

Giftedness Through Their Eyes:  
Portraits of Black Women from Rural South 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 and Instruction

in the Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development  
of the James L. and Dorothy H. Dewar College of Education and Human Services

May 2023

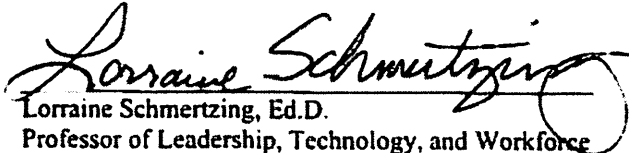
Christine Hiers

Ed.S., Valdosta State University, 2011  
M.S., Valdosta State University 1998  
B.A., Valdosta State University, 1994


© Copyright 2023 Christine Wade Hiers  
All Rights Reserved

This dissertation, "Giftedness Through Their Eyes: Portraits of Black Women from Rural South Georgia" by Christine Hiers is approved by:

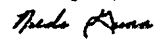
**Dissertation  
Committee  
Chair**

  
Lorraine Schmertzinger, Ed.D.  
Professor of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce  
Development

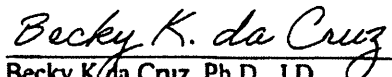
**Committee  
Researcher**

  
Richard W. Schmertzinger, Ed.D.  
Professor of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce  
Development

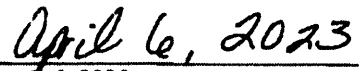
**Committee  
Member**

Deauthorized by:  
  
DCCM005048A473  
Nicole P. Gunn, Ed.D.  
Instructor of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce  
Development

**Associate  
Provost for  
Graduate  
Studies and  
Research**

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

**Defense Date**

  
April 6, 2023

## 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.

*Christine Hiers*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, I used portraiture to share the experiences of three Black women who as Black girls participated in gifted education. Homogeneous purposeful sampling was used to select three participants that met the criteria for the study. Participants were asked to share their educational experiences before, during, and after enrollment in gifted programs in rural South Georgia. Through Seidman's (2013) three interview structure, data was obtained. After the interviews, data was analyzed using Saldaña's (2016) two-cycle coding. First cycle coding included attribute, in vivo, and magnitude coding. Second cycle coding included pattern coding. Portraiture was used as a method to guide data gathering, analysis, and portrait construction in order to share the participants' stories. Four themes were constructed from the data analysis to address the experiences participants had before, during, and after enrollment in gifted programs. Critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist thought (BFT) served as guiding theories for the work and the clear connections between constructed themes, which included: family expectations fueled their positive outlook on the special privileges experienced because of the gifted program, White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs, teachers' suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall, and school employees need to learn how to better communicate with the families of Black students.

*Keywords:* Gifted education, Black women, portraiture, critical race theory, Black feminist thought

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background of Study .....	2
Statement of Problem .....	5
Significance of Study .....	9
Research Design .....	11
Research Goals .....	13
Research Questions .....	14
Conclusion .....	15
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework.....	16
Experiential Knowledge .....	17
Existing Theories as a Framework .....	20
Critical Race Theory (CRT) .....	21
Tenet 1: Racism as the Norm .....	22
Tenet 2: Stories, the Method .....	23
Tenet 3: Interest Convergence .....	24
Tenet 4: Whiteness as Property .....	25
Black Feminist Thought (BFT) .....	27
Feature 1: Standpoint .....	28
Feature 2: Oppression and Diverse Experiences .....	28
Feature 3: Individual Viewpoints .....	29
Feature 4: Charlene the Status Quo .....	29
Feature 5: Significance of Change .....	30

Feature 6: Social Justice.....	28
Existing Research .....	31
Enrollment .....	31
Racial identity issues .....	36
Mastery versus performance .....	39
Peer pressure .....	40
Pilot Interview .....	42
Conclusion .....	45
Chapter 3: Methods .....	47
Research Design .....	48
Setting .....	50
Participants .....	52
Data Collection .....	57
Observations and memoing .....	57
Interviews .....	60
Data Analysis .....	65
Attribute coding.....	68
In vivo coding.....	69
Magnitude coding .....	70
Pattern coding .....	72
Validity .....	76
Conclusion .....	80
Chapter 4: Portraits .....	82

Tamika-The Quiet One .....	83
Tamika’s voice .....	84
Reflection on Tamika.....	94
Jordan-The Loud One.....	94
Jordan’s voice .....	95
Reflection on Jordan .....	104
Akira-The Driven One.....	105
Akira’s voice .....	106
Reflection on Akira .....	114
Conclusion .....	115
Chapter 5: Constructed Themes .....	117
Research Question 1 .....	120
Theme one .....	120
Tamika .....	121
Jordan .....	122
Akira .....	124
Theme two .....	125
Tamika .....	126
Jordan .....	127
Akira .....	127
Theme three .....	128
Tamika .....	129
Jordan .....	130



Akira .....	131
Research Question 2 .....	133
Theme four .....	134
Tamika .....	135
Jordan .....	135
Akira .....	136
Conclusion .....	137
Chapter 6: Conclusion .....	139
Overview of Study .....	140
Discussion of Themes .....	144
Theme one .....	144
Theme two .....	146
Theme three .....	148
Theme four .....	150
Suggestions .....	152
Limitations and Recommendations .....	155
Final Thoughts and Personal Implications .....	164
References .....	159
Appendix A: IRB Approval .....	168
Appendix B: Volunteer Flyer .....	170
Appendix C: Introductory Letter.....	172
Appendix D: Questionnaire .....	174
Appendix E: Sample Interview Questions .....	176

Appendix F: Introductions and Requirements ..... 181

Appendix G: Interview Protocol ..... 182

Appendix H: Recorded Consent to Participate ..... 184

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Final concept map for research design .....	12
Figure 2: Map of the geographic regions of Georgia .....	54
Figure 3: Example of written memo on a printed article .....	58
Figure 4: Example of memos and reflection from interviews .....	59
Figure 5: Transcript after being exported to Word and corrected .....	62
Figure 6: Example of in vivo code to pattern code .....	74
Figure 7: Constructed themes revealed from the data in this study .....	119

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic information on selected participants .....	55
Table 2: Interview dates and locations .....	61
Table 3: Attribute codes and descriptors.....	69
Table 4: In vivo coding and magnitude coding.....	71
Table 5: Preliminary categories.....	73
Table 6: Summary of themes connected to CRT .....	143
Table 7: Summary of themes connected to BFT .....	144

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### My Family

Thank you to my parents, husband, children, and grandchildren who have all been supportive during this process. You have had to sacrifice your time and space to allow the opportunity for me to finish. Those sacrifices have not gone unnoticed. Now that the process is over, I am all yours.

### My Committee

Dr. Lorraine Schmertzling, Dr. Richard Schmertzling, and Dr. Nicole Gunn, I cannot express my gratitude for your support and countless hours of reading and providing suggestions for improvement. When I wanted to stop, thank you for pushing me forward, I would not have finished this project if it were not for your encouragement.

### My Editor

Scott Grubbs. Thank you for the quick turn around when I would frantically send you revisions. Your guidance was priceless in this process.

### My Participants

Tamika, Jordan, and Akira. Thank you. Without your stories, this would not have been possible. Thank you for sharing your life experiences with me. Thank you for trusting me and allowing me the opportunity to share those experiences with others.

### The Future

To future Black girls who enroll in gifted education, this was for you. My hope is this study improves your experiences in gifted education.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment—and that is not easy . . . but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue. (Delpit, 1995, p. 55)

*Giftedness Through Their Eyes* is the product of a desire for change. This change needs to start with dialogue. Sometimes, dialogues are difficult to have because we must address failures that we have personally made, but in order for change to occur, the dialogue has to start. This dialogue started by listening to the stories of three gifted Black women and their experiences in gifted education. As I listened, I became aware more people needed to know about this dialogue—stakeholders, policymakers, administration, teachers, students, and parents. Through this dialogue, I sought to highlight the opportunities that are available through gifted services in South Georgia and address the underrepresentation of Black girls in those programs by sharing the experiences of three gifted Black women. While the participants' experiences revealed both benefits and struggles of being in the gifted program, not one regretted being involved in the gifted program. Their experiences can be used to help start new dialogues to support change in how minority students are referred and served in gifted programs in South Georgia.

This chapter opens with my personal and professional background experience, which led me to realize the number of Black girls who were recognized as gifted was

disproportionate when compared to the general population. From there, I determined this to be the problem as it stands in schools located in rural South Georgia and addressed why this problem was significant. The research design is then explained briefly using a concept map, followed by an explanation of how the research goals and questions were established based on the problem.

### **Background of Study**

“When I grow up, I want to be a teacher.” My whole life this is how I answered the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I was raised in a military family, meaning I moved around a lot when I was younger. While there were a few drawbacks to these moves, the experiences I gained shaped me into the person I am today. I was able to live in neighborhoods that were comprised of many different backgrounds and cultures. The schools I attended mirrored those communities. I was unaware that my experiences were different from other kids. Admittedly, as a young child, I was sheltered from many social issues involving race.

When my father retired, he returned to his home in South Georgia. It was there, as a teenager, where I attended high school. I would say I was actively involved in high school, participating in several leadership clubs, academic teams, and the band. However, looking back, I still say I was sheltered from many of the social issues that affect the education system. Being a White student in a majority Black school, I was blind to many injustices that occurred. This blindness is an example of one of the failures that I had to face when starting dialogues for this study.

Now, I am a White educator with over 25 years of experience in a predominantly Black school. During those years, I taught in only two school systems. Both of those

systems were Title I school systems in which minorities were the majority. The system in which I taught the longest is the system from where graduated high school. Through the years, I taught students from fourth to eighth-grade. I have taught all levels including special needs students, English as a second language students, and gifted students.

Currently, I am teaching sixth to eighth-grade students enrolled in the gifted program. I am confident in my ability to teach students, as is evident from previous years' relationships with students, administrators' evaluations, and standardized test data. I believe a degree of this confidence derives from knowing the history of my students, having attended school with their parents and, in some cases, their grandparents. Because I am familiar with the community in which I teach, I thought I understood all the students. However, early on I seemed to struggle to reach one particular demographic group: Black girls.

I thought it was just me. Maybe, it was just the system where I was teaching, or it was just the students' learned behavior from the policies in place and even conditions in the larger community. No matter what strategies or incentives I had to offer, I struggled to connect with this group of students. I had a difficult time helping them see their potential and reach it. I attended professional development on ways to reach all students. I talked with other teachers, who seemed to have a good rapport with Black girls, to learn strategies they were using to reach this group of students. Through professional conversations with other teachers over the years, I learned to work with this group by building relationships with them and gaining their trust. However, because of my focus on this particular demographic group, as my teaching career continued, I noticed



something interesting about this group of students. This group was underrepresented in our gifted program.

To understand the underrepresentation, I began to look at data from the Georgia Department of Education. The school system in which I spent most of my years teaching is 54% Black (Georgia Department of Education, 2018a). Yet, when I looked at the participation levels of Black students in the gifted program, the percentage was lower, at approximately 38%. Furthermore, when I looked at Black girls in the gifted program, the percentage was even lower at approximately 16% of the gifted population being Black girls (Local, 2017). I followed this up by exploring data from schools with similar demographics in rural South Georgia. According to the data, the number of Black girls enrolled in the gifted programs was disproportionate across the rural South Georgia region averaging approximately 18%, while the population of Black girls was approximately 31% of the total population (Local, 2019).

As a way to gain more understanding on this issue, I researched the topic of Black students, specifically girls, enrolled in gifted education and discovered this was not isolated to rural South Georgia. The percentage of Black students in gifted programs is lower than the population breakdown of Black students across the United States, with a discrepancy between the two of 37% for Black girls (Wright, Ford, & Young, 2017). I wondered what the problem was. If these students are capable of succeeding in a gifted program, then why are the numbers of Black students enrolled, specifically Black girls, low?

In attempting to find answers to this question, I intended to seek out life experiences from Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs in rural South

Georgia as K-12 students. I wanted to start a dialogue with Black women who completed these programs and listen to the stories of their experiences. I wanted to discover what motivated them to stay—and ultimately succeed—in their respective gifted programs. I wanted to talk to the women and did in order to gather their stories and their thoughts to share with and help other Black girls experience the same opportunities and successes. The descriptions of their experiences and subsequent advice they offer can be used to enhance recruitment of Black girls to gifted programs in rural South Georgia and also help retain future students in these respective programs.

### **Statement of Problem**

Based on my experiences with Black girls, enrollment in the gifted program, and information from research studies (Crabtree, Richardson, & Lewis, 2019; Ford, 2010; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Wright et al., 2017), there is a problem that needs to be addressed in gifted education. This problem is not new. In their text on giftedness, Coleman and Cross (2005) reminded us that Thomas Jefferson believed talents among the rich and the poor should be developed but rarely were as the groups were not given the same opportunities without advocacy. They further explained gifted programs were designed to take the brightest students and push them to reach their fullest potential without having to wait on other students to catch up. These programs were meant to be all-inclusive from their inception. In practice, however, this idea of inclusivity has not turned out to be the case.

Gifted education dates back to 1868 when William T. Harris, Superintendent of Public Schools in St. Louis, first started efforts to educate gifted students. Gifted education, in its present iteration, originated in 1988 when Congress passed the Jacob

Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act as part of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“A Brief History,” 2018). This act directed the Secretary of Education to make grants and contracts for programs or projects designed to meet the educational needs of gifted students, including the training of teachers or their supervisors (“Jacob K. Javits,” 2022). As a result, today, there are gifted programs in all 50 states in an attempt to effectively serve gifted students (“Gifted Education,” 2018). However, there are no federal guidelines; each state is responsible for overseeing the gifted program in their state (“Gifted Education,” 2018).

As of 2012, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) estimated there were approximately 3.2 million students being served in gifted programs in the United States (“Gifted Education,” 2018). However, certain demographic groups remain underserved, among them are Black girls (Henfield et al., 2008; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Middleton & Ford, 2022; Wright et al., 2017; Young, Young, & Ford, 2017). Data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights [USDOEOCR] (2021) revealed Black girls accounted for 9% of the total student population but only 5.2% of the gifted population of students in the United States. Using the formula established by Wright et al. (2017), this would be an underrepresentation of 37% of Black girls. By comparison, White girls accounted for 25% of the total student population and 28.7% of the gifted population (USDOEOCR, 2021). Using the same formula from Wright et al. (2017), this would be a -20% underrepresentation for White girls. The underrepresentation of Black girls is also reflected in the number of minority women working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers (Joseph, Hailu, & Boston, 2017; Young, Ero-Tolliver, Young, & Ford, 2017).

Education in STEM is an area of focus in gifted programs (Crabtree et al., 2019). It is interesting to note the underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted programs is similar to the number of Black women in STEM careers. Currently, only 10% of STEM professionals are women of any color (Young et al., 2017); while 13% of the population are Black women (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2013). This underrepresentation is also obvious when comparing the number of math doctorates awarded to Black women in 2012 ( $N = 10$ ) to the number awarded to White women ( $N = 163$ ) (Joseph et al., 2017).

In 2010, after almost 2 decades of research, Ford (2010) recommended changes to ensure Black girls were represented in gifted education. The recommended changes included being aware of the underrepresentation, focusing on early identification and talent development, and being aware of the need for recruitment and retention policy change as it relates to race (Ford, 2010). Ford's work in this field continues today (Ford et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2023; Middleton & Ford, 2022) showing the discrimination in enrollment continues to affect minority students and highlights the lack of culturally responsive educators.

In a qualitative study by Henfield et al. (2008), 12 Black students were interviewed about their experiences in gifted education. Their varied experiences led to recommendations for change that included teachers and program administrators needing to be aware of the issues Black students face and address those issues in order to help students continue in the program; needing to know and attend to how Black students navigate through the program, which differed from other students because of cultural

differences and family awareness levels; and needing to understand the benefits and drawbacks of the program for students of color and work to eliminate the drawbacks (Henfield et al., 2008). These recommendations highlight ways to improve the gifted experience for Black students, yet not making improvements like those suggested by Henfield et al. (2008) exacerbates the disproportion of most gifted programs.

Specifically, regarding the underrepresentation of Black girls, Ford (2010) pointed out that the issue not only affected the students, but also their families, schools, communities, states, and this nation. She argued Black girls should be afforded the same opportunities as other students and deserved the benefits provided by gifted education programs. Henfield et al. (2008) discussed five of these benefits: academic rigor, highly skilled teachers, equally skilled peers, future preparedness, and increased options and opportunities in the future.

I attempted to find an explanation in the literature as to what caused this underrepresentation. Possible reasons for this underrepresentation included lack of teacher referral and out dated referral policies (Ford, 2010), mental fatigue and anxiety due to expectations (Henfield et al., 2008 & Middleton & Ford, 2022), and lack of focused initiative directed at minority populations (Fletcher, Hines, Ford, & Moore, 2022). More interestingly, I found recommendations made to address the underrepresentation: Ford (2010) recommended a focus on early identification and talent development; Ford et al. (2023) recommended addressing the cultural group and ensuring Black women were reflected in all areas of teaching and learning; Henfield et al. (2008) recommended all school personnel work with Black students to help navigate the

experience of being Black and gifted; and Young et al. (2017) recommended instruction that was more compelling and relevant to Black girls.

These findings (and the lack thereof) clarified a need to further investigate the lack of enrollment in gifted programs experienced by Black girls. By interviewing Black women previously enrolled in gifted programs, I believed a better understanding could be developed about how to improve the experiences of Black girls to change and improve programs for higher enrollment and more consistent retention, which could constitute a significant contribution to their education and the literature. Therefore, this study is intended to explain how I explored the issue of underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted programs by listening to three Black women tell their experiences related to gifted programs. I hoped this would allow me to gain insight on ways to increase enrollment and retention of future Black girls, ways to improve the gifted learning environment, and ways to reach teachers with the information by telling the participants' stories.

### **Significance of Study**

Adding findings from this study to the literature helps fill a gap mentioned by Young and Young et al. (2017) on the experiences of Black women in gifted programs. This investigation also affords Black women a voice in the conversation about their underrepresentation in those programs. Young and Young et al. (2017) used the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to examine the differences in the performance of students who had access to gifted programs and those who did not. Through the use of statistical data, the researchers discovered Black girls with access to gifted programs outperformed their counterparts without access to gifted programs almost twice as frequently as White girls outperformed their counterparts. Young and Young et

al. (2017) stated future studies should continue to disaggregate data as it relates to race and gender; and from these studies, educators can use data to make informed decisions as it relates to reversing the underrepresentation of Black women.

Another study that has given voice to Black women in gifted programs was conducted by Henfield et al. (2008). Through interviews with 12 (five boys and seven girls) Black high school students enrolled in gifted education programs in the southeastern and Midwestern regions of the United States, Henfield et al. (2008) provided an opportunity for these students to be heard. The participants provided insights into some challenges (peer relations, identify issues, etc.) and benefits (advanced curriculum, college credit, etc.) faced by participants in the gifted programs. The authors of the study suggested further research was needed focusing attention on the experiences of Black students in gifted programs. A focus on this population to address their underrepresentation in the programs, as noted by Young and Ero-Tolliver et al.'s (2017) longitudinal survey of 1,810 Black female high school respondents, would help do as Henfield et al. (2008) suggested and afford the same opportunities and benefits in schools that other populations have. They could then experience the academic rigor, highly skilled teachers, equally skilled peers, future preparedness, and increased options and opportunities often found in gifted programs (Henfield et al. 2008).

This study used the experiences of Black women to address the need to reverse the underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted programs in South Georgia in order to increase enrollment and retention to help ensure Black girls are afforded the same opportunities and benefits as other students enrolled in these programs. By looking at the problem of lost educational opportunities from the inside out, the experiences of Black

women, as told through their stories, will encourage others who qualify to participate in gifted programs and thereby enhance and improve the experiences for future students. Additionally, teachers and administrators will be able to learn from these stories in order to change policies to allow for practical solutions to increase enrollment and retention of Black girls in gifted programs providing them with the same educational opportunities others receive.

### **Research Design**

In order to achieve these outcomes, I followed Maxwell's (2013) "interactive" model for research design. This model has five components: goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity. This design evolved with the research. Maxwell (2013) said this about the flexibility of this model:

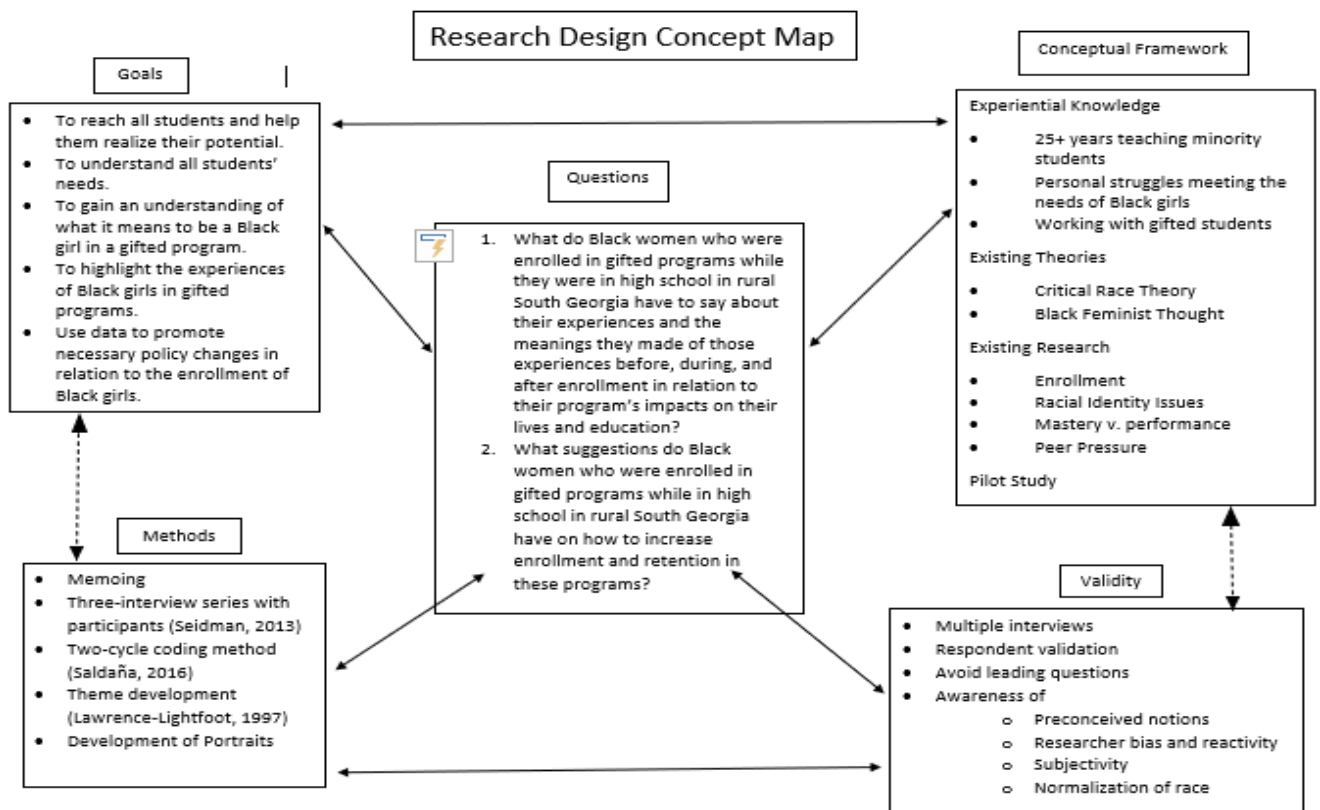
The connections among the different components of the model are not rigid rules or fixed implications; they allow for a certain amount of "give" and elasticity in the design. I find it useful to think of them as rubber band. They can stretch and bend to some extent, but they exert a definite tension on different parts of the design, and beyond a particular point, or under certain stress, they will break. (p. 5)

Figure 1 illustrates the final concept map that was created to show the research design of this study. All five components are connected and reflect back to the research questions. Each of these components helped start the dialogue for this study.

