seven participants were currently in college with two of them working on postgraduate degrees.

Courtney was the only participant who had not been labeled as gifted as a student, but she tested multiple times for gifted programming. She received gifted services by being placed in advanced content classes in elementary and middle school. One participant, *Lynn*, has earned her undergraduate degree and currently works in the corporate office of a children's apparel merchandising company. Although each participant shared similar experiences, their

recollections highlighted different vantage points and characteristics of the gifted Black girl experience. Kim (2016) asserted that narrative analysis is the process of finding “narrative meaning” which “concerns diverse aspects of experience that involve human actions” (p. 190). With each story, a unique quality resonated in each retelling highlighting its own narrative meaning.

Data Collection Procedures

After the participants were identified, scheduled interviews took place with each participant. I initially collected data from all seven participants by conducting one 90-minute interview for each participant. The interview included 18 semi-structured interview questions to help address the research questions of this study (see Appendix C). These questions were loosely structured under three areas of focus: early life experience, gifted life experience, and meaning-making from gifted experience. The first section (questions 1-5) were semi-structured to center on the participants’ early life experiences with family, school, and community that shaped their understanding of their identity. Questions 6-12 were guiding inquiries that allowed the participants to reflect and narrate their experiences of navigating giftedness in schools through their interactions with peers (gifted and non-gifted), teachers, and curriculum. The final set of questions were curated to allow the participants room to express how they made meaning of their gifted experience and its influence on who they are now navigating society.

Patton (2015) emphasized how focus groups are beneficial in giving marginalized groups a voice in a larger milieu. Guyotte et al. (2021) and Toledo et al. (2023) demonstrated the use of focus groups to bring women together to build community and help build narratives of experiences. Inspired by this work, I attempted to bring some of the participants together for a

focus group as another method to triangulate data that would allow the participants to connect and reflect on their experiences for managing giftedness while provided insight on methods of systemic support for gifted Black girls. Although three participants agreed to participate in the focus group, only two participants were able to participate on the scheduled day and time. I continued on the focus group serving as a research partner sharing my own experiences with the participants. Using semi-structured interview questions, the two attending participants and I engaged in an authentic and candid conversation about our identity as Black women navigating giftedness providing an added depth to interpretation of data (see Appendix D).

Individual interviews were carried out using different online meeting platforms based on the participant's preference: Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. The focus group was conducted via Microsoft Teams. The interviews were transcribed using Otter AI and manually edited for enhanced accuracy. The interview process took place in an estimated eight-week time span with two and half weeks designated for each interview. Participants were sent transcripts of each interview they participated in as an opportunity to member check for edits, revisions, and additions.

Data Analysis

After each interview, memos were written to “not only capture analytic thinking about data but also facilitate such thinking” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). I began to facilitate my analytic thinking by reading each transcript and “exercising my judgment about what is significant in the transcript” (Seidman, 2013, p.120). I made marginal notes on each participant's transcript about my initial reactions, interpretations, and questions to their interviews. Profiles were then crafted for each participant based on their interviews. Seidman (2013) encouraged profiles as an

effective way of sharing interview data in qualitative research that is “most reliable with the process of interviewing” (p. 122). Kim (2016) described the analysis of narratives “organizes experiences as ordered and consistent...attending to general themes and characteristics” (p. 196).

Kim (2016) referenced Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) suggestion of three analytical tools for narrative inquiry: broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying. After profiles are created, common themes and concepts were identified to present the findings through the in vivo and pattern coding analysis. Saldaña (2021) suggested In Vivo coding as an appropriate coding method for narrative inquiry studies. In Vivo coding allowed me to broaden (find a broader context) through codes that refer to “words or short phrases from the actual language found in the qualitative data from the participants themselves” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 137). I then burrowed (focused on more specific details) to identify patterns. These codes were organized alphabetically and reexamined in a second round of coding (pattern coding) from common themes to “group the summarizes into smaller numbers of condensed categories” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 322). Using the MAXQDA coding software, I uploaded the transcripts and used the manual in vivo and pattern codes to identify code frequencies for theme constructions. During this reiterative engagement with the data, recurring references to topics, such as family upbringing, self-perception, belonging, academic pressure, and representation constantly resonated. My personal connection to this topic along with my observations from the data helped construct the following themes: family as the first gifted classroom, self-perceptions of the complexity of being a gifted Black girl, academic duality, belonging in the classroom, and visions for change and representation.

Data Presentation

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasized that narrative inquiry relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. Reporting narratives should display coherence and authenticity to the participants' stories and the context of the stories being told (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) added that these criteria should make qualitative researchers reflexive about their own perspective allowing them to think critically about the research process. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted that narrative inquiry "focuses on experiences and the qualities of life and education" (p. 3). In order to adhere to the principles of narrative inquiry, I presented thick, rich descriptions combined with significant quotations from the stories. Patton (2015) advocated that thick descriptions birth thick interpretations that connect these stories to bigger public issues and programs.

Patton (2015) outlined several options for organizing and reporting qualitative data that are embedded in three approaches: storytelling, case study, and analytical framework. These approaches are "not mutually exclusive" and "different parts of the report may use different reporting approaches" (Patton, 2015, 2015). Since I analyzed interviews focused on the variations in the experiences Black girls who were labeled as gifted, I employed the comparative case study approach to organize my data. Patton (2015) proposed to begin by writing a case description of each participant and cross analyze for themes and patterns. Once each case description was completed, I began to develop what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) referenced as "storying" by constructing a narrative analysis for each participant. Kim (2016) described narrative analysis as the design of the data into a "cohesive whole" using Elliot Mishler's typology as a guide for models of narrative analysis (p. 197). The narratives of each participant

were centered in Category 1: Reference and temporal ordering. The narratives were a “series of temporally ordered events...that represent the interpretation of the reader through prioritizing sequences of events and their textual representation” (Kim, 2016, p. 200). Using the themes from the coding cycles, I employed the following story pattern to construct the narratives: an opening that established the participant’s identity through early life and family influences; a recollection of feelings and experiences related to navigating giftedness; a concluding voice of each participant’s reflective insight from the experience.

My passion for writing continued to shape how I immersed myself with the data. As I engaged with the narratives, I felt charged to honor their voices by bringing their narratives together as a poetic reflection of common themes and individual sentiments. Bhattacharya (2013) and Yi and Mackey (2024) supported the use of poetic thinking to honor participant’s lived experiences. Wright (2018) encouraged the use of both field notes and participants’ words as a meaningful source to create poetry is useful in data analysis and interpretation. Using the words from the participants’ interview, the focus group transcript, and researcher memos, I used the shared knowledge of the participants and created found poems. The related participants’ quotes created patterns which also served as the foundation for crafting the poems as an artful illustration of the emotional and conceptual essence women’s narratives. Table 2 provides a visual of how some the participants’ quotes transformed from themes to poetic expression.

Table 2

Transformation of Participants’ Quotes to Poetic Expression

Participants’ Quotes (s)	Emerging Patterns	Poetic Excerpt
“We were taught to prioritize education.” “You have to do	Family as the First Gifted Classroom	<i>Principles before play; I was taught to prioritize education</i>

<p>this workbook before going outside.”</p>		
<p>“There’s this ongoing weight of pressure to perform.” “I enjoyed the in-depth learning.”</p>	<p>Academic Duality of Giftedness</p>	<p><i>They didn’t tell us how heavy it would be; We wear the crown with pride</i></p>
<p>“Giftedness is shown in different ways. Why only use a paper-and-pencil test?”</p>	<p>Gifted Reform</p>	<p><i>What if their tests assessed our power in unconventional ways?</i></p>

Table 2 provides an analytic snapshot of the process of how the participants’ language emerged into themes and then were embedded into poetry. To create these poems, the participants’ words served as the initial codes. Related quotes were grouped together and coded for emerging themes, such as family as the first gifted classroom, academic duality of giftedness, and gifted reform. The participants’ words were rearranged and condensed into poetic lines to capture the essence of the themes. I constructed found poems as a creative synthesis of the participants’ narratives to convey a shared understanding of emotions related to the experience of being Black girl labeled “gifted”. Under the continued dedication to honor the participants’ voices, participants were given the opportunity to review and respond to the poems. Instead verifying if the poems use of their exact language, they were asked if the poems captured the essence and emotions of their experiences and understandings. Feedback was used to refine the wording and tone of the poems. This use of member checking aligns with the principles of narrative inquiry and BFT as the poems reflect an interpretive truth co-constructed from the words of the participants and researcher (Collins, 2000; Kim, 2016).

Validity

In Chapter 6, Maxwell (2013) provided a thorough discussion of validity and its significance in a qualitative study. Maxwell (2013) argued that qualitative researchers must be

aware of the threats that could discredit the trustworthiness of their study. Researcher bias and reactivity both served as validity threats in my study. My positionality as a Black woman who participated in the gifted program brought in a shared experience of navigating giftedness. I remembered feeling validated by receiving the gifted label; I even sought it out. The gifted label played a significant role in how I experienced education as a student; it also influences my critical awareness of labeling students as an educator. My strong connection to the label unconsciously influenced my analysis. Because of my previous negative experiences in gifted programs and much of the existing literature on the topic highlighting deficit-thinking regarding the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs, I had to ensure that these premature biases did not seep into my analysis of the data results. I found myself mistaking their moments of awareness as my moments of doubt. I could not assume that all the participants would have negative experiences or that the experiences in the gifted program negatively impacted their sense of identity. I had to honor their truths while also reconnecting with my own. Analyzing their interviews for tone, journaling, and member checking allowed me to notice those assumptions.

Creating the narratives and constructing the poems served as a reflective and healing process. Cutts (2019) asserted that “writing, particularly writing poetry, is a spiritual practice” which is “critical necessity” where one must “access racial/cultural memory and engaging in (re)membering” to promote awareness and healing (p. 911-912). Although the poetic presentations were not verbatim representations of the participants’ language but my own, they revealed the complex and emotional richness of the participants’ experiences. Using works of Audre Lorde and Cynthia Dillard, Cutts (2019) maintained that Black women use poetry and

narrative writing to not only heal from, revolutionize against, and challenge scientific ways of knowing but also “to live” in fields where they “were not meant to survive” (p. 913) Using these representations of exploratory writing combined the reflection of my own experience with the engagement of the Black women participants’ experience to mutually shape the knowledge that celebrates the complexity of their experiences. My personal experience as a Black woman who participated in gifted programs uses my positionality as insight. In connection to BFT, Evans-Winters (2019) argued that “Black feminist truth claims are deemed to be credible within our communities, and our ‘truths’ must be validated from within (p. 23). My positionality shaped my interpretations of the women’s narratives, and my experiences helped ground my understanding of their interviews to create the poems. Our experiences and stories are our realities and serve as genuine beds of knowledge, and my goal in constructing these narratives and poems was to ensure that they resonated with the community it reflected—the Black women participants.

In order to protect the validity of the results, I collected rich data from the interviews and focus group of the participants. Maxwell (2013) suggested rich data as a useful strategy to increase the validity of data interpretation by collecting “detailed data and varied enough to provide and full picture of what is going on” (p. 126). Because I taught in Young County, and I used participants from this county, the validity threat of reactivity also inflicted the authenticity of the study. Though I did not use my own students, my influence as a well-known teacher in the county hindered the validity of the results. In order to minimize this validity threat, I allowed participants’ the opportunity to member check their interview transcripts, constructed themes, and found poems. Comparative triangulation of the participants’ interviews, focus group conversation, and memo reflections helped enhance the validity of this study. Additionally,

approval to conduct this narrative inquiry was granted by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E). This study followed all ethical guidelines for protecting the participants' confidentiality as well as ensuring informed consent throughout the research process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach in conducting this study on the experiences of gifted Black girls in Southeast Georgia. This chapter describes the setting and participant selection for the study along with the research process. I used the narrative inquiry method to honor the voices and capture the nuanced experiences of participants as being gifted, Black, and girl. Semi-structured interview questions were created to facilitate interviews with each participant as well as a focus group. Using the interview transcripts, focus group conversations, and research reflections, narratives and found poems were constructed to illustrate the findings. Outlining the methodology of the study provides a foundation to present the findings. The following chapter will introduce the narratives while also highlighting the themes of the study.

Chapter IV

Presentation of Findings

It was the summer before fourth grade when I discovered “the label”. My grandparents—birthed in the womb of the Jim Crow era—were very particular about their relationships with White people. This mentality spilled over on my mother; she was very apprehensive about my willingness to befriend others so easily at a young age. Cautiously after a few playdates, she allowed me to sleep over at my friend Jordan’s house that summer. During my stay, Jordan shared some news with me. *“I got into the gifted program,”* she gloated. My innocent mind was left confused because I was not aware of such a program. *“It’s for smart people,”* Jordan further explained, *“You should get in too.”* She spoke of it as if it were some special club designed for the academic elite. I wanted in.

“How did she know about this program, and I didn’t?” I wondered. Jordan and I were in the same class the previous school year, and the friendly competition of sharing grades and test scores was common. I performed just as well in class as Jordan...sometimes better. I felt deprived, and I was oblivious to the red-tape policy of gifted recommendations and testing criteria. My good grades were not enough for “the label”. After inquiring about the program the following school year, Mrs. Pike, my fifth-grade teacher, recommended I be tested. I got in! I felt validated. While I enjoyed the challenge and opportunities of the gifted program, there were a few moments that remained indelibly pierced in my brain: realizing there were only three shades

of melanin in my gifted class, being accused of cheating because I advanced through the logic simulations quicker than some others, feeling like anything below a 95 was subpar, and knowing that the price tag attached to the eighth grade study trip kept most of the Black students from attending. While I had gained access to quality education, moments like this reaffirmed something I did not understand back then: being a gifted Black girl means dancing with two worlds of brilliance and burden.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Black student experience while navigating rigorous academic spaces through the gifted program. I sought to add to this scholarship by exploring the lived experiences of Black women who participated in gifted programs in southeast Georgia. With a focus on the intersectionality of being Black, a woman, and labeled academically gifted/high-achieving, I aimed to give a voice to the stifled presence of the Black woman experience in academic discourse by highlighting the valuable perspective of these young women and how they made sense of their personal, social, and academic environments as participants in gifted and advanced academic classes in Southeast Georgia. Admittedly, I wanted to give my experience, along with the experiences of women who look like me, an opportunity to be heard, understood, and valued.

Using the principles of intersectionality as a guiding framework allowed me to examine the phenomenon of the overlapping identities of race, gender, and academic capability in girls while participating in rigorous and restrictive learning spaces. Adding the Black Feminist Thought (BFT) philosophy to the groundwork of this study helped amplify the marginalized voices of Black women while challenging the dominant narrative of the White student experience. I chose the narrative inquiry design to illuminate and understand the rich and

complex experiences of the participants. This study was guided by three principle research questions:

RQ 1: How do Black women describe their experiences as students who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms?

RQ 2: How do Black women understand the ways their experiences as students in K-12 gifted/honors classes have affected their sense of identity and connection with peers and teachers?

RQ 3: What strategies do Black women who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms identify for increasing the support of Black girls in these classrooms?

Through 18 semi-structured interview questions and seven focus group questions categorized by areas of foundational experiences and supports, academic and social experiences, consequences of dual identity in academic spaces, and participant-recommended strategies for enhancing representation, I was able to address each research question. Kim (2016) posited the playful notion of “flirting” with qualitative data to familiarize oneself with the data, ignite new developments of surprise and curiosity, raise questions and observations, and become emotionally and intellectually responsive to the participants’ voices. After conducting and transcribing individual interviews, I read through the transcripts highlighting phrases and sentences that moved me and generated questions. I created memos of my reactions and questions for each participant. The phrases and sentences from these interviews served as in vivo codes to honor the participants’ voices and further develop categories and themes. This chapter presents the findings of this study through narrative portraits of the participants with researcher

reflections, a focus group narrative synthesis, found poetry, and a discussion of emerging themes across the narratives.

A Poetic Expression

To further honor the voices of the participants, I composed two poems in effort of capturing the identity of being labeled a gifted Black girl and the weight it carries. I offered the following poem as a poetic introduction to their narratives. I am a creative writer at heart, and I enjoy the artistic way words have the power to paint a clear visual of feeling and human thought. As a Black girl navigating through giftedness, many of the experiences that the participants shared resonated with me. Poetry ignites and pulls in emotions through “connections of all subjects involved and implicated” (Yi & Mackey, 2024, p. 1854). These lines—a repositioning of words taken from their interviews and researcher memos—established the profound tone of their narratives while blending the commonalities of their gifted Black girl experience. Yi and Mackey (2024) defined found poetry “finding evocative and moving quotes from participants and arranging them on a page without editing or changing their order” (p. 1854). Wright (2019) added that it “helps to at least temporarily, explode the relationship between the researcher and the subject” (p. 289). This found poem reflects how the intellectual identity of these participants were inherited, internalized, and displayed before they entered the doors of the classroom:

The Gift

Knowledge is power.

Whispered into my braids,

Birthered into my name,

Tucked into my bookbag.

I had it before they knew I had it.
You've got to work twice as hard.
Books before ball games.
Discipline over disorder.
Principles over play.
I was taught to prioritize education.
Your confidence must match your capability.
Gifted habits strutted in my walk:
Asking questions, reading books,
Learning quickly, making connections
I knew how to use it.
I used it to shine
before I knew I had it.

Narrative Portraits

When I decided on the appropriate method to illustrate the experiences of the participants, I chose narrative portraits for their depth and humanization. While poems are engaging and artful, they are brief. I aimed to honor the marginalized voices of Black women who were participants in gifted programs through in-depth storytelling that vividly captured the essence of their experience. Narratives created the opportunity to show and not tell. I used the first-person perspective as a transparent way to create an authentic voice of the participants and show my positionality in meaning-making of the experiences. Although centered around the same core idea, each narrative offered a different perspective showing the complexity of the

gifted Black girl experience while also revealing patterns. The dialogue, descriptions, and events in these stories revealed themes as they naturally unraveled through the lived experiences of the participants. Personal anecdotes promote feeling, but they also ignite change. CRT and BFT scholars praised the use of storytelling as a means of challenging the dominant culture's constructions of race (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Collins, 2000; Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) also added that narrative inquiry was the best approach to reshape educational views. I hoped the voices of these narratives were ingredients of empathy and intention for all educational stakeholders (parents, teachers, and policymakers). I wanted stakeholders to feel the importance of being intentional in modeling behaviors and implementing practices that support Black students in their learning experiences.