In Figure 1, the research questions are at the center of the map because they were the component that directly affected the other components. The top half of the map, goals and conceptual framework, were developed early in the process. The arrows



between the top areas show how this process was connected. The questions have a clear connection to the goals; the goals were formed based on theories and existing research; and the theories and existing research were relevant to the goals and questions of the study. The bottom half of the map was the operational part, which explains how the study was conducted. Each of these parts was also related. The methods selected allowed the questions to be answered and dealt with threats to validity, the questions were phrased in a way so the researcher was mindful of feasibility of the methods and validity threats, and validity from the questions and methods were maintained for the study to be relevant. The rest of this chapter will discuss how the goals and questions evolved and guided the study.



**Figure 1.** Final concept map for research design. This map was designed using Maxwell's (2013) Interactive Model of Research Design.

## **Research Goals**

The detailed, descriptive experiences of Black women in gifted programs in South Georgia are pivotal in reaching the goals of this research. Maxwell (2013) suggested having a clear understanding of the goals that motivated one to do a study in order to ensure focus would not be lost in the complexity of gathering and analyzing data. My goals not only guided me through the study, but, as Maxwell (2013) explained, also provide justification for the study. My goals are discussed in this section to align with Maxwell's (2013) distinction of three types of goals: personal, practical, and intellectual.

Personally, I want to be the best teacher I can be. While my role has changed over the years, this goal has not. Now as a teacher of gifted students, I realize this goal still means reaching all students and helping them realize their potential. In order to do this, I need to be able to fully understand their needs from their perspective, which means I must put aside my personal biases. This needs to occur not only in my daily teaching, but most importantly for this work, I had to articulate areas of my personal beliefs that might interfere with hearing from women who are racially different than myself. Dialogue could not start if I was not prepared to admit that race would be a major issue with this study. Another issue would be social justices. I had to realize that I cannot solve all the problems I would hear about in these dialogues. I simply had to listen and be willing to share the participants' experiences. These biases will be discussed more in the methods section of this study. By interviewing a group of Black women who completed gifted programs, I found out how they navigated the process of being a Black girl in a predominately White gifted program. I learned from their stories and changed the way I

addressed issues with Black students, particularly Black girls, may encounter in my classroom. This personal goal to be the best teacher I can led to my intellectual goal.

An intellectual goal is focused on understanding something by gaining insight into what is happening (Maxwell, 2013). By listening to these young Black women describe their experiences with gifted programs, my goal was to gain a better understanding of what it means to be a Black girl in a gifted program. The information gained from the dialogues helped me meet this goal by letting me into their words and opening my eyes to the situations as they saw it. This understanding was then used to help meet my practical goal.

A practical goal is one focused on accomplishing something (Maxwell, 2013). A practical goal for this study was to design research to highlight the experiences of Black women in gifted programs and to share those experiences with educators and policymakers with the hope that they would understand the situation and work to improve it. If policy changes need to occur, results from this study could provide the necessary data to support those changes. In order to better accomplish the aforementioned goals, I sought to answer two overarching research questions, which are discussed in the following section.

### **Research Questions**

Being a qualitative study, research questions were posed but not fixed at the start of the study. They were constantly being shaped and expanded as the study evolved (Maxwell, 2013). As research occurred and data was collected, the questions were changed to meet the needs of the study, which is why Maxwell (2013) pointed out the importance of goal setting in the beginning stages of research design. Keeping my goals

in mind, two research questions were developed for this study that could be answered by talking to Black women who graduated from high school in rural South Georgia about their experiences within gifted programs and about ideas to increase enrollment and retention of Black girls in gifted programs. This qualitative study addressed the following questions:

- (1) What do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia have to say about their experiences and the meanings they made of those experiences before, during, and after enrollment in relation to their program's impacts on their lives and education?
- (2) What suggestions do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs while in high school in rural South Georgia have on how to increase enrollment and retention in these programs?

## **Conclusion**

These questions focus on understanding the experiences of Black women in gifted programs in rural South Georgia and how the value of these programs impacted their lives with the hope of understanding how to motivate other Black girls to enroll and remain a part of these programs. Furthermore, it is my hope that the stories from this study may give educators and policymakers ideas about improving future experiences and ultimately help institute new policies to improve recruitment and retention of Black girls, helping to meet the practical goal of this study. The questions in this study were aligned to and evolved from components of the conceptual framework, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 2**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Don't wait for inspiration. Create a framework for it. (Glei, 2022, para. 1)

In an interactive model of research design, the connections are flexible, but also help keep everything focused (Maxwell, 2013). Identifying the problem and why it is important was only one of the steps I took in designing and conducting this qualitative research. A conceptual framework was also vital to keep me focused while exploring a particular, multi-faceted phenomenon of Black girls in gifted programs. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) defined a conceptual framework as a product and process used to guide a study. Maxwell (2013) viewed the conceptual framework as a constructed outline to be used when studying a particular phenomenon. A conceptual framework should “shape the design and direction of your study and guide its development” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 4), but is also flexible and should evolve with the study. As Maxwell (2013) suggested, four main sources used for this framework included experiential knowledge, existing theories and research (traditionally referred to as the theoretical framework and literature review), pilot study, and personal thoughts. To argue why this topic matters, I did as Ravitch and Riggan (2017) indicated and started with my experiential knowledge of Black girls in gifted programs. From there, I reviewed how existing theories and literature affected this study. For the last part, I focused on results from a pilot study and my own personal thoughts.

## **Experiential Knowledge**

The current study reflects my growth and thought evolution as a White teacher in a predominately Black school system. I assumed a lot about the students with whom I taught because I attended school in the same district as a child. Despite my childhood experiences with the school culture and growing up with minority friends, my assumptions were wrong. Through courses in the doctoral program, I became aware that I lacked an understanding of race and culture. I considered this a personal failure, or bias, that I had to admit to before starting the study. Reflecting on over 25 years of teaching, I realized the hardest group of students for me to reach has been Black girls. Regardless of the potential I saw, no matter how hard I tried to motivate, they rarely achieved what I believed to be their fullest potential. I often wondered if there was something I was not doing as a White teacher that would help keep these students from falling short of their best. Through conversations with successful teachers and many failed attempts to build relationships, I learned how to teach this group of students by gaining their trust early in the year through relationships.

Six years ago, my concerns about this topic grew stronger as I was assigned a position in the gifted program, and I realized there were not a lot of Black girls in my classes. I began to try to research why this demographic group was not represented like the other groups. I wanted to know what was happening with the way this group experienced education and what may be improved for future students.

At the time, I was enrolled in a summer course for my doctoral program titled *Race and Culture in Education*. During the course, I read several books dealing with race relations in education (Delpit, 1995; Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010; Pollock, 2008). I began

to see the importance of truly acknowledging the cultural differences across races instead of ignoring them. A lot of the failures I encountered early in my career were issues related to my unwillingness to address race in my classroom. Through the doctoral course, I discovered I did not need to ignore race, but rather I needed to address the situation for what it was. I learned to acknowledge the injustices I was seeing, embrace them, and work to change them. I knew I needed to take time to truly understand what this group of students experienced in education, more specifically in the gifted programs.

I first became aware of the foundations of the gifted program when I started working daily with gifted students. Modern gifted education started in 1972 when the Marland Report issued the first formal definition of giftedness (“A Brief History,” 2018). Giftedness is when a child’s ability is significantly above the norm for his or her age; this ability may manifest in one or more domains such as intellectual, creative, leadership, or in specific academic field (“Gifted Education,” 2018). I quickly learned that students are typically referred by teachers and/or parents to the gifted education program based on their academic performance. There are no federal regulations for gifted programs, and each state has unique qualifications that must be met for students to receive gifted services.

As a Georgia educator, I became aware of the qualifications for that state. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2018b), there are two options to qualify for gifted education. The first option is a child scores in the 96th percentile on a nationally age-normed mental ability test and in the 90th percentile in reading, math, or complete battery on a nationally normed achievement test. The second option is one where a child meets three out of four established criteria. The first two criteria are mental

ability and achievement (the same as option one). The last two criteria are creativity (scoring in the 90th percentile on a nationally normed creativity test) and motivation (3.5 GPA or higher in academic content for 2 years or scoring in the 90th percentile on a motivation scale). Once a student meets the qualification for gifted education, school systems are required by law to provide differentiated instruction to address their special needs (Georgia Department of Education, 2018b).

Working with gifted students in the state of Georgia provided the opportunity to experience four different models of delivery the Georgia Department of Education (2018b) recognizes for serving the needs of gifted students: resource classes, advanced content classes, cluster grouping, and collaborative teaching. For the past 6 years, I have been working with advanced content classes. These classes are designed for gifted students, with a focus on an enriched and rigorous curriculum. In my experience, sometimes a student who has been identified as gifted does not want to participate in the class and may elect to exit the program, but their parents must sign a withdrawal form stating they no longer seek to receive gifted services for their child. Once the form is signed, the school system is no longer required to provide gifted services for the child.

Ironically, the criteria for qualifying for gifted education and the ease of being released from the program are two factors I believe influence the enrollment and retention of students in the gifted program where I work, especially in the case of Black girls. Over the years, I referred Black girls to the program, but most of them either did not qualify as gifted, or if they did qualify, they asked to leave the program after a year or two. Through different conversations with Black girls who stayed and some who left the programs, I discovered both groups had similar views about their education in general,



but their educational experiences differed. The increase in the difficulty of work and scoring average on work that is more difficult were reasons given by the students with whom I spoke who chose to leave the program. Interestingly enough, the students who stayed in the program talked about the same factors but viewed these factors as motivational. The differences and similarities in these views and how they were created seem to be in the experiences they had and their interpretations of them.

Through this study, I was able to gather and analyze detailed descriptions of experiences I believe to be similar to previous girls whom I knew. Through my three participants, I believe I gained a better understanding of the girls about whom I was concerned by hearing participants' viewpoints of their experiences and how they made sense of them. My previous experiences with girls like the women in my study were during their school years and provided a lens through which I could tell the participants' stories in hopes of inspiring others to enhance gifted programs in ways that make them more appealing for Black girls. While my experiential knowledge certainly fueled my passion for the study and was foundational to my initial understanding of the phenomenon, I also turned to previously published explanations related to the schooling of Black girls in order to better grasp their situation.

### **Existing Theories as a Framework**

As I became more aware of previous work related to educating Black children, I embraced two existing theories relevant to my topic. Each theory influenced my thinking throughout the research and influenced both the design and execution of it, which I explain in this section: critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist thought (BFT). As Maxwell (2013) suggested, by having an understanding of existing theories related to the

study, I, as a researcher, also have an opportunity for a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

**Critical race theory.** In this study, critical race theory (CRT) cannot be ignored because it addresses how race, racism, and power affect all aspects of life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In the 1970s the Civil Rights Movement effectively stalled, and as a result legal scholars and activists pushed for more change. Scholars and activists began using their writings to document and describe how race and racism were interwoven parts of society that must be understood (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The core idea behind CRT is that race is a social construct, and racism is not just a product of individual biases, but also embedded in systems and policies. One such system is the education system. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were among the first to note how race played a difference in the educational opportunities of Blacks and Whites. One area of interest to this study discussed in their article “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” was *the absolute right to exclude*. This section addressed whiteness and the history of exclusion including absolute denial of education to Blacks, separate schools for Blacks and Whites, White flight, vouchers, tracking programs, and the institution of gifted programs (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This article reminded me of the multitude of ways we, as Whites, worked to keep Blacks separate and not equal. Critical race theory sets forth several tenets related to this majority/minority dichotomy that are important as beginning truths. Ladson-Billings (1998) research of how the tenets are seen in the educational system was embraced and therefore influenced this dissertation. Ladson-Billings (1998) lists these tenets as: (1) racism has become the norm to American culture; (2) CRT employs storytelling to examine the foundation of racism in America; (3)

interest convergence keeps the current system in place in the United States unable to make the necessary changes to stop racism; and (4) “Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of the civil right legislation” (p. 12).

***Tenet 1: Racism as the norm.*** One tenet of CRT is that racism is a permanent normative feature in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Racially based incidents occur daily, yet many people ignore, overlook, or simply do not see them because of the normative construction of race and racism. These incidents impact the people to whom they are directed, and unfortunately, often the aggressor in these situations is not even aware of the incident because of radically different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives between Black and White cultures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

As Ladson-Billings (1998) suggested, the social construction of race can affect members of minority groups because of the internalized stereotypic images it causes in certain elements of society. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), the social construction of race was created by Whites to indicate inferiority of other ethnic groups. The embedded and often unrecognized prejudices that accompany the construct of race often leave teachers to presume deficits in Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1998), which in turn allows them to believe Black students cannot meet the rigor of an advanced curriculum and to use instructional strategies that are not targeted to this population they believe “can’t keep up” (Chang & Demyan, 2007). When teachers presume students, particularly minority students, fail in school because of internal deficit with them and their families that limit the learning process, it is referred to as deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). The result of this deficit thinking by teachers is often foundational to the limited

access to the “enriched” curriculum via gifted programs (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a result, Black girls who are enrolled in gifted education could experience an “. . . imposter syndrome, which describes feelings of high-achieving females who suffer from intense internal struggles of being intellectually phony . . .” (Middleton & Ford, 2022, p. 121).

The disproportionate number of Black girls enrolled in gifted education reflects this tenet of permanent racism. Students should not be held back because of misunderstood teacher biases and deficit thinking. The next tenet addresses a method that can be used to create an awareness of this inequality.

***Tenet 2: Stories, the Method.*** Key to the understanding of CRT is the use of stories because they provide “necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting” all aspects of life (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13). This tenet focuses on bringing awareness to the White majority through stories, as story telling is foundational in the Black culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Addressing the individuals affected by the problems takes work and time; however, their stories have to be heard (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The use of CRT was essential when Henfield et al. (2008) interviewed 12 Black students who were enrolled in a gifted program. The purpose of their work was to provide educators with insider information that could be used to improve the recruitment and retention of Black students. This information came from interviews with the students, a gathering of their stories. After the interviews, Henfield et al. (2008) identified three themes relevant to the students’ perceptions and experiences: critical issues facing Black students, ways the students navigated through the gifted programs, and the benefits of gifted education. The use of CRT as a theoretical framework allowed

the researchers to “expose, advocate, and confront injustices” (Henfield et al., 2008, p. 436) for the marginalized group.

As I sought and co-created descriptive stories with the participants, I provided a context within which they could tell their stories. Thus, I applied the CRT tenet of using stories in race-related research to further the field and facilitated Black women talking about their experiences in gifted programs. Stories, such as the ones that were gathered in this research, seek to describe the normalized inequalities found in gifted programs. By viewing the experiences of Black women through the interpretive lens of CRT, participants in the study were able to voice their concerns as they related to race-related issues and gifted education. The analysis of the stories allowed a chance to do as Henfield et al. (2008) did and better “expose, advocate, and confront injustices” (p. 436) as a researcher. The next tenet exposed the difficulties of confronting this injustice.

***Tenet 3: Interest Convergence.*** Interest convergence is part of CRT that states the rights of Black people only advance when they converge with the interests of White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Because of this interest convergence, Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that the current system in place in the United States is not equipped to handle the changes necessary to stop racism. Sweeping changes are needed, but addressing change through our legal system will take time due to interest convergence (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Although there have been many attempts to bring equality to education, these attempts have had questionable effectiveness. An example of this questionable effectiveness provided by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) is desegregation, which was meant to provide more and better opportunities for Black

students, actually increased White flight and resulted in a loss of Black teaching and administrative positions.

Recognizing both the need to stop racism and the slow process for change became clearer after starting research for this study. I personally have witnessed this need in our educational system. Even in 21st century classrooms, teacher biases and systemic racism are prevalent as they continue to manifest in the way students are perceived and tracked based solely on race (Ford et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Understanding interest convergence was crucial to understanding the injustices I would discover through the interviews conducted for this study. The last tenet addresses one of the injustices that I would learn to understand through this study.

***Tenet 4: Whiteness as Property.*** Whiteness as property means being White in the U.S. is a valuable commodity that gives those who possess it unearned privileges (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This idea supports the argument that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of the civil right legislation, (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Educational funding is one area in which this can be clearly seen. Since desegregation was put in place and funding for schools is through property taxes, there is a direct correlation between the two and a disparity between Black neighborhoods and White neighborhoods (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It could be argued, in terms of this study, that standardized testing practices for gifted enrollment also benefit White children simply because they are White and excluded Black populations because of cultural insensitivities, resulting in a higher number of White enrollees.

Critical race theory is the pulling together of multiple beliefs (tenets) that offer an explanation for how and why power remains in the hands of the White majority.

Knowing what those beliefs are is just the first step toward doing something about the inherent injustices that result because of them. Taking on the cloak of CRT allows educators to view learning environments through a lens that not only sees differences in groups of people but embraces the differences. CRT challenges educators to not only recognize but acknowledge and address the power dynamics between White educators and minority students (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). By gaining an understanding of the tenets of CRT then believing them, educators can begin to recognize the system is filled with inequalities and inherently racist and begin to address the problems. My belief in the permanence of racism, my understanding of the social construction of race, and the desire to use storytelling to communicate findings made CRT vital to reaching my goals in this research and understanding the experiences of Black women who were a part of gifted programs during their formative years.

While CRT allowed me to focus on storytelling and the results of the construction of race in the experiences of three Black women in gifted education, there was another area of concern that needed to be addressed: intersectionality. Everyone has overlapping identities and cannot be assigned a “single, easily stated, unitary identity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 10). Thus, intersectionality emphasizes the idea that different aspects of one’s life cannot be separated out into “discrete and pure strands” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). Brah and Phoenix (2004) further discussed the importance of recognizing all areas of intersectionality in one’s life.

As I conducted my research, I considered who the people truly are I am interviewing; they were Black, and they were women. By recognizing the intersectionality of these two identities, I was able to form a better understanding of who

my participants were and the subsequent experiences they shared with me. I began my journey into understanding the intersection of race and gender by reading Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) work on Black feminist thought.

**Black feminist thought.** Patricia Hill Collins wrote about Black feminist thought as a way to label a body of knowledge on the perspectives and experiences of Black women. Black women view the world from an intersecting position. This position is one where both race and gender meet, as such, Black feminist thought addresses the two positions as one (Collins, 2000). Brewer (1999) pointed out the value of BFT as a framework to deconstruct existing frameworks in society in order to address the needs of Black women. It also makes it possible for people who are not Black women to recognize their unique place in the world and in educational research. Collins (2000) noted that comprehending the origins of Black women's thoughts required capturing them from Black women's experiences and their ways of knowing and positioning these understandings in the world.

Collins (2000) explained six distinguishing features of Black feminist thought: (1) the ties between experiences and consciousness impacts the everyday lives of individual Black women and Black women as a collective, creating a collective Black women's standpoint; (2) the ways in which Black women think about oppression is influenced in diverse experiences; (3) Black women share common experiences, yet they develop individual viewpoints that often foster activism; (4) Black women use their standpoint and unique perspective to challenge the status quo; (5) Black women understand the significance of change, as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them; and (6) Black women recognize the importance of social justice



for not only Black women but all marginalized humans. These distinguishing features will be discussed in the rest of this section.

***Feature 1: Standpoint.*** One of the core features include amplifying the voices of Black women as effective change cannot occur without highlighting the existence of and experiences perceived by the women themselves (Collins, 2000). Even though racial segregation is organized differently today as compared to racial segregation of the 1950s, being Black and a woman continues to expose Black women to certain common experiences (Collins, 2000). These experiences permeate Black women's experiences in education and can shape who they become later in life. These  
“... ties between what one does and what one thinks illustrated by individual Black women can also characterize Black women's experiences and ideas as a group ...” (Collins, 2000, p. 24). Examples noted in today's education system include unnecessary tracking of Black girls in math through high school because they are more likely to attend a tracked primary school (Joseph et al., 2017) and Black girls' talent often being overlooked because of teacher misconception (Young et al., 2017). By interviewing Black women on their experiences in gifted programs, I captured their experiences and recorded their understandings of them. These experiences are as varied as the responses to them, which is realized in the second tenet.

***Feature 2: Oppression and diverse experiences.*** While it is true that Black women face common obstacles, it does not mean that every Black woman has the same experience or that there is a consensus on the significance of that experience (Collins, 2000). To listen and learn about the experiences of Black women and the politics that affect their voices takes an open mind, and as a result of these voices, there is a call for

social change (Collins, 2000). This social change includes an end to oppression based on race, class, and gender. Chang and Demyan (2007) revealed this social change also needs to occur in education. Using data from an ethnographic study of academic success in an urban high school, Fordham (1993) noted the impact of gender diversity on school achievement. Fordham (1993) stated that often, Black girls silenced their voice to experience true success. Black girls found themselves having to "conform to standards of 'good behavior' without actually entering the realm 'of bad behavior' by breaking any school rules" (Fordham, 1993, p. 16). Despite this challenge, there are Black girls that experience success in gifted programs (Young et al., 2017). This perception of oppression also affects their response to common experiences.

***Feature 3: Individual viewpoints.*** There are certain suppressions and stereotypes experienced only by Black women, and subsequently we must attempt to understand those experiences to not propagate the situation. Collins (2000) argued that BFT is important because it gives voice to and empowers Black women to overcome. Collins (2000) explained how one's actions can illustrate the connections among lived experiences with oppression, but by developing one's own point of view concerning those experiences, certain acts of resistance can follow. This resistance to oppression is noted when a Black girl becomes successful in math despite being placed in a lower tract (Joseph et al., 2017). This empowerment to overcome oppression is the focus of the next tenet.

***Feature 4: Challenge the status quo.*** Using the knowledge shared by the thoughts and actions of Black women combined with scholarship is essential to challenge the status quo (Collins, 2000). Black women often live in the same neighborhood which

allow for common shared experiences to be combined with knowledge to promote activism, which is essential to empowerment (Collins, 2000). This empowerment can be used to promote change in the education system. For example, Joseph et al. (2017) called for change, such as collective resilience, to allow more Black girls to be successful in math related fields. Recognizing that the needs of Black girls are not static is the next tenet discussed.

***Feature 5: Significance of change.*** Change is always occurring, and as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them (Collins 2000). This on-going change requires a need for Black women to constantly evaluate the commonalities of their situation and how they are experienced differently. For example, Ford (2010) and Henfield et al. (2008), pointed out that Black students may be misunderstood because of their desire to not “act White” and today Black girls can be judged based on what teachers view on social media platforms (Joseph et al., 2017). While both of these views are wrong, realizing their commonalities allows each to be addressed through the lenses of BFT to address the injustice. The last tenet addresses the importance of justice not just for Black women, but all humans.

***Feature 6: Social Justice.*** Through their experiences, a number of Black women have recognized that Black women’s struggles are a part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice (Collins, 2000). These women recognize the theme of oneness of all human life (Collins, 2000). The desire for change in gifted education can be seen in research conducted by Ford (2010) and Ford et al. (2020). In both cases, Black girls were not the key focus—all students of color were the focus.

Using the interpretive lens of BFT, I was able to recognize patterns in the three Black women's stories that were shared with me that demonstrate the features of BFT, especially features one, two, and three. While the understanding of theories was useful when conducting research because it allowed me to look at complicated problems through a different lens (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017), it was also important to possess an understanding of existing research (Maxwell, 2013). Existing research can provide justification for the study, inform the decisions on methods, provide a source of data, and help generate new theories (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Existing Research**

Keeping the aforementioned two theories in mind, I carefully constructed the third part of the conceptual framework after searching the literature to familiarize myself with Black girls in gifted programs. In the search, I discovered there was not an abundance of research available on Black girls in gifted programs. So, I began to read articles on Black students in gifted programs and girls in gifted programs. I was not shocked to find that even though education is supposed to be equally available to all students, it is not. Ford (1995), an extensive researcher on gifted education, indicated cultural misunderstandings of key issues often kept gifted education out of reach of many minorities. The most common issues dealing with underrepresentation found in the literature were with enrollment (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011; Ford, 2010), racial identity (Ford, 1995), mastery versus performance, and peer pressure (Henfield et al., 2008; Mayes & Hines, 2014). Each reason will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

**Enrollment.** The first issue of concern when dealing with underrepresentation involved enrollment practices. There were several problems with the enrollment practices

for gifted programs: lack of program accountability for underrepresentation (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2020), use of appropriate qualifiers (Baldwin, 1987), and teacher biases (Bianco et al., 2011).

According to Ford (2010), underrepresentation has negatively affected the lives of Black students as well as the community, state, and nation in which these students live. The reasons for this underrepresentation remain unchanged over the last several decades (Ford et al., 2020). Several facets of CRT can be identified as underlying reasons for underrepresentation (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2020): *deficit thinking*, a belief that culturally different students are genetically and culturally inferior to White students (Valencia, 1997); *colorblindness*, when educators intentionally or unintentionally suppress the importance of and role of culture in learning (Ford, 2010); and *White privilege*, unearned privileges that benefit White students (Henfield, et al., 2008).

Through her research and studies, no single set of data led Ford (2010) to conclude the lack of a federal mandate for gifted education programs caused district leadership to believe they are not accountable for the underrepresentation, but years of doing research in the field and seeing a variety of contexts gave her reason to believe this to be the case. Nationally, gifted education is a small part of the educational system, and there are several states that do not have any mandates for administering or funding gifted programs, and only six states are fully mandated with a set of regulations and funding for the programs (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). This lack of accountability makes it easy for districts to delay rectifying the issue of underrepresentation (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2020).

The state of Georgia, however, not only requires all public schools in the state to offer programs for gifted education but also funds these programs (Georgia Department of Education, 2018b). Nevertheless, there are no practices in place to address the underrepresentation of minority students. Some practices Ford (2010) suggested over a decade ago included revising educational definitions to honor cultural differences, changing policies and procedures to account for cultural differences, and moving from a state of colorblindness to one of cultural responsiveness.

Cultural responsiveness involves understanding and appropriately including and responding to the combination of cultural variables and the full range of dimensions of diversity that an individual brings to interactions. Cultural responsiveness requires valuing diversity, seeking to further cultural knowledge, and working toward the creation of community spaces and workspaces where diversity is valued (Hopf, Crowe, Verdon, Blake, & McLeod, 2021). When addressing cultural responsiveness, Black girls fit a unique category because they not only identify with Black boys but also White girls (Middleton & Ford, 2022). Despite this uniqueness, this group of students needs to be affirmed and supported in their educational endeavors (Middleton & Ford, 2022). Ford et al. (2022) suggested that educators and administrators need exposure to scholarship by and about Black students to help improve this understanding, which could lead to more appropriate qualifiers for gifted education.

Another issue found in the extant literature involved the use of appropriate qualification measures. Ford et al. (2008) and Ford et al. (2020) stated the use of traditional tests, such as IQ tests, contribute to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Objective test data was easy to use and defend when making

choices about program participants, but when comparing the numbers of minority students in the program with the general population, these tests were not effective at identifying minorities who may have qualified under a less bias form of measure (Baldwin, 1987; Ford, 2010; Ford et al. 2020). These objective tests were designed with the White majority in mind and the traditional view of giftedness, characterized by high grades, high scores on achievement and IQ tests, and strong classroom performance (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008). This traditional view neglected cultural differences (Briggs et al., 2008). Ford (2011) and Baldwin (1987) stated culture must be honored in whatever screening process is used in order to avoid bias. They believed subjective tests as well as objective tests should be used when identifying minority students for gifted programs. In 1994, Georgia adopted the multi-criteria approach to identifying gifted students. Districts no longer had to rely on objective tests alone for qualification to gifted education, they could consider other factors like creativity and motivation (Georgia Department of Education, 2018b). Yet even with this expanded qualification method, underrepresentation in these classes continued (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, 2021).

Besides accountability and qualification measures, teacher biases constituted another barrier to enrollment in gifted programs. While the first two issues could be addressed with mandates and policy change, teacher biases were more difficult to address. These biases included gender (Bianco et al., 2011) and racial biases (Briggs et al., 2008). A mixed methods study by Bianco et al. (2011) identified the presence of gender bias in teacher selection related to gifted program enrollment. The 189 educators who participated in the study were asked to read a vignette on either a male student or

female student, complete a Likert-scale rating on whether the student should be referred to the gifted program, and answer a survey question explaining the justification for their answers. Their findings indicated male students were more likely to be referred for gifted services, even though the females shared the same characteristics as the males. Another form of teacher bias related to racial bias is deficit thinking (Ford et al., 2022). Not only does deficit thinking keep students from being referred to gifted education (Ford et al., 2008), but it can also influence behavior of Black students once admitted into the program (Ford et al., 2022). This deficit thinking among teachers causes a culture where students do not believe they are supposed to be in the gifted program—creating an imposter syndrome, or a feeling of high-achieving students who suffer from intense internal struggles of being intellectually phony (Middleton & Ford, 2022). This type of culture can be reversed with work once the biases are removed (Fletcher et al., 2022).

Biases in programs can also affect enrollment (Briggs et al., 2008). Through the use of questionnaires, document reviews, and interviews, data was gathered on 25 selected gifted programs. The purpose of the qualitative study was to evaluate methods used to increase diversity in gifted education. The data collected during this study focused on program qualities, particularly referral and delivery methods, teacher training, parent/community involvement, learning environment, and program evaluation. One result was how programs that employed these methods increased minority enrollment by shifting the perspective of teachers from a deficit mindset to a strength-based mindset when working with minority students. Briggs et al. (2008) also noted that the programs, which were successful in minority enrollment, provided cultural awareness training to staff members to make teachers more aware of their biases. Teacher biases happened



when the preconceived idea of gifted—quiet, studious, hardworking, always prompt, and correct with assignments—interfered with the identification of other students, typically minority and/or female, who also had indicators of giftedness (Briggs et al., 2008).

According to the tenets of CRT, underlying race issues are endemic and ever present in society. In education, these race-related issues can manifest in the form of teacher bias. These biases, along with lack of program accountability and inappropriate qualifiers, influence and affect the referral and enrollment of Black girls into gifted programs. Related to issues with enrollment, the literature also evidenced underrepresentation based on perceptions of racial identity.

**Racial identity issues.** Racial identity is the extent to which people of color are aware of and understand the importance of their racial background (Grantham & Ford, 2003). As a result of this awareness, Grantham and Ford (2003) postulated that for Black students in gifted programs, there may be feelings of isolation, the need to separate one's self from the group, and an awareness of the lack of similar peers. This isolation, or social withdrawal, was also noted in a study by Middleton and Ford (2022) as a way students coped with racial identity issues.

In a meta-analysis of 24 studies in the literature related to gifted Black students, Grantham and Ford (2003) concluded finding one's racial identity was a difficult task for anyone in school but being Black in the gifted program made the task more difficult. In 1998, these authors conducted a case study with a Black girl named Danisha. Danisha was in high school at the time and enrolled in a gifted program (Grantham & Ford, 1998). Field observation data and interview transcripts were analyzed to find themes across her experiences at school. Most notably researchers noticed her perceptions of social

variables that caused Danisha to have feelings of isolation. She was one of only a few Black students enrolled in the gifted program, and she often found herself having to display different personas depending on whether she was in school around White people or out of school around Black people. She also expressed concerns over social injustices she noticed, yet she felt a sense of helplessness in addressing these injustices in a setting of White people. This case study concluded with an emphasis on the importance of working with Black students enrolled in gifted programs to ensure they are able to develop a healthy racial identity (Grantham & Ford, 1998).

Grantham and Ford (2003) researched the development of racial identity of Black students in gifted programs. To do so they used a Venn diagram as a conceptual model to explore, extrapolate, and integrate the literature on the affective and psychological needs of Black gifted students (Grantham & Ford, 2003). These findings included the idea that Black students enrolled in gifted programs may be especially aware and sensitive to social injustices because of their gifted characteristics (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Nine years later Mays and Hines (2014) conducted a similar meta-analysis with a clear focus on Black girls. The findings indicated girls did not see others who looked like them in gifted programs and because of the limited number of Black girls in these classes, the girls often believed they did not belong in the class. Middleton and Ford (2022) also noted this imposter syndrome among Black girls in gifted education. These feelings of inadequacies were hard for students to process, as they believed they needed to choose one group, gifted or regular, with which they identified and be a perfect example for that group (Mays & Hines, 2014). Both reviews noted the lack of a sense of belonging to the

gifted group as a whole because they looked different, which led to a sense of isolation (Mayes & Hines, 2014; Middleton & Ford, 2022).

Gifted identity distancing or separation from the group was one strategy that Henfield et al. (2008) noted as a way the 12 gifted students (five Black males and seven Black females) interviewed in their study in the Midwestern region of the U.S. handled the pressure of trying to be perfect. Eleven of the 12 students embraced their gifted identity, but at the same time distanced themselves from their gifted identity by hiding their giftedness, changing the language they used when around non-gifted peers, keeping the same appearance as non-gifted peers, and participating in extracurricular activities. These findings supported the literature review by Grantham and Ford (2003) that identified the complexity of the intersectionality of these two identities, Black girl and gifted. This intersectionality led students to think they needed to abandon the one identity to preserve the other identity, which led to a battle between academic success and social acceptance, and ultimately sabotaging their achievement (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Due to underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted programs, Black girls were reported repeatedly in the literature to doubt their abilities and tended to experience a decrease in self-esteem (Ford et al., 2023; Mayes & Hines, 2014). Black girls could not relate to their classmates and became susceptible to believing stereotypes about Black inferiority and being intelligent meant the student was ‘acting White’ (Mayes & Hines, 2014). Students also experienced peer rejection because of their inability to relate to their peers (Mayes & Hines, 2014), which was also a finding from Henfield et al. (2008). These studies pointed out the students wanted to be seen and treated as being “normal”

by everyone (Ford et al., 2023; Henfield et al., 2008; Mayes & Hines, 2014). Mastery versus performance was another topic prevalent in the research.

**Mastery versus performance.** Besides enrollment and racial identity, another area of concern with underrepresentation was mastery versus performance. Most students want to be successful and succeed. However, being grouped with an equal ability peer group can be stressful because students realize they may not be the best anymore (Adams-Byers, Whitsell, & Moon, 2004).

Adams-Byers et al. (2004) conducted research in which 44 students enrolled in gifted programs were surveyed about the academic and social perceptions of being grouped homogeneously or heterogeneously. Their findings included that once in gifted classes, most students, regardless of gender and race, found themselves in a new situation where they were no longer confident in their ability, where someone else had the last word in a discussion, or where there was an increase in competition to be at the top of the class (Adams-Byers et al., 2004). Henfield et al. (2008) had similar findings, as the 12 Black students in their study did not want it to appear the work was too hard because there was a fear they would be removed from the program or be viewed negatively by their fellow gifted students. Elion, Slaney, Wang, and French (2012) conducted research with 219 Black students who completed a survey addressing perfectionism, racial identity, self-esteem, and depression. One of the findings from this study was similar to the aforementioned investigations: when this feeling of no longer being adequate occurred with Black students, they tended to think the gifted program was not where they belonged (Mayes & Hines, 2014; Middleton & Ford, 2022). Research by Mayes and

Hines (2014) also included the finding Black students felt they could not seek assistance with difficult problems for fear of being viewed as inferior and not gifted.

Gifted students in the study by Adams-Byers et al. (2004) derived a portion of their identity from being the smartest among their peers and valued performance over mastery. Mayes and Hines's (2014) research also found if this mindset was not changed, it could cause students to doubt their ability when they were around other gifted students. Middleton and Ford (2022) recognized an increase in anxiety and doubt when these feelings occurred. Adams-Byers et al. (2004) concluded from their study this doubt could lead to students seeking dismissal from the gifted program, which could be accomplished by simply asking to be dismissed. The fight to stay in and master concepts was overpowered by the desire to be high performing (Adams-Byers et al., 2004). This need to conform, or peer pressure, was also addressed in the literature.

**Peer pressure.** In addition to mastery versus performance, racial identity, and enrollment, peer pressure constituted the final major area of concern in the literature with underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted programs. Moore, Ford, and Milner (2005) used existing literature to extrapolate and draw implications for gifted education. One finding in this literature review was that the need to be accepted by peers, especially other Black students, was something that Black students in gifted programs needed socially in their lives. Through the studies, it appeared this desire or need for acceptance applied to Black students in general and was not gender specific, nor was it specific to those enrolled in the gifted programs (Moore et al., 2005). When there was a lack of peer interaction, Black students experienced underachievement and other maladjustments (Moore et al., 2005). One such maladjustment occurred in the case study by Grantham

and Ford (1998). In this study, Danisha, a Black girl, was unable to communicate effectively with her White peers when she found herself to be in an unfamiliar environment. Henfield et al. (2008), concluded that many Black students experienced a sense of isolation in gifted programs, which led to a longing to be with Black non-gifted friends.

Acceptance by classmate peers is not the only peer struggle for Black girls in gifted programs. They also fear rejection from non-gifted peers (Henfield et al., 2008). Henfield et al. (2008) discovered the students in the study also faced accusations of ‘acting White’ from their non-gifted Black peers. In the case study by Grantham and Ford (1998), when interviewed, Danisha, a Black girl, stated when she was with White peers, she needed to speak standard English instead of slang, and if her Black peers observed this, they would consider her to be *acting White*. Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, and Tavegia, (2005) conducted 12 interviews with African American families and cited there was even a fear the isolation from the non-gifted Black peers would affect the students after school hours. Students in the study by Henfield et al. (2008), sought out opportunities to interact with non-gifted Black students through extracurricular activities to overcome the feeling of isolation. These students were ultimately seeking any acceptance from their peers.

The gap in research that exists is the one that tells the complete experiences of gifted Black women. By using the lens of CRT and BFT through this study, I sought to fill that gap. By conducting a pilot study, I was able to begin to further investigate concepts and theories in order to develop a deeper understanding of that which was held

in the research (Maxwell, 2013). The next section includes a pilot study that I conducted before beginning this project.

### **Pilot Interview**

After exploring existing theories and literature, I thought about Maxwell's (2013) suggestion about the use of a pilot study. Maxwell (2013) suggested using a pilot study to help "develop an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the people you are studying" (p. 67). I took his suggestion to the degree I could and completed a pilot interview to see how the theories and literature I read might be evident in my data. It was completed as part of the work in my advanced qualitative research class.

The pilot study included interviewing a young Black woman, DaVonna, who completed gifted and advanced classes in middle school and high school. She was never tested for gifted, but in middle school was placed in the gifted classes. By using questions designed to elicit deeper conversation and information, I probed as to why she was never referred, and she stated she did not know.

I don't know why I was never referred. I know my fifth- grade teacher was really mean and didn't seem to like any of us. I guess in middle school the teachers were just too busy and figured if we were smart we would have already been in them classes.

As soon as she said this, I thought about the findings in the study by Bianco et al. (2011) where the teacher biases were sometimes the reason for referrals not being completed. Could this young Black woman have missed an opportunity simply because her teacher did not like her or did not view her as being as smart as others in her class because she had not already been referred?

Throughout the pilot interview, there were other interesting revelations. The participant said she was lucky growing up because she had both her mother and father supporting her at home. This statement supported the research calling for a support system outside of school (Ford, 2010; Henfield et al., 2008). She stated that many of her friends were on their own after school with no support system. Because of this lack of support, her friends did not realize the value of education.

I was real lucky. My mom and dad lived together. I knew they'd be there. I didn't like it when I was in school because they seemed to always be in my business. But as an adult, I know that I was a lucky one. Many of my friends had to go home and take care of their little brothers and sisters and even cousins. Some of them would go days without seeing their mom.

When asked why she thought the number of Black girls enrolled in the gifted classes was low, she again stated she believed it was because there was no support system.

I feel like it goes back to what happened outside of school. A lot of my friends were smart, probably smarter than me. I mean they were caring for three or four kids every night. I still can't even boil water. I don't imagine homework was very important. They were adulting when they were kids. A lot of teachers were not aware of what some of my friend had to do every night, and I don't think they really cared.

When I asked DaVonna about her friends and if she felt she had to change when around them she said she was not different around her friends, but she said they often "ragged" her about being smart and having to do homework.



Oh, they gave me a hard time when I couldn't hang out after school. I got called a lot of names but you know nothing real serious—they just picked on me. I knew they were playing, but sometimes it would get old.

Having a support system consisting of family and friends was one of the same issues Henfield et al. (2008) mentioned in their study.

When asked what she thought could be done to change the system, she said the teachers need to be more understanding, especially the White ones. She apologized numerous times for saying this about the White teachers, "I'm sorry for keeping saying White teachers. Not all White teachers are bad, it just happened that I had more White teachers and some really didn't understand my life." This statement alone made me realize the importance of using the different lenses of CRT and BFT to carry out this study because both will allow the opportunity for these Black women's voices to be heard as they share their full experience in gifted programs. These lenses will also ensure I view their responses with an understanding of the social construct of race and the intersectionality of race and gender ensuring I present the findings with fidelity and in proper context. She continued saying,

If White teachers would understand what it was like outside of school and not be so hard on students for not having a project done because they could not get the supplies, then a lot of the other students would not shut down so easily.

She was unsure if this alone would help because some students would always use not having supplies as an excuse not to complete projects simply because they required too much personal time. The final comment she made was as a society we need to find a way to highlight "cool, smart Black people" and not just the celebrities. She believed most of

the young girls look up to singers and actors and, when they realize they cannot become a singer or actor, all they know to do is be a mom and work the system, “We just don’t hear about a lot of positive Black women role models. That needs to be taught more.” This point was also part of the suggested framework developed by Mayes and Hines (2014) after their literature review.

Conducting the interview allowed an opportunity for me to practice my interview skills. This was just one interview, but it provided me the opportunity to learn to listen and not lead with my questions. I realized that the questions for the study would be much more in-depth and would require me to listen to what was being said, how it was said, and respond with appropriate probes. I also was able to see how the information from the interview connected with the existing literature. After reading literature and conducting the pilot study, I realized, even more, the importance of understanding the theories used in this study.