Emoni: "The Gift of Solitude"

As a 23-year-old graduate student majoring in digital marketing, I smile thinking about who I am now. I was not always this vibrant ball of enthusiasm clothed in confidence and courage. Being a middle child in a house where the rules always ruled, I knew not to try my mama. Raised in Southeast Georgia, my mother created a home governed by respect, reverence, and responsibility. My father, though a steady constant in my life, did not overpower the resonating presence of Mama. Determined to keep us focused, she monitored everything we consumed. We weren't allowed to follow up with a lot of the trends growing up. "You're not wearing that. Turn that off. You betta' watch that 'lil girl," she would often advise. All aspects of our lives were analyzed through her microscopic lens of parenting. It kept me centered; it made me disciplined; it developed a lady.

I learned early that knowledge was sacred, but also that early signs of intelligence, especially as a black girl, could be... confusing. “You’re being tested for gifted,” they told me. I was always pretty advanced, and I remembered being the only kid knowing the answer to certain questions or how to pronounce certain words. But what else did this mean? I never understood how I even got into the gifted program, but I knew it meant I was special—different. The colorful humor and cartoon illustrations of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* became replaced with the voluminous pages of *Harry Potter*. I was a smart girl, but I had no clue what any of that stuff meant. Picture books were too *simple*? You can’t tell an 8-year-old that and expect them to easily understand. “You are too advanced for that. This is to push you,” my teacher encouraged. I was up for the challenge. I did not know it then, but this new space was more than thicker books.

Mama pushed us to excel in school. “Education will open doors for you!” she insisted. She was right. The gifted classroom was an environment of opportunity to be innovative and creative. We emerged in research and explored new concepts through technology. The study trips were the best as we took field trips with other gifted kids in Young County to make real-world connections and gain a deeper understanding. I even learned how to sew a dress. I felt mentally stimulated as we continued to move through the curriculum at an accelerated pace through unique learning experiences.

This term “gifted” did not always appear to be much of a present or island of opportunity. It wasn’t a path forward, or at least I didn’t see it that way. I was smart, but I wasn’t THAT smart. Yea, I grew up in the nice neighborhoods like *them*, and I didn’t carry myself like some of other Black kids. Maybe that’s why I was chosen; I fit their mold...or so they thought. Honestly, there were other Black girls who could have fit in here too. I wasn’t like *them* [White kids] either

though, and I felt it. “Gifted” was a trap of silence. I remembered some of my teachers not liking that I was gifted...maybe because I was a little, Black girl...I don’t know. My White peers mistook my quietness for arrogance. Black peers, divided by academic tracking and social groups, felt even more disconnected. “She thinks she’s all that,” they would whisper. I had to painfully pretend to ignore the verbal punches. If they only knew how badly I wanted to relate...to connect...to befriend. The gifted classroom was not a friendly place for me. I had to fend for myself: academically, emotionally, and socially. I began to watch the world from a distance in silence and solitude. One moment, in particular, is still stamped into my memory.

During an off-topic discussion in an advanced math class, a White peer callously stated that the 13th Amendment should have never been passed: slavery should have never been abolished. The words belched out confidently with no hesitation. It was triggering. I watched my peers as the room grew silent and intently anticipated a justified reprimand for the insensitive remark. It didn’t come. “No, don’t say that,” the teacher replied. So casual. She went back to the board and continued with her lesson. I was shocked, but I remained silent. We [Black kids] could never say anything like that.

This was one of many moments that reinforced what I already suspected: my giftedness granted me access to quality education but ostracized me from the protection of equality. I felt exposed and lonely as the casual racism filtered through my school experience. I needed an “out”. It was this realization that shaped my decision on life after high school. I couldn’t do that for another four years. Choosing to attend an HBCU was an act of restoration of my voice. Going to an HBCU saved me—just being around people who looked like me and held themselves to a high standard. I was sold. At my HBCU, I also found a community of

excellence. I saw executive board members and class presidents who weren't just watching, but they were doing. I developed a sound to substitute the silence of my childhood. Now, I am a graduate student. The echoes of my early experiences whispered profound lessons that I carry today. Everyone's experience is not my experience, nor do I want anybody else's experience. It unlocked a standard that people held me to, and I even expect myself to go above that standard.

Researcher's Reflection. Reading *Emoni's* story highlighted a resounding memory in my own childhood—familial support. Before entering the gifted program, I learned in my family's classroom first. Like *Emoni's* mother, my family governed with rules that molded my character and expectations that were emulated into a lifestyle of discipline and excellence. She lived the label before even entering a formal classroom. Her mother created a lab of learning at home that cultivated her giftedness positioning her child to be in spaces to display her brilliance and character. When *Emoni* walked into academic spaces, she was not easily embraced. She was left with unwarranted feelings of isolation and alienation. Her solitude brought awareness and a need for community, and she found that gift by attending an HBCU.

Emoni's story illustrated that belonging does not automatically coexist with access. You may have a seat at the table; however, you may not feel comfortable eating. While the gifted label opened doors to quality education, it also invited disconcerting silence and seclusion. Her experience pushes us to reframe what gifted/advanced classrooms should look like when identity is honored just as equally as intellect: where the meal at the table is filling for everyone.

Lauren: "The Gift of Perseverance"

School **did not** prepare me for the real world. As a matter of fact, I'm not quite sure anything I learned in school was even that useful. I'm a 23-year-old single mother of a five-year-

old working for a better life, and it's hard. I know that it will be greater later. I know I'm meant to do more. Looking at my son, I have to make that happen...for him. I was just his age when my family packed up from Florida and moved to Young County, Georgia. My stepdad received a job opportunity, and this was our meal ticket for better. Since my stepdad worked, Mama made sure she did what she was supposed to do as a wife. She managed our household with precision; she created a tightly-woven daily routine of schoolwork, meals, and chores for me and my two younger siblings. "Ya'll not goin' outside if ya chores ain't done!" she would demand. Little did she know, sometimes I didn't care much about being outside. We did not exactly live in Beverly Hills. As long as I had a book in hand or a piece of paper to write, I was content. I loved reading and writing, and I was good at it.

Elementary school was quite a breeze. We would have these timed multiplication-fact practices to test our retention. "You have 10 minutes," my teacher would instruct.

She would set the timer, and before she would finish her second lap of surveillance around the classroom, I would shout, "I'm done!"

"Okay, Lauren," she'd smile, "Find something else to do while everyone else finishes up." You would think my teacher would have developed a backup plan considering the frequency of these incidents. She hadn't, so my "something else to do" became talking to my friends. Apparently, she had had enough because I remember being pulled out of class one day in third grade to a little trailer right outside the main school building. "You're going to be coming into this class. There are more kids in here like you who learn at a faster pace," I recalled being told.

It weirded me out. I wanted to be in the class with my friends; I didn't know any of these kids. They were all...White. I didn't recall any of these faces from my neighborhood. No one even asked me how I felt about it. Mama just said, "Oh, you're going!" I was stuck. The gifted classroom did not become enjoyable for me until middle school. My middle school was a little more diverse, so I was no longer the only spot in the gifted classes and had even made some friends. Our class became the pilot class for technology, so we all had Chromebooks. I did not have a computer at home, so this new access to more technology was engaging. We played games, like Minecraft, and learned how to work in Google Classroom before everyone else in the school. I had just gotten used to this "gifted" thing until ninth grade.

The first major shift came at the start of high school when my mother and stepfather divorced. The steady beats of my early childhood—dinner at five, chores before play, scheduled homework time—began to unravel. Mama, now a single parent, leaned heavily on me for support, especially with caring for my younger siblings. I just wanted to be a kid. My mama needed help, she was new to this life, and I get that **now**. Back then, I just wanted to go out, have fun, be with my friends. It caused a lot of arguments between us. My emotions were torn between responsibility and freedom; I felt the strain.

School became an added arena of frustration. High school was harder and demanded higher expectations. School had always come so easy to me, but those high school teachers were different. My middle school teachers were much more nurturing. One teacher just expected us to know everything already. He did not teach us anything. "Watch this video and answer these questions," he would advise. No discussion. No explanation. Nothing. I started slipping. Instead

of feeling exceptional, I felt overwhelmed. The gifted class wasn't exactly a haven. There were always those gentle reminders that they did not want me there.

One time, we were divided into groups, and I remember my White classmate requesting I be replaced with another student because "I wasn't that smart," and the teacher honored his request! I grew tired of having to prove to them that I was smart. You know it was bad when your classmate followed you to your advanced class because he didn't believe you were in there. I was a spectacle. They always seemed to call on me for those "hard" questions just to see if I was keeping up. The White kids could easily refuse to go up to the board or not answer with any backlash. Even during the times I knew they were baiting me, I could not give them what they wanted—the angry Black woman. You can't be too loud. It was irritating—learning through a lens. Homelife did not make the circumstances any better. Mama and I were constantly at odds, and I began spending more time outside of the house than in it. I chose to drop most of my advanced courses—seeking relief in the "Easy A" route—except for English. Reading and writing—that's always been mine. I could escape in a book. I could express myself in my writing. It didn't feel like work.

Despite the doubts of others and the internal battles I faced, I pushed forward. I became a mother while still a teenager—another tide, another shift. Yet through it all, I have held onto a quiet certainty that my journey is just getting started. I don't want this regular job at this restaurant. I know I'm meant to do more. I want to go back to school. For me. And for my son. My life has been marked by transition. I keep moving and pushing. Even when pulled away from the shores of traditional success, I circle back with purpose. My strength lies in my ability to shift, survive, and thrive; it is not linear.

Researcher's Reflection. When I finished interviewing *Lauren*, I could only think about how defeated she must have felt as a young Black girl navigating her giftedness. Her childhood began with promise: two-parent household, structure, and intelligence. As educators, we often assume that this is the recipe for successful students. Her narrative showed what can happen when brilliance is left unsupported at home and in school. Her family's shifting structure created a weight of pressure and responsibility that was met with the obligation of being a stellar student. Teachers perceived her giftedness as a meal ticket to automatic understanding, and her peers questioned her brilliance. The system and her family had failed her to see her needs. Oddly, I felt like I had failed her too. Empathy can be the mother to guilt especially when you know the victim. *Lauren* attended my church during the time she was in school, and I occasionally helped with the youth department. I knew her. Although I did not teach her during this time, I could have been more intuitive in my interactions with her; I could have been a helping hand. I had not paid attention. There was no room of support, and she needed someone.

Even though the choices of life gifted her with motherhood sooner than expected, *Lauren's* voice as a young mother still demanded success. "I HAVE to be successful for my son; I know I can do it," she said in her interview. She was hungry for it, and she knew she was capable of it. Her enthusiasm to persevere and prosper reaffirmed her brilliance. Motivation is a quality of giftedness that does not receive enough glory. Everyone is not gifted with that intrinsic fire to propel towards success especially when the prevalence of challenges seems to overshadow success. *Lauren* has it; I heard her heart.

Lauren's voice should remind educators that gifted students can also be at-risk. They, too, need those same intentional conversations that create safe spaces to recognize the weight

they carry. Allowing the perceptions of what they *should* be able to handle can make us blind to the reality of their challenges; we then miss opportunities to better support our students. Our help should not solely be tailored to their intellectual needs, but we must aim to support their social and emotional needs as well.

Lynn: “The Gift of Discernment”

I was dealt a good hand in life. I’m the oldest of 6 siblings. We grew up in the same hometown (Young County), but our experiences were so different. They did not have someone to speak for them or validate them. As a 23-year-old corporate professional originally from Southeast Georgia, I see the value of having an advocate; someone to always fight for you, so you can do it for yourself. I was gifted with that. Born to teenage parents, I was primarily raised by my grandmother, a paraprofessional in special education, who brought both structure and academic value into my upbringing. I had early exposure to the importance of education. “Knowledge is power,” Grandma recited. I rarely missed school even when I was sick. “You gotta push through,” Grandma urged.

I have always been a logical and critical thinker. I always had questions; I always yearned to make sense of everything around me. Mrs. Derwin, my Black first grade teacher, saw that in me. In first grade, this concept of Santa Claus delivering all of these presents to every single child in the world made no sense. “Lynn, now you and I both know that Santa isn’t real, but Sweetie, everyone else in class may not know that,” she informed me.

“Why not? That doesn’t even make sense,” I rebutted.

Mrs. Derwin knew I was different. With her advocacy, I was identified as gifted in the second grade. I quickly became accustomed to standing out. Being the only Black girl in the

classroom was not taboo; I had gotten used to it because it started so early in my educational experience. Most of the people in my neighborhood were White along with the kids in my class. Most of my friends were White; it was normal to me. My experiences as one of the few Black students in gifted programs shaped my self-awareness and ability to adapt across environments. My innocent childlike mind did not understand the hidden microaggressions at first. My fourth-grade teacher called me, “Puff Ball” because I wore my hair in a fluffy ponytail. I found it so endearing. “We have to move you to the back, Puff Ball, so everyone else can see,” she said with a warm smile. It wasn’t until I retold that story to a friend that I realized she probably should not have said that.

The gifted classroom was a hodgepodge of different experiences. The curriculum introduced responsibility in elementary school through the use of flash drives, folders, and research projects. Our teachers expected us to keep track of our progress, and if we forgot our materials, there were consequences. We played brain games and took field trips with other gifted students. Middle school brought in the implementation of learning new languages and emerging in the world of technology. The teachers poured into us through these meaningful lessons; I now feel guilty that other kids did not get to experience it.

Once I got older, being gifted was a building block for even more opportunity. I moved from Southeast Georgia after middle school to a much more progressive metropolitan area. My new school environment was significantly more diverse, not only in race but also in instructional practices. It was more open. Teachers didn’t just teach by the book. We had projects; we had dialogue; we could explore. In Southeast Georgia, it was very evident that there were boundaries around certain topics. The teachers at my new school encouraged more independent thought and

created space for students to be expressive through discussions and Socratic seminars—experiences that strengthened my sense of voice and advocacy. Mrs. Boulder championed that school with a vision of inclusivity and agency. With her gifted cohort, she developed a research project allowing us to be peer facilitators for other non-gifted peers by mentoring them to remain on track with their assignments. I was literally a teacher’s assistant sending reminders to turn in work. There was a purpose behind that work for me and others.

I do not recount overt racialized trauma, but I do recall immense pressure. There’s this social pendulum created in schools. The struggle kids were criticized for not being smart; the intelligent ones were judged for being too smart. The ones in the middle were safe. Having that “gifted” label stamped me as a “smart kid;” therefore, I always had to show up as the “smart kid.” You couldn’t be the *Black* smart kid who did not pass the test or know the answer. I felt like I always had to be perfect...no matter what...all the time. “No days off” like Grandma used to say. It even transcended into college. I left high school with a 4.23 GPA and earned admission into an affluent predominantly white institution (PWI) in Georgia. My first semester of college ended with a 3.6, and I felt like a gutted fish. I was ashamed. I wanted so bad to be perfect. I realize now how dramatic I was being.

I’m aware of both my privileges and the quiet pressures I cared. Now as a corporate professional, the expectation to excel is still ever-present, but I now have the emotional intelligence to give myself grace. I interact with a lot of women through my job, and the need to “show up” seems to never go away. The experiences I have had through being a gifted Black girl has given me empathy to help others, even when they do not always reach back to help me. I have learned to pivot, reflect, and recalibrate—not just for me, but for others navigating similar

spaces. I've always been trying to make sense of where I am and how to do well in it. That's just how I move. My intelligence, serving as my compass, finds the best route forward even in uncertain terrain.

Researcher's Reflection. *Lynn's* interview illustrated a collection of positive memories: supportive family, ongoing teacher advocacy, and consistent acceptance. Her grandmother fostered her learning; Mrs. Derwin advocated for her intelligence; Mrs. Boulder encouraged her creativity and critical thinking. Her giftedness was celebrated and cultivated by these dynamic women. This made me think of my "Mrs. Derwin" and "Mrs. Boulder" who poured into my ability to be great. Her narrative was a refreshing revelation that gifted Black girls can feel welcomed in advanced academic spaces when support is consistent; an experience that many of the other participants had not shared. Her experience was not a burden of racial discrimination and microaggressions; it was a celebration of both intelligence and identity. Despite the affirming recollection of nurtured excellence, *Lynn's* narrative did highlight a common tension of the Black girl experience—pressure. The pressure to exude excellence appears to be an unspoken rule for gifted students, and it resonates even more when you are Black. *Lynn's* discernment of the expectations in being gifted allows her to extend grace to herself when feeling overwhelmed and to show empathy to others sharing that space.

My conversation with *Lynn* reaffirmed my appreciation for the work of educators, specifically those who are intentional in *seeing* students beyond their abilities. In a climate where teachers are often criticized for not valuing the needs of students of color, it confirmed that there are teachers who are champions in the fight for equality. As an educator, I hope all of my fellow colleagues understand the importance of being a "Mrs. Derwin" and "Mrs. Boulder": creating

spaces where *all* students are heard, held, and honored. This vision of support ensures the best return in educational investment—equity.

Sasha: “The Gift of Advocacy”

With a military mother and an African father, independence, respect, and strength were core values in my household. I was born in Germany and spent my early years traveling frequently, but my mom eventually settled in Young County, a small town in Southeast Georgia. We lived off base for the first time here, and I became acutely aware of the socioeconomic disparities and cultural differences between the environments I had previously known about and my new Southern home. Everyone was the same on base with very few nuances to distinguish them, but in Young County it was evident who had “it” and who did not.¹

The serpent of racism ran rampant in the South. With the added layer of being part-African, I realized that people didn’t like different here. Identified as gifted in the third grade, I quickly noticed I was one of the only Black students in that classroom. There was actually only one other Black student in the gifted class besides me. Mommy was a drill sergeant for correct pronunciation, so my articulate speech was an additional mark of criticism. My teachers and my peers penalized me for being eloquent and outspoken; two qualities that should have been celebrated. I had mostly White teachers. You could tell by the way they treated the blonde girls that I wasn’t a fan favorite. They weren’t warm or welcoming, and I could not connect with any of them.

¹ Sasha implies that when living on-base there is less of a focus on status symbol as housing and amenities are very similar for all families. Sasha’s quote reveals that she became more aware of socioeconomic differences and educational disparities between families when living off-base in civilian housing.

My regular classroom teachers did not understand me. Threats to remove me from the gifted program were less about my academic performance and more about my behavior being too bold...too loud...too much. It was stressful because I really enjoyed my gifted class and my gifted teacher. If I could hibernate in there all day, I would be fine. My mind was an overflowing pool of ideas and thoughts that would always just flow through my mouth. Jacob Boykin had been written up six or seven times, and they never kicked him out. It appeared that the zero-tolerance policy only applied to me.

Dr. Hodge, my middle school principal, saw me differently...all of us! “I have your records from elementary school,” she said as she raised some folders in her hand. “I haven’t even opened them. This is a new start,” she assured as she tossed the folders in the trash. Now that I think about it, I’m sure the folders were for theatrics, but her reassurance that this was a fresh start was a gamechanger. The staff was much more diverse, and I felt seen. We had programs for Black History Month and Veterans Day; we went on class trips out of the state. That school saved me.