## **Conclusion**

The multiple versions of the claim, “all students are equal and are treated equally” continues to circulate among the majority of educators and unfortunately creates a vicious cycle that keeps producing the same negative results of underrepresentation of minorities, an academic achievement gap, and Black girls who should be in gifted programs not having the opportunity. Unfortunately, many students do not receive the best education possible. Educators must become aware of this underrepresentation recognize their role in it, and profess the negative effects it has on Black girls in order to overcome it. There needs to be a concentrated effort to ensure these students are not made to think they are

inferior because of their current situation and also be made aware of the possibilities available to them.

Using Maxwell's (2013) text on qualitative research design and armed with knowledge and experiences I explained in the conceptual framework, I created the opportunity for three Black women to answer questions about their experiences as gifted students in rural South Georgia and offer suggestions on how to improve enrollment and retention of other Black girls. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods used in this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODS**

Decisions about research methods depend on the issues you are studying and the specific context of your research, as well as on other components of your design. The bottom line for any decision about methods is the actual result of using these methods in your study; what would be an excellent decision in one study could be a serious mistake in another. (Maxwell, 2013, p. 87)

Qualitative research design is not a one-size-fits-all design. The design that works best for a study is based on multiple factors (Maxwell, 2013). Different designs yield differences in the way researchers select and interview participants, code and categorize transcripts, and present their data. The purpose of this section is to explain how I used a combination of these factors to answer the research questions:

- (1) What do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia have to say about their experiences and the meanings they made of those experiences before, during, and after enrollment in relation to their program's impacts on their lives and education?
- (2) What suggestions do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs while in high school in rural South Georgia have on how to increase enrollment and retention in these programs?

Personally, I asked these questions because I wanted to discover ways to become more understanding and effective as a teacher of gifted Black girls. Professionally, I asked them to discover ways to help educate other gifted teachers on how to be more

effective with gifted Black girls. This section will address six components of the methods I employed to answer the research questions: research design, participants, data collection, data analysis, data presentation, and validity.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative study was chosen to allow for a deep investigation of the experiences of what I hoped would be 10 but turned out to only be three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during high school in rural South Georgia within the past 5 years. According to Patton (2015), qualitative inquiry is personal. Not only was it personal to me, but I knew I wanted my participants to share deeply personal information. I wanted a research design that would allow for the personal nature of both positive and negative experiences but would also allow the goodness of the experiences be highlighted. Subsequently with my goals and questions in mind, I chose *portraiture* as the qualitative approach used (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Dialogue is essential to portraiture.

The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. The encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3)

Portraiture is Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's innovative approach that combines art with science to create portraits of people and/or places with a focus on *goodness*, which documents the strong, resilient, and worthy in any given situation (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). This focus on goodness, the positives, made portraiture a good fit for this research

with a focus being given to the positive outcomes of being in gifted education. Lawrence-Lightfoot stated her rationale for this view of goodness:

. . . to formulate a view that recognizes the myriad ways in which goodness gets expressed in various settings; that admits imperfection as an inevitable ingredient of goodness . . . that reveals goodness as a holistic concept, a complex mixture of variables whose expression can only be recognized through a detailed narrative of institutional and interpersonal processes. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 25)

This view of goodness does not mean I will not hear about negative experiences in the gifted program, but what it does mean is that all experiences will contribute to the goodness (positive outcome) of being in a gifted program.

Often to understand a situation, we need to consider the whole picture. There is no better way to understand a situation than to talk with the people who experienced that situation or phenomenon (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The process of doing portraiture calls for the researcher to explore how people are socialized and to look deeply at the path of their lives (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). People learn through their social interactions and gain knowledge by meanings they make of their experience. Regardless of mistakes or regrets that the participants may have, the portraitist, by being a supplicant learner and not an expert, can build trust. Through this trust, a climate develops with respectful listening, sharing, and learning with the participants. The portraitist can then hear the participants' authentic voices regarding their life experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Other people can also learn from the meanings that the stories have for them, both individually and collectively. By using portraiture, I was able to "record and interpret the

perspectives and experiences of people being studied, documenting their voices and their visions” (p. xv) as suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). Through the gathering of stories and experiences of three gifted Black women in rural South Georgia, I developed portraits that allowed me to “convey perspectives of people negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3).

Portraiture is about using stories to provide insights that might lead to positive policy changes (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). With portraiture, I was able to retell the stories of three gifted Black women focusing on their stories and experiences related to gifted programs. By retelling the participants’ stories, I elevated their voices and provided school stakeholders insights about what it is like to be a gifted Black girl in today’s rural South Georgia schools. Creating portraits in conjunction with the participants allowed an opportunity to give educational stakeholders a more direct understanding of the experiences of the participants. With this newfound understanding, change could result in the way future gifted Black girls are enrolled into gifted programs, taught by teachers with greater racial awareness, and retained. In the following section, the setting for this study will be discussed.

### **Setting**

When selecting a setting for this study, I reflected on my experiential knowledge in South Georgia and knowing the characterizing features of this area, I knew I wanted to target the gifted programs of this region. I wanted to use that knowledge and the knowledge gained from this study to make an immediate impact. Therefore, after receiving IRB approval (Appendix A), I sought participants who were from rural South Georgia. Since diversity exists even in small rural areas like the one from which I came, I

set the criteria for the place from which I drew participants to be a limiting factor. I only invited Black woman (18 or older) who graduated from a high school located in rural South Georgia with fewer than 600 students, was enrolled in the last 5 years, and was enrolled in a gifted program established with the state's criteria. Due to state guidelines, it was understood that the design of the programs may be different depending on each system's local policies.

The three rural counties from which the interviewed participants came have similar characteristics such as a population less than 20,000; on average a 43% minority population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019); a negative growth or no growth in population over the last decade (World Population, 2021); an agriculturally based economy; an average median income of \$35,323, well below the average state median income of \$58,700 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019); at least 75% of the schools in each county received Title I funds (Title I Status for Public Schools, 2021);, and the governing of each county's schools were an elected school board consisting of no more than seven members.

This setting was chosen because of its proximity to me and my familiarity with it. I had actually seen the previously discussed underrepresentation in action in this geographic area. This familiarity also provided knowledge of the policies governing the gifted programs in which participants were enrolled. I knew many of the Black girls who were enrolled in the gifted programs in the area graduated high school and went on to college, and often returned to the area for family visits. The visits home allowed time for interviews to be conducted. The setting of the schools and programs available to the students were similar in surrounding rural South Georgia counties; therefore, there was a



pool of others who may benefit from the work of this research. While the setting of a study is important to understand, it is equally important to understand its participants.

### **Participants**

The selection of participants is vital to any research. Creswell (2014) stated that “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants . . . that will best help the researcher understand the problem” (p. 189). With that idea, homogeneous purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Homogenous purposeful sampling is used for studies where participants have similar attributes (Patton, 2015).

Seidman (2013) suggested the use of a gatekeeper, whether formal or informal, to help locate participants. For this study, I used the librarians at a local university as informal gatekeepers by allowing a flyer looking for participants to be displayed in their media centers (Appendix B). I left the flyers up for 6 weeks. During that time, I received emails from 18 prospective participants. After being contacted by prospective participants, I emailed the participants (Appendix C). In that email, I introduced myself, the purpose of the study, the involvement required of the participants, and requested they express their interest in participating by completing a questionnaire (Appendix D). In the questionnaire, I collected basic information about their school experiences to help determine eligibility for the research. I received 16 questionnaires.

From the returned questionnaires, I sought participants based on the criteria mentioned earlier. The first criterion was Black women (18 or older). By selecting participants who were over 18, I avoided minors who may fear retaliation for speaking out against their schools because there are no longer affiliations with their high schools.

Older participants, ostensibly, would no longer have affiliation with their former high schools. Participants at this age should also be able to understand the questions and process their thoughts about experiences they had related to being in gifted programs without any explanation that may influence their answers. The 16 participants who completed the questionnaire were over 18 years.

The second criterion was the participant had to be graduated from a high school located in rural South Georgia with less than 600 students and enrolled in the last 5 years. For this study, rural South Georgia consisted of the Coastal Plain region of Georgia as defined by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), an agency of the United States Department of the Interior (2022). Figure 2 is a map of the five regions of Georgia, including the Coastal Plain region, which was used when looking at the counties of the participants' high schools. Because the 84 counties in this area have diverse populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019; USGS, 2022) and these populations are sometimes not compatible when comparing educational programs, I also limited the size of the participants' high schools to fewer than 600 students. This number aligns to the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) (2021) classification of high schools. Schools with fewer than 600 students are classified as 1A schools. Finally, having participants graduate within the last 5 years allows for a more accurate description of their experiences. The combination of these two limiting factors took the potential pool of participants down to five.

The third criterion was the participants must have been enrolled in a gifted program established with the state's criteria. Georgia Department of Education (2018b) allows two options to qualify for gifted education. The first option is for a child to score

in the 96th percentile on a nationally age-normed mental ability test and in the 90th percentile in reading, math, or complete battery on a nationally normed achievement test.



**Figure 2.** Map of the Geographic Regions of Georgia (US Geological Survey, 2022). The region used for this study is the Coastal Plains region, indicated by the tan color.

While, the second option the child meets three out of four established criteria: mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation. There are several delivery methods that allow for students to be served after meeting one of the two options for gifted. This study did not focus on the delivery methods, but rather on the overall experiences of the participants. Besides the aforementioned criteria, each participant needed to be willing to participate and be available for multiple interviews.

Of the 16 questionnaires returned, four prospective participants were excluded because they were from schools outside of rural South Georgia area defined by this study. Another seven prospective participants were excluded because the high school they attended had an enrollment greater than 600 students. One prospective participant was excluded because she was enrolled in advanced classes, not gifted classes. Another

prospective participant was excluded because she was unavailable for three interview sessions. After excluding the prospective participants, I was left with three who met the criteria for the study. Table 1 provides the high school year of graduation for each participant, as well as, their high school enrollment and gifted enrollment for their district and the state for that same year, and the racial breakdown of the school for the same year.

**Table 1**

*Demographic information on selected participants*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	HS Grad. Year	HS Enrollment for Graduation Year	HS Percent of Gifted Enrollment for Graduation Year	State Percent of Gifted Enrollment for Graduation Year	Racial Breakdown of HS for Graduation Year
Tamika	2019	402	2.9%	11.8%	53% Black 4% Hispanic 41% White 1% Multiethnic
Jordan	2019	407	7.2%	11.8%	1% Asian 49% Black 4% Hispanic 42% White 4% Multiethnic
Akira	2018	540	9.4%	11.6%	59% Black 2% Hispanic 37% White 1% Multiethnic

*Note:* Individual high school data obtained from Georgia’s Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2022)

Basic demographic information (enrollment for graduation year, gifted enrollment for school and state, and racial breakdown of high school) was obtained from the Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement website from each participant’s high school.

This data was used to note similarities among the learning environments from which the participants came.

Only having three participants after a 6-week window was frustrating. However, once I looked into what other researchers published, I was encouraged. Howard (2001) used data obtained through interviews from four teachers, fitting a specific criterion, to address strategies to reach African American students. McCarthy (2017) used the experiences of three Indigenous educators to add a new voice to the achievement of success for educators and community leaders. Berry (2005) used the voices of two African American males to identify factors that foster success and encourage others to use these voices to improve academic conditions for African American males. These studies showed me that when the right techniques are used, valuable information can be obtained with a limited number of participants. Using Seidman's (2013) three-interview series helped me glean descriptive, thoughtful stories and responses from the three participants that generated enough data to answer my main research questions (Appendix E), see themes develop, and also build each participant's unique story in her portrait. Interviewing only participants who met the study's criteria was mentioned by Patton (2015) as a way to also increase the likelihood data would describe the specific phenomena of interest. In this case, the phenomenon was limited to 1A school graduates in the Coastal Plains counties.

Once the participants were selected for this study, the collection of data began with the interviews. As I implemented this study with Black women from rural counties in South Georgia, I tried to understand what it was like to be a gifted Black woman by

listening intently to this dialogue about their experiences and asking follow-up questions to round out my understanding.

### **Data Collection**

“The data in a qualitative study can include virtually anything that you see, hear, or that is otherwise communicated to you while conducting the study” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 87). According to Maxwell (2013), the researcher is the main tool for data gathering; the second is the interview protocol, which includes the interview questions. Therefore, data was collected for this study from interviews, observations, and memos. Interviews were conducted according to Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series (p. 21) strategy.

Observations were made during the interviews, in conjunction with memos. According to Maxwell (2013), memos can be used to help develop ideas and understanding of the topic being researched. Understanding all aspects of a participant’s experience was essential when developing a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2017). The end product, the portrait, shows the participant was “fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected, [and] scrutinized” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2017, p. 5). I accomplished this with observations, memoing, and the three-interview phase strategy.

**Observations and memoing.** Observations of participants made while interviewing them can enable you to draw inferences about their perspective that you could not obtain by relying exclusively on the interview data (Maxwell, 2013). Memoing allows the researcher to keep track of these observations. Maxwell (2013) referred to memos as “an extremely versatile tool that can be used for many different purposes” (p. 19). Maxwell (2013) continued to explain that memos are any written notes, other than actual field notes, that are recorded during the research process, which includes

observations. These notes were useful in processing and understanding the information that was collected. These memos allowed an opportunity for me to do as Maxwell (2013) suggested and “facilitate reflection and analytic insight” (p. 20).

Memos from literature I gathered were written on the printed article. Maxwell (2013) did not put a restriction on the size of memos because what is important is getting the ideas down on paper. Figure 3 is an example of my memoing on a printed article. This memoing was completed during the planning and preparation part of the study. As you can see, I underlined and wrote my thoughts in the margins. This allowed an opportunity for me to reflect on the literature that was being read and at the same time provided a written record of my thought process for later use.

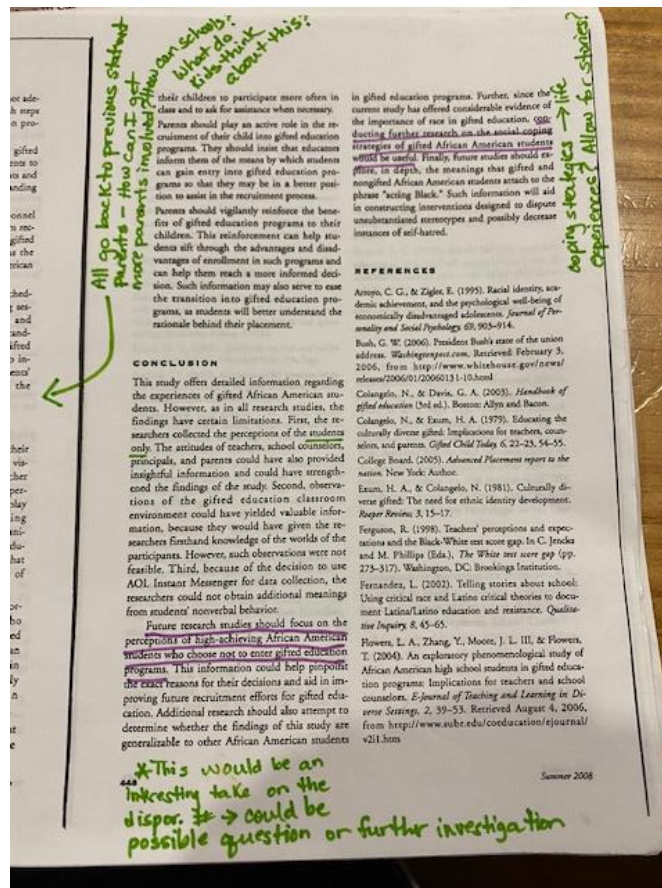


Figure 3. Example of a written memo on a printed article

Memos made during and after interviews were written on a double-sided notepad, see Figure 4. This is a page of interview notes and reflections taken during the first interview of one of the participants. By using a double-sided notepad, I was able to take notes during the interview on the right side and then be a little more reflective on those notes afterward by recording my thoughts on the left side. These memos helped me remember more than just the words that I heard, but also my reactions to those words. In this section, you can see my notes about the participant being uncomfortable. I even asked her as the interview progressed about her uneasiness. The notes I made and the reflection helped me remember this moment with more detail than just the transcript would have provided. During the coding process, these memos were also coded using in vivo (phrases were underlined) and magnitude (events marked with a symbol like + for strong) coding.

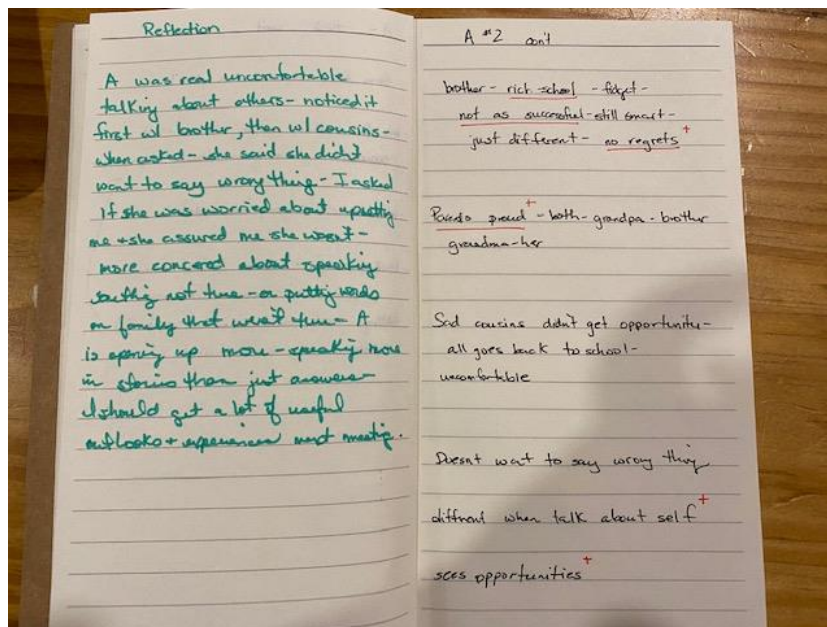


Figure 4. Examples of memos and reflection from interviews



Both sets of memos were used throughout the research process and data analysis by using coding techniques and comparing the coded memos with other collected data, the interviews. However, memoing alone did not allow me an opportunity to gather enough data on the participants; I also used the three-interview series strategy to collect more data through interviews.

**Interviews.** To fully explore the meaning of the participants' experiences in the context of their lives, I studied Seidman's (2013) advice about interviews. I developed a plan to ensure these interviews were better than the one conducted for the pilot study, see Appendix E for sample interview question. Even though I had a list of questions, I listened more than I talked. Seidman (2013) stressed the importance of listening on three levels: to what the participant is saying, to the "inner voice," and finally to listen being aware of the process and substance being acquired. I incorporated open-ended questions to encourage storytelling as participants answered the questions (Seidman, 2013). As the interviews progressed, I realized that the sample questions were only a guide. I began to probe the participants to go deeper with their answers in order to give a more complete description of their experiences. The collection of their experiences was accomplished by the use of a series of three separate interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2013). These interviews allowed the participants an opportunity to tell the stories necessary to complete the portrait.

After initial contact with the participants, I used email and phone calls to set up interviews. The interviews were face-to-face and conducted in a location convenient for the participant: a local diner, public library, and local coffee shop. The series of interviews were scheduled to be conducted at week long intervals; however, some

interviews took a little longer due to schedule conflicts, see Table 2. Seidman (2013) suggested this week-long time period would allow participants to reflect on the previous interviews, but not take so much time as to lose the connection between the two. Another benefit of this interval, mentioned by Seidman (2013), was the opportunity to work with the participants over a period of 2-3 weeks, which allowed time for a substantial relationship to be developed.

**Table 2**

Interview Dates and Location

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Interview One	Interview Two	Interview Three	Location
Tamika	01/10/2022	01/15/2022	01/22/2022	Local Diner
Jordan	02/15/2022	02/28/2022	03/07/2022	Public Library
Akira	04/04/2022	04/25/2022	05/02/2022	Downtown Coffee Shop

To ensure all necessary data was collected through the interviews, all interviews were recorded using Otter AI, a transcription program. I also used the recording app on an iPhone 8 as a backup in case of failure on the first device. Both devices were password protected. After each interview, I compared the transcriptions with the recordings. Using Otter AI allowed for the transcriptions to be exported to a Word document. Once the transcripts were converted to a Word document, I was able to make the corrections that needed to be made. I only corrected errors in the transcribing, not errors in spoken language. Figure 5 shows a section of a transcript that had been exported to a Word document. By doing this validation so quickly after the interview, it helped ensure validity and that the interviews were transcribed correctly.

24:32

And that's just how housing was. Whoever closest to the school that's where you go. You know. That's not that any thought was given to the situation. I don't really. I really don't know if it is given now or not. I knew like some people like family members that wanted to get into the academy that were like a little bit younger than me, but it was just like a problem. They didn't know about the application or like how to complete it. Or like doing it late after the deadline. If some of them didn't have the grades I don't think they tried. I hurt, you know, like I heard a lot of like I didn't know that's what you had to do.

25:13

Can you tell me about one family member in particular that tried to get into the academy and couldn't? I'd like to hear about that.

*Figure 5.* Transcript after being exported to Word and corrected

At the first interview, I introduced myself and the study's requirements (Appendix F). I also used an Interview Protocol (Appendix G) and Recorded Consent to Participate (Appendix H) before the interview began. Once I completed the introduction, protocol, and consent, I followed Seidman's (2013) example and used the focus of this study as the context for the interviews. The first interview established the context of the experience of being a gifted Black woman in rural South Georgia. By focusing on the context of experience, I avoided "why" questions and focused more on "how" to recreate a timeline of past life events that related to their time in gifted programs.

The second interview reconstructed the details of the experience of being a gifted Black woman in rural South Georgia. The purpose of this interview was to seek out details of their experience. Participants were encouraged to share stories of their experiences to acquire more details. Following Seidman's (2013) advice, during these interviews, participants were encouraged to give details of their experiences instead of opinions. These interviews produced a myriad of stories and memos as the participants shared both highs and lows from their lives as related to being a gifted student.

The third interview focused on how the participants made meaning of their experiences in gifted programs. This interview allowed the participants to look at how past events influenced their current experiences. These interviews were the longest and flowed the best as relationships had been developed in a way that both of us were comfortable with each other. Maxwell (2013) noted that the relationship between researcher and participant is a “changing entity. . . The researcher is the instrument and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done” (p. 91). As such, I was careful to not break the trust that I had earned through the interviews. I listened more intently as each story was told and more stories were told as the interviews progressed. During the validation of the transcripts, this relationship continued to be beneficial. I allowed each participant to share freely if they realized I had made a mistake. When that moment came, because of the relationship, there was no awkwardness between the two of us. The evolution of the relationships allowed this openness to occur.

Sample research questions for each phase can be found in Appendix E. Each phase allowed me to gather a unique and interrelated data set of information about the participants. As I moved through each interview, I reflected on Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) words.

The research stance evolves from quiet watchfulness-where the portraitist is mostly taking in stimuli and listening carefully-to the more purposeful activities of initiating relationships with actors, scheduling interviews, and developing a plan of action. With each stage of data collection, at the close of each day, the

portraitist gathers, scrutinizes, and organizes the data, and tries to make sense of what she has witnessed. (p. 187)

I reflected not only on that participant's story, but also on how all of the stories were filled with the goodness that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) mentioned in their writings. This can be seen in the memo below recorded after the last interview, before I started coding.

*Reflective memo after last interview*

*The last interview was today. I can't believe that I am done. I also can't believe how far I have come since I've started this process. This interview was the easiest. It literally felt like I was just visiting with a friend. I know now the hard part is about to start. I really have to get this coding down and understand how these unique experiences can work together to provide answers to my questions.*

*Thinking about what I have heard these last couple of months, I think about what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis said about goodness and portraiture. Today, Akira spoke with sadness about her family members missing out on opportunities that she had, but at the same time she was so grateful for her opportunities. She was honest about what could be done and did not seem hesitant as she did in the past to share her thoughts on how to help people. But then thinking not only about A, but also Jordan-her story is full of goodness and gratefulness about her experience. Even Tameka's story has a goodness about it. That goodness is what I want to come out. That even when there are hard times and things don't always seem fair, the goodness that is in each situation should always shine through. I*

*hope I do these stories justice-I really want their voices to be heard when I finish.*

(Reflective Memo, May, 2, 2022)

I knew by reflecting on my thoughts and analyzing my observations, memos, and the data collected from the interviews, I was closer to the development of an in-depth portrait of each of the participants than I had ever been, and I was excited to move to the next phase of development of them.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis started immediately (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) with the transcribing of the interviews. This transcription allowed an opportunity to reflect on what was said and make notes on what needed to be revisited in the next interview. I was also able to allow the participant to verify the transcription before the next meeting to help maintain validity. Listening to the recordings, reading the transcripts, and memoing are the initial steps (Maxwell, 2013). After the first interview and the initial steps of listening, reading, and memoing, I quickly realized that I needed to develop an organization method for the data that I collected.

Since I used Otter AI to record the interviews, after each interview, I uploaded the transcripts to a Word document. Some may see this as an extra step, but by using a printed Word document I was able to make notes of necessary corrections. Once the transcripts were corrected and verified, they were imported into the data analysis software program MAXQDA. I also printed a hard copy to use during coding. Through this study, I discovered that I am very tactile and am more comfortable writing on paper than entering information into the computer. For that reason, my organization included a

different colored folder for each participant, which held all their transcripts and memo notepads.

In the beginning, I was a little leery of using MAXQDA. I was overwhelmed with all the toolbars and afraid that I was going to mess up the coding.

*Reflective Memo after attempting in vivo coding*

*I am so frustrated with this program. Someone needs to make a MAXQDA for Dummies. I have transcripts uploaded, but I feel like I keep messing up and I wind up deleting and starting over with the coding. I have nine transcripts to get coded. I do not think I am ever going to get done. I have taken a break today and will work on it again later. When I come back I want to focus on in vivo coding only. I'm going to try and watch some tutorials and get a grip so that I am confident in completing this coding. (Reflective Memo, May 31, 2022)*

Because of this frustration, I found myself marking codes on both the transcript and in MAXQDA. As one can imagine, this was extremely tedious, and I definitely had to keep everything organized. As my comfort with the program grew, I realized the usefulness of having a software program.

One of the features that I found most beneficial was the code in vivo feature. This allowed me to code the participants' words more quickly than what I was previously doing. Once I discovered this feature, I found that my coding style moved from a "lumper" style, coding every three to five sentences (Saldaña, 2016, p. 107), to a "splitter" style, coding almost every line (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). The ease of the in vivo function allowed this to happen, which allowed me the opportunity to really focus on words that were coded. Since I started coding with hard copies and MAXQDA, I

continued doing so, using the hard copies for analytical memos throughout the coding process. These written memos allowed the opportunity for me to question myself and the reasons I marked each line. They also allowed the chance for connections to start being made between the different codes. With the memos, I was also able to note similarities from one participant to the other that would be used later in the formal stages of coding.

According to Seidman (2013), coding consists of several fundamental steps: reduce interviews to what the researcher considers important, define categories and themes, and sort these labels into files that can be easily obtained for study. Coding occurs when a short attribute is assigned to passages throughout the transcript to draw attention to something about the passage (Saldaña, 2016). Coding can also be used to reduce a large amount of data into a smaller number of analytical parts, which is what I used to gain a deeper understanding of certain incidents and interactions. Following Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) recommendation for use of this method, I used these memos to help record my thoughts as the interviews were broken down. As analysis progressed, they would be fundamental in helping restructure the parts and becoming the foundation for my themes. An example of this was seen in a reflective memo on Tamika's first interview transcript.

*Reflective memo on in vivo codes*

*This code [feel special regardless] makes me feel she never felt special before getting into elementary school. I need to follow up on that and make sure that was her feeling. If this was the case, I wonder what is going on-as a teacher, I want to make all students feel valued. This would definitely be a positive, goodness mark*



*for being in gifted. Everyone wants to feel special, regardless.* (Reflective Memo, June 5, 2022)

As I started coding, I followed Saldaña's (2016) two-cycle coding; the first cycle coding was used during the initial coding of data to help reduce the interviews to what I considered important. For this study, I used three methods in the first cycle of coding, which will be further discussed in this section: attribute coding, in vivo, and magnitude coding. The codes I generated were descriptive in nature and when possible were taken directly from words the participants used. Throughout this analysis, analytical memos were made to record my reflections about each participant's experiences.

**Attribute coding.** Attribute coding was used to mark the basic demographic type, descriptive information (Table 3). This coding provided "essential participant information and contexts for analysis and interpretation" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 83). As mentioned above, I was leery about MAXQDA when starting, I elected to complete the attribute coding by hand on the hard copies of the transcripts. Most of the attributes, or basic descriptive information about their background, used for this study were acquired from each participant's first interview. These attributes were beneficial in allowing me to see basic commonalities among the participants. Attributes for each participant were arranged in a table. Table 3 shows a portion of the combined table of attributes for each participant.

Once data was arranged in the table (Table 3), there were some commonalities worth noting. All the participants were about the same age, they were all enrolled in gifted programs for multiple years, and they all lived in a household with siblings. There were also some differences worth noting. Even though the participants were close in age, their years in college did not match. The number of years in gifted classes ranged from

seven (entering in 6th grade) to 11 (entering in 2nd grade). Two of the participants lived in a household with grandparents.

**Table 3**

*Attribute codes and descriptors*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Age	HS Graduation Year	Years in Gifted	Years in College	Family Structure
Tamika	22	2019	9	1	Grandparents, Mother, Aunt, sister, 2 cousins
Jordan	21	2019	11	3	Grandparents, Mother, 2 sisters
Akira	22	2018	7	4	Mother, Father, brother

*Note:* Other attributes were coded but are not included in the table because they could be seen as identifying descriptors.

**In vivo coding.** After collecting attributes, I began using MAXQDA and began coding in vivo, which by definition required me to use the participants’ words and concepts in the coding (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) recommended in vivo codes to capture the way participants see things, which fell in line with the purpose of this study-- sharing the experiences of gifted Black women. Keeping their words in the context of their story maintained validity and allowed for insight into the way participants experienced the gifted program and how they made sense of their experiences. Knowing that each situation was going to be unique, I wanted to ensure that I captured the essence of each participant’s journey through gifted education. I wanted that uniqueness to remain and the participants’ voices to be heard. Through the use of the “splitter” style,

coding almost every line (Saldaña, 2016, p.106), I was able to focus on the uniqueness of each participant.

**Magnitude coding.** While coding for in vivo, an amalgam of magnitude coding was used to mark positive descriptions of events experienced by the participants. I chose to mark only the positives events, by using the plus (+) symbol (Saldaña, 2016), because portraiture is a focus on goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The researcher who asks first “what is good here?” is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure. But it is also important to say that portraits are not designed to be documents of idealization or celebration. In examining the dimensionality and complexity of goodness there will, of course, be ample evidence of vulnerability and weakness. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 9)

Examples of in vivo coding with magnitude coding can be seen in Table 4, which shows that not every in vivo code had a magnitude code. This did not mean that the code was negative or useless; it just was not an experience or feeling that could be considered positive. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated that “. . . the counterpoint and contradictions of strength and vulnerability, virtue and evil . . . are central to the expression of goodness” (p. 9). This statement further reminds us of the importance of analyzing all data.

I spent months using analytic memos and reflecting on all the hundreds of codes generated by in vivo coding and number of positive experiences of the participants.

**Table 4***In vivo coding and magnitude coding*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Transcript Line of Text	In Vivo Codes	Magnitude Coding
Tamika	In elementary school, the gifted teacher just made you <i>feel special regardless</i> of who you were.	Feel special regardless	+
Jordan	She would come home talking about how everyone expected her to <i>be perfect</i> and <i>she wasn't</i>	Be perfect She wasn't	
Akira	The <i>passionate teachers</i> made high school. Their passion just seemed to <i>flow to the class</i> .	Passionate teachers Flow to class	+

Through reflection, I recalled why the participants' words are so crucial to this dialogue.

*Reflective memo on codes and categories*

*I'm not sure if I have messed this up or not. I have been reading Saldaña and Lightfoot. I have more in vivo codes than I want to count. Grouping them into categories did help a lot. But looking at these categories I can begin to feel a little of the remorse the ladies talked about. The feelings they shared about being included and being made to feel special-I am sad that they did not feel they had the opportunity to experience that in a regular class-but I as a gifted teacher, I also hope I make my students feel that way. These ladies also seemed to be driven by expectations. Expectations from everyone involved in their life-family, friends, teachers, even themselves. Expectations seem to be everywhere. Right now I have*

*them divided, but as I continue, I may need to put them all in one group. The positives are helping me stay focused on the goodness of their experience and not forget the reason behind portraits.* (Reflective Memo, July 2022)

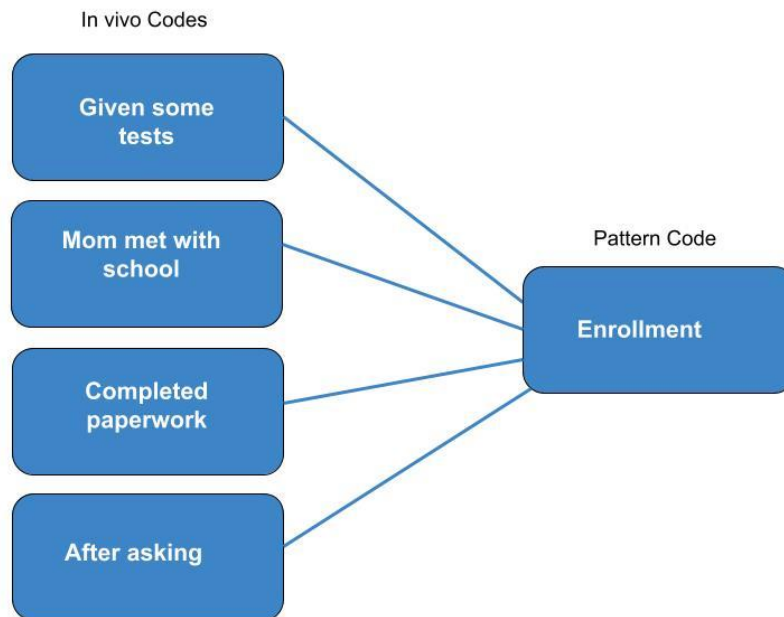
I wanted the participants' stories to be told and their voices heard as I answered the research questions for this study. Keeping their words in mind, I began to form preliminary categories from the in vivo codes. An example of how I initially related the transcripts, codes, and categories are shown in Table 5.

At first, I had 48 categories for in vivo codes. I knew this was too many, and I would have to condense some. For example, I had four expectations categories, two are shown in Table 5: expectations (family), expectations (friends), expectations (teachers) and expectations (peers). While some preliminary categories were easy to combine, others were not. For that reason, it was necessary to continue with the second cycle coding. This allowed me the opportunity to “reorganize and reanalyze data coded through the first cycle method” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234).

**Pattern coding.** Saldaña stated the goal of second cycle coding is to help develop a “sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (p. 234) from the codes obtained in first cycle coding. I chose to use pattern coding for this cycle allowing me to group my original codes into smaller categories because I knew 48 categories were too many. Continuing to follow the sequence suggested by Saldaña (2016) and Seidman (2013), I grouped my codes from the first cycle into a smaller number of categories, based on patterns that I identified that shared similar characteristics. An example of some in vivo codes that were used to develop a pattern code is shown in Figure 6.

**Table 5***Preliminary Categories*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Transcript Line of Text	In Vivo Codes	Preliminary Categories
Tamika	Because I did what she told me to do. . .be quiet and listen to the teacher	Be quiet and listen to the teacher	Expectations (Family)
	I can't explain it, she was just different. I knew she believed I could do the work.	She believed	Expectations (Teachers)
	I wanted to go on field trips, too.	I wanted to go	Exclusion
Jordan	My G-Ma was not going to let me fail. I knew that from the beginning.	Not going to let me fail	Expectations (Family)
	I would have been just another kid in the class	Another kid in the class	Expectations (Teachers)
	Just widen the criteria and include everyone who is gifted even if it gifted in an area that is not academics.	Include everyone	Exclusions
Akira	Mom wanted the best for me. Since she worked in the district and the middle school was closer to the one I went, that's where I went	Mom wanted the best for me	Expectations (Family)
	I never doubted myself because I always believed that the teachers knew I could do the work.	The teachers knew I could do the work	Expectations (Teachers)
	Honestly why would they have been left out	Left out	Exclusion



*Figure 6.* Example of in vivo code to pattern code

These pattern codes became my categories. Reviewing the preliminary categories and in vivo codes took time. I found myself organizing and reorganizing the data. Finally, I had 12 categories for the in vivo codes. Seidman (2013) indicated once these categories were established, connections were then made between various categories, which could be classified as themes that reoccurred throughout the interviews. To start this process, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggested the use of repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, and institutional and cultural rituals.

Following Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) suggestions, modes were identified in the transcripts, starting with repetitive refrain. These were the items that occurred repeatedly throughout the interview data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Each participant had phrases that kept being repeated. For example, Tamika kept saying,

“be quiet and listen to the teacher;” Jordan kept saying, “I don’t know where I’d be without my G-ma;” and Akira kept referring to the “White man.” There were a couple of similarities across the participants’ transcripts, but no repetitive refrains.

Continuing the analysis, resonant metaphors, which were words or phrases that hold a unique meaning or symbolism for the participants, were noted (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Tamika stated that she felt like she was always “walking on eggshells,” and Akira said she was in the “right place at the right time” and that led to her success. Next, institutional and cultural rituals, which are rituals or ceremonies found in the community of the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), were identified. Each participant spoke about her graduation with excitement. This came about naturally in the interviews. There was no direct question on graduation, yet each participant believed their graduation was a rite of passage and seeing their families proud was a highlight that they shared freely with me.

After coding and categorizing, implementing triangulation allowed a chance to take data and look for points of convergence among them (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). To complete this step, I looked for points in the data that all three participants seemed to have in common. The use of pattern coding (second cycle coding) gave me the opportunity to see the similarities between each of the participants.

*Reflective memo of similarities*

*Using the 12 categories that I have, I can now begin to see where the commonalties are between these ladies. Like really see, not just suspect. The data gives me those specific points where each of the experiences converge. It is so interesting to see how three people in different locations can experience the same*



*thing in different ways. The communication between these school systems and teachers was different but yet so similar. Each one stated the fact that the schools just do not communicate. While the expectations were different for each, they were what drove the ladies to be successful. They knew someone believed they could do it. I am beginning to see some themes for this study develop by making note of these common experiences. (Reflective Memo, July 2022)*

Four themes emerged from this analysis, which could be used to answer the questions of this study. These themes will be discussed in detail in a Chapter 5. Once themes were established from the data analysis, I engaged in reflection on those themes and began to create the respective portraits. The stories of the three participants provided enough life experiences to accurately allow their voices to be heard in the Chapter 4 portraits, which was imperative to ensure the validity of the research.

### **Validity**

Throughout the process, there was attentiveness to validity-related issues. Participants were encouraged to answer freely and not worry about saying something “wrong” because they were being interviewed by a White lady. As a classroom teacher with over 20 years of experience, I had preconceived ideas about why the number of gifted Black girls enrolled in gifted programs is low. Addressing my subjectivity was helpful in reducing the influence my preconceived ideas had on the study.

As a researcher, I worked to remain aware of my subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) stated researchers should be aware of their subjectivities and monitor them so they can control the impact their biases may have on the results of their research. Following my exposure to Peshkin’s (1988) discussion of his subjective I’s, I identified my major

subjective I as *Social Justice I*, which indicated my desire for everyone to have the same opportunity, regardless of race, gender, or wealth. My commitment to issues of social justice relates in many ways to my work on this dissertation. For example, I believe the minority populations are shortchanged when it comes to being served in education, especially gifted education. I believe there is a lack of understanding for cultural differences, and instead of learning to address those difference some find it is easier to just move on. I also believe my views on social justice can affect policy change. I am concerned with current policies that seem to be unfair to certain groups of people. I believe if a policy is written, it should be fair and equal to all. As I completed these interviews, I was careful to not become too reactive to the stories I heard and not lead the participants in their answers. In order to keep this *Social Justice, I* in check, I needed to admit I possessed it. I also had to become an active listener during the interviews and avoid the use of leading questions.

After studying the tenets of CRT and BFT, I had a keen awareness of the normalization of race and how the needs of Black girls were overlooked; therefore, I made an effort not to allow preconceived notions to guide the questioning during the interview. I conducted the interviews with integrity and showed respect to the Black women who shared their stories and the experiences they had during their time in the gifted program. I worked to not lead the discussions using my preconceived ideas. Being aware of these ideas and subjectivities at the start of the research helped keep me from projecting my attitudes into the research process or the data I was analyzing. Each time I could sense my *Social Justice I* at play, I memoed to unload it privately.

*Reflective memo on my frustrations*

*There were so many things I that are wrong in schools today. The more I hear the angrier I get. I just cannot wrap my head around how this can be happening in schools and no one say anything. I know it happens-but when I see it happen, I have to say something. Maybe someone is and as a student it is not being seen. But I just can't believe parents aren't speaking up-but maybe they don't know. As these interviews continue that seems to be the case. The parents just don't know. I know what I can do about that in my corner. I just find it so hard to sit quietly and listen. I want to jump up and scream at someone. These are kids, good kids. I know there are some that are not getting what they deserve. It's just not right.*

(Reflective Memo, February 2022)

Maxwell (2013) stated researcher bias and reactivity are threats to validity. As the researcher, my bias and preconceptions could lead to confirmation bias and negatively impact the validity of this study. Reactivity is the influence of the researcher on the individuals being studied. While this influence cannot be eliminated, understanding reactivity allowed me to make productive use of it during the study (Maxwell, 2013). Being aware and keeping a check on these threats upfront maintained the validity of the study.

*Reflective memo on my Social Justice I*

*This is the hardest thing I have ever done. I know that I am not supposed to lead the questions, but I so wanted to today. I wanted to get Akira to really open up about the rich school. I wanted her to say what I wanted to hear. But I know that*

*is not right. I just listened and said-can you tell me more-I really wanted to say Are you kidding me? How can a school system not provide the same opportunity to two entire schools? I am flabbergasted. I definitely have notes about what I want to get her to dig deeper into at the next interview, but I also know I need to be mindful and make sure that I do not lead those questions; I need this to be her story. (Reflective Memo, April 4, 2022)*

Once interviews were done, I again needed to make sure my bias, subjectivities, and preconceived ideas did not interfere with the analysis of the data and the interpretations drawn from them. Respondent validation was used to increase the validity in the data at this stage. Respondent validation involves soliciting feedback from the participants on the accuracy of the data collected and conclusions drawn (Maxwell, 2013). I accomplished this in multiple ways. The first step was to verify the transcripts were transcribed correctly. After each interview, I would use Otter AI and download the transcripts, verify them, and email them to the participants for their verification. As I began coding, I continued to email the participants questions I had about an experience or quote. I wanted to ensure that I was telling their story and not my version of their story. For example, an in vivo code from Tamika's transcripts was "feel special regardless." After memoing, I knew that I had to clarify that statement. I emailed Tamika and asked if she could clarify that statement. Her response was,

In elementary school, before gifted, I think I felt I had to be good to feel special. I needed to behave and make 100 on everything and then the teacher would notice me. After I was moved, I was noticed without having to do anything. Even if I

messed up, the teacher still made me feel special. (Email Response, June 10, 2022)

This response illustrated the relationship that was formed through this process (Seidman, 2013). The whole process allowed the participants to make sure there was no misinterpretation of the meaning of what was said during the interview. Respondent validation provided an important check on the validity of the analysis and this study.

The more threats can be eliminated from the researcher's subjectivity, including preconceived notions, and reactivity, the more credible the research. The more validity in the research, the more the voices of gifted Black women from rural South Georgia can be heard in this dialogue and their experiences used to bring about change for future students.