Though still in the minority, I thrived in this space of cultural understanding and representation. Even in the gifted classroom, our projects and assignments challenged us but also allowed us to express ourselves creatively. The gifted classroom was always my safe space. From the gifted teachers to my gifted peers, we were all alike: talkative, nerdy, and eccentric. It was the outsiders who did not always understand us. They saw gifted as nerdy and White, but those of us who were actually in it knew better. Our classroom was a place where differences were welcomed.

As I transitioned to high school, I made the strategic decision to opt out of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and pursue dual enrollment at a local university. When the teacher expressed doubt that the class would pass the AP exam—implying the coursework would be for nothing—I took initiative. “May I go to the bathroom, please?” I asked after he finished his speech of discouragement. I grabbed my bookbag and never returned to class. I wasn’t going to let his deficit thinking keep me from opportunity; I wrote a letter advocating for myself to begin dual enrollment early. A path that was traditionally reserved for upperclassmen was now accessible to me. My request was granted.

I’m 22 now and working on my master’s degree in cybersecurity as I apply to law school. I earned my bachelor’s degree in three years due to my early start through dual enrollment. My confidence was not just self-assurance—it was action. Many of my college friends had early opportunities of internships prior to graduating high school; I did not have that growing up in Southeast Georgia. It became important to me to make things happen despite the circumstances. I do not wait for doors to open; I knock, speak, and walk through. Growing up as a gifted Black girl in an unforgiving Southern environment, I learned to self-advocate. I became committed to making space for myself. Now as I pursue a legal career, I am learning how to be a voice for others who may not have found theirs. My voice continues to grow stronger and resonate louder.

Researcher’s Reflection. One word came to mind while talking with *Sasha*—maverick. As a young girl who grew up being a people-pleaser, I admired Sasha’s bold, assertive disposition. I always accepted missed opportunities or closed doors at face-value, and it was not until I was much older that I combed against the grain. I could not imagine leaving a class and never returning all while masterminding a way to stay ahead. At an early age, *Sasha* had been

trained militantly to figure things out, and this was a skill that she used to create opportunities and advocate for herself even when others tried to discourage her. She did not allow the narrowed opinions of others to diminish her perception of her ability.

Sasha's narrative revealed a subtle tension that had not been highlighted in many of the other narratives: growing up gifted in the South. *Sasha*, unlike the other participants, spoke candidly about her southern community being “unforgiving” and “not liking what was different.” As a product of military living, she had not recognized socioeconomic differences until moving to the South. These differences also reflected social hierarchies and cultural misunderstandings that began policing her expression and even threatening to dismiss her from the gifted program. I recognized that *Sasha* expressed feeling “safe” in the gifted classroom because her non-gifted teachers did not understand her layers of intelligence. Being nurtured by her gifted teachers and Dr. Hodge created a space for *Sasha* to thrive. Her story shows the transformative power of educator support; it sharpens students' skill and talents. It creates gamechangers.

Courtney: “The Gift of Resolve”

My childhood was spent in two different places. I spent my younger years of elementary school in Maryland with my mother. My mother set the foundation for the importance of education. “You’re not going to go outside. You going to do this workbook first,” she demanded. Schoolwork took precedence over fun. In fourth grade, I moved with my father and grandmother in Young County. They constantly praised me for being so smart. If you asked them, I was the smartest kid ever. I didn’t see it as much to brag about because it was always the expectation with my mother: head in the books.

Dad and Nana were not as rigid as my mother; however, I was immersed in a household that prioritized work ethic and education. My family frequently shared stories of how perseverance and academic achievement opened doors for them—values that shaped my approach to school and life. Family cookouts were filled with storytelling of the old days when opportunity for my people meant working twice as hard to get half as much. Uncles, aunts, and cousins gathered together—a collective of degrees to showcase—to exchange laughs and intellectual dialogue.

I wasn't as talkative as my family. I'm sure some of my teachers forgot I was even in their class until report card day. When I moved to Georgia, I was shy, and everyone seemed so outgoing. I became comfortable in my silence because everyone else was filling the space; I got to just sit back and listen. Learning in Young County was so linear and easy. I was so sick of reading about White people and their dogs. It was boring, but I was able to do it with ease. Although I tested multiple times for the gifted program, I was never officially identified.

Still, I carved out my own space in advanced and honors-level courses throughout middle and high school, demonstrating a high level of achievement without “the label.” I didn't need it to know who I was. I began getting tested for gifted every year from 4th grade throughout middle school and never got accepted. Why would they constantly insist that I be tested just to deny me? How exactly does one display giftedness through a paper-pencil test? These questions rattled my brain. There are so many ways to define giftedness. Feelings of disappointment and failure used to cover me, but I was still in accelerated classes. Those same gifted kids who were going to the pullout class were asking me for help. I stopped caring.

In high school the label did not matter anymore anyway. I enjoyed the access that came with being in advanced classes, surrounded by teachers who were well-prepared and engaged. They don't just let anyone teach smart kids. We always got the better pickings of the teachers and lessons. I felt so disconnected from my classmates though. The classes were filled with mostly White kids who were prone to complain. "Why are you even here?" I silently wondered observing their lack of appreciation for opportunity and ability. I never spoke an utterance of complaint because I knew my goal post was different from theirs. I remembered those stories from the cookouts: you have to work twice as hard to get half as much.

Subtle racial microaggressions colored my experiences. "Look Courtney, our skin is almost the same," the girl beside me bragged. Her skin was nowhere near as dark as mine despite her few hours of weekend tanning.

"Can I touch your hair?" was a staple. Regretfully, I would let them touch my hair. I refused to internalize the otherings. My response was to work harder, push forward, and let my performance speak louder than the perception. I became comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Giftedness doesn't show up in one definitive way. We all think differently; we show our talents differently. Effort, excellence, and self-awareness reframed my story of what it means to be "gifted". My fire for success burns steadily; it is grounded in ancestral values and fueled by determination. Despite the institutional badge of "gifted," my brilliance was still undeniable. Labels may ignite the fire of opportunity, but purpose and persistence will always keep the light on.

Researcher's Reflection. *Your family is your first teacher.* I have repeated this often when discussing the significance of family support in a child's educational experience. Family

expectations, household storytelling, and consistent praise nursed *Courtney's* perception of her intelligence. Her parents and grandmother instilled a legacy of excellence and work ethic before the schools attempted to measure her academic ability. Although her giftedness was not identified with a formal label, *Courtney* continued to shine and flourish in advanced academic spaces. Her participation and success in advanced classes showed that “the label” does not reflect capability or potential; giftedness is not created through identification systems. She did not allow the label to minimize her confidence, and it fueled her drive. “My goalpost is not their goalpost,” she candidly articulated. I knew exactly what she meant: the road to success—for her—required more effort than her peers. This ideology of resolve had been grounded in the teachings of her family.

As an educator-aunt, I understand the importance of laying the foundation of education for children at home. I insist on making sure my nieces and nephews develop a knack for learning by providing them books and learning experiences outside of school. The family is the grassroots of child development: what they learn, how they think, and how they see themselves....even in spaces that may not *see* them. *Courtney's* family served as her first teachers, and they gifted her with the vital lessons to be successful: intelligence, discipline, confidence, and resilience. The label did not define her. Her story is a valuable reminder to families on how what is deposited can vitalize a child to press forward.

Diana: “The Gift of Composure”

I had a pretty picturesque family: father, mother, older sister, and younger brother. As a middle child of highly educated parents—Dad held a master’s degree and Mom a doctorate—I was born into the values of education, hard work, and compassion. I worked really hard to do

well in school. Darius, my younger brother, struggled with processing information, so I wanted to make things easier on my parents. One less child to worry about. My upbringing was structured, intellectually rich, and guided by the same mantra most girls like me hear: “you’ve got to work twice as hard to get half as much.” I spent my entire public-school career in Young County; it was all I knew until I left for college.

I could probably count all the Black teachers I had in school on one hand. With the exception of maybe two, I don’t think I started consistently having Black teachers until I got to college. I would see most of my Black classmates in the general education classes even though I knew some were just as bright—sometimes brighter— than the students in my advanced classes. I wasn’t a fluent reader until second grade, so I didn’t think I was very smart; however, I was very well-behaved and polite. Looking back, I think *that* is what the teachers confused with giftedness. I had taken the gifted test in both 3rd and 4th grades, but I wasn’t accepted into the program until 5th grade when I finally scored high enough on the creativity portion. They placed me in advanced classes anyway. Once I got to fourth grade, I became aware of more differences in education. I began taking honors social studies and English classes. This transition is when I noticed the stark contrast—a plethora of White kids. I also noticed that the power of connection granted you more access. The “fancy stuff”, like Safety Patrol and assembly speakers, were reserved luxuries for these kids. Their parents were either teachers or connected to a teacher, and these kids got first dibs on almost everything especially leniency.

Earning large numbers of Accelerated Reader (AR) points was a passion rooted in overcoming early reading struggles, so my determination to improve became a lifelong drive. A White peer once accessed my AR account to track my progress. “Diana, I don’t think anyone

cares that much to do something like that,” my teacher dismissively replied when I reported it. No consequence took place until another White peer reported that same student doing the same thing. I guess I wasn’t taken seriously because I was Black.

Navigating the gifted classroom had various dynamics of privilege and bias. We got better access to our teachers. They were more willing to help us because the material was more challenging, and they allowed us more opportunities to work in partners or groups since they thought we were all smart and well-behaved which was not always the case. If a student complained about a deadline, it oftentimes got changed. Being one of few Black girls, I found solace and solidarity with other minority students—Indian, Asian, gay, Muslim—anyone who knew what it felt like to be the token. I remembered my AP science teacher in high school frequently asking about my father and his job, a line of questioning that seemed rooted in stereotypical opinions about Black families. These subtle acts of bias accumulated, but I enjoyed proving them wrong.

When they can’t beat you, they will insult you. During a mock trial, I outperformed one of my White peers. He furiously referred to me as “a black, angry dog.”

“So you’re upset that you lost? Who really looks like the angry dog” I responded confidently. I loved moments like that when I could be “Bug.” “Bug” was my nickname—short for Ladybug—for my resilience and inability to be easily caught in frustration. It was how I navigated life with quiet persistence, grace, and strength that often surprised others. My giftedness alienated me. Some of my Black peers felt I was “too white”. Even with my fellow Black gifted girls, competition sometimes replaced community. In all these instances, I’ve just understood the need to keep going. You must turn the bad into the good. I’m a 20-year-old

college student now, living in a different city. That small world of Young County as a gifted Black girl prepared me for this bigger world. Strength doesn't always shout; it moves forward quietly, untethered.

Researcher's Reflection. When presented with moments of adversity, we are often faced with two options: to confront or to concede. *Diana's* narrative was a great example of composure. I was drawn to *Diana's* poise in difficult situations. I could sense her disappointment when her elementary teacher failed to address her concern about her classmate's unethical behavior with her AR account, yet she remained centered. She was taught to be well-mannered, and she continued to carry those roots as she grew older. I could only imagine the sweltering anger she felt when her classmate called her "a Black angry dog"; she responded with stark sarcasm instead of aggression. She had expressed in her interview that she sometimes forfeited fun out of fear of being viewed as a stereotypical Black girl. I knew this feeling all too well: trapped under a microscope. Navigating gifted Black girlhood, I felt I always had to be cognizant of what I said and how I responded, even when baited. Those moments tug at our authenticity because we feel forced to present ourselves to be opposite of our true selves.

Diana's narrative revealed how Black girls navigate belonging in the gifted and advanced classrooms; sometimes belonging is less about acceptance and more about surviving. Like *Diana*, Black women who were labeled gifted are often taught to ride the waves of stereotypes and targets with raised chins and high heads. This belief teaches them to console their frustrations with injustice even when they should boldly resist them. Adults must be careful when instilling coping mechanisms for adversity because the price tag could result in a psychological toll.

Taylor: “The Gift of Ambition”

Success is a reflection of my self-worth, my upbringing, and my character. I have to disprove the stereotypes. I want to be successful; I want to be the best. I grew up with my single mother until she married during my middle school years. Mama preached the value of education, compassion, and responsibility. My parents were models of hard work and support. They were my cheerleaders—always encouraging me to be the best. I was rewarded for doing well. Some people would say that I was spoiled, but I did what I was supposed to do.

Going to school in Southeast Georgia meant being part of a system that was deeply rooted by Southern influence. Most of my schools consisted of an even blend of White and Black students along with some Hispanics and Asians. The teachers—mostly White—were well-respected members of the community that taught from a Eurocentric perspective. There weren't a lot of conversations being had about Black historians or Black culture. Our curriculum did not reflect everyone who was represented in the population. I was identified as gifted in the second grade and remained in the program until we relocated to Young County, but I chose not to continue in the gifted program when I moved. I was shy; I needed to adjust to a new school environment. I didn't want one more thing making me...different.

I continued to push myself academically. The general education class would just reaffirm that I was smart. There was no challenge for me to think harder or push myself to perform better than average. I was still enrolled in advanced courses, often surrounded by White peers and Eurocentric curricula. I enjoyed the challenge and working harder for the “A”. There was satisfaction in knowing that I earned excellent grades through truly working hard.

The lack of diversity was deeply felt, especially because I didn't have my first Black teacher until middle school. My middle school was a little more diverse. Those teachers' empathy and inclusivity made me feel more seen and supported. The Black teachers understood the magnitude of representation. Once I got to high school, I had mostly White teachers. There wasn't much representation in the gifted classroom, and I felt overlooked despite how hard I worked. It was hard to bond with my peers sometimes because my academic abilities were questioned.

In AP Literature, we had to write essays to practice for the AP exam. It was common for us gifted kids to discuss our grades and teachers' feedback. I received a perfect score on a practice AP essay. "How'd you get that?" a White peer reacted with surprise. I had worked really hard on that essay, so for her to question my performance stung. It was confirmation: no matter how hard I tried to combat these stereotypes some of them [my White peers] still questioned my ability.

Despite this, I thrived on the surface—serving as class president, cheering on the sidelines, and excelling in AP courses. Internally, I carried immense self-imposed pressure to be excellent in everything. It was the standard. Even when I didn't perform my best, my crown of expectations pushed me to work harder. As an 18-year-old college student, I am aware of the microscope I live under—my own and others. Pride and perfection stare back at me through the lens. I am still learning how to redefine success in my own terms as I try to detach from outside expectations.

Researcher's Reflection. I saw parts of myself in every participant of this research, but *Taylor* resonated with me the most: popular, pleasant, and praiseworthy. From being an active

member in various clubs to carrying titles fashioned with crowns and sashes, we were “school royalty.” While talking with her and reading her narrative, I empathized with *Taylor* because we shared a very similar journey in navigating gifted Black girlhood. We did not crave the spotlight, but we desired excellence. Our hunger yielded awards and recognition. Our perceptions of ourselves were shaped so much in our ambition for success along with our satisfaction of challenge, thus creating self-imposed pressure to always be great. Being “the best” had become second nature, and we were dedicated to holding that crown. We expected it of ourselves, and others did too. Maintaining a persona of excellence carried an emotional weight: no room for mistakes. We could not disappoint ourselves...or others.

“What they think doesn’t matter.” This was an age-old adage in my household that my mom used when advising me to ignore the opinions of my peers. Although the opinions of others should not determine self-worth, the views of others definitely meant something when being a Black girl navigating giftedness. People are driven by social connection; therefore, displaying excellence is our way of connecting especially in spaces where we are not majority. Success and challenge are empowering, but they are also cumbersome. Normalizing conversations about pressure allows Black girls to feel vulnerable and supported. Education professionals must be intentional in the safe spaces they create for students.

Focus Group Synthesis

The purpose of the focus group was to provide a common space for the participants to share their insights on their experiences in order to highlight connections but also acknowledge differences. Conducting a focus group for this population of participants was insightful and complex. Collecting an adequate sample size for an already-limited population of busy, young

professionals posed quite the challenge. The initial focus group was scheduled for three participants: *Emoni, Diana, and Taylor*. Due to an overlap in scheduling to a prior commitment, *Taylor* could not attend. With a last-minute warning, I decided to continue the focus group discussion with the other two participants: *Emoni and Diana*. Both women had graduated from the same high school in Young County and matriculated through the county's gifted program and advanced courses from elementary up until graduation. They were shocked that they attended the same school but had never met. Despite the lack of acquaintance, their shared experiences as Black girls navigating giftedness allowed for seamless connection, mutual understanding, and meaningful reflection.

A Meaningful Conversation with Emoni and Diana

The opening icebreaker set the tone for a conversation of vulnerable and honest friendship. Each girl was asked to bring an object that she believed best represented her journey as a gifted Black girl. *Emoni* presented an initial-engraved container filled with seashells. She revealed, *"I'm a water person. Water allows me to decompress and calm down if I need to get away from everyone."*

Diana showcased two items. She pointed to a ladybug bracelet—a family heirloom. *"The women in our family are very drawn to resilient creatures. My nickname in my family is 'Bug',"* she shared proudly. *"Ladybugs are considered to be resilient creatures. Even if you think you got rid of them, they come back quickly,"* she confidently disclosed. She shared the same sentiments about her Snitch necklace. *"You can't really catch them; they are hard to keep down,"* she explained.

Before I shared my object, I shared with the girls a common trait I observed in their objects: elusivity. Collectively, all of the objects are hard to hold on to if not attended to with care and patience. Water can slip through your fingers, ladybugs are hard to catch if not approached gently, and the high-speed Golden Snitch of Harry Potter ends the Quidditch games if captured. The identities, needs, and geniuses of these young gifted Black women are commonly obscured in gifted and advanced programs, where they remain underrepresented and misunderstood. My object, my grandfather's memory blanket, did not tie into the elusivity of their items. It was a tangible representation of the individuals (parents, grandparents, and uncles) who shaped my educational and personal experience of being a gifted Black woman. The blanket illustrates memories and connections that have colored my identity. Including my object as a contrast showed the different ways people create meanings from a similar experience.

This commonality segued into a candid discussion about self-perception and self-inflicted pressure to perform. When asked how being in the gifted program influenced how she felt about herself and her educational decisions, *Diana* admitted, *"I was embarrassed at first because I got in later than some of my peers. I took the test twice before being identified as gifted."*

Emoni then added, *"Yeah, me too! There was this intense pressure for me to get into those classes. I felt like I was doing something wrong."* They internalized their inability to test into the program on the first try as an inadequacy exposing feelings of shame and pressure to gain access. Both girls expressed that once they gained access to the program and grew older, the program helped build their academic confidence as the teachers viewed them as role models. *"The teachers used me as an example and wanted me to help other students," Emoni* reflected.