## **Conclusion**

This study on the experiences of three Black women who were in gifted education as youth can make a positive contribution to the literature on Black women in gifted education. As an educator, I want to make a difference in every student's life that I teach. I also want to make sure that all students have the same opportunities. For this study, I used portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as a method for gifted Black women to share stories of their experiences in gifted education in rural South Georgia. Critical race theory and Black feminist thought served as the theoretical framework for this study. Seidman's (2013) three-series interview method was used to collect data from each of the participants on their experiences. Once the data was collected, attribute, in vivo, magnitude, and pattern coding were used to break down and build back the data into categories and themes. Validity was maintained by awareness of subjectivity and

biases and respondent validation. By sharing the stories of three gifted Black women, my goal is to start a conversation that could lead to change in policy that would allow more Black girls to enroll in gifted education. The next chapter presents the participants' portraits that highlight their experience in the gifted program.

## **Chapter 4**

### **PORTRAITS**

Thought flows in terms of stories — stories about events, stories about people, and stories about intentions and achievements. The best teachers are the best storytellers. We learn in the form of stories. (Smith, 2022, para. 1)

Once the interviews were complete, the dialogue was paused and the time came to create the portraits of the participants. The use of portraiture allowed me to opportunity to focus on goodness from the participants’ experiences, which would document the strong, resilient, and worthy in any given situation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1983). All the data that had been previously broken down, through multiple steps of coding, now required being reassembled. From the reassembly, each participant’s portrait was developed. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated that the challenge “lies in the task of composing the narrative-assembling the various parts into one unified, coherent representation” (p. 261). Each portrait was developed to highlight the uniqueness of each participant’s experience in the gifted program. Due to the amount of data collected during the interviews, figuring out what to include and exclude was a challenge. Ultimately, the themes that were constructed guided the development of the portraits. Portraits were then created by balancing the themes with the participants’ experiences and voice (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The following section contains a portrait of each of the participants' gifted education experiences in rural South Georgia. I want to introduce three young Black women—Tamika, Jordan, and Akira—who shared their stories openly to get the dialogue started. Tamika, who considered herself a quiet student, wanted to make her mom proud and followed her advice to “be quiet and listen to the teacher.” Tamika’s story is unique because she recognized her own giftedness in elementary school. Jordan who considered herself a “loud student,” loved school and enjoyed her time in the gifted program. However, as she aged, she began to take notice of issues that needed to be addressed. Akira, who considered herself to be “driven to succeed,” credits her success in school to a decision her mother made when she was first enrolled. She reflected often on how everyone deserves the opportunities she experienced.

Each portrait is organized by a description of who the participant is today, followed by their experiences with the gifted program, and concluding with their suggestions for improvement. After the description of each participant, I used Berry (2005) as a frame of reference and used the voices of the participants; thus, the sections titled with “voice” are in first person. The stories included were used to construct the themes, which answered the two research questions regarding experiences of young, gifted Black women in rural South Georgia. These experiences, like these voices, are crucial in starting a conversation about the disproportionality in gifted programs in rural South Georgia.

### **Tamika-The Quiet One**

Tamika was born in a small rural community in South Georgia. She grew up living with her mother, aunt, and maternal grandparents, as well as her older sister and



two cousins. Her mother and grandmother both worked in the cafeteria of the elementary school in the county. With her county being so small, there was only one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. After graduating, Tamika decided to take a couple of years off and moved in with her older sister in Atlanta. While in Atlanta, she began work in a loan office, eventually becoming one of the office managers. She enrolled at a historically Black university for the fall 2022 semester, majoring in film production and business management.

When Tamika enters a room, one cannot help but notice. She is taller than most women and wears her hair pulled back into a poof on top. She dresses very modern, but low-key. At first glance, she appears to be disconnected from the world, with a serious look on her face. As one begins to talk to Tamika, the seriousness is replaced with a smile and her personality becomes evident.

**Tamika's voice.** When I was in elementary school, I was able to go to school every day with my mama and grandma. They both worked in the lunchroom. This was pretty cool because I didn't have to ride the bus to school. My friends that lived around me had like a 45-minute bus ride to and from school every day. The county that I lived in was small, so our elementary school only had three teachers per grade level. There were a lot of Black students in my school, and I knew most of them. There were not a lot of White teachers at my elementary school either. In fact, from kindergarten to fifth-grade, I only had one White teacher. That was my fifth grade teacher; he was a man. He was the only male teacher in my elementary school. I liked elementary school.

I remember how I got involved with gifted education. It started when I was in third grade. There was only one class that was allowed to go on a field trip, and that was

the gifted class. I did not fully understand what it meant to be in the gifted class, I just knew that they were smart, and they got to go on field trips. I knew I was smart, and I wanted to go on field trips, too.

When I was in fourth grade, I asked my teacher if I could be tested for the gifted program. That is how I got involved with gifted, I just asked my teacher. I remember my fourth-grade teacher agreeing that I was smart enough to do the work. She told me I couldn't be lazy if I was in the class, I would have to work. I remember telling her that wasn't a problem because I liked school. From there, I guess the teacher got the paperwork together. I remember her taking some papers to my mama in the lunchroom to sign. These gave the school permission for me to be tested. My teacher explained these forms, and my mama signed them. There was not a formal meeting that explained the gifted program to my mama. I guess the teacher assumed my mama knew about the gifted program, but I don't think she ever really understood everything about the program. It wasn't that my mama didn't care about what I was doing. She just wanted me to do good in school, and I was. She never really asked about my classes; she never really had a reason to speak to my teachers, because I did what she told me to do. Be quiet and listen to the teacher.

The tests they gave me were interesting. They had little to do with the things I was learning about in class. I remember some math puzzles and a few reading things, but what I really remember was this drawing test. I guess it was seeing if I was creative. One of the items was an oval and I was told to draw a picture using that as a starting point. My first thought was, "It's an egg, what do you want me to do with an egg?" My final drawing wasn't an egg; I used the oval as a design in a girl's dress. I don't know why that

sticks out in my head after so many years, but it does. I had to use an egg to draw a picture to be told that I am gifted!

I think it was about a month after the tests, that I found out I qualified. Again, I do not remember a formal meeting. One Friday after school, my teacher walked me to the lunchroom and told my mama that I would be moving to a new class Monday. That was it. Monday morning, I was in a new class, a very different class. That class was very White. I didn't even know there were that many White kids in our school. There were only three other Black girls in my class. I didn't really care. My friends were with me at lunch and recess. Once I was in the gifted class, it was also easier to do what my mama told me to do--be quiet and listen to the teacher.

I was good student in elementary school. I was always on honor roll, and I remember receiving many citizenship awards because I was never in trouble. I was scared to get in trouble; you know what I mean. My mama was at the school. The teacher didn't have to call my mama; she could just tell her at lunch. There was no way I wasn't doing what my mama said, "Be quiet and listen to the teacher." Gifted classes really made learning easier for me because everyone wanted to learn, and it was fun. There weren't very many distractions, everyone was good.

My favorite teacher was my fifth-grade teacher, a White man. He did not fit in at our school, but man, was he a jam-up teacher. In elementary school, I loved history, and Mr. Martin has a way to make history come alive. There was one day when we were talking about one of the wars; I think it was World War One. He actually changed clothes during lunch and came in as a soldier and told us stories of the war like he was actually

there. It is something I can still see today. I remember thinking this isn't Mr. Martin, who is this guy?

In elementary school, the gifted students were pulled out of class once a week. I want to say there were seven of us that would go to pull out. This was my favorite part of the gifted program. It made me feel special being pulled out and getting to do things the other students didn't get to do. I guess I felt like it was a reward for being quiet and listening to the teacher like my mama said to do. I guess you can also say it was a little like a mental break. I could just do the activity and not have to worry about a grade or anything. Most of the topics discussed during pullout were centered around social studies or science, which made them fun to learn.

I remember I was sad leaving elementary school, but I was excited to go to middle school. I knew my classes were all going to be gifted classes, so I pictured them all being like the pullout classes. I was wrong! I was not prepared for what the gifted classes in middle school were going to be like. Even though I knew I wouldn't be with the same teacher all day, I was not prepared for the change. Changing classes and having to keep up with four different teachers was hard. My middle school was set up with only one team for each grade level. [A team in middle school is a group of four academic teachers who specialize in one subject: math, English, science, or social studies.] We also had the chance to take elective classes like technology, PE, and art.

The class I was in was basically the same as my fifth-grade class. We moved from class to class together. The only time I was not with them was during my elective classes. This was both a good and bad thing. I did get tired of having the same classmates every year, but I knew them well. I knew who I could trust and who I could not. I think I

also became a little more observant in middle school to the make-up of classes. My class only had three Black girls and four Black boys. The other classes were basically the opposite with like only five to seven White kids in them. I guess in middle school I started to really understand that my class was different than the rest of the school. I didn't really ask anyone why; I guess I just kind of sorted things out in my mind for myself. I didn't agree with it. I knew some of my friends could easily do the work I was doing, but I didn't know what to do about it. I guess I figured it was more about behavior than smartness, because I know a lot of my friends always seemed to be getting in trouble in middle school.

Another thing, I realized was that there were a lot of White teachers at the middle school. I only had one Black teacher, my eighth-grade math teacher. I do not think this bothered me very much in sixth grade, because I had just left Mr. Martin's class. But by the end of middle school, I felt like I had to be perfect in the classes taught by the White teachers. I felt like they were always judging me or expecting me to be behind everyone. It might have had something to do with my seventh-grade math teacher. I remember she would always set up stations. She would put all of the Black students in one group. When we got to the station where the teacher sits, she would always say something like, "I know you might not be able to get this, but just do the best you can. It'll be okay." We were always like--what?? If we don't get this right, you still going to count it wrong. Just show us how to do it or where we messed up.

I guess it was during my seventh-grade year that I started to feel like I had to be perfect, and I started to put unnecessary pressure on myself. I felt like I was walking on eggshells everywhere I went because I wanted to do everything I was supposed to do. I

wanted the respect of my friends and teachers. Maybe it was because I no longer had a recess period to hang out and vent with my friends. After school, I was always doing homework. You know middle school is a time where friends are a big part of your life; you just want to hang out. You do not really know what is best for you; you just want to be like everyone else. I wasn't like my friends. By the end of middle school, I felt isolated. When I was in eighth grade, I almost dropped out of the gifted classes. I was just really tired of being around the same kids all the time.

I did love one of my elective classes in middle school. My business class gave me a chance to be around other students. It was a break and an opportunity for me to express myself a little differently. It kind of reminded me of the pull-out days in elementary school. I was a member in Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). I was selected by my teacher to go to the state convention each year. We had to complete these projects every year, and I guess mine were always one of the best. I liked the competitions. I was able to present my ideas and receive feedback. In middle school, they made me feel like I was an adult. You know you had to dress professional and speak on a stage. It was fun; plus, I got to miss school.

Outside of school, I was really on my own as far as figuring out homework. I really just wished someone would have told me the truth--that after elementary school, gifted ain't fun; it's real. My mama didn't understand, my cousins just said that I was in the good class and thought I was just doing extra work as a way to kiss up to the White teachers. So, you can see my frustration. I knew my mama still expected me to get good grades, be quiet, and listen to the teacher. But I knew the work my older sister and cousins had to do was nothing compared to the work that I had to do, and I thought it was

unfair. But I didn't know what else to do besides what my mama expected me to do. Luckily, high school was a lot better.

I didn't think high school was going to be any better, but it really was. I knew I was still going to be with all the same kids because we all were taking the AP [advanced placement] courses. But I was excited to begin my CTAE [Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education] business pathway. When high school started, one of the Black boys had dropped out of the advanced classes because he played football and did not have time for the work. Another thing that was different at the high school was there were more Black teachers. I liked high school better than middle school. The classes were still kind of hard, but the teachers made me feel more comfortable. They were encouraging and not just do, do, do. But there were more Black teachers than what I had in middle school.

The teachers in high school made all the difference. My high school teachers just got me. I was more comfortable with the Black teachers, but even the White ones in high school seemed to understand us better. I was still frustrated, but I felt like I had support at school. If my 9th grade year had been like middle school, I probably would have dropped out. But I'm glad it changed. The stress that I was having didn't go away all together, but it was certainly better than middle school.

My senior AP literature teacher, Mrs. Smith, worked us so hard. She was able to get us all motivated and believing in ourselves. I actually wrote a 15-page research paper in that class. I could not believe it. It felt like a novel for me. She never let us say we couldn't do something. It was always like go, go, go. Not like middle school do, do, do. But more like a cheerleader. At the end of the year, the whole class passed the AP exam.

We were so excited, but also so proud for Mrs. Smith. Every student needs a teacher like that.

I also completed the CTAE business pathway my junior year. I loved my business classes and still competed at the FBLA state convention every year. I even scored high enough to place at the state convention a couple of times in high school. Because I completed my CTAE pathway my junior year, I was able to take a film production class my senior year as an elective. This was just an introductory class, but it was something that I fell in love with. It was the first time I could see myself using what I was learning in school in my life.

I graduated from high school with honors. I was third in my class and had an opportunity to speak at graduation. Not like a speech or anything, I just welcomed everyone. It was still cool to stand up on the stage and say something to everyone. My mama was proud of my accomplishment, and I was so happy to see her and my grandparents at graduation. I knew they were proud, especially my grandma. She told everyone about how smart her baby was—that made me feel good. But, really, I was just so glad high school was over!

I was tired of the stress and ready for a break from school. I was accepted to a historically Black university in Atlanta but decided that I needed a break from school. I was tired of constantly doing schoolwork and just wanted a mental break. My sister was already living in Atlanta. I was already going to live with her during college to help save money, so I decided to wait on college but continued with the move to Atlanta. I have no regrets about any of my decisions. I know that I am prepared for college, even though I took a couple of years off. The struggles made me who I am today and there were so



many teachers that did push and encourage me to always strive for the best. I would not change anything about those experiences. I would be a different person if I had not been in gifted classes. I do not know who that person would have been, but I like who I am. So, I have no regrets.

When I think about it, I guess it is a little odd for a 10-year-old to say, “Hey I want to be in that class and take field trips;” and everyone just says, “Okay, we can make that happen.” But I think the teachers failed everyone else in my school. What about the others that maybe wanted to take field trips but were too afraid to ask? Maybe teachers need to really sit down with parents and talk about all the programs, like really explain them--gifted, special education, everything. I think parents are just given permission slips, and they want to do right so they sign them because they trust the teachers. That’s why my mama signed. She didn’t read that letter; she just trusted that the teacher was going to do what was best for me.

When I think about what I got out of being in gifted, not only the education, but learning how to handle pressure and expectations from different people, those are skills that will stay with me my entire life. But I also think about the missed opportunities of my friends. They weren’t bold enough to say, “Hey, I want that, too.” They just rolled with the program. Unfortunately, the teachers did not try to stop the roll. They probably just assumed that they could not do the work. I don’t think that is true for some of them. I just think they were never pushed. Never made to feel like they could do the work. Never given a reason on why they need to do the work. Some kids need a push. That doesn’t mean they aren’t smart.

One of my closest friends in elementary school, Nyia, she was so smart. Based on my observations, I know she's gifted. But Nyia liked to have fun—even in elementary school. Nyia's mom was really young. So, she was more like a friend to her. Nyia played a lot. When I was moved, she used to say she was going to get moved, too. But she never said anything. When we were in middle school, she used to tell me that she's glad she didn't say anything because she wouldn't do all that work. And she didn't. She barely passed her classes in middle school, but every year at the end of the year when they had the celebration for kids who scored well on those tests she was always at the celebration because she scored a 3 or 4. [Each year in Georgia, students take the Georgia Milestone Assessment. Students can score level 1 (Beginning Learner), level 2 (Developing Learner), level 3 (Proficient Learner), or level 4 (Distinguished Learner).] But I don't think her teachers ever saw her real potential, they just saw as Black girl who was loud and liked to play around. Nyia dropped out of school her senior year. I don't know if it would have changed things, but I can't help but think that if someone would have noticed her for who she really was, it might have made a difference.

So, as far as improving the gifted experience for other young Black women, all I can say is make sure the teachers are genuine. They need to identify their bias and then get rid of them. They need to try and identify all students that might do good in gifted classes. They need to make sure they do not forget about the students while they try to teach everything they have to teach. They need to get to know all their students and they need to recognize all students, not just the ones that speak up. Sometimes, the quiet ones feel overlooked and unknown.

**Reflection on Tamika.** From the beginning, Tamika's experience with gifted education was noteworthy. I have never heard of a student asking to be tested. Tamika spoke of this at our last meeting. She felt that parents should be educated more about gifted programs so they know what to ask about and what to expect as far as the level of work required to be successful in the program. She pointed out that she felt her mom signed the paper because she trusted the teacher. It made me wonder if I, as a teacher, am worthy of that level of trust?

Tamika's desire to make her mother proud was clear throughout each interview session. She wanted to please her mother and to do that, she knew she needed to do what her mother expected her to do—be quiet and listen to the teacher. When the classes seemed to difficult, instead of quitting, she knew she just needed to do what her mother wanted her to do. Her mother's instruction helped her to be successful, even when things seemed difficult.

The teachers about whom Tamika spoke, she spoke with a passion. Most were encouraging, interesting, and challenging, and even though there were a couple who caused frustration, she was grateful for the experiences and would not change them. She did state that teachers need to be genuine and get rid of their biases. She shared the story of her friend, Nyia. From that story, I could tell she felt strongly about all students having an opportunity to be tested for giftedness. Throughout her interview she would state she knew other students were as smart as she was and she did not understand why they were not in the gifted classes, too. I wonder how many other students feel this way.

## **Jordan-The Loud One**

Jordan was born in a large city in central Florida. She does not remember too much about her younger years, but has been told about her early life and has seen pictures of her life in Florida. When she was three, her dad moved out. Her mom did not handle the situation well and began abusing prescription drugs. Her grandparents recognized that her mom needed help and moved her and her younger sisters to a small rural community in South Georgia to live with them. Her mom was admitted to a drug rehabilitation center and in time was able to overcome her addiction. When her mom was released from the program, she also moved in with Jordan, her sisters, and grandparents.

Jordan's grandparents were both teachers. Her grandmother taught at the elementary school she attended, and her grandfather taught at an elementary school in a neighboring county. The county where Jordan attended school had two elementary schools and one middle and one high school. After graduating from high school, Jordan enrolled in a university near her home. She is currently a junior majoring in Business Management. She is also the owner of two successful businesses.

Jordan is a beautiful young woman whom one cannot help but notice when she walks in a room. She carries herself well and is up to date on all the latest fashions. She is average height, and her hair and nails are always "on point" to help advertise her small businesses. Arriving late to one interview, she stated, "Sorry I'm late, but you can't have the CEO looking like a hot mess." Her personality is as big as whatever room she is in at the time. She has an infectious laugh and always seems ready to talk.

**Jordan's voice.** I loved school from the first day. I think it was because my G-Ma was a teacher. I think I thought I was little Miss Thing because of my G-Ma. Everyone

knew who I was, and I didn't have to wait with all the other kids in the lunchroom in the mornings, I could go on the hallway before anyone. After school it was the same thing, I didn't have to stand out and wait for the bus or someone to pick me up, I just walked down to my G-Ma's class. I could really go anywhere I wanted to after school. That was cool for an elementary kid.

Even though I grew up in a small town, I didn't really view my school as a small school. I mean I know we were, but it wasn't like I knew everyone student in the school. I think in elementary school there were like five to eight classes at each grade level. There were a lot of Black kids at my school, but there were a lot of Black kids in the town I grew up in, too. So that wasn't weird or anything. But my class in elementary school was way different than the rest of the school. First, we had more White kids than anyone and second, we had less boys. That was no big deal in elementary school, but by high school [said with a chuckle] . . . it was really weird having so few boys in our class. The teachers in my elementary school were probably about 50-50 Black to White. But you know I only had two Black teachers in elementary school. It was probably because my class had all the White kids.

After making friends in college and listening to stories of their school years, one thing that I have discovered that was strange is my class stayed pretty much the same from kindergarten to 12th-grade. Like very few kids moved away or moved in. I don't think that was true for the whole school because looking back, I realize most of the better-off kids were in my class. You know what I mean. I guess those families were established and not going anywhere-like my grandparents.

I remember how I got involved with gifted education. I was in second grade and there was one day in second grade that every second grader in the school had to take a test. This was a big deal. It is the first test I remember taking. There were letters sent home about getting a good night's sleep and eating a good breakfast. The principal shut off the second-grade hallway and everyone had to sit at their desk in a straight row. My teacher gave everyone "special" pencils. I really don't remember too much about the test, but I do remember my G-Ma telling me it would be used to see who got into the Quest program. [Quest was the name the elementary school used for their gifted classes.] The Quest kids got to leave school one day a week and didn't have to make up the work they missed. I thought that was cool, I didn't understand smart, dumb, and all that other stuff. I just thought it would be cool to leave school so I tried my best on the test.

After I took the test, I do not think I thought anymore about it. When I was younger, I think I really lived in the present. I remember my G-Ma telling me one day that I would be pulled out of class and be given some more tests. These tests would be used to determine if I qualified for Quest. That was weird to me. Why would they give me a test for Quest, but then have to give me more tests to see if I the first test was right? I am still not certain what that was all about. I think the only students that took the second round of tests were from my class. But you know as a kid, you don't think about things like that.

All I remember about the second round of tests was that a lady came and got me out of class and took me to a room by the front office. She had a lot of books that stood up and had pictures and sentences and shapes and stuff. She asked me all kinds of questions and would go from book to book asking me these questions. I don't really

remember how long each day took, but I want to say I was pulled out like three or four times.

One day after school, my G-Ma told me we were going to go to a meeting. When we got to the meeting, the Quest teacher was there. That is when I was told I would be a part of Quest. My G-Ma had to sign some papers and the next week when the Quest kids were pulled out, I got to go with them. I was so excited! I would get to leave school one day a week and not have to make up any work that we missed. You know I really did think I was Miss Thing at that point.