Diana joined in, *"Same! It helped build my confidence."*

Despite providing a boost in confidence, both girls shared how being in the program affected their sense of belonging with a desire to be around more people who looked like them in academic spaces. *Emoni* asserted critically, “*Who wants to do that for four more years if they have a choice? I chose my HBCU because I’ve never had that experiences of Black excellence.*”

Although *Diana* chose to attend a primarily white institution, she revealed, “*I initially wanted to go to an HBCU to be surrounded by Black excellence. I wasn’t surrounded by a lot of Black people in my classes. They didn’t have my major. I was really sad.*” While the gifted label affirmed their intellectual confidence, matriculating through the program reaffirmed the absence of the Black community in these environments.

A contrasting shift emerged when discussing how each woman navigated the social dynamics of being one of the few Black girls in advanced courses. *Diana* and *Emoni* discussed different coping strategies for surviving these spaces. *Diana* used the power of social support. “*I was really good for making friends with another minority. They didn’t necessarily have to be Black...any person of color...or gay. We were most likely going to be friends,*” she gloated.

Alternatively, *Emoni* exercised the avoidance coping skill of isolation. “*I found myself isolating a lot. I sat in the back of the class. I had my head down. I didn’t ask questions. I took everything in, but I didn’t make friends ‘cause I didn’t feel anybody wanted to be friends with me,*” *Emoni* lamented. Their diverging responses to socially surviving their academic environment as students shows the varying layers of the Black girl experience; it is not monolithic.

Both participants disclosed identical visions for increasing underrepresentation. Their conversation revealed a lack of sound knowledge regarding gifted policy. *Emoni* shrugged, “*I*

don't know anything about the policy. I don't even know who recommended me. I just remember testing." The discussion allowed me to share that parents and even students can recommend themselves for testing.

"I had no clue students and parents could do that," Diana shrieked. "Parents need to know they can advocate for their child in this way." The dialogue opened the door to discuss ways parents of gifted minorities could better support their children. It revealed a parental assumption that gifted children can handle more responsibility and less supervision due to their advanced ability. *"Don't rush them into growing up, and don't make them take on more adult responsibilities just because they are smart," Diana warned.*

"Just because I'm gifted, you can still check my grades and help with homework. I don't have it all together just because I'm gifted," Emoni forcefully reminded.

Additionally, Diana had some *"hot-take opinions"* on the lack of culturally-responsive practices in gifted testing and teacher instruction based on her previous experience in a contemporary issues in education course. She encouraged continual testing and culturally-sensitive training. *"Just because a child shows early signs of advanced cognitive ability doesn't mean they stay at the same linear level of getting smarter. Regression is a thing,"* she advised. *"Teachers need to check their mindset before teaching these students. Your prejudices will come out when teaching them."*

"I agree with everything Diana said. She took the words out of my mouth," Emoni complicitly smiled. Both participants agreed that teachers need cultural-awareness training to better understand and support minority students in the gifted classroom.

Despite the heaviness of the topics, the focus group was a successful exchange of a shared human experience. The small number of participants allowed the girls to share their thoughts candidly and to remain engaged in the conversation without responses becoming redundant. The discussion offered the opportunity to recognize an established community that they were not covertly aware. *“I didn’t realize that we are a community,” Emoni rejoiced.*

Taylor’s Reflection

Although absent from the live focus group, *Taylor* later submitted a photograph along with a brief reflection of the themes she felt resonated with her most. As shown in Figure 1, her item, a bookbag, symbolized the weight she carried as a gifted Black girl. Taylor shared, *“My backpack represents the responsibilities and expectations I have to carry.*

Figure 1

Taylor’s Bookbag of Responsibility and Expectation



“My backpack represents the responsibilities and expectations I have to carry. My struggles, ambitions, and talents contribute to the heaviness of my backpack.” I shared the themes that I created from the narratives and brief descriptions with the participants. Taylor expressed that “academic duality of giftedness” mostly aligned to her sentiments of navigating giftedness. The

high expectations Taylor created for herself, along with the expectations of others, created intense pressure; however, Taylor thrived from it. *“I overcome it with excitement because it motivates me to work harder than I already do; I am able to maximize my full potential by overcoming these burdens of high expectation,”* she wrote.

Researcher’s Reflection

Although organizing the focus group was complex, the opportunity to bring the participants together proved to be insightful and rich. I enjoyed hearing from and connecting with the young ladies as we collectively shared gripes and gains; I truly felt like a partner in the research. It was therapeutic. Though they were different ages, both women attended the same high school at the same time; however, they did not know one another. The sparkle in their eyes when I mentioned this to them was magical. I would like to believe that connection helped foster the candid discussions. Prior to the focus group, I was nervous about the execution of the conversation since only two members would be participating. I believe the small number was comforting and safe while also inviting for authentic conversation where all voices felt valued.

One of the most valuable moments of this activity was the conversations about reform. Scholarly literature is valuable, but firsthand experience is priceless. Each participant provided suggestions based on their individual context. As a student who had taken courses on contemporary educational issues, *Diana* seemed to be very in-tune with ways to support Black girls who are labeled gifted through the lens of policy and practice. *Emoni’s* insight was positioned through a different lens; her recommendations were targeted more at parents and families. As educational researchers, we may dismiss the areas of support we can provide in our homes because our focus is tailored in educational policy and instruction. As an educator-aunt,

hearing *Emoni* express a need for parents to be more empathic for the academic and social-emotional challenges of Black students made me reflect on my interactions with my nieces and nephews. I consistently advocate for and practice with my nephew who struggles academically. I have a niece and nephew who are both labeled gifted, and I too am guilty of not checking in with them because they perform well in the classroom. Her recommendations promoted the need for a dual understanding—school and home—of how policymakers can help reform gifted education.

Themes

The lived experiences of the participants illustrated a complex journey sculpted by identity, expectations, and advocacy. Family guidance and support served as the initial gateway into education by instilling expectations of success. The gifted label shaped the participants in conflicting ways. As students, the women adopted this marker of achievement creating moments of scrutiny from teachers and peers. Additionally, being characterized as gifted afforded the women opportunities to tackle academic challenges. The gift of quality education also presented burdens the towering pressure to perform and defy stereotypes. Navigating gifted Black girlhood also showed how students can thrive when they feel valued in supportive and diverse spaces. While reading the narrative portraits, the following common themes permeated in each participant's story: family as the first gifted classroom, perceptions of the gifted Black girl, academic duality of giftedness, belonging in the classroom, and visions for change and representation. These themes shown in Table 3 expose the loaded reality of being a gifted Black girl.

Table 3*Theme Development Chart*

Themes	Categories	Example In Vivo Codes
Family as the First Gifted Classroom	Family Morals and Support	“Knowledge is power,” “We were taught to prioritize education.”
	Growing up in Southeast Georgia	“Mostly White teachers,” “We didn’t read about a lot of Black historians”
Self-perception of the Complexity of Being a Gifted Black Girl	Self-Perception	“I knew I was supposed to be here,” “I didn’t think I was that smart”
	Others’ Perception	“overachiever,” “whitewashed”
Academic Duality of Giftedness	Academic Pressure	“Self-imposed Pressure,” “I got burned out”
	Better Access	“We got the better pickings of the teachers,” “I enjoyed the challenge”
Belonging in the Gifted Classroom	Racial Isolation	“I was really disconnected,” “It was discouraging”
	Tokenism	“You are kinda the token Black girl,” “They asked to touch my hair.”
	Teacher Relationship	“You notice how the blonde girls are treated,” “Black teachers were inclusive”
Visions for change and representation	Teacher representation and empathy	“Culturally relevant training,” “check your mindset”
	Identification Practices	“Paper and pencil test,” “standardized testing is biased to the majority”
	Parent Involvement	“Don’t assume because I’m gifted I don’t struggle,” “Check in”

Family as the First Gifted Classroom

“We were always taught to prioritize education”-Emoni

For many of the women in this study, the foundation for their giftedness was at home. The tenets for success were preached and practiced through structure and expectation. This theme reflects the integral role that family plays in fostering intellectual curiosity, instilling discipline, and encouraging academic excellence. These young women were raised in cornerstones of academic excellence where educational success was established, supported, and applauded. Their families did not rely on school personnel and policy to acknowledge and nurture their children’s abilities. Their homes were structured spaces for early learning and identity formation.

Several participants described homes where learning was purposefully prioritized and sewn into everyday routines. It was a value. *Emoni* recalled, *“We were always taught to prioritize education.”* *Emoni’s* statement reflects how deeply her family viewed education as not just important but indispensable. For her and others, it was a resonating cultural responsibility where other hobbies and interests took the backseat to education in the vehicle to success.

Similarly, *Lynn* drew a direct connection between learning and empowerment: *“Knowledge is power. My grandma drilled that into me early. She made me help her with her schoolwork.”* For *Lynn*, the communication of intellectual wealth was intergenerational. Being educated meant building a meaningful legacy. Her quote echoed a common belief among participants that knowledge could be a form of liberation, transformation, and opportunity—especially for Black girls navigating inequitable systems.

Other participants emphasized how their family structure shaped their academic habits and confidence. *Lauren*, for example, described her home as deeply organized and focused: “*Home was strict growing up. We had to have all our ducks in a row. My mom had us on a schedule. If that schoolwork wasn’t right, there was no playtime.*” *Lauren’s* story highlights the importance of a structured household. In her early childhood, her home did not just support her schoolwork, but it trained her for the demands of advanced courses. It kept her focused and driven. When her family dynamics shifted from divorce and the structure dissolved, *Lauren* began to struggle. Narratives, like *Lauren’s*, expose how the infrastructure of the household can potentially affect children’s motivation.

In their narrative portraits, women like *Sasha*, *Courtney*, and *Taylor* also recalled educational routines and high expectations within their families. While the methods varied—some rooted in discipline, spiritual wisdom, or trinkets of incentives—the outcome was the same: they stepped into school already knowing that education was a non-negotiable in the blueprint to success.

This theme combats deficit narratives applied to Black families and academic achievement. These young women were not "discovered" to be gifted by schools. They were already birthed with giftedness through the values, expectations, and stories milked into them by their families. They were living in homes that cultivated seeds of giftedness. Their families were their first teachers long before any stamp of giftedness was applied. This theme speaks directly to the RQ1 by revealing how participants’ early experiences with family mold their academic identity. These women were active learners in culturally fertile environments that valued intellect. Their homes were the foundation for their resilience, confidence, and achievement.

Self-perceptions of the Complexity of Being a Gifted Black Girl

“There’s no play-by-play in navigating how to be a gifted Black girl.” — Diana

This theme describes the complexity of how Black women perceived themselves as students and how they were seen within the academic settings that many times failed to recognize or support their multifaceted identities. Participants reflected on the coupled burden of maintaining high expectations and disproving stereotypes which painted a constant battle between authenticity and acceptability. “Overachiever”, “whitewashed”, “you ask too many questions” were just a few adages that made these young women recognize the lens of racial and gendered scrutiny. The result created an internal tug-of-war between authenticity, expectation, and perception. The narratives revealed that there was no guidance for how to navigate gifted spaces as Black girls. *Diana* offered this reflection in her interview: *“There’s no play-by-play in navigating how to be a gifted Black girl. You could either be accepted or rejected...even from the people who looked like you. I didn’t want to play into the stereotype.”*

Diana’s words revealed the uncertainty of how to build connections in the gifted classroom. They gambled being welcomed or excluded. Women, like *Diana*, felt the need to edit themselves in order to disprove stereotypes. Being a gifted Black girl meant making calculated decisions to feel protected and accepted. *Diana’s* use of “play into the stereotype” signifies a sense of erasure, concealing pieces of her personality to avoid reinforcing racial stereotypes of being arrogant, aggressive, or “acting White.” *Diana* added, *“I was scared to have fun in class. I didn’t want them to catch me being stereotypical. It made me feed into the whitewashed accusations.”* “Whitewashed accusations” refers to assumptions that she was emulating

“Whiteness” to fit into behavioral norms. She felt pressure to suppress feelings of authentic expression in fear of “being caught” deviating from behavior that was not viewed as acceptable.

Despite these pressures, participants, like *Sasha*, expressed deep confidence about their intelligence and right to be in gifted spaces. She did not allow other’s perceptions to police her. *Sasha* said, “*I know I was supposed to be here.*” *Sasha’s* certainty reflected the pride many girls carried in their academic identity, yet that internal confidence often existed alongside external misunderstanding. Their self-perception as gifted and capable was not always affirmed by peers or teachers.

Taylor, for example, described being seen as “an overachiever”. Although it appeared to be positive, the label was loaded with expectation. She stated, “*I feel like people had this perception of me as an overachiever...I wanted to do everything in excellence.*” This impression endorsed the feeling of walking a tightrope, consistently reaching for excellence while trying not to fall into the pool of discomforting others.

The participants also recognized that other characteristics may have influenced their identification as gifted students. *Emoni* mentioned, “*I think the way I carried myself had something to do with. I also did not live in same neighborhoods as many of the Black kids*” noting that her presence in the classroom as engaged and articulate along with her family’s socioeconomic status may have influenced her access to the gifted classroom. *Diana* added, “*I was well-behaved and sometimes that gets misunderstood as gifted.*” Both *Emoni* and *Diana* acknowledged that other Black students at their school were just as smart as their White peers who were in the gifted program, but they may not have had the same resources or displayed “acceptable” behaviors to allow them access. Their comments reflected the idea that academic

ability is not the sole measure of giftedness; behavior and socioeconomic status are perceived factors of giftedness and who may gain access to advanced academic spaces.

All perceptions were not birthed in negativity. A notable aspect of this theme is how intellectual awareness shaped participants' identities. *Lynn* reflected, "*I'm a very logical person and questioned everything.*"

Sasha noted, "*I had all of these ideas in my head.*" Their words refuted the idea that they were passive learners or cautiously compliant. *Lynn* saw her giftedness as a critical thinker; *Sasha* was an innovator. These behaviors—leading with logic or out-of-the-box thinking—were sometimes misunderstood as invaders to conventional norms.

Across the narrative portraits of *Sasha*, *Diana*, and *Lynn*, the theme of perception was most visibly present. They were proud of their intelligence, but they recognized the social price of visibility. While facing microaggressions and exclusion, the participants' self-perceptions were molded by the expectations placed upon them.

This theme aligns to RQ 1 and 2 by revealing how their experiences affected their self-perception, while also highlighting how the perceptions of others shaped their experiences in gifted spaces. These girls were balancing the weight of academic rigor in advanced programs while simultaneously navigating an identity space with no instructional manual. Their stories task educators to consider how racial and gendered perceptions influence how students authentically express themselves while participating in gifted classrooms.

Academic Duality of Giftedness

"There was this unspoken pressure to perform higher." — *Taylor*

"I enjoyed the in-depth learning."—*Sasha*

This theme highlights the academic paradoxes rooted in the gifted experience: more opportunity and enrichment alongside performance pressure and academic burnout. The Black women in this study revealed how the duality of giftedness was complicated. All of the participants acknowledged the intellectual rigor and benefits of advanced programs—better teachers, engaging lessons, and collaborative learning. The same program that stimulated their minds also demanded relentless excellence which robbed them of opportunities to relax or be a kid.

Several participants celebrated the academic enrichment they experienced in gifted classes. Sasha shared, *“I enjoyed the in-depth learning. It felt like we could go deeper, like we weren’t just memorizing stuff. We were thinking, discussing, making connections.”* Sasha’s comment supports a critical strength of gifted education: a space cultivated in critical thinking and academic exploration.

Diana recalled, *“The teachers were more willing to let us work in partners or groups because they felt like the work was more evenly distributed because we were all smart.”* Diana acknowledged her teachers’ assumptions of her and her peers’ ability allowing more flexibility and autonomy when learning. Though they may not have felt seen socially or culturally, the girls felt valued intellectually.

Courtney praised, *“We definitely got the better pickings when it came to lessons. I liked picking my own books to read and not what they wanted me to read sometimes.”* Comments like Courtney’s reveal a contrast about general education and gifted classes—academic privilege.

Gifted classrooms afforded greater access to resources, creativity, and engagement.

Diana also noted, “*I think we got better access to our teachers. They were more involved with us...more willing to answer questions or explain things differently.*”

These experiences reinforced participants' intellectual sense of belonging in academic spaces. The same access that helped them thrive also burdened them with heavy expectations. Greater challenges yielded greater pressure. Many participants described feeling exhausted by the fear of academic failure. *Lynn* explained emphatically, “*As a gifted kid, sometimes I felt burnt out. I was doing more work and taking harder class. I HAD to do well because you're smart...and the only Black girl.*” *Lynn's* quote highlights the intersectional pressures of being gifted, Black, and a girl in a restrictive academic space. She believed it was her responsibility to surpass expectations as it was representative of her ability and her race.

Participants spoke as if giftedness was conditional; they described constantly striving for perfection as if any hiccup invalidated their ability. *Taylor* echoed this idea, “*There was this unspoken pressure to perform higher. It's like, if you're the gifted Black girl, you can't just be average one day.*” The weight of proving their ability sometimes smothered the rewards of deeper learning. The duality of giftedness—the crown of privilege and cross of pressure—indicated that their intellectual identity was both liberating and laborious.

This theme was particularly pronounced in the portraits of *Lynn* and *Taylor*. They were hungry for the challenge but expressed an emotional toll of burnout and perfectionism. The women seemed to self-regulate their mental health and motivation in these environments that provided no aid kit in being a Black scholar in a rigorous classroom. This theme addresses RQ1 and RQ2 by highlighting the contradiction of academic access in gifted programs. For Black

girls, being labeled as gifted came with both rewards and responsibilities. There was little room for imperfection as excellence crowded their expectations. Their stories invite stakeholders to consider how giftedness is defined and to recognize its impact as an identifier on Black girls, emphasizing a need for practices and policies that are sustainable to stretch their ability and preserve their well-being.

Belonging in the Classroom

“You’re kinda like the token Black girl.” — Lynn

This theme denotes the complex layers of emotions in being one of the few—or sometimes the only—Black girl in gifted classrooms. The participants described being academically capable, and many were confident in their abilities. Their sense of belonging, however, was commonly compromised by underrepresentation and social isolation. This lack of cultural representation often led to feelings of seclusion, scrutiny, and insecurity regarding their place in those advanced classrooms.

Despite being in gifted programs based on academic merit, many participants reported feeling socially and culturally out of place. *Emoni* agonized, *“It was pretty lonely. I didn’t feel like I had anybody.”* Her statement highlights a yearning to connect with others, as well as, an absence of community. Taylor expressed synonymous feelings:

“I wasn’t always with people who looked like me, and that was often time discouraging.” Taylor’s reflection emphasizes the significance of representation and how its absence can quietly chisel away at the iceberg of confidence.

Although the participants were thriving academically, their classrooms neglected to reflect their identities. This lack of representation often yielded unwarranted symbols. *Courtney*

described it apologetically, “*I used to be so token. I would let them touch my hair. We compared skin tones after their weekend tanning. It’s crazy to think about now. I learned from my mistakes.*” This experience of tokenism described the feelings of being othered but also accommodating to racial microaggressions in order to belong. *Courtney* became consequently self-aware of how this conformity was more diminishing than inclusive.

Lynn offered a different perspective that challenged the assumption that underrepresented populations face hardships in advanced classrooms: “*I think I was simply blessed. I can’t recall a time of feeling isolated or differently from my peers. Perhaps, me being so young, I didn’t notice those things.*” *Lynn’s* narrative described diverse environments and supportive teachers for middle and high school; therefore, her noting, “*I was simply blessed,*” was her acknowledgement that these elements served as buffers from the negative experiences and feelings of the other participants. She also acknowledged that her age and maturity could have placed limitations on her interpretations of her experience.

Courtney, Taylor, and Emoni provided narratives that described the strained belonging that Black girls felt in rigorous academic settings while *Lynn’s* proved a critical point of diversity—not all Black girls feel isolated and marginalized in gifted programs. Supportive teachers and diverse environments provided moments of connection and representation. The overarching tone, conversely, was one of enduring the gifted classroom experience. Their intelligence was supported, but their identities were disregarded.

This theme relates to RQ 1 and also provides framework for RQ 2 by showing how isolation in gifted classrooms shaped participants' emotional and academic journeys. The supportive teachers and diverse environments that *Lynn* and *Sasha* described through their

narratives can serve as approaches to recruit and retain underrepresented populations in gifted classrooms, relating to RQ3. Despite the differing perspectives, their stories reveal that true inclusion in gifted programs does not solely require more rigor; it requires genuine support, diverse representation, and cultural awareness. Without those vital components, belonging becomes a steady struggle rather than a seamless success.

Visions of Change and Representation

“We have to bring more awareness to underrepresentation and advocate.” — Taylor

The participants in this study did more than recount their experiences; they imagined better futures. This theme captures their recommendations for transforming how giftedness is defined, identified, and supported for marginalized students. Their insights called attention to systemic flaws, culturally irresponsible teaching practices, and preconceived assumptions about gifted students. These visions were rooted in lived experiences with a desire to make the journey more equitable for those next in line.

Participants frequently questioned the tools and standards used to determine who gets labeled gifted. For *Courtney*, the issue was the restrictive assessment process: *“Why use a paper and pencil test when there are several ways to show giftedness?”* From someone who did not receive the formal label, her critique defies the idea that intelligence can be captured in a single test, especially one often disconnected from students’ cultural or verbal situations.

Through her knowledge of educational issues, *Diana* also brought attention to the biases in standardized testing, *“Standardized testing is sometime built to benefit the majority...Experiences and contexts that are easy to digest for a White student maybe difficult for a Black student.”* *Courtney* and *Diana* advocated for various measures of ability that assess the

different aspects of giftedness: creativity, leadership, critical thinking, and ability. This suggestion reflects current scholarship calling for more holistic, culturally responsive assessments—an approach that may better recognize the diverse brilliance of students of color.

Participants also spoke about the misconception that gifted children are self-sufficient and need little support. *Emoni* offered this insight to parents: “*Parents sometimes leave it up to their gifted child... they think they don’t need help.*” Once the formal label has been stamped, the same families who laid the groundwork for academic success sometimes harbor the faulty assumption that students are independent sailors who navigate challenges effortlessly. In practice, they need the same emotional support, advocacy, and culturally relevant responses as students who struggle. *Emoni’s* comment also reflects the notion that giftedness coats struggle. Failing to support gifted students, especially ones who are already underrepresented, can contribute to isolation, burnout, and underachievement.

The participants also called attention to reformation for educators. *Diana* communicated a clear call for change: “*Teachers need more cultural awareness training.*” She and others emphasized that cultural awareness is key to improving both identification and support of Black students in gifted programs; it is the baseline requirement for supporting all students. Understanding and recognizing cultural differences allows teachers to better interpret behavior, identify potential, and handle classroom dynamics. *Diana* warned teachers, “*Don’t always ask Jamal to carry the desk because he’s strong and Black. Check your mindset because those prejudices will come out.*” *Diana* challenged educators to actively reflect and respond to careful consciousness when interacting with students as their biases show up in their choices.

Another vision vocalized a collective call-to-action—one that acknowledges that underrepresentation is an issue and actively promotes more representation. *Taylor* echoed the need for advocacy: “*We have to bring more awareness to underrepresentation and advocate.*” In using “we”, *Taylor* urged all stakeholders (educators, policy makers, parents, and students) to push policies that propel diverse representation. *Taylor* noted the need to bring awareness as to why underrepresentation is an issue: “*The lack of representation is why a lot of White students and even White faculty still have specific stereotypes of Black students and how they perform in school. Having more representation helps change that narrative.*” *Taylor’s* comment reflects how underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs corroborate deficit assumptions about these students and their work ethic which affect their success in educational settings. Recognizing the issue and mobilizing procedures to increase Black students’ presence in advanced spaces can increase equity, broaden giftedness perception, and disrupt deficit thinking.

As participants provided strategies for increasing the number of Black girls in gifted programs, this theme connects to RQ 3. They identified systemic testing bias, culturally irresponsible instruction, and misguided expectations of giftedness as key contributors of the underrepresentation of Black girls in advanced programs. Reimagined identification practices, cultural awareness, and persistent advocacy were clear and informed recommendations to enact change. These tools of equity have the potential to change the Black girl experience.

Through this process, narrative inquiry opened the door for me to dawdle in the lived experiences of my participants. Through memos and analysis, I also revisited my own experience as a Black girl who was labeled gifted. The following found poem, “The Curse of the Crown,” is

a resonating effort of the connection that I shared with the participants through their words and reflections to poetically describe the weight the gifted label carried for the gifted Black girl:

The Curse of the Crown

We shined our way to the crown.

They didn't tell us how heavy it could be.

We had to learn this on our own—

how to be brilliant, Black, and barely seen.

We learned new gifted habits.

We learned there was more to gain.

Hiding hurt with smiles,

Polishing perfection to mask the pain

We never took it off.

Minds challenged but hearts strained

We wore the crown with pride

Despite the pressure of the game.

Chapter Summary

The narratives of the participants in this study revealed an insightful convergence about the experience of Black girls who participated in gifted programs: their academic identity was marked by intelligence, burden, and resilience. Through the conversations in the interviews and focus group common threads were highlighted: supportive family foundation, various perceptions of identity, contrasting elements of giftedness, social and cultural recognition in predominately White academic spaces, and insightful visions for change. Each participant's

narrative uniquely highlighted her own individual experience. When examined through the glasses of race and gender, one concluding notion was visible about their experiences: giftedness was grounded in roots of pride and pressure. Giftedness was a gift; it was also a toil. While the label opened doors to enhanced educational access and opportunities, being Black and a girl invited feelings of pressure and isolation. The shared experiences of these participants showed the necessity of reassessing how giftedness is identified, supported, and experienced in gifted Black students. The final chapter of this study will now lean into interpreting the findings of this study and how they consider implications for educational practice and policy with concluding reflections to honor the valued experience of these participants.

Chapter V

Interpretations, Implications, and Conclusion

A prideful smile colored my face the day I received my letter: *Your child has been accepted into the gifted program*. It was something about that label that meant so much to me as a young Black girl growing up in South Georgia. Slavery and its birth-child, Jim Crow, were not very fond of my ancestors, so being allowed access in *this* space made me feel validated. I knew I was smart, but I did not feel smart enough until I had that label. Entering the gifted classroom meant that I was just as good as them...or so I thought. I was challenged to stretch my mind and offered opportunities to see different places outside of my small hometown. For these vessels of access, I was grateful. I wished, however, that acceptance letter had come with a warning label like the infomercials on television. I wish I had known there would only be a morsel of melanin in the classroom. I wish I had known I had to enunciate every syllable at school only to have to cut them off around my cousins...to blend in. Walking the tightrope of acceptance became second nature. Like *Courtney*, I had become comfortable with being uncomfortable. I wish I had known that learning to thrive in one world while not backstabbing the other was a part of the label.

As a former gifted student, I saw parts of my own story buried in each participant's experience. Like them, I, too, carried my family's rearing of expectations and morals into the classroom, and my giftedness extended beyond my academic ability. While I shared *Sasha's* pride in being gifted, I also suffered from moments of *Emoni's* solitude and *Diana's* composure

when interacting with my peers, both gifted and non-gifted. It took *Courtney's* resolve to feel secure when I felt “too Black” in the gifted classroom and “too White” around my Black peers. *Taylor's* ambition kept me hungry for success while using *Lauren's* perseverance and *Lynn's* discernment to navigate the difficulty of an environment that was not always welcoming to me. My experience, like theirs, was layered with trials and triumph, and I had not fully recognized this until I began to carry out my research. This study afforded me the opportunity to see the different layers of the Black girl journey. Although each portrait shared similarities, each participant's story added to the complexity of navigating advanced academic spaces as a minority.

The purpose of this study was to provide a more inclusive understanding of the Black student experience in gifted programs by exploring the lived experiences of gifted or high-achieving Black women who had participated in these academic classrooms. A purposive sample of seven Black women from Southeast Georgia participated in this study. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I re-created stories the participants shared about their experiences of navigating giftedness as students in a small county in Southeast Georgia. The conversations with the participants were guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do Black women describe their experiences as students who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms?

RQ 2: How do Black women understand the ways their experience as students in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms affected their sense of identity and connection with peers and teachers?

RQ 3: What strategies do Black women who participated in K-12 gifted/honors classrooms identify for increasing the support of Black girls in these classrooms?

The narratives composed from this study illustrated the complex realities of Black girls navigating giftedness in Southeast Georgia. These stories did not just reflect the opportunity of access, but it also painted an intricate picture of experiences colored in family, race, gender, and emotional layers. This chapter is a detailed interpretation of the findings from the narratives of seven gifted Black girls raised in Southeast Georgia. By honoring the voices of the marginalized through the art of counter-storytelling, “a form of storytelling used to challenge dominant narratives and ideologies,” these participants expressed how they navigated gifted girlhood in the South (Jones, 2023, p.1829). Their narratives reflected their abilities in having “*The Gift*” but also the complexities of “*The Curse of the Crown*.” Each theme is interpreted through the incorporation of participant quotes aligned with existing literature and the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Joined with a reflective recognition of study limitations, the chapter concludes with recommendations for practice, policy, and future studies.

Interpretations of Findings

The unsung voices of these gifted Black scholars created narratives that revealed the complex experiences of high-achieving Black girls in Southeast Georgia. The portraits showcased several common themes that characterized their lived experiences. These patterns illustrated the depth of their experiences through the lens of family, self-perception, duality, and acceptance. Their voices roared visions of change to ensure equity and support for gifted Black

girls in advanced academic settings. The following sections provide an interpretation of the major themes that emerged in this study.

Family as the First Gifted Classroom

The theme *Family as the First Gifted Classroom* shows how family expectations shaped achievement and identity of gifted Black girls. This theme reflects the pivotal role that the participants' families played in introducing the importance of education and cultivating their discipline for learning. Each participant consistently reiterated that *education* was a valued staple in the home. Before formal education, the participants' first experiences of learning, drive, and ability were rooted in the teachings of their families. Families introduced skills of reading, writing, and studying before the participants entered the classroom.

Participants' portraits illustrated how family members, specifically the women, functioned as first teachers, using everyday moments to encourage advanced thinking and creativity. These everyday practices challenge the stereotype that Black families are not invested in education. As *Lynn* explained, "*I was introduced to advanced learning early,*" crediting how helping her grandmother with advanced schoolwork exposed her to elevated vocabulary and sharpened her critical thinking skills at a young age. The stories also highlight how Black women are the cornerstones of structure and discipline: two staples in yielding success. *Lauren* noted, "*my mom did not play,*" communicating that structure, discipline, and success were expectations in her household. Additionally, the participants also credited their families for instilling dispositions of structure and self-confidence into their identity.

These narratives echo research discussed in Chapter 2 showing that parental involvement, particularly from mothers, and high expectations contribute significantly to academic success

(Anderson, 2020; Hurt, 2018; Lamb & Hertzog, 2025). Yosso (2005) described the different ways communities of color create capital that challenge the “dominant knowledge” of “White, middle class norms valued in schools” (p. 76). Through the lens of CRT, the families of these participants combat the central narratives centered around gifted Black girls by gifting them with “navigational capital” with the “ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind” (Yosso, 2005, p.80). The seeds of values and expectations sown into the participants grounded them with resilience to navigate the challenges of advanced academic settings. While Pendarvis and Wood (2009) and Card and Giuliano (2016) advocated for alternative school-based methods to identify gifted minority students such as universal screening and early referral intervention, these narratives reveal giftedness manifests in homes.

Additionally, these narratives also align to the framework of BFT as Collins (2000) noted that the Black women’s role in family challenge the Eurocentric view of family. Even with a father figure in the home, these stories show the illuminating presence of the Black mother in instilling discipline, structure, and expectation. *Lauren* firmly described her mother’s demand for discipline and success as having to “have all our ducks in a row”. The mothers proved to be an integral factor in establishing and emphasizing values for the participants. Through the lens of BFT, the family’s—predominantly the Black mother—role in implanting values of identity, confidence, and resilience “confront race, gender, and class oppression” (Collins, 1990, p. 221). The portraits revealed that families were not only cultivating cognitive ability but also preparing participants to navigate spaces where their giftedness might be questioned or overlooked.

In interpreting *Family as the First Gifted Classroom*, family is named as the earliest and most influential teachers for Black girls maneuvering through giftedness. Families were not just

responsible for shaping their academic abilities, but they also equipped these scholars with tools to be resilient learners in a socially restrictive environment. The families required a commitment to success by teaching their children skills to be disciplined, secure, and curious scholars. By centering these stories, the study not only documents the influential role of families but also asserts their pertinent place in the narrative of gifted education of minority students.

Self-perceptions of the Complexity of Being a Gifted Black Girl

Self-Perceptions of the Complexity of Being a Gifted Black Girl captures the multifaceted ways the participants saw themselves as gifted learners. The participants' portraits revealed contrasting views of their perceptions in their abilities in comparison to their peers. While some participants expressed innate confidence in their abilities as gifted learners, others were more critical of the label and its meaning. These perceptions influenced their sense of belonging. Their portraits emphasize how different structures—family, community, and school can mold the perceptions that gifted Black girls internalize.

Participants like *Sasha* and *Taylor* shared an awareness of their capability; they were confident in their competence. *Sasha*, for example, affirmed her place in the advanced classrooms as she stated, “*I know I’m supposed to be here.*” *Taylor* recognized how she, along with others, perceived herself as an “*overachiever*” who pursued challenges because regular courses did not provide the rigor she desired. She did not want the “*easy A.*” Gifted Black women, like *Sasha* and *Taylor* support Evans-Winter (2014) notions that Black girls tend to carry positive self-perceptions; however, some participants held different sentiments.

Emoni and *Diana* were more resistant in embracing the gifted label. They recognized that the gifted classroom was not just about intellect; socioeconomic status and behavior was also a

defining trait of students in gifted classrooms. *Emoni* admitted, “*I knew I was smart, but I wasn’t THAT smart,*” when comparing her ability to her peers who she perceived to be more creative and craftier. She also pointed out that she and the other gifted Black students lived in similar [middle-class] neighborhoods while also accrediting “the way I carried myself” as two determining factors of her giftedness. *Diana* believed her behavior—not her ability—was misinterpreted as giftedness as she described herself as “*well-behaved*” in comparison to her other peers and mentioned “behavior sometimes gets misinterpreted as giftedness”. *Diana’s* speculation about how her place in advanced classes were attributed to her being “*well-spoken*” and “*not running around all over the place*” reflected Luria et al.’s (2016) assertion that disruptive students are not typically identified as they do not “match teachers’ conception of how gifted students should behave” (p.48). *Emoni* and *Diana’s* comments lean into the critically conscious conversation of how students are identified as gifted. Both women recognized that there were other Black students who should have been in their gifted or advanced classes but may not have been identified because of where they lived or how they conducted themselves at school. As noted in Chapter 2, teacher perception largely dictates the minority presence in gifted programs as their beliefs tend to “ignore the shy, disruptive, and economically disadvantaged (Hurt, 2018, p. 122). The lack of Black representation in these academic spaces heightened their awareness that this label privileged certain behaviors and socioeconomic status.

Ladson-Billings (1998) and Collins and Horne (2022) explained that CRT is an ideology that emphasizes how racism is embedded in U.S. systems and policies. Ladson-Billings (1998) further posited that these racist structures have seeped into the U.S. educational system and shape the Black student experience, often times creating outcomes where Black students are

marginalized and underestimated. *Emoni and Diana's* stories illustrated how underrepresentation in gifted education created critical awareness about academic ability by highlighting their proximity to Whiteness through their socioeconomic status and behaviors. Being “*one of the few*” caused them to question how students were selected into these programs allowing them to recognize how the intersections of race, class, and behavior determine access. Their words reflected a new conversation that challenges the traditional conversation of gifted and advanced courses as a vehicle of quality education and opportunity: gifted and advanced programs also functioned as a pathway to separate students not on intellectual merit but on resources and privilege (Gentry, 2022). Stories that challenge dominant narratives are a significant framing of CRT and BFT (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998). *Sasha and Taylor's* portrait defy dominate narratives of deficit-thinking about the minority children in education by showing what Evans-Winter (2014) considered “high levels of resilience.” Their confidence in their ability show agency in a system historically rooted in inequality. Through the framework of CRT, these narratives revealed that the self-perceptions of navigating giftedness are not static; they are based on conditions of their environment.

Interpreting this theme also aligns to a foundational principle in the theoretical framework of BFT as Black women “express their standpoint....by valuing their self-definition and perspective” (Collins, 2000, p. 388). The way in which Black women view themselves as students are shaped by their educational experience and is situated within the study’s theoretical framework. Their knowledge creates the necessity for educators to acknowledge the biases that influence gifted education. The participants’ experiences remind us that perceptions are not neutral. Their lived experiences create polarizing feelings that affect how they internalize their

ability in academic settings and recognize the world around them. These emotions are an intersection of affirmation and awareness traveling the complexity of Black gifted girlhood.