Five of my friends made it into Quest that year. In fifth grade, we took another test. By the end of fifth grade, there were a total of 10 of us going to Quest once a week. Only three Black kids from my class went to Quest; I was the only Black girl. I really didn't think anything about that the time. It was just kids from my class. It was weird that it was only kids from my class. But at Quest, we were there with kids from all the grades. So, there were a few more Black kids. Not very many though.

I had the same Quest teacher through elementary, Mrs. Strickland. She worked at another school, and we rode the bus to that school every week. I think we left right after the bell would ring and get back right before it was time to go home. I really liked Quest. Even though there were kids from different grades in class with us, the class was always smaller and we played games and did all sorts of things.

One of my favorite memories was racing Mrs. Strickland in Sudoku. I swear she started us in second grade on those things. It took us a little while to catch on and she always beat us until the fourth grade. The first time someone in our class beat her it was like we had won the Super Bowl--shoot, I don't even remember what we won. We were

just so excited about someone beating her. . . I'd say by the end of fourth grade everyone was beating her.

Being able to master Sudoku like that and then to beat an adult. That gave me so much confidence. By the end of fourth-grade I was ready to take on the world. You know we weren't really learning facts, but looking back we were learning so much with those puzzles. We learned not to give up and how to solve problems. We learned that if you practice, you really do get better. Between my G-Ma, Mrs. Strickland, and the other teachers, I never doubted my academic abilities and by middle school, I knew I could accomplish anything.

I was excited to go to middle school. The middle school I went to had two teams per grade level, but all the gifted kids were still in one class. I no longer was pulled for Quest because each teacher I had was a gifted teacher. When compared to other classes, I think we just had to do more work than they did. I do not think that was fair. For example, every year in middle school, I had to do a science fair project. Now I kinda' liked doing these projects, but they took a lot of time. Every other class had a choice on whether they wanted to do the project or not. You know, by eighth grade, if I was given a choice, I wouldn't have done the project, but my class didn't have the choice. We had to do the project. All the other kids were given the choice. That's what I mean when I say I didn't think it was fair.

Even though we did have to do more work, the teachers in middle school always did a good job encouraging us. They even tried to explain why we had to do more work. They reminded us that we would be taking high school classes in eighth-grade and we had to be prepared because those classes would go with us to the high school. My



seventh-grade English teacher used to give the best speeches about why we were pushed. She would say things like, “It is my job to make sure you do not flunk that high school course next year. If I have to work twice as hard to make sure you are ready, you’re going to work twice as hard to get ready.” She had a little wooden box that she called her soap box. Every time she sensed we needed a talk, she would stand on that box and preach to us. But the end of the year, we knew what was coming when she kicked that box out. Even though we got tired of hearing the lectures about being prepared, for the most part we understood the reasons and just moved on with it.

One of the best parts of middle school was the debate team. I absolutely loved debate in middle school. Mr. Howard was the sponsor for the team. There were ten of us that would go--all from my class. Friend and frenemy. And at debate team, we were allowed to argue! We were given really interesting topics--sometimes they would be current events and other times they were crazy things like defending the Big Bad Wolf. Debate team really reminded me of Quest. Just a time to do something fun without worrying about grades.

You know my G-Ma was always there for me. In elementary school, I didn’t really need a lot of help, but I knew if I did, she was there. She has always supported me and still does today. She would always make sure I got my homework and projects done. She tracked me all through school. When my mom came to live with us, she helped, too. But there was sometimes that she wasn’t home after school because she would work late hours. I did not have a lot of other family because they were still in Florida, but I knew I had support. My grandparents supported me, my mom and sisters supported me, and our friends supported me. I never really felt like I was alone or not supported.

My high school years were the best. Just awesome. I was able to do all of the stuff I had seen in movies and read about in books. I was in clubs; I went to dances; I skipped classes—I just didn't get caught. Being in gifted gave me confidence in who I was and I wasn't scared to try to do anything.

My junior year, I was asked to join the math team. That sounds exciting, right? But I liked my math teacher, Mrs. Jones, and said I would give it a try. I had no clue as to what you did on a math team, but I figured why not. I quickly learned that you took tests on a math team! You heard me right, you signed up to take timed math test. We went to the region competition—I know it wasn't the most exciting competition, it was a competition—and the five of us on the math team won first place! We got a big trophy to take back to the school, but we also qualified to go to state! For state we would miss three days of school. The competition was in Athens, and we had to take a day to travel up there. This competition was a little different. The first day we had to work together as a group to solve a problem, then, we took the tests. The second day, we were given one final round of test and were told the winners. We didn't place in the top five, but it was a pretty cool experience. Something I can tell people about when I get older.

During high school, I did have the chance to dual enroll as a junior. [Dual enrollment allows a high school student to earn college credit by completing certain college courses in high school.] This allowed me to have an entire year of college completed when I graduated from high school. It also built my confidence because I was able to see that I could be successful in college. I wasn't going to fail. I was going to continue to succeed.

I graduated seventh in my class with honors. I was so excited to be able to see my grandparents in the stand as I walked across the stage to receive my high school diploma. But you know what, I think my G-Ma was even more proud when I started college. To G-Ma, my first day of real college was a bigger moment than graduation. I am not sure if she was proud of everything I had accomplished or if she was ready to get me out of the house. She didn't even cry when she dropped me off...she was in celebration mode!

I do not regret being in the gifted classes at all. I was in classes with my friends. I still keep up with most of my friends today. When you are with someone for 13 years, you learn to love them! I cannot even begin to imagine what I would have experienced if I was not in gifted. Those classes made me who I am today.

I know my story is a little unique. With my G-Ma raising me, but if my mom hadn't recognized her drug problem when I was little and if my G-Ma hadn't been willing to take me and my sisters, I could have ended up way different than I did. I know how the system works, and I know that I could have been taken away from my mom and put in that system.

In high school, I took the business pathway for my CTAE classes. These were the only classes that I was away from the other gifted kids. My freshman year, I got to know another student really well. Serenity was in the system. She was living in a foster home. She was a really sweet girl. She was quiet and just kinda' stayed back out of the way. My G-Ma calls those people wall flowers. That was Serenity. She was really good with the computer programs we learned in business class. By our junior year, I could see her begin to open up to new ideas. We were paired together to complete a project to take to competition. She was excited to present her part of the project—she was going to be

using a spreadsheet to show sales predictions. Then one day a couple of weeks before the competition, she didn't show up for school. When she missed the next day, I texted her to see if she was okay. She said her foster family couldn't keep her anymore and she had to go to another one. She wouldn't be able to compete with me because she was in another school. We texted for a couple of weeks, and I could tell that she kinda' went back into her shell. I know a lot of the other people didn't really think much about her move. But it really got to me. I know that could have been my life.

Fortunately, I had my G-Ma. Once I started school, G-Ma was always there and always on top of things. That kept me grounded. I wouldn't change anything about it. But I also know that everything is perfect. You can have kids from the same house who experience the same thing end up with completely different takes on those experiences.

My sisters are a perfect example. My G-Ma did everything the same for us when we were younger. But each of my sisters have a different experience. Maggie's experience was a lot different than mine. She did not qualify for Quest, and she hated being in the top class. She would come home talking about how everyone expected her to be perfect and she wasn't. Going into middle school, she asked G-Ma to be moved out of her class because she was tired of always getting in trouble because she wasn't perfect. My G-Ma agreed, and Maggie didn't get in trouble much anymore, but just really coasted through school as an average student. Lily did get into Quest and really loved it in elementary school. But in middle school, she had a hard time adjusting and actually asked to be moved to the alternative school. But she's really creative and artsy. I just think she couldn't switch her mind off from all that artsy stuff. In alternative school, she just completed the online modules and then she could google all that artsy stuff. That worked

out better for her. My family is a perfect example of how people's personalities can influence their experiences.

So what do I think can be done to increase enrollment in gifted programs? All students should have the chance to be tested for the program, not just the ones who do well on a test. I also think the criteria should be widened beyond just academics, especially in middle school when kids' talents really begin to develop. As far as retention, all students just need to be accepted. The classes need to make sure they reach all kinds of learners, not just the ones like me. But like Lily. Include some of that artsy stuff so those students can feel noticed, too.

Teachers just need to be accepting of the differences that make kids unique. That includes all kids. I know that sometimes I got special treatment and didn't always get in trouble when I should have because I know I was a loud student. I laughed at everything and I talked all the time. But I didn't get in trouble. Some other students who looked like me and weren't as loud seemed to always be in trouble. So, yeah, acceptance is key.

**Reflection on Jordan.** Thinking about everything that Jordan shared with me, I keep having one thought--Jordan is a perfect example of a model student. Not just a model gifted student, but a model student. She loved school and she was grateful for the opportunities she had. She was aware of the "what could have been." Even when she talked about the extra course work when she hit middle school, she was accepting of it because she knew it would benefit her later in school. She knew the expectations of her family and teachers and rose to meet them time after time. As a teacher, I want a class full of Jordans every year.

Throughout the interviews, Jordan stated several times that looking back things seemed weird or wrong. It was not until she was older that she realized that it was wrong to have all the gifted kids come from only one class. She also thought it was strange that someone had to take a test to see if they could take a test to determine eligibility for gifted education. She did not understand why more than one test was needed. Something she reflected on was the teachers she had in elementary school. She commented that even though the teachers were 50-50 Black to White in her elementary school, she only had two Black teachers; and that was probably because all the White kids were in her class.

Even though Jordan had success in the gifted program and could see the benefits of the program, she was not blind to the fact that not all students have the same experience as she did. Jordan advocated for acceptance of all students and teachers valuing their uniqueness, even saying “So, yeah, acceptance is key.” She talked about the experience with her younger sister, Lily. She felt her younger sister was misunderstood because there were no classes in the gifted program that met her sister’s needs. This provided a perspective that I had not thought about before, but upon reflection can see where a student may feel left out because a gifted program’s focus is on academics and no other areas of giftedness, like the arts.

### **Akira-The Driven One**

Akira was born and raised in a small town in South Georgia. She grew up with her mom and dad and younger brother. Both sets of grandparents were in the same town, as well as numerous cousins. Her father worked in construction and her mother was a business teacher at the local middle school. The town they lived in had three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. After graduating from high school,

Akira enrolled in a university in South Georgia majoring in Psychology and Biology. She is currently a senior and works at a genetics food lab. After graduating from college, she plans on continuing her work at the lab in a full-time position.

Akira carries herself like someone who is in her early 30s instead of her early 20s. She dresses and walks with confidence. She wears a short haircut, and her complexion is radiant. As she begins to speak, her confidence carries through to her conversation. She is articulate and insightful in her answers--her inner personality matches her outward appearances.

**Akira's voice.** I think the town I grew up in is real unique. There were three elementary schools in the town, and we were not a big town. But our district did not run school buses. So the kids all either walked or were dropped off at school. The school closest to my home was not the best. My mom always talked about the students that came from that school. She knew a lot of the kids because she was an exploration teacher at the middle school. [The exploration teachers taught subjects like business, art, PE, and music.] I think their test scores were low. Mom wanted the best for me, so she sent me to the best elementary school. This elementary school was close to the middle school, so she just dropped me off on her way to work every day.

My cousins called it the "rich" school. I didn't really know what they were talking about because I had no knowledge of their schools. It wasn't until I was older that I heard stories about how their schools had broken desks and no computers. That their playgrounds were missing swings and there were no basketball courts or four-square areas. I thought all the schools were like mine. My school had desks and computers. The playgrounds were well kept. We not only had basketball courts, but we had the balls to

play with, too. So looking back, I guess it was the rich school. There were a lot of doctor and lawyer kids there. But I don't think it should matter who goes to the school. Kids from the same town should have the same experiences. I guess things like the PTO and fundraisers really make a big difference to schools like the ones in my town.

I liked going to my elementary school, but when I started, I didn't know a lot of other kids there. I only remember like four to five Black girls in the whole school. I know I may be wrong, but that is all I remember. I made friends easy enough and on the weekends, I was able to spend time with my cousins. When I would say something about wishing I could go to school with my cousins so we could play every day, my mom would say that school was not the place to have fun, but to learn.

To me, my elementary years were pretty normal. I had one main teacher each year up until fifth grade. There were also special classes that we went to like PE, art, and music. Everyone in all my classes seemed to be like me and always played with me. They were just White. But, that really didn't bother me. We were all learning together. I was on honor roll, and I did sing in the choir one year. I did not know anything about gifted education in elementary school. I am not even sure if there were any gifted classes at my elementary school; I do not remember anyone being pulled out or anything.

The first time I heard about the gifted program and advanced classes was in fifth grade. At the end of the year, the middle school always sent people over to talk to the fifth graders. Some of the coaches, the band teacher, a couple of club sponsors were there. It was a way to get us excited and ready for middle school. I remember this one speaker. He was a White man and he said he oversaw the gifted and advanced classes. These classes would allow you to earn high school credit in middle school. He kept going



on and on about being better prepared for college and that the first step was going to happen in middle school. If we wanted to succeed, we really needed to start focusing on our academics now. He scared me. I knew my mom wanted me to do well, and I wanted to do well. I knew I had to talk to my mom about what he was saying, and I had to do it fast.

That day when I got home from school, I asked my mom about it. She knew about it and explained to me what the program was about. She scheduled a meeting with my teacher. I remember being in the meeting and my teacher. My teacher was talking about the tests that would be given, and they were going to try to get them done before the school year ended. Before I knew it, I was pulled out of class and given a variety of different tests. I do not remember all the tests. Most of them seemed very basic to me. I remember one where I had to take a swirl mark and draw a picture from it. Then I had to write a story to go with the picture. I was glad I had the chance to write the story because I am not a good drawer. If I was graded on the drawing alone, I would have probably been put in remedial classes. But over the summer, I received a letter in the mail informing me that I would be enrolled in the gifted classes in middle school.

I was so excited when I got the letter! I remembered what that White man had said about being prepared. I was going to be prepared. That same day, I went to my grandmother's house to share the news with my cousins. I told my cousins, and they were like, "You're going to do what?" I told them about the White man and how he said we had to get focused and be ready for the first step of being prepared for college. Then they said, "No White man talked to them, only the people from the clubs and sport team." But they were cool with it. They didn't seem bothered that I was going to be in the gifted

classes or that the White man didn't talk to their class. They used to joke and say I already acted like I was in college.

Once in middle school, nothing much changed as far as my classes. There were two teams at our middle school. Most of the kids I went to elementary school with were on one team, and the other team was made up of kids from the other two elementary schools. Two of my cousins were on the other team. These teams stayed pretty constant through middle school. There were a few students that swapped teams, but not very many. Like only seven or eight every year moved from one team to the other. I'm not sure why they moved. Maybe so the school could say that the teams were mixed with kids from all the schools.

It was in middle school that I realized the racial differences in the classes. The team my cousins were on had many Black students, while the team I was on had many White students. That sounds funny to say. Middle school was not that long ago, the two teams were literally divided, and no one said anything. The students didn't really say anything except outside of school. Even then, when something was said it was not really about race but more about the "rich" team or the "good" team versus the "poor" team or the "bad" team.

When I talked to my mom about what I was seeing and asking her if it was right or not, she would always say something like, "Some students are given chances because of who they are and some are given chances because of what they can do. A lot of times, appearances dictate that chance. You have a chance to do something great because of what you can do, take that chance and run with it."

It took me a couple of years to fully understand what she was telling me, but I never felt like I did not belong in gifted classes. I felt supported and encouraged by everyone around me. I did feel bad for my cousins because they did not have the same opportunities that I had. I hate that not everyone had the chances I had. I still do not know why the students in other schools were not informed about the gifted program. I better understand why my mom took me to the other elementary school. That decision changed my life. Like, all the educational decisions made for me early on ultimately made me who I am today. I hate that there are other kids like me that do not get the same chances I got just because of the neighborhood they live in. I think it is wrong.

When I was in eighth grade, my younger brother was in fifth. He went to the same elementary school I did. He heard the same talk, probably by the same White man. After that meeting my mom followed the same steps. A meeting, some test, acceptance into the program. But you know his experience was a little different than mine. Johnny knew he needed to go to school to learn, not have fun, but he was a boy and the baby. He got away with a little more than I did. He was also more of a hands-on learner and did remarkably well in his exploration classes and later CTAE classes in high school. He was a C student and only earned a few college credits. But you know what, he had the opportunity, and I guess he made the most of it for him. He discovered what he was really good at, and he is working in the construction field today and loving life.

When I got to high school, my cousins would complain about the amount of time I spent on school, but this did not really bother me. I think they were more bothered by the workload than I was. They didn't think it was fair that I had to do all that work. It

didn't really bother me because I liked learning. I actually enjoyed doing the projects and research. I know I was weird, but that is what I liked.

My interests actually changed as I moved from middle to high school. In middle school, my favorite classes were the history classes and social sciences. These classes seemed to always be taught by the most passionate teachers. One teacher in particular stands out, Mrs. Bennett. She was a White history teacher who I actually had three times: once in eighth grade, again for psychology, and finally for AP US History. She was extremely passionate and knowledgeable. The passion was what really stood out. I never remember her having a bad day. She was always ready to go when we walked in her class. It was like we were the most important part of her day. And this didn't change from the time I had her in eighth to when I had her for AP US History; she was always ready for us.

In high school, I found a rhythm to my learning and discovered how passionate I really was to learn new things. I found a new love. I still enjoyed the history and social sciences, but now I loved Biology. Mrs. Frazier, an older Black teacher, opened up a new world that I had never experienced. She taught me how what I was learning in class was applicable to the real world. Like, she would bring in people who worked in the area we were learning about for that unit. One time, when we were discussing blood types, she had a lab technician from the hospital come and talk with us about what his job. His hospital job was neat, but his side job, which was helping to analyze blood for the GBI [Georgia Bureau of Investigation], was so cool. He even brought the materials to let us type our blood. It was the first time I realized there were actually careers available to me in this field.

Part of the gifted program at the high school was an opportunity to dual enroll as a junior at the local college. Not everyone in my class took advantage of this. Some students decided to just take the advanced classes. I saw this as an opportunity to get ahead and be prepared. I remember what the White man said in fifth grade. I was still going to be as prepared as I could be. These college courses really were not that difficult. We only had two college courses a semester. The other classes were our regular advanced high school courses. Some of the times, I felt that the college courses were actually easier than the high school courses.

The neat thing about the dual enrollment at our school was by graduation, I had enough credits to enter college as a sophomore. Being in the gifted classes allowed me that opportunity. Through those classes, I learned not to wait to the last minute to complete a project, how to handle and meet high expectations, and how to be passionate about a topic.

The best thing about high school was the finale. I was valedictorian of my senior class. That is a very special milestone for me. I owe it all to my mom. One of my favorite memories about that day was watching my parents as I gave my speech. During the speech, all I could see was their faces. It was like something out of a movie. I believe I was where I was because of my mom working behind the scenes. That one decision about what elementary school to send me to put me on the stage that night. It's crazy.

I view college as another stepping-stone. I still loved learning, and I had no problem adjusting to college classes, even when entering as a sophomore. There was one difference, I was able to meet and become friends with other Black girls who were not my cousins. I think college was the first time I really had a group of friends that were like

me--Black and smart. We shared similar interests, but we also loved learning. They didn't make fun of me if I skipped out on a night out to study. It's nice. It really is.

The gifted program changed my life. I know I was on the path to be just another Black girl at elementary school by the tracks before my mom made the decision to put me in the other elementary school. I think about my cousins and the other girls in my neighborhood. They were good girls. They were just as excited about school as I was. But what happened? I developed a love for school and some of them developed a hatred for school. One girl that lived on our block, Mercedes, used to always play with me after elementary school. We would laugh and talk about what we were doing in school. I remember one day we had gone on a field trip, and I was telling her about it. She told me they never got to go on trips. As we got older, our play dates stopped. I would see her in middle school and often times she was in trouble. She would get in fights and stuff. One day toward the end of middle school, we saw each other after school. I had asked her how it was going, and she said something I will never forget. She said she was learning to live in the real world, while I was learning to live in a pretend world. She added in a few choice words, and I could tell she was angry. Like what happened? Why were our paths so different? It's not fair.

I am not sure if my mom would have ever met with the teachers to discuss the gifted program or not if I had gone to the elementary school close to my house. I do not know if I would have ever fell in love with learning, but what I do know is she did make that change. And I am who I am because of that change. My love of learning was fostered, and I was able to quench my curiosity of how the world really works. Yes, the

classes were hard, but not to the point of stressful—just challenging. I always felt support from my family and teachers. That support drove me to succeed.

I do feel there needs to be some changes made to the gifted program. No one should be left out because of where his or her family lives. Mercedes deserved a chance to go on field trips. My cousins should not have had to go to school and sit in broken desks. Especially since we all lived in the same small town. Today, location should not dictate your success.

All school employees need to make outreach in the community a priority. Why not meet parents at their jobs? The lab that I work at has a conference room up front where they bring people in from the community and tell them about the work done in the lab. I'm sure other businesses have a similar conference room. Why can't these rooms be used for parent teacher conferences? Teachers can go to the parents if a parent is unable to go the school. The school needs to meet these parents half way. All parents need to be informed about all programs that are available. Teachers also need to be willing to help parents with paperwork. Make sure they are aware of deadlines and if the deadline is a firm deadline. Help them complete the paperwork if necessary. This goes for all programs. Teachers need to be out in the community talking to parents.

I know that I was not the only driven Black girl in my grade. I was in the right place at the right time, thanks to my mom, but some other girl never got the chance. That makes me sad. Teachers can do a better job and let all students know about the opportunities—even if they think they aren't listening, someone probably is.

**Reflection on Akira.** Every interview with Akira kept returning to one key moment in her life—a moment over which she had absolutely no control. The moment

was when her mom enrolled her in an elementary school across town. The elementary school that her cousins referred to as the “rich school.” Akira knows that moment changed her life. As important as that moment was to her, she also reflected on the missed opportunities for other girls like her. Although she did not dwell on those missed opportunities, they did seem to be a constant reminder of what could have been.

Akira also shared about her teachers. The passion they had in the classroom kept her yearning for more knowledge. Bringing in people from the community, allowed her the chance to begin to realize the opportunities that were available in a subject she grew to love—Biology. Akira used her teachers’ passions as motivation to meet their expectations. Motivation that helped her succeed in school, college, and, eventually, will allow her to succeed in life.