Academic Duality of Giftedness

Academic Duality captures the psychological paradox that the participants shared regarding enjoying the challenge of advanced curriculum while carrying the barbells of emulating perfection. The participants expressed immense appreciation for the rigorous and engaging opportunities that the gifted/advanced courses provided to improve their critical thinking and enhance their problem-solving skills. Simultaneously, their voices consistently echoed the burden of pressure to maintain excellence. This persistent push for perfection derived from expectations of participants' family, teachers, peers, and themselves. This contradictory bind illustrates two warring realities of celebrating academic achievement while cautiously avoiding any mistakes that would potentially stain their gifted image.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) built on W.E.B. Du Bois's ideology of double consciousness that African Americans feel when mediating between two identities through the lens of education. Their overlapping identities—gifted, Black, and girl—imposes complex experiences of intersecting layers of oppression. *Academic Duality* illustrates this same concept of “*twoness*” as the participants are empowered by academic rigor as gifted students but burdened by the pressures to perform flawlessly as Black girls in a predominately white space. *Sasha's* portrait was a valued affirmation of challenge as she enjoyed the opportunity to learn complex content. She was intrinsically motivated to learn rigorous material. *Taylor's* narrative revealed that regular-paced academic courses were “*no challenge,*” and she had an insatiable desire for “*working hard to get the A.*” The participants enjoyed the quality of academic

instruction in advanced courses. *Courtney* believed she had “*better pickings*” when it came to teachers, and *Diana* observed that teachers in gifted courses encouraged more collaborative, innovative learning models. According to *Diana’s* interview, “*They thought we could handle it better because we were smart.*”

Intelligent engagement, however, was also met with weighted expectations to perform. The participants described feeling the expectation to overperform in order to defy stereotypes of Black women. Raymundo (2021) asserted that due to inherent racist and historical context of developing honors and advanced classes, Black students struggle with perfectionism as it is influenced by the lack of minority representation in those environments. The lack of representation of Black students in gifted education reflects negative views and constant questioning of ability that “feed into perfectionism...and promote racism and anti-Blackness” (Raymundo, 2021, p.114). *Lauren* shared, “*I feel like they expected more of us. You can’t be too loud.*” *Diana’s* portrait uncovered how she refrained from “*having fun*” in her gifted classes in an effort to meet behavioral expectations. *Lauren* and *Diana’s* comments uncovered that they recognized the negative stereotypes held about their race, so they governed their behaviors to negate those views. The intense pressure to perform well was also internalized. Being one of the few minorities in the advanced classrooms left them feeling obligated to represent their collective. Explaining her call of duty, *Lynn* insisted, “*You HAD to do well because you’re smart, AND the only Black girl.*” She explicitly saw herself as a collective representation of three identities—gifted, Black, and girl. *Taylor* added, “*When you’re the gifted Black girl, you can’t just be average one day.*” *Diana, Lynn* and *Taylor* held a shared belief that it was necessary to model perfection at all times as they often felt scrutinized.

These portraits personify Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) insight of double consciousness in education not only shows the emotional burden, but also the structural damage of marginalization in education. CRT emphasizes that racism is not individualistic but systemic (Brown & Jackson, 2013; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) The participants expressed a compounding need to outperform their peers, to muzzle authentic behavior, to represent their community. These weighted expectations resulted in academic burnout and disconnection from peers along with failures or stumbles feeling like collective shame. Their pressures reflect how the system of gifted education does not affirm minority students—specifically Black girls. Their voices challenge the idea that gifted and advanced programs are exclusively beneficial for students especially in terms of emotional well-being. Through the perspective of BFT, Davis (2018) acknowledged how “the intersections of race and gender play a role in their worldview” for Black women (p.51). Their portraits give a voice to the Black woman experience as they expose the intersectionality of navigating giftedness as they juggle multiple layers.

With little research provided on gifted Black students, understanding the *academic duality* of gifted Black girls highlights the complexity of their experiences. *Academic Duality* illustrates the tension between gifted recognition and ongoing pressure. Participants' narratives showed how Black girls in Southeast Georgia meander through the multiple layers of their identity in academics while challenging the dominant narrative of gifted education as purely advantageous, showing instead that for Black girls in Southeast Georgia, the experience involved constant negotiation across intersecting identities.

Belonging in the Classroom

Belonging in the Classroom means creating equitable spaces in the gifted classroom that allow marginalized students to feel valued and safe. This theme speaks to the participants' social and emotional connection—or lack thereof—within the advanced classrooms. Many of the participants revealed that access to academically challenging classrooms meant negotiating social and emotional comfort. Interactions with teachers and peers paired with the racially gendered demographics of these classrooms affected the participants' perception of acceptance. The girls valued the academic challenge of rigorous courses; however, they frequently described moments of isolation, tokenism, or exclusion that compromised their sense of belonging.

The literature on the gifted Black student experience highlighted how underrepresentation affects the students' sense of belonging. Anderson and Martin (2018) and Sewell and Goings (2019) noted that disproportionate numbers of representation will most likely create an isolating experience for gifted Black girls. *Emoni* struggled with feelings of isolation as she expressed feeling “lonely” and lacking support. The absence of community left her desiring to connect with her peers. Similarly, *Taylor* described feeling “sometimes discouraged” by not being in classes with peers who looked like her. *Lauren* felt unsupported and chose to unenroll from many of her advanced courses in high school as she expressed that many of her advanced teachers left her to “figure it out on her own.” These emotional reflections of exclusion revealed the damaging effect of disproportionate representation.

Participants also shared methods of creating their own sense of belonging. For Black girls in gifted education, making connections are pivotal to their success. *Courtney* negated Ford et al.'s (2013) claim that microaggressions erode the sense of belonging when she mentioned how

the conditional bonds of tokenism created in her experience by allowing subtle gendered and racial microaggressions of hair-touching and skin-comparing made her feel connected with her White peers. *Diana's eagerness to seek out her own community in the school by building relationships in the classroom and through extra-curricular activities with other minorities or students who felt othered by their differences aligned with Sewell and Goings' (2019) view that gifted minority students relied on relationships with peers enduring the same experience to help enhance their sense of belonging.*

The findings also challenge the narrative on the culminating effect of disproportionate representation in gifted education on minority students. *Lynn and Sasha* shared stories that disrupt Anderson and Martin's (2018) claim that underrepresentation ultimately produced negative experiences for minority students. Their teachers were intentional in cultivating opportunities that affirmed various identities which fostered feelings of acceptance, so they did not feel ostracized in the classroom. *Sasha* felt more understood in her gifted classrooms with her gifted peers instead of with her non-gifted peers. Their portraits uncovered the truth that belonging was possible when deliberate efforts of inclusivity were implemented. Teachers who built relationships through cultural competence and celebrated diverse identities created positive experiences for gifted minority students (Chadwell et al. 2009; Grantham, 2004; Harmon, 2002).

The theoretical framework of CRT helps build the context of belonging. Under the lens of CRT, *Emoni, Taylor, and Lauren's* feelings of isolation, discouragement, and disregard align to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argument of the institution of gifted programs as the modern "absolute right to exclude" to preserve "whiteness as property" (p. 58). The access to gifted programs have mostly been reserved by White students as "gifted programs and advanced

placement courses are the myriad ways that schools are re-segregated” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 28). Disproportionate representation in gifted and advanced programs result in the advancement of norms, values, and beliefs of the majority and may influence minority students to accept these behaviors. Participants like *Courtney* internalized the position of a guest by accepting these microaggressions as a means of connecting with the majority. The participants’ portraits contrasting emotions to feeling accepted reflects their response to the systematic struggle of disproportionate representation in gifted and advanced courses. Brown and Jackson (2013) confirmed that the CRT perspective analyzes systematic struggles. The participants’ compromise of acceptance and, for some, identity exposes the toil of being underrepresented in advanced academic spaces.

Through these narratives, *Belonging in the Classroom* exposes the emotional weight Black girls carry when navigating giftedness. Access does not automatically yield inclusivity. Some participants felt isolated while others sought to be accepted through building relationships. Some of these relationships were conditional while others were built through common otherness. This finding challenges dominant narratives of gifted education being a fundamental benefit to minority students as it is a reminder that automatic acceptance is not an inherent feature of these programs.

Visions of Change and Representation

Visions for Change and Representation captures the progressive suggestions of the participants for a reimaged version of gifted education. Collectively, the girls were appreciative of the access to opportunities afforded through advanced academic spaces, but they were also aware of the flawed features that are packaged with being in these academically challenging

environments. Voices of the participants supported a need for reform to identification and teaching practices along with emotional and culturally responsive practices to support Black gifted girls. Their narratives recognized a need for change to yield an inclusive and affirming space that values Black girls' ability and identity.

The lack of representation in advanced academic spaces was not only reflected in minority student population but also in curriculum. Both *Courtney* and *Taylor* commented on the lack of diversity in curriculum when being educated as a gifted Black girl in Southeast Georgia. *Courtney's* candid disdain for "*reading about White people and their dogs*" represented a desire to see more examples of instruction that celebrated the contributions and realities of Black figures supporting Ford et al.'s (2019) work of incorporating multicultural literature and instruction through bibliotherapy where Black girls "see themselves" (p. 55). Similarly, *Taylor* recognized the lack of "*new information that catered to Black students*" when learning. *Sasha* emphatically elaborated on how comforting it felt that "*the White students weren't treated because they were White...we had no cliques*" while being in a school with diverse faculty and staff who intentionally created learning experiences that celebrated all backgrounds and treated all students equally. *Sasha's* remark aligned with various scholars that gifted students of color saw more effective teaching practices, such as collaborative learning and incorporating diverse cultural knowledge, with teachers of color (Anderson, 2020; Chadwell et al., 2009; Grantham, 2004; Harmon, 2002; Morgan, 2019). These stories emphasized the importance of representation in valuing identity and diversity and how it affected the participants' sense of belonging. When representation was missing, the girls felt overlooked; however, its presence bolstered equity and inclusion.

The participants also noted a need for better methods for identification when identifying gifted students. *Diana and Courtney* questioned the validity of standardized paper-and-pencil tests in properly identifying giftedness for students of color. As highlighted in Chapter 2, the use of nonverbal assessments in Pendarvis and Wood’s study (2009) and universal screening in Card and Giuliano’s (2016) research worked to mitigate underrepresentation in advanced classrooms by reducing cultural and language biases and providing opportunities for all students to display their abilities. Since teachers are vehicles to accessing and shaping quality education, the participants communicated a strong need for teachers to refine their interactions with students. Allen (2017) and Grissom and Redding (2016) focused on culturally- responsive practices when identifying gifted minority students; however, the participants revealed a need for these practices to continue to cultivate quality experiences for minority students after gaining access. Ford (2010) advocated for the use of cultural knowledge, learning styles, and prior experiences to not only identify students’ abilities but to also create learning experiences that affirm their identities. *Diana’s* recollection of her teacher’s “*obsession*” about her father’s occupation and role in her life pushed her to suggest that “*teachers need more cultural awareness training.*” She recognized that her teacher’s relentless attention to her father’s occupation—not her academic ability—illustrated how teacher biases and assumptions can disrupt instructional practice and student rapport. Culturally responsive pre-service and professional training can enable teachers to acknowledge their biases to better identify and support high-achieving minority students (Allen, 2017; Grantham, 2003; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wright et al., 2017).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) both offer a framework for understanding these participants’ visions as counter-stories that confront the dominant

narrative. These participants' suggestions of how gifted education should be presented reframe the discourse of gifted education by emphasizing their experiences as gifted Black girls who have felt unseen. *Visions for Change and Representation* emphasize the necessity for representation and change. Their portraits challenge educators and policymakers to develop an inclusive definition of giftedness and move toward practices that honor diverse cultural knowledge and increase representation. While this theme does offer a critique of current practices, it also serves as a pathway towards transforming the education system by celebrating all the students it serves.

Limitations

Narrative inquiry honors the lived experiences of participants through in-depth data collection and analysis. This rich collection of information allots for the opportunity to better understand experiences of participants; however, there are limitations that should be acknowledged within this methodology. Narrative inquiry promotes the idea of a small sample size. This study's compliance to this notion with a small, purposive sample of seven participants limits the generalization of these findings. While the objective is thorough exploration, the readers must be aware that these portraits reflect a small group of young women within a limited scope and are not representative of every gifted Black girl in other parts of the country. Within the bounds of generalization, it is also important to recognize the small number of participants who contributed to the focus group. Brady (2022) and Clemons (2019) praised the act of sharing one's story and connecting with other Black women with parallel experiences to understanding challenges. While my intent to align with this belief was commendable, having only two of the scholars participate limited the diversity of voices within the group of participants as their

experiences may seem to overshadow that of the others. I do, however, argue that the “failed” focus group was actually one to be celebrated as it built community. The focus group was transactional; the conversations were not solely rooted in data collection. The dialogue was an insightful exchange of experience through sharing emotions, ideas, and support.

Additionally, all of the participants were identified and educated in the same county with the exception of Lynn moving after middle school. The environment, resources, and experiences may differ from the experiences of participants in other regions of Georgia or the United States. School practices and community-culture specific to this area could influence the shared experiences of the participants that are not reflective of other gifted Black girls in other areas.

Another confining element to this narrative inquiry study is recall. The participants of this study have graduated from high school with some being almost five years removed from the public education system. Memory is subjective; memories are susceptible to evolving or dissolving with time. Memories have the power to embellish or distort the reality of actual events. The narratives of these participants, however, were constructed by reflections of past events and how the participants perceived these experiences and made meaning of them. Their perception is significant in understanding their perspective and valuing their voices; it is *their* truth.

In referencing perception, it is important to recognize my relational role as a researcher. My interactive approach to data collection and interpretation through interviews, focus group, and poetry may present concerns of subjectivity questioning the study’s validity. Maxwell (2013) noted how this concept closely aligned to quantitative research as conventional ways of knowing in academia have relied on measurable data. These narratives were constructed through

conversations between me and the participants. The findings of this study are a reflection of the co-constructed knowledge shaped by my relationships with these young women—authentic, transparent, and compassionate. The intentional exchange of respect and trust added a depth to the execution of the experience and triangulation of the findings that could not have been replicated through objective measures. Perry and Gunn (2025) asserted that nonconventional methods of conducting and communicating are important in “inclusively honoring diverse and intersectional ways of being knowing”. I am a Black woman educator who grew up as a gifted student in the South matriculating through my hometown’s education system. It is essential to acknowledge that my positionality may have influenced the ways I interpreted and internalized participant narratives, despite my efforts to maintain reflexivity and objectivity through memoing and member checking. Aside from these limiting factors, the narratives provide meaningful insights into the complex realities of Black women while adding to the pertinent discourse of equity in education.

Implications and Recommendations

What If?

What if our intelligence was never questioned
but celebrated from the start
and classrooms were collages of genius
colored with all shades—light and dark?
What if their tests assessed our power
in unconventional ways
like how our confidence isn’t a threat

and still worthy of praise?

What if they begged to hear **all** of our stories

carefully listening to understand

while choosing to see us fully in

with no desire to reprimand?

What if we felt like we could stumble

and not suffer the stain of scrutiny?

What if the hands used to label us

built opportune bridges of community?

What if equity was a promise

that the world vowed to keep?

Then maybe I—the gifted Black girl—

wouldn't be a rose fighting to blossom through concrete.

The poem “What if?” was constructed from the data of this study to reflect a desire for a world that recognizes, understands, and support gifted Black girls. It condemns the restrictive practices of standardized tests, biased perceptions, and inequitable classrooms. The final stanzas imagine a world where giftedness is also marked by embracing mistakes and building community. This poem creatively depicts the implications the inform educational practice and policy for stakeholders.

The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted and advanced academic spaces is a widely-researched educational topic. Unfortunately, the academic discourse of this topic provides minimal insight to the Black girl perspective. Research studies that explore Black girls

navigating giftedness are limited, and this dilemma became evident as I researched this topic. The findings from this study reveal that the experiences of Black girls navigating giftedness is not just rooted in academic achievement; their journey is an intersection of their layered identities. Providing equitable experiences for all children in the U.S. education system is an ongoing battle as conflicting political insights seep into conversations about the field. The findings from this study through the frameworks of CRT and BFT produced several implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study highlighted the trials and triumphs of Black girls navigating rigorous academic spaces. These understandings identify actionable steps that educators can implement to increase support for these students. The recurring themes of the study also point to transformative ways that schools and families can mitigate negative feelings associated with perfectionism and isolation.

For Teachers. Educators are agents of knowledge. They are not only givers of education, but they are receivers. Embracing the mindset of lifetime learning is a critical component of being a transformative teacher. Teachers must not only do it but model it for students. Safe and supportive learning environments yield positive outcomes for students. Classroom practices should validate the identity of gifted Black girls. One way this can be done is through building culturally-responsive classrooms where children feel seen and valued. Gay (2002) and Herrera et al. (2012) advocated that teachers should consistently incorporate activities and images that connect with diverse students' identities, interests, and prior knowledge in order to affirm student identity. Displaying and incorporating content (texts, images, and videos) of diverse writers,

leaders, and thinkers help diverse gifted learners feel represented in a restrictive environment. Educators should also work to understand and connect with the contrasting emotions of Black girls navigating giftedness through opportunities for them to express moments of confidence as well as self-doubt. Journal writing, teacher check-ins, and open discussions with incorporated feedback are structured methods that open doors for building rapport with students and acknowledging their feelings. Many of the participants expressed the cumbersome pressure of being smart while feeling the need to perform perfectly in the classroom. Helping students understand the beauty in making mistakes is important in modeling lifetime learning. Hooks (2010) discussed “teaching students how to evaluate progress” through the use of assignments that discourage perfectionism and emphasize growth (p.125). Learning portfolios and process-based assignments that allow students to submit drafts, receive feedback, and reflect on their learning empowers them to take ownership in the learning process. Praising effort, encouraging risk-taking, and showing students how to correct mistakes fosters a community of academic growth. Educators must acknowledge and attend to the socioemotional needs of gifted Black girls.

For Schools. A key component in serving different communities requires educators to learn about those communities. Before educators can learn and understand diverse communities, they should first address their assumptions about these communities. Gay (2002) described critical cultural consciousness as a practice that allows teachers to reveal and evaluate how their morals, belief systems, and assumptions influence their behaviors in the classroom while identifying ways to minimize them. Schools can implement *cultural consciousness conversations* or what Ezzani et al. (2021) referred to as a “gifted/talent audit” through data-driven workshops

that allow teachers to refine their instructional practices for diverse learners through identifying their biases or assumptions about diverse learners, reflecting how these beliefs affect their instruction, and strategizing practices that encourage rigorous learning while valuing various cultures (p.115). As they develop new knowledge about various communities, educators should incorporate these new understandings into the curriculum allowing gifted Black girls a chance to learn more about communities who are representative of their identities.

Schools must also create and promote pathways to bridge the gap between teachers, families, and community. Cultivating opportunities for these stakeholders to come together would be integral in providing an equitable experience for gifted Black girls. Hosting family nights and community forums that invite parents and community partners to understand gifted identification and curriculum, observe gifted learners at work, and discuss students' needs shows a two-way investment for all learners. Establishing mentorships with other Black women role models in their schools and communities. Representation matters; therefore, seeing and learning from women who look like them allows gifted Black girls to feel seen and understood.

For Families. The findings also reflect a call-to-action for families of gifted Black girls. Because families are considered the *first teachers* and prove to be pivotal in fostering behaviors that allow Black girls access to gifted education, it is important that families continue to support these learners once they enter these academic and emotionally challenging environments. Families must support and advocate for their children. Black girls journeying through giftedness have layered experiences that affect their intersecting identities. Their layered identity—Black, gifted, and girl—must be supported at school and home. Once Black girls received the formal label, families may assume their gifted learners no longer need academic or emotional support.

One beneficial way that families can support them is by doing consistent (weekly or bi-weekly) check-ins that allow them to express their feelings about what they are learning or how they are adapting in school especially in their rigorous courses. Providing a space to express their feelings can alleviate the pressures they may feel to emulate perfection or competition. Consequently, families must be sure to advocate for their children. Parents can actively support their child by communicating with teachers by initiating conferences that allow them to ask questions, express concerns, and learn about the curriculum. When schools and families establish strong communication, a strong network is built to support student learning.

Implications for Policy

Developing enriched academic environments allows high-achieving learners to feel recognized; however, education policies must be implemented to ensure more representation is reflected in these academic spaces. Although there have been improved policies such as universal and non-verbal testing to expand identification, Black students are still seen in disproportionate numbers in gifted and advanced classrooms. Biased testing measures of ability that reflect binary ways of knowing have attributed to the disproportionate representation of minority students in gifted education (Allen, 2017; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Gentry, 2022; Wright et al., 2017). Stambaugh and Ford (2015) emphasized that gifted students who are culturally different tend to be more kinesthetic and display behaviors that question authority and emulate leadership which do not show up on standardized tests. Educational policy in gifted identification must expand its definition of giftedness. Traits such as creativity (divergent thinking) or motivation (goal-oriented behavior) are authentic ways of displaying intellect (Matthews & Dai, 2014).

Since teachers are viewed as gatekeepers to access gifted education, gifted education policy must create new gates through family and community member referrals. Policymakers have to make a conscious effort to reach minority communities to build representation. As social media has become an accessible tool to deliver information, school systems can use social media outlets to host informational sessions on the recommendation and identification processes of gifted testing. This shows that policymakers are actively invested in communicating information to families and communities. If school data reports the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs, districts should implement data reflection sessions among schools to look at meaningful ways to increase representation and support the retention of minority students in gifted and advanced education. Policies must also include cultural relevant professional development rooted in helping teachers nurture the unique talents and identities of high-achieving minority students. Ford (2010) emphasized that culturally responsive teachers employ differentiation that accommodate different learning styles and intelligences. Luria et al. (2016) also argued that creativity is one of the multiple ways that students display giftedness while mentioning other concepts like “resilience, leadership, and emotional intelligence” should be included in the conversation with identifying students from diverse population (p. 49). Educational policies must require schools to incorporate teacher training on differentiation, flexible grouping, collaborative learning to create cooperative learning environments that help build community (Ford, 2010).

While research supports these actionable steps to help increase Black student representation in gifted programming, Peters (2022) argued that these actions are just a “band-aid” for a larger problem. Aligning to the tenets of CRT, gifted education reform requires a

disruption in societal system. As noted in Chapter 2, income enhances learning opportunities (Allen, 2017; Hurt, 2018). Students who come from low-income homes are less likely to benefit from early learning opportunities and rigorous academic experiences (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Lewis & Boswell, 2020). Peters (2022) outlined how legislation such as the Social Security Act of 1965 helped minimize poverty and negative-life stressors for U.S. citizens. Implementing legislation that ensures livable wages and affordable childcare for all U.S. citizens opens doors for more Black parents to provide better learning experiences for their children. Since early access to education influences a child's ability, educational policy should mandate early education programs allowing students with fewer outside resources to have early access to foundational skills that can not only display their abilities and close achievement gaps (Peters et al., 2019). As presented in Chapter 2, while White teachers dominate the profession, Black students are most likely identified and supported by teachers who look like them (Peters et al., 2019). Educational policymakers must work to diversify the workforce of education by implementing initiatives to recruit and retain more teachers from Black and culturally diverse backgrounds (Peters, 2022).

Recommendations for Future Studies

While this study aims to add to the scholarship of this issue, the experiences of gifted Black girls need to be further explored. Extending research to populations in different regions, specifically metropolitan areas of Georgia, may provide an additional lens to examine and compare the gifted Black girl experience in South Georgia. In the earlier stages of my research, I discovered other counties in Georgia that contained high populations of minority gifted students (Georgia Department of Education, 2022a). I would be interested in learning about the

experiences of gifted Black girl participants who were surrounded by more diverse populations throughout their educational journey. With no universal practice of gifted identification and education from state-to-state, studies of the experiences of gifted Black girls should expand beyond the South. Findings from studies that represent a larger population or different regions may reflect different results. Comparative studies to other regions of the United States would be helpful in identifying trending and opposing themes within the experience that could be an aid in revising and enhancing educational practice and policy to promote equity.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry study explored the experiences of gifted Black women in Southeast Georgia who participated in the gifted program and how these experiences may affected their sense of identity and influenced their perceptions beyond high school. The experiences of gifted Black girls are consistently being left out of the conversations relating to the inequities in gifted programming. Through Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT), I explored the experiences of seven Black women who participated in gifted programs to not only provide a more holistic viewpoint of the experiences of Black students in gifted programs but also build awareness about what it feels like to be a Black girl navigating through the various messages communicated by society. Through the interviews and conversations with these participants, the findings have helped me grow as an educator as I work to better support my students. The results of this study challenge dominant narratives about how giftedness is cultivated, the construct of the gifted label to identify intellectual ability, and the experiences that gifted education create for Black students. These results push educational policymakers and

practitioners to provide more inclusive interventions to support Black students, so that all people will empathize with people of color.

As I conclude this chapter, I'm taken back to any earlier moment of this study when I interviewed *Emoni*. "*I never thought there was a community of us,*" she admitted. Her words weighed in as it redefined the purpose of this study. In the spirit of CRT and BFT, I aimed to shine light on the unheard voices of Black women as they described their lived experiences of navigating giftedness as students in Southeast Georgia. Her words confirmed a stifling effect of being gifted Black girl: they experience their brilliance in isolation. Gifted Black girls are unaware that others share their same struggles. I realized that this research helped foster connections and build community. When gifted Black girls fail to see others who look like them in academic settings, they are made to believe that they are traveling the journey alone as the system fails to support their community. The onus falls on us as practitioners and policymakers to transform their "What If?" into "What Is!" If we make an intentional effort to fertilize our gardens of communities—soiling them with support and pruning the curses of inequity—we can ensure that our gifted Black girls will not have fight to blossom.

References

- Alhumam, I. (2015). Reflections on racism in American schools. *Journal of Education and Practice, 6*(11), 160-161.
- Alinia, M. (2015). On Black feminist thought: Thinking oppression and resistance through intersectional paradigm. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(13), 2334-2340.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1058492>
- Allen, J. (2017). Exploring the role teacher perceptions play in the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted programming. *Gifted Child Today, 40*(2), 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217517690188>
- Anderson, B. N. (2020). See me, see us: Understanding the intersections and continued marginalization of adolescent Black girls in U.S. classrooms. *Gifted Child Today, 43*(2), p. 86-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217519898216>
- Anderson, B. N., & Martin, J. A. (2018). What k-12 teachers need to know about teaching gifted Black girls battling perfectionism and stereotype threat. *Gifted Child Today, 41*(3), p. 117-124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217518768339>
- Anderson-Faithful, S., & Goodman, J. (2020). Turns and twists in histories of women's education. *Women's History Review, 29*(3), 363-376.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2019.1611118>
- Arao, B. (2016). Roles of Black women and girls in education: A historical overview. In Betty Taylor (Ed.), *Listening to the Voices: Multi-ethnic Women in Education* (pp. 137-143). . San Francisco, CA: University of San Francisco.
https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=listening_to_the_

voices

- Ashford-Hanser, S., Springer, S. B., Hayton, M. P., & Williams, K. E. (2020). Shadows of plessy v. ferguson: The dichotomy of progress toward educational equity since 1954. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 89(4), 410-422.
- Barnard-Brak, L., Johnsen, S. K., Hanning, A. P., & Wei, T. (2015). The incidence of potentially gifted students within a special education population. *Roeper Review*, 37, 74-83.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2015.1008661>
- Battle, J., & Lewis, M. (2002). The increasing significance of class: The relative effects of race and socioeconomic status on academic achievement. *Journal of Poverty*, 6(2), p. 21-35.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J134v06n02_02
- Bellibaş, M. S. (2016). Who are the most disadvantaged? Factors associated with the academic achievement of students with low socio-economic backgrounds. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 16(2), 691-710. <https://doi.org/10.12738/etsp.2016.2.0257>
- Bešić, E. (2020). Intersectionality: A pathway towards inclusive education? *Prospects*, 49, 111-122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1125-020-09461-6>
- Bhattacharya, K. (2013). Voices, silences, and telling secrets: The role of qualitative methods in arts-based research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 604-627.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2013.6.4.604>
- Black, D. (2023). The lynchpin of educational inequality. *Poverty & Race*, 32(2), p. 3; 24-25.
- Brady, J. (2022). Exploring the role of Black feminist thought in pre-service early childhood education: On the possibilities of embedded transformative change. *Contemporary Issues of Early Childhood*, 23(4), 392-407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491221136584>

- Brisport, N. N. (2013). Racism & power: The inaccessibility of opportunity in the educational system in the United States. *National Lawyers Guild Review*, 70(1), 17-29.
- Brooks, J. N., & Muhammad, G. E. (2024). History and education of the sacred: Black girls and curricular violence in literacy learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 77(6), 1001-1007.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2291>
- Brown, K., & Jackson, D. D. (2013). The history and conceptual elements of critical race theory. In A. D. Dixson, & L. Marvin (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 9-22). Routledge.
- Campbell, E. (2023). Critical race theory: A tool to promote an anti-racist pedagogy. *Urban Social Work*, 7(1), 43-55. <https://doi.org/10.1891/USW-2022-0005>
- Card, D., & Giuliano, L. (2016). Universal screening increases the representation of low income and minority students in gifted education. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(48), 13678-13683. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1605043113>
- Carl Vinson Institute of Government. (2022a). *Economic Data File*. University of Georgia.
<https://georgiadata.org/data/data-tables>
- Carl Vinson Institute of Government. (2022b). *Population Data File*. University of Georgia.
<https://georgiadata.org/data/data-tables>
- Chadwell, S. M., Bonner, F. A., & Louis, D. (2009). African American high school males' perceptions of academically rigorous programs, identity, and spirituality. *The National Journal of Urban Education & Practice*, 3(1), 230-246.
- Chapman, T. K. (2013). You can't erase race! Using CRT to explain the presence of race and racism in majority White suburban schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of*

- Education*, 34(4), 611-627. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.822619>
- Civil Rights Data Collection. (2024, July 9). *National data*. Office for Civil Rights.
<https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov/profile/us?surveyYear=2020>
- Clemons, K. M. (2019). Black feminist thought and qualitative research in education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1194>
- Collier-Thomas, B. (1982). The impact of Black women in education: An historical overview. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 51(3), 173-180.
- Collins, D. L., & Horne, T. H. (2022). Critical Race Theory. *Leadership*, 51(4), 34-38.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). Defining Black feminist thought. In C. McCann, S. Kim, E. Ergun (Eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader* (5th ed., pp. 379-394). Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Connelly, M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Sage.
- Cutts, Q. (2019). More than craft and criteria: The necessity of ars spirituality in (Black women's) poetic inquiry and research poetry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(7), 908-919.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419884966>

- Dai, D. Y. (2020). Assessing and accessing high human potential: A brief history of giftedness and what it means to school psychologists. *Psychology in Schools, 57*(10), 1514-1527.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22346>
- Davis, A. M. (2018). Not so gifted: Academic identity for Black women in honors. *Journal for National Collegiate Honors Council, 19*(2), 47-71.
- DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A. D. (2004). “So when it comes out, they aren’t surprised that it is there”: Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(5), 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033005026>
- Dentith, A. (2016). Women’s history in education in the United States. *Adult Education Research Conference*. <https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3847&context=aerc>
- De Wet, C. F., & Gubbins, E. J. (2011). Teachers’ belief about culturally, linguistically, and economic diverse gifted students: A qualitative study. *Roeper Review, 33*, 97-108.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2011.554157>
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau-Anderson, C. K. (2017). And we are still not saved. In *Critical race theory in education: All god’s children got a song* (2nd ed., pp.32-54). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eisenmann, L. (2001). Creating a framework for interpreting us women’s educational history: Lessons from historical lexicography. *History of Education, 30*(5), 453-470.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00467600110064735>
- Epps, E. G. (1995). Race, class, and educational opportunity: Trends in the sociology of education. *Sociology Forum, 10*(4), 596-608.

- Evans-Winters, V. E. (2014). Are Black girls not gifted? Race, gender, and resilience. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 4(1), 22-30.
- Evans-Winters, V. E. (2019). Introduction. In *Black feminism in qualitative inquiry: A mosaic for writing our daughter's body*. Routledge
- Ezzani, M. D., Mun, R. U., & Lee, L. E. (2021). District leaders focused on systemic equity in identification and services for gifted education: From policy to practice. *Roeper Review*, 43(2), 112-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2021.1881853>
- Feldhusen, J. F., & Hoover, S. M. (1986). A conception of giftedness: Intelligence, self concept and motivation. *Roeper Review*, 8(3), 140-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783198609552957>
- Flint, M., Guyotte, K. W., & Coogler, C. H. (2025). Inquiring artfully: enacting artful politics. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19408447251334602>
- Ford, D. Y. (2010). Culturally responsive classrooms: Affirming culturally different gifted students. *Gifted Child Today*, 33(10), 50-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107621751003300112>
- Ford, D. Y., & Grantham, T. C. (2003). Providing access for culturally diverse gifted students: From deficit to dynamic thinking. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 217-225.
- Ford, D. Y., Harris, B. N., Byrd, J. A., & Walters, N. M. (2018). Blacked out and whited out: The double bind for gifted Black females who are often a footnote in educational discourse. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 27(3), 253-268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791802700302>

- Ford, D. Y., & King, R. A. (2014). Blacked out: Racial and gender segregation in gifted education 60 years after Brown vs. Board of Education. *Multiple Voice of Ethically Diverse Exceptional Learners, 14*(2), 3-11. 10.56829/2158-396X.14.2.3
- Ford, D. Y., Scott, M. T., Moore III, J. L., Amos, S. (2013). Gifted education and culturally different students: Examining prejudice and discrimination via microaggressions. *Gifted Child Today, 36*(1), 205-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217513487069>
- Ford, D. Y., Walters, N. M., Byrd, J. A., & Harris, B. N. (2019). I want to read about me: Engaging and empowering gifted Black girls using multicultural literature and bibliotherapy. *Gifted Child Today, 42*(1), 53-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217518804851>
- Ford, D. Y., Wright, B. L., & Scott, M. T. (2020). A matter of equity: Desegregating and integrating gifted and talented education for under-represented students of color. *Multicultural Perspectives, 22*(1), 28-36. 10.1080/15210960.2020.1728275
- Ford, D. Y., Wright, B. L., & Tyson, C.A. (2021). Lance and other gifted and talented students of color matter: Five models and theories to guide early childhood educators in advancing equity. *Gifted Child Today, 44*(1), 48-56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10762175202940754>
- Fudge, M. L. (2017). Reinvesting in public education, A cornerstone of America's success. *Harvard Journal of Legislation, 54*(2), 201-224.
- Gay, G. (2002). Culturally responsive teaching in special education for ethnically diverse students: setting the stage. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 15*(6), 613-629. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839022000014349>
- Gentry, M. (2022). Excellence, equity, and talent development: Time to retire the g-word. *Gifted*

- Education International*, 38(3), 373-378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02614294211054203>
- Georgia Department of Education. (2022a). *Enrollment by ethnicity and gender* (FTE2022-3). https://oraapp.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethnicsex_pub.entry_form
- Georgia Department of Education. (2022b). *Gifted students enrolled by grade band* (DR-20210926-1) [Excel]. Location: Mark Vignati.
- Georgia Department of Education. (2022c). *Student enrollment by grade level pk-12* (FTE2022-3). https://oraapp.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_enrollgrade.entry_form
- Georgia Department of Education. (2025). *Georgia department of education resource manual for gifted education services*. https://lor2.gadoe.org/gadoe/file/bee567bb-0913-4f0f-9694-a0a65375e238/1/20252026_%20Georgia%20Department%20of%20Education%20Resource%20Manual%20for%20Gifted%20Education%20Services.pdf
- Gist, C. D. (2016). A Black feminist interpretation: Reading life, pedagogy, and emilie. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 15(1), 245-268. <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.15.1.13>
- Grantham, T. C. (2003). Increasing black student enrollment in gifted programs: An exploration of the Pulaski County special school district's advocacy efforts. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47(1), 46-65.
- Grantham, T. C. (2004). Rocky Jones: A case study of a high-achieving Black male's motivation to participate in gifted classes. *Roeper Review*, 26(4), 208-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783190409554271>
- Green, P. C. (1999). Can state constitutional provisions eliminate de facto segregation. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 68(2), 135-153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2668121>

- Griffin, G. S. (2023). *Gifted program: Services not aligned with funding intent* (Report No. 22-11). Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts.
<https://www.audits.ga.gov/ReportSearch/download/29986>
- Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *AERA Open*, 2(1), 1-25. doi:10.1177/2332858415622175
- Guyotte, K. W., Flint, M. A., & Shelton, S. A. (2021). Giving up as a willful feminist practice. *Gender and Education*, 32(2), 202-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2020.1743821>
- Habtamu, S. (2024). For us, by us: The role of Black feminist pedagogy in the education of Black girls. *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*, 4(1), 77-60.
<http://doi.org/10.21423/jaawge-v3ila154>
- Hardaway, A.T., Ward, L. W. M., & Howell, D. (2019). Black girls and womyn matter: Using Black feminist thought to examine violence and erasure in education. *Urban Education Research & Policy Annuals*, 6(1), 31-46.
- Harmon, D. (2002). They won't teach me: The voices of gifted African American inner-city students. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 68-75.
- Harrison, L. (2017). Redefining intersectionality theory through the lens of African American young adolescent girls' racialized experiences. *Youth & Society*, 49(8), 1023-1039.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X15569216>
- Hébert, T. P., & Beardsley, T. M. (2001). Jermaine: A critical case study of a gifted Black child living in rural poverty. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 45(2), 85-103.
- Henfield, M. S., Moore, J. L., III, & Wood, C. (2008). Inside and outside gifted education

- programming: Hidden challenges for African American students. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 74(4), 433-450.
- Herrera, S. G., Holmes, M. A., & Kavimandan, S. K. (2012). Bringing theory to life: Strategies that make culturally responsive pedagogy a reality in diverse secondary classrooms. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 14(3), 1-19.
- Hines, E. K., Ford, D. Y., Fletcher Jr., E. C., & Moore, J. L., III. (2022). All eyez on me: Disproportionality, disciplined, and disregarded while Black. *Theory into Practice*, 61(3), 288-299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2022.2096376>
- Hodges, J., & Gentry, M. (2021). Underrepresentation in gifted education in the context of rurality and socioeconomic status. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 32(2), 135-159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X20969143>
- Hooks, B. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking*. Routledge.
- Hopkins, A., & Garrett, K. (2010). Separate and unequal: The underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented programs. *Black History Bulletin Board*, 73(1), 24-30.
- Howard, J. (2018). The white kid can do whatever he wants: The racial socialization of a gifted education program. *Educational Studies*, 54(5), 553-568. [doi:10.1080/00131946.2018.1453512](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2018.1453512)
- Hubain, B. S., Allen, E. L., Harris, J. C., & Linder, C. (2016). Counter-stories as representations of the racialized experiences of students of color in higher education and student affairs graduate preparation programs. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(7), 946-963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1174894>

- Hurt, J. W. (2018). Why are the gifted classes so white? Making space for gifted latino students. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 21*(4), 112-130.
doi:10.1177/1555458918769115
- Hutson, T. M. (2022). By any means necessary: A brief educational history of Black women and girls in United States. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis, 11*(3), 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp.12960>
- Jones, A. M. (2023). Letters to the attackers: Using counterstorytelling to share how Black women respond to racial microaggressions at a historically white institution. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 36*(9), 1825-1837.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1942292>
- Joseph, N. M., Viesca, K. M., & Bianco, M. (2016). Black female adolescents and racism in schools: Experiences in a colorblind society. *High School Journal, 100*(1), 4-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2016.0018>
- Kaerwer, K., & Pritchett, M. (2023). Critical race theory in education: How banning its tenets undermines our best hope for equity in education. *Behavior and Social Issues, 32*, 300-313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42822-023-00130-9>.
- Kauper, P. G. (1954). Segregation in public education: The decline of Plessy v. Ferguson. *Michigan Law Review, 52*(8), 1137-1158.
- Kim, J. H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry*. Sage.
- Kohli, R., Pizzaro, M., & Nevárez, A. (2017). The “new” racism of k-12 schools; centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education, 41*(1), 182-202.
<https://doi.org/10.3102.0091732X16686949>

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), p. 7-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 47-68.
- Lamb, K. N., & Hertzog, N. B. (2025). Voices of families of color: Navigating white spaces in gifted education. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 69(1), 49-67.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862241281892>
- Lewis, K. D., & Boswell, C. (2020). Perceived challenges for rural gifted education. *Gifted Child Today*, 43(3), 184- 198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217520915742>
- Ludvig, A. (2006). Differences between women? Intersecting voices in a female narrative. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 245-258.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065755>
- Luria, S. R., O'Brien, R. L., & Kaufman, J. C. (2016). Creativity in gifted identification: increasing accuracy and diversity. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1337(1), 44-52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13136>
- Madigan, J. C. (2009). The education of women and girls in the United States: A historical perspective. *Advances in Gender and Education*, 11-13.
- Matthews, D. J., & Dai, D. Y. (2014). Gifted education: Changing conceptions, emphases and practice. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 24(4), 335-353.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2014.979578>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks,

CA.: Sage.

Mayes, R. D., Lowery, K. P., Mims, L. C., Rodman, J., & Dixon-Payne, D. (2023). "My greatness made a difference there": Exploring the high school experiences of high achieving Black girls. *Education and Urban Society*, 1-28.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245231195001>

McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 30(3), 1771-1800. <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>

McClain, M. C., & Pfeiffer, S. (2012). Identification of gifted students in the united states today: A look at state definitions, policies, and practices. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 28(1), 59-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377903.2012.643757>

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: examples for discussion and analysis* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Misra, J. (2021). Categories, structures, and intersectionality theory. In Messerschmidt, J. W., Martin, P. Y., Messner, M. A., & Connell, R. (Eds.), *Gender Reckonings*, (pp. 111-130). NYU Press.

Moffat, K. (2022). What's the deal with critical race theory? A brief introduction, part 1. *The Washington Library Association Journal*, 38, 18-24.

Morgan, H. (2019). The lack of minority students in gifted education: Hiring more exemplary teachers of color can alleviate the problem. *The Clearing House*, 92(4-5), 156-162.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2019.1645635>

Morgan, H. (2020). The gap in gifted education: Can universal screening narrow it? *Education*, 140(4), 207-214.

Morgan, H. (2022). Resisting the movement to ban critical race theory in schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 95, 35-41.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.2025023>

Morris, J. E., & Paris, L. E. (2022). Rethinking arts-based research methods in education:

Enhanced participant engagement processes to increase research credibility and

knowledge translation. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 45(1),

99-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2021.1926971>

Morris, V. G., & Morris, C. L. (2005). Before brown, after brown: What has changed for african-

american children? *The University of Florida Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 16(2),

215-232.

Morton, C. S. (2021). Sistahs in stem: A critical race counterstory uplifting Black women's

experiences in stem. *Journal of Negro Education*, 90(3), 306-321.

National Center of Education Statistics. (2023). Percentage of public school students enrolled in

gifted and talented programs, by sex, race/ethnicity, and state or jurisdiction: Selected

school years, 2004 through 2020-2021[Excel]. Location: National Center of Education

Statistics.

National Institutes of Health. (2025, June 12). *Race and national origin*.

<https://www.nih.gov/nih-style-guide/race-national->

[origin#:~:text=has%20stigmatizing%20potential.-](https://www.nih.gov/nih-style-guide/race-national-)

[,Black%20and%20African%20American,or%20other%20dual%2Dheritage%20terms.](https://www.nih.gov/nih-style-guide/race-national-)

Nevo, B. (1994). Definitions, ideologies, and hypotheses in gifted education. *Gifted Child*

Quarterly, 38(4), 184-186.

Noltemeyer, A. L., Mujic, J., & McLoughlin, C. S. (2012). The history of inequality in education.

In A.L. Noltemeyer & C.S. McLoughlin (Eds.), *Disproportionality in Education and Special Education*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pendarvis, E., & Wood, E. W. (2009). Eligibility of historically underrepresented students referred for gifted education in a rural school district: A case study. *Journal of the Education of the Gifted*, 32(4), 495-514.

Perry, S. A. B., & Gunn, N. P. (2025). We must create space to feel it all: Empowering bipoc women through university-based professional development. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 1-5.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/19394225251339037>

Peters, S. J. (2022). The challenges of achieving equity within public school gifted and talented programs. *Gifted Children Quarterly*, 66(2), 82-94.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862211002535>

Peters, S. J., Gentry, M., Whiting, G. W., & McBee, M. T. (2019). Who gets served in gifted education? Demographic representation and a call for action. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 63(4), 273-287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016986219833738>

Prasad, P. (2018). *Crafting qualitative research: Working in the postpositivist traditions*. Routledge.

Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide*

- research* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Raymundo, J. (2021). The burden of excellence: A critical race theory analysis of perfectionism in Black students. *The Vermont Connection, 42*(1), 110-120.
- Robertson, R. V., & Chaney, C. (2017). “I know it [racism] still exists here”: African american males at predominately White institutions. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, 39*, 260-281.
- Roets, L., Kurtz, B., & Biraimah, K. (2023). The impact of the racial and economic divides on access to quality education in South Africa and the United States. *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society, 21*, 89-95.
- Rouse, C. E., & Barrow, L. (2006). U.S. elementary and secondary schools: Equalizing opportunity or replicating the status quo? *The Future of Children, 16*(2), 99-123.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Sanders, C. E., & Lamm, A. J. (2022). Artful engagement with the concept of identity: Using poetic transcription to reimagine participant voices. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221091662>
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College.
- Sewell, C. J. P., & Goings, R. B. (2019). Navigating the gifted bubble: Black adults reflecting on their transition experiences in NYC gifted programs. *The Roeper Institute, 41*, 20-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2018.15553218>
- Shields, C. M. (2019). Challenging racism in our schools: Good intentions are not enough. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 47*(3), 3-17.

- Smedsrud, J. (2020). Explaining the variations of definitions in gifted education. *Studies in Education, 40*(1), 79-97. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nse.v40.2129>
- Stambaugh, T., & Ford, D. (2015). Microaggressions, multiculturalism, and gifted individuals who are Black, Hispanic, or low income. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 93*(2), 192-201. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2015.00195.x>
- Sternberg, R. J., Desmet, O. A., Ford, D. Y., Gentry, M., Grantham, T. C., & Karami, S. (2021). The legacy: Coming to terms with the origins and development of the gifted-child movement, *Roeper Review, 43*(4), 227-241. <https://doi.org/10.1080.02783193.2021.1967544>
- Stokes, M. N., Hope, E. C., Cryer-Coupet, Q. R., & Elliot, E. (2020). Black girl blues: The roles of racial socialization, gendered racial socialization, and racial identity on depressive symptoms among Black girls. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 49*(11), 2175- 2189. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01317-8>
- Suriel, R. L., Martinez, J., & Evans-Winters, V. (2017). A critical co-constructed autoethnography of a gendered cross-cultural mentoring between two early career Latin scholars working in the deep South. *Educational Studies, 0*(0), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2017.1356308>
- Tate, W. F. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education, 22*, 195- 247. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167376>
- Thomas, V. G., & Jackson, J. A. (2007). The education of African American girls and women: Past to present. *The Journal of Negro Education, 76*(3), 357-372.
- Thornton, M. E. (2023). Segregating the “gifted” in Charlottesville: The founding of quest, 1976-

1986. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 55(2), 128-145.
<https://doi.org/10.1080.00220620.2022.2072275>
- Tikly, L. (2021). Racism and the future of antiracism in education: A critical analysis of the sewell report. *British Educational Research Association*, 48(3), 469-487.
<https://doi.org/10.1002.berj.3776>
- Toledo, W., Flint, M., Sharkey, C. N., McCollum, S., Ferrari, B., Paseda, O. K., Cottrell-Yongye, A., & Mitchell, N. (2023). Building community through feminist collectivity: Being and becoming women in academia. *Gender and Education*, 35(4), 365-383.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2023.2193208>
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2015). Teaching for excellence in academically challenging classrooms. *Society*, 52(3), 203-209. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-015-9888-0>
- Walters, P. B. (2001). Educational access and the state: Historical continuities and discontinuities in racial inequality in american education. *Sociology of Education*, 74, 35-49.
- Wei, V., & Broome, J. (2022). Same standards, different classes: A comparative case study of two art classes within communities of contrasting socioeconomic status. *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, 63(1), 55-68.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.2007689>
- Wells, A. S., Fox, L., & Cordovo-Cobo, D. (2016). How racially diverse classrooms and schools can benefit all students. *The Century Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>
- Williams, B. T. (2004). The truth in the tale: Race and “counter-storytelling” in the classroom.

- Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(2), 164-169.
<https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.48.2.7>
- Wright, B. L., Ford, D. Y., & Young, J. L. (2017). Ignorance or indifference? Seeking excellence and equity for under-represented students of color in gifted education. *Global Education Review*, 4(1), 45-60. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1137997>
- Wright, T. (2018). Beauty in the struggle: Poetry found in the lives of mothers experiencing homelessness. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 49(4), 462-468.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12262>
- Wright, T. (2019). Phenomenology, pedagogy, and poetry in the lives of women raising children in poverty: An approach for educational researchers. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 16(3), 285-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2018.1561559>
- VanTassel-Baska, J. (2018). American policy in gifted education. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 41(2), 98-103. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217517753020>
- Yi, V., & Mackey, J. Z. (2024). Poetic transcription and its possibilities for (re)presentation. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 37(7), 1853-1867.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2023.2233935>
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>

Appendix A:
Recruitment Letter for Colleagues

A Gift or A Curse?

Experiences of Gifted Black Females in Southeast Georgia



Dear Colleague,

My name is Talmeshia Parker, and I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. I am conducting a study that will highlight the experiences of gifted Black females in southeast Georgia. Minority students are widely underrepresented in gifted education, and most of the literature on this topic highlights Black males. My hope is that this study will give a voice to the silenced perspective of high-achieving Black females.

The participants for this study should be high school graduates who meet the following criteria: must be at least 18 years of age, identified as “gifted” in elementary school, matriculated through gifted/talented programs throughout middle and high school, and have graduated within the last five years from a county in southeast Georgia. The participants will be asked to take part in two phases: one single interview session and one focus group session based on questions about their lived experiences in the gifted program and their understanding of its influence on them. All identifiable information will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Participation in this study will contribute to the warranted discourse needed ignite educational reform. If you know of anyone who may fit the description, please provide me with a name and contact information via email: trparker@valdosta.edu.

Thank you for all
that you do,

Talmeshia Parker



Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Talmeshia Parker at trparker@valdosta.edu. This study (IRB-04558-2024) has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix B:
Participant Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR DISSERTATION STUDY

A Gift or a Curse?: Experiences of Gifted Black Females in Southeast Georgia

Purpose: The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive view to the experiences of Black students in education to propel progressive conversations and ignite equitable reform to better serve all students.

Benefits: As a participant, you will be contributing to the current, limited knowledge on the experiences of gifted Black females. Your participation could be the catalyst in groundbreaking educational change for future generations.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Must be at least 18 years old
- Identified as gifted in elementary school
- Graduated from high school in Bulloch County or another county in Southeast Georgia from 2020–2024
- Enrolled in gifted or advanced/accelerated classes while in middle and high school

PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

- Voluntary participation in both a single interview and focus group session
- Available to dedicate 60–90 minutes to each session
- Willing to be transparent and authentic about experiences

All identifiable information will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. If you have met the eligibility requirements and are interested in participating in this study, please contact Talmeshia Parker:

Email: trparker@valdosta.edu
Phone: (912) 483-9349



Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Talmeshia Parker at trparker@valdosta.edu. This study (IRB-04558-2024) has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix C:
Participant Interview Guide

1. Please state your name and age.
2. What year did you graduate from high school? What high school did you graduate from?
3. Describe your upbringing. Where did you grow up? What was home life like for you?
4. What values and morals seemed to be most important in your family? How did you know this?

(Will follow up with a question about educational values if it is not addressed in question #4)

5. Describe your school dynamics (teachers, students, curriculum, opportunities).
6. Describe how you were identified as gifted and how you felt being labeled “gifted”. How do you believe you showed characteristics of giftedness?
7. How long were you in the gifted program?
8. What advanced courses did you take in high school?
9. Describe your experience as a participant in your system’s gifted/advanced programs?
How were you served in the gifted program? What types of activities or opportunities were provided to you through the gifted program? What were the demographics of the students in your classes? What was the curriculum like in comparison to the other classes?
10. What did you enjoy most about being in these courses? What did you enjoy the least?
11. How do you believe being a gifted Black girl affected your experience in the gifted program? How do you believe it affected your educational experience outside of the gifted program?
12. Tell me about a significant racialized experience have you had as a Black girl in gifted programs?

13. Please describe your higher education and/or work engagements and how you feel your K-12 experience in gifted programs prepared you for life after high school.
14. Earlier you described some racialized experiences you have had as a Black girl in gifted programs or advanced programs. Of these experiences, which one was the most memorable/significant? Why would you say so?
15. In dealing with these experiences, what lessons have you learned from them? How have these experiences influenced how you interact with others?
16. Compare the interactions you have with your peers who are gifted versus non-gifted? Black versus non-Black? boys versus girls? What similarities and/or differences do you recognize.
17. What role do you feel (or think) your giftedness has played in your academic achievement? Personal achievement and successes? What other factors have contributed to your achievements and success?
18. Is there anything else related to this experience that you would like to share that I may not have asked?

Appendix D:
Focus Group Interview Guide

1. How have these racialized experiences in gifted programs impacted your everyday life?
Your life possibilities in academics and/or careers?
2. How do you think/feel others view your giftedness? How do you think your giftedness has impacted your relationships with family and friends? In other words, would you consider it a gift or a curse?
3. Reflect on your experiences. If you could go back in time, would you change your decision to be in a gifted program? Why or why not?
4. What unique challenges or success did you face being a gifted Black girl in gifted/advanced programs?
5. How inclusive do you feel these courses were in terms of diverse voices, perspectives, and experiences?
6. What suggestions do you have for stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, and policymakers) to better support gifted students from marginalized groups?
7. Is there anything else related to being labeled gifted and participating in K-12 gifted education programs that we should talk about that I haven't asked about?

Appendix E:
IRB Protocol Exemption Report



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04558-2024

Responsible Researcher(s): Talmeshia Parker

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Nicole Gunn

Dissertation Research Member:

Project Title: *A Gift or A Curse? A Narrative Inquiry Study on the Experiences of Gifted Black Females in Southeast Georgia.*

Institutional Review Board Determination:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations, **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

Comments:

- *Per exempt protocol guidelines, it is permissible to record interview/focus group sessions to create an accurate transcript to be utilized for documentation or analysis. Once the transcript has been constructed, all recordings must immediately be deleted from all devices, including electronic files used to store recordings. This measure is in place to uphold confidentiality and ensure that information contained in the recording is adequately protected.*
- *To adhere to consent guidelines, when recording an interview/focus group, the researcher must: begin by reading the consent statement aloud to the participant, explicitly confirm their understanding of the information presented, and establish their voluntary agreement to participate in the interview/focus group; additionally, the participant should be provided with a physical copy of the research statement to keep for their records. The interview and focus group transcripts must document the consent process.*
- *Pseudonym lists must be kept in a secure, separate file from data and email lists.*
- *Upon completion of the research study all data (e.g. data, pseudonym/email lists, transcripts, etc.) must be securely maintained (e.g. locked file cabinet, password-protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*

Proposed modifications must be submitted to the IRB Administrator at tmwright@valdosta.edu for review and approval before being implemented.

Elizabeth W. Dophie

11.20.2024

Elizabeth W. Dophie, IRB Administrator

Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 06.02.10