Akira’s response on how to help make changes was the sincerest response I received. Having cousins her same age and being able to see the differences between the two tracks allowed her a chance to fully see the opportunities that the gifted program offered her. She was so honest in what school systems needed to do--even giving suggestions such as teachers going into the community to share information and helping parents complete the paperwork. Easy tasks that would help more girls have the opportunities that she experienced in the gifted program.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I present three portraits of Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs for a combined 27 years of their 36 years of primary and secondary education in rural South Georgia. Each one shared their experiences with the gifted program and how their life has been shaped by those experiences. These experiences involved not only themselves, but also family members, teachers, friends, and sometimes,



even complete strangers. At the end of their portraits, I shared my reflections on each one and recurring themes I noted in their stories. While each story is unique, there are commonalities that exist between them. These commonalities were used to construct cross-case themes. In the next chapter, I explain each theme and how the themes are prevalent in each woman's story.

## Chapter 5

### CONSTRUCTED THEMES

Usually the portrait's conception grows out of the dominance of an emergent theme that reveals itself in many forms, through diverse voices, in a variety of settings. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 248)

A key characteristic of most qualitative research is that the researchers are key data gathering instruments because they are the ones who talk to and observe the participants (Creswell, 2014). They are also the main tool in analysis and presentation of the data. Researchers generally break down and analyze all parts of the data, create codes, develop categories, and eventually find the themes in participants' storied experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). In my case, I followed Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) suggestions on theming through stories by listening for repetitive refrains (e.g. "Be quiet and listen to the teacher."), resonant metaphors (e.g. "right place at the right time"), and the institutional rituals (e.g. high school graduation). From these, the portraitist can construct themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). These themes are an attempt to offer insight from the data that can be used to answer the research questions of the study. My job, as researcher turned portraitist, was to paint a picture of the experiences each girl had in the gifted program using her words. To accomplish this, I had to listen to and organize their experiences so that I could do as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) and have the voices woven

together into a thread-like tapestry to create a comprehensive narrative of the experiences of Black women in gifted education.

After analyzing the data from each interview, the participants' experiences were collectively used to answer the research questions of this study:

(1) What do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia have to say about their experiences and the meanings they made of those experiences before, during, and after enrollment in relation to their program's impacts on their lives and education?

(2) What suggestions do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs while in high school in rural South Georgia have on how to increase enrollment and retention in these programs?

Each step of the data analysis served a purpose in the construction of the themes for this study. Starting with hundreds of in vivo codes, I developed 48 categories. Knowing that 48 categories were too many to discuss, I continued with pattern coding and identified 12 essential categories. From these 12 categories, four noticeable themes were developed: (a) Family expectations fueled their positive outlook on the special privileges experienced because of the gifted program, (b) White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs, (c) Teachers' suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall, and (d) School employees need to learn how to better communicate with the families of Black students.

Figure 7 captures the alignment of the 12 categories of codes to the four themes in relation to the two research questions for this study. Each theme is aligned to one of the

research questions and is placed under the question for which it helps provide an answer.

The bottom piece of the figure aligns the 12 categories of codes with the timeline of the participants' experiences in the gifted program. While these categories were found throughout the data, the table shows where the occurrence was most prominent.

Constructed Themes: Giftedness Through Their Eyes			
<p><b>RQ 1:</b> What do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia have to say about their experiences and the meanings they made of those experiences before, during, and after enrollment in relation to their program's impacts on their lives and education?</p>		<p><b>RQ 2:</b> What suggestions do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs while in high school in rural South Georgia have on how to increase enrollment and retention in these programs?</p>	
<p><i>Family expectations created a drive in each participant to excel in the gifted program</i></p>	<p><i>White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs.</i></p>	<p><i>Teachers' suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall.</i></p>	<p><i>School employees need to learn how to better communicate with the families of Black students.</i></p>
<p><b>Before enrollment:</b></p> <p>Expectations (family, friends, teachers)</p> <p>Special privileges (field trips, pull-outs, etc.)</p> <p>Enrollment Requirements (testing, applications, meetings)</p>	<p><b>During enrollment:</b></p> <p>Class racial make-up before and after enrollment</p> <p>Limited access to gifted</p> <p>White = Gifted</p>	<p><b>After enrollment:</b></p> <p>Microaggression</p> <p>Black teachers</p> <p>Teachers' passion and encouragement</p> <p>Teacher misunderstanding</p>	<p><b>Suggestions:</b></p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Application process</p>

Figure 7. Constructed themes revealed from the data in this study

It is important to consider how these women's experiences inform answers to the research questions on which I focused in this study. Therefore, in the following section,

the participants' responses, as coded through the data analysis, are discussed in relation to the constructed themes in the table and how these themes were used to answer the questions of this study.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question dealt with the experiences the participants had with gifted programs in rural South Georgia in relation to their lives and education. The data used to answer the question came from one-on-one interviews with three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs in rural South Georgia during the K-12 school years. Three themes were generated from my analysis of that data that help explain what shaped the experiences and the subsequent meaning or value it had in their lives: (a) Family expectations fueled their positive outlook on the special privileges experienced because of the gifted program (b) White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs, and (c) Teachers' suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall.

The rest of this section will discuss each of these three themes as they relate to the girls' experiences. For each theme, I cited an example from the existing literature that is supported by the theme. Also, I included brief descriptions of some of the experiences from each participant that were included in the categories that formed each theme.

**Theme one.** The first theme centers on expectations. In the participants' stories, this theme was prevalent in their lives even before enrollment in gifted education. Three categories of codes were used to develop this theme: expectations, special privileges, and enrollment requirements. During the interviews, each of the participants spoke graciously

about their families' expectations. Looking back on their experiences, they were aware that these expectations kept them not only motivated, but also encouraged.

This theme supports one of the suggestions in the study conducted by Henfield et al. (2008), which was a recommendation for parents, "Parents should vigilantly reinforce the benefits of gifted education programs to their children" (p. 448). While the parents of the participants were not aware this suggestion, they were aware of the importance of education in their daughters' lives. In the portions of the portraits that support this theme it is clear how valuable Henfield et al.'s (2008) recommendation was in the cases of my three participants.

*Tamika.* The expectations that Tamika's mom had were simple and prevalent after our first meeting. As she continued to tell me her story, these expectations remained constant. Tamika's mom had high expectations for Tamika, and Tamika wanted to make her mom proud. Through the interviews, it became apparent that this was not something that was discussed in detail, but through gentle but stern reminders such as, "be quiet and listen to the teacher," on almost a daily basis. As Tamika noted, "My mom supported me in school. From a young age I knew that I had her support. I knew she expected me to succeed and 'be quiet and listen to the teacher' was her way of helping me." High school graduation allowed Tamika the opportunity to make her mom proud as she met these expectations, "After I received my diploma, my mama stood for what seemed like 30 minutes, clapping, smiling, and crying. Every time I looked back, she was still standing and crying. It made me cry; so, I stopped looking back."

Tamika's story certainly highlights the view of the special privileges of gifted education. Tamika asked to be in the gifted program because of a field trip. This

experience also highlights Tamika's experience with the enrollment requirements.

Tamika's mom was not informed about the gifted program. Because her mom worked in the cafeteria at the school, obtaining permission to be tested was very informal. Tamika feels like her mom signed the paper because the teacher went to her mom while she was at work, and more or less told her to sign the paper because it was a good opportunity for Tamika. There was not an opportunity for formal questioning. While her mom may not have fully understood what the gifted program had to offer, her mom understood the importance of education. The use of the phrase "be quiet and listen to the teacher" was one that Tamika used quite often.

These experiences provide a snippet of the importance of family expectations for Tamika. Tamika's perception of gifted education was based on her mom's expectation for her. Her mom's expectations were set before Tamika entered the gifted program, and she supported her through the program.

**Jordan.** Jordan had no doubt what her grandmother expected from her as a young child. Being raised by her grandparents, who were teachers, Jordan grew up with an unspoken school rule:

My G-Ma never switched out of teacher mode. It seemed like every conversation centered around education for me and my sisters. She struggled with my younger sisters not loving school like I did, but she constantly supported them, like she supported me. We were never allowed to think that we could quit school or quit learning. I think we even had to learn on vacations.

Jordan's grandmother understood the importance of being in the gifted program and encouraged all her grandchildren to strive for the best. Even though

Jordan did not need a lot of support, she knew how important family expectations were by witnessing how her sisters handled school, with one qualifying for gifted but not fitting in the program and the other not qualifying. Jordan's comment supports this observation:

Even though Maggie and Lily did not follow my path, my grandparents never criticized their decision. They just constantly reminded us that we could do whatever we set our mind to and quitting was not an option we had. She used to joke that we all had to get a good job in order to take care of her and Papa.

After high school, Jordan is able to still witness those expectations for success. She stated that her grandmother was more excited about her first day of college than she was about her high school graduation. She says she still feels that support in her entrepreneur endeavors, stating that, "My G-Ma continues to be my biggest motivation. She stays on me about completing my homework and then will support my business by purchasing my merchandise—even though she doesn't really use it. So yeah, that support has not ended."

Once completing the enrollment requirements, which included two rounds of testing, Jordan remembers meeting with her teacher and grandmother to be informed of her acceptance into the gifted program. She was then able to experience the perceived special privileges of the gifted program in elementary school—pullout classes. When she was accepted, she pulled out of class once a week to participate in Quest, the name of the gifted program for her school. This allowed her a time to enjoy learning with no pressure.



Jordan understood her grandmother's expectations for her. These were the same expectations she had for her sisters. She knew that she would not be allowed to quit. Her grandmother still has those high expectations for her today.

*Akira.* Akira's story is one where it is easy to see the family expectations. Akira's mom, a teacher in the system where Akira attended school, was not going to wait and see if the opportunity for success would come to Akira. Instead, she put Akira in a place where the opportunity was and all Akira had to do was take it. The "rich school," as Akira's cousins called it, did offer more opportunities for Akira to succeed. However, Akira's internal desire to always learn drove her to take full advantage of those opportunities. This was fueled by her mother's desire to see her be successful, as evidenced by the statement, "Mom wanted the best for me."

Since entering college, Akira continues to feel supported by her family. She said, "My parents used to call me every day to make sure I was doing okay and getting my school work done, now they either text or call about every other day . . . I do not mind, I know they care. It's nice to know that they still want me to do well and succeed. I guess, I still want to make them proud of me, too."

Akira was the only participant who did not enter the gifted program in elementary school. She was able to enroll in the gifted program after a guest speaker came to speak to her class when she was in fifth grade. After that, she asked her mom about the program, her mom scheduled a meeting, and she was pulled out of class for testing. She entered the gifted program when she entered middle school. For her, the special privilege of the gifted program occurred in high school, when she was given the opportunity for dual enrollment to earn college credits while in high school.

Akira, like the other participants in this study, was fortunate to have a strong support system with their families. The expectations were set even before the participants entered the gifted program. Once in the program, the expectations continued along with the support. This was vital to their perceptions of the gifted program. Besides family, teachers also had an impact on the experiences in the program.

**Theme two.** The second theme for this section centers on White privilege. Elements of this theme were clear when you begin to look at enrollment techniques and the time in which they were actually enrolled in the gifted programs. Three categories were used to develop this theme: class racial make-up before and after enrollment, limited access to gifted service, and White = Gifted. This influence can be seen in each participant's story.

This theme is supported by existing research in the field of gifted education. Ford (2010) stated that White privilege is a form of entitlement and affirmative action in which the social and cultural capital of White Americans is valued and held as normal, normative, or the standard (p. 33). After more than 10 years of data collection, White privilege is still a problem in the disproportionate number of minority students in gifted education (Ford, Wright, & Scott, 2020). Between the access to gifted education and a lack of true accountability of gifted programs, White privilege can contribute to the disproportionate number of minority students being served in the gifted programs (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2020).

**Tamika.** Tamika qualified for gifted services in fourth grade, after asking to be tested herself. When she qualified, she was moved to another class to be served. This was Tamika's reaction to the move, "The class was very White. I didn't even know there were

that many White kids in our school.” Since she was from a small community, this group of students stayed pretty much the same from elementary to high school. In middle school, Tamika realized that the demographics of her class were different than the demographics of the rest of the school. She stated,

I didn't really ask anyone why; I guess I just kinda' sorted things out in my mind for myself. I didn't agree with it. I knew some of my friends could easily do the work I was doing but I didn't know what to do about it. I guess I figured it was more about behavior than smartness.

In addition to the racial make-up, Tamika and her family were unaware of the gifted program. The only way Tamika had knowledge was by learning about another class getting to go on a field trip. Tamika never stated anything about a school-wide identification program. Without these types of programs, access is limited.

Even at a young age, Tamika knew something was not right about what she witnessed in the program. It wasn't right that this one class got to go on field trips, and she did not. She could solve that problem by asking to be part of the class, but the bigger problem was the one that affected her friends who were not given an opportunity, and as much as she wanted to change that, she was unable to do anything about it.

Tamika's story highlights the limited access to the gifted program in rural South Georgia. It also highlights the drastic change in the racial make-up of the classes. Because of these experiences, she wonders why her cousins and friends did not have the same opportunities.

**Jordan.** Jordan stayed with the same group of kids from kindergarten to 12th grade. She stated that most of the classes in her school were predominantly Black, but her class was about 50% Black. She stated that her class also had the high socio-economics kids. When asked about her reaction to the percentage of Black students in her class, she was honest with her answer.

Looking back now, I do see the difference in the classes. But honestly, at the time, I did not know any better. I was with the same group of kids. At the time, I really didn't even notice the class difference. Is it weird, yeah! I think it's some of that good ole' boy stuff my grandma talks about. It's not fair.

While everyone in Jordan's school did take what appeared to be a screener test for the gifted program, only students in her class were selected for further testing. Jordan questioned the reason for this second round of testing.

Upon reflection, Jordan clearly saw that there was a problem, even though White privilege was not directly said in the interview, there was an inference about White privilege affecting the enrollment with the "good ole' boy" quote.

**Akira.** Akira's mother was an advocate for her education from the beginning. Working in the system, her mother knew which elementary school was the best school. Akira stated that her mom enrolled her in the "rich school" because the school in her neighborhood had low scores. The school in her neighborhood was predominately Black. The school she went to was predominately White, Akira only remembers four to five Black girls from elementary school. Akira qualified for the gifted program in middle school. It was at this time, she began to notice the difference between her class and the

other classes in the school. In fact, the division between the teams in middle school emphasized the White privilege in the gifted program in her district.

The fact that her cousins were not even told about the gifted program seemed so unfair to Akira, “I hate that there are other kids like me that do not get the same chances I got just because of the neighborhood they live in. I think it is wrong.” The limited access was something that bothered her not just now, as she thought back, but even as a child she was caught between enjoying the benefits of the gifted program and being saddled with guilt on behalf of those who missed out.

Akira heard about the gifted program because of the school she attended. She told the story of the “White man” who talked to her class, but did not go to the school her cousins attended. Akira also stated that her school did not have as many Black students as the school her cousins attended. She also talked about her mom’s reasons for sending her to the “rich school,” academic performance being one of those reasons. Like the other participants, *White privilege* was not stated as a term, but the meaning of it was certainly implied as the reason that kept her cousins from having the same opportunity that she had.

**Theme three.** This theme centers on the impact that teachers had on the participants. From my experience in education teachers are often unaware of the influence they have in a classroom. Simple words can either build a student up or tear a student down, often times unbeknown to the teacher. During the interviews, each participant spoke about the experiences they had with teachers once they were enrolled in gifted education. Four categories of code were used to develop this theme:

microaggression, Black teachers, teachers' passion and encouragement, and teacher misunderstanding.

This theme and its underlying categories are also seen in prior research.

Microaggression and teacher misunderstanding are discussed in the study by Ford (2010) as instances that often occur in classrooms taught by teachers of another race. The results from this study also support the recommendation from Briggs et al. (2008) on the importance of educating teachers on cultural differences and switching their mindsets from a deficit-based to strength-based model of teaching, especially for minorities in gifted education (Briggs et al., 2008).

Following the format of the first section, I will provide examples from each participant's story that can be found in the categories used to develop this theme.

*Tamika.* As Tamika talked about her experiences in the gifted programs, I could tell that the teachers she had at each grade level greatly influenced how she perceived the experience. She loved elementary school, especially her fifth grade teacher, a White male, the only White and male teacher she had in elementary school. In middle school, she only had one Black teacher, her eighth grade math teacher. It was during middle school that Tamika began to feel frustrated, like she was "walking on eggshells" in all her classes. She did not feel like her teachers understood her and often judged her as being behind the other learners. She specifically talked about her seventh grade math teacher grouping her and the other Black students in one group on station day and then telling them, "I know you might not be able to get this, but just do the best you can. It'll be okay." This was before they were even given a chance to understand the problem. She spoke of how station days would frustrate her and began to cause her to stress about her

grades, especially in math. “Just her implying that I did not understand caused me to begin to doubt my abilities. Even to doubt who I was. Just totally stressed me out.”

She spoke how this feeling of frustration changed when she got to high school. She had more Black teachers and felt more encouragement than she did in middle school. She went on to say that,

My high school teachers just got me. I was more comfortable with the Black teachers, but even the White ones seemed to understand us better. I was still frustrated, but I felt like I had support at school. If my ninth-grade year had been like middle school, I probably would have dropped out. But I’m glad it changed. The stress that I was having didn’t go away all together, but it was certainly better than middle school.

The high school teachers created an environment that eased her frustrations, just by listening and not treating her as if she did not belong.

Tamika had vivid memories of the experiences that were impacted by the teachers she had. She loved her elementary school teacher who would dress up and make learning fun, but it was her teachers in high school that really took the time to understand her and encourage her.

**Jordan.** There were plenty of teachers who impacted Jordan’s experience in gifted. When asked about the support she received in school, she could name several teachers at different levels. For example, Jordan said,

Mrs. Strickland was the best teacher ever. I know I only had her for Quest, but she gave me so much confidence in all areas of learning. I really think she made me feel like it was okay to be smart. She was always pushing us

to try new things and showing us new ways to do things. Mr. Howard was another teacher that opened up the world to me through debate. I felt like I could finally use my voice--literally--in his class. I loved arguing and he gave me the perfect place to do it. Mrs. Jones, my 11<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher, she pushed us through Trigonometry, never letting us give up or settle for less than an A. I really cannot think of a single teacher that did not at one point offer encouragement and support . . . I guess I was lucky.

The teachers in Jordan's education career made a difference by believing in her. She seemed to be supported and understood by all of them. With that support, there was no doubt that she could succeed in their classes.

Throughout Jordan's interviews there were several times that Jordan would state something was "just weird." For example, her class was the only class the students were pulled out of for Quest and despite there being an equal ratio of Black teachers to White teachers, she only had two Black teachers in elementary school.

Through Jordan's stories we can see the impact that teachers had on her experiences. Jordan expressed happiness with her experiences because of the teachers that were involved.

*Akira.* While Akira had many teachers that impacted her education, there is one that changed her course in school.

The one person that influenced me the most in school, I do not even remember his name. It was the White man that came and talked to us in fifth grade about the gifted program and making sure we were ready for college.



This moment is very clear in Akira's memory. I think it was not necessarily this moment, but more the fact that her cousins did not get to experience the same moment. At a young age, Akira began to question why some people were given opportunities and others were not. She questioned her mom about these things, and her mom gave a memorable response.

Some students are given chances because of who they are and some are given chances because of what they can do. A lot of times, appearances dictate that chance. You have a chance to do something great because of what you can do, take that chance and run with it.

It was the teachers' passion that was important to Akira. It made her feel like the teachers were genuine in what they were doing. One of her history teachers really stood out because of this passion. In Akira's view, "She was always ready to go when we walked in her class . . . it was like we were the most important part of her day." Akira went on to say, "Classes like that were easy because of the way the teacher handled life every day." The teachers created an atmosphere where Akira felt welcomed and wanted compelling her to work even harder.

Akira's teachers and the teachers of the other participants impacted each one in a way they will forever remember. The majority of the stories told centered around positive, encouraging teachers that focused on the best interest of the students. However, some of these experiences were not the best for the participants. Reflecting on a few of those experiences, participants could see the impact that White privilege had on the gifted program.

What do three Black women have to say about their experiences in the gifted programs in rural South Georgia? Each participant had a plethora of stories and details to add to the conversation about Black girls in gifted programs. Examining all the different experiences, there were common ones that could be found throughout each person's data. Each participant spoke about the family expectations, White privilege, and teachers that impacted their lives. Each of these could be seen at various points in their enrollment in programs. This dialogue provided insight into a world that I thought I knew, but found I was only seeing what I wanted to see. The stories that were shared can be used as fodder to keep the dialogue with other educators going and work toward improved gifted programs that meet the needs of future Black girls. The improvement of these programs was the focus of the second question.

### **Research Question 2**

By asking the second overarching research question, I hoped to get suggestions from the participants, that were grounded in their experiences. Specifically, I was concerned about ways to increase enrollment and retention in gifted programs by making them more inclusive of Black girls. To my surprise, the majority of the recommendations they had revolved around the need for school personnel to learn how to communicate better, more often, and in ways that connected with family members on their terms.

The rest of this section will discuss the theme as it relates to the participants' experiences and the existing literature used for this study. Again, for the theme, I use an example from literature that is supported by the last theme of this study. I also used brief descriptions of some experiences from each participant that were included in the categories that led to the development of the theme.

**Theme four.** This theme deals with the need for school faculties to communicate better with the families of Black students. In addition to improving the overall communication process with Black families, there also needs to be a focus on the application process. Participants expressed concern that parents are just not aware of the programs and cannot advocate for something they do not know exists.

Data collected from the participants support findings in current literature on the importance of having the family involved with a child's education because the effects of the disproportionate enrollment hinder not only the students, but also the community (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2020). Ford (2011) suggested over a decade ago, that administrators offer meetings in the community about opportunities students have at school. By doing this, it could increase the number of families that are aware of opportunities that are available and make parents more like advocates for their child. Fletcher, Hines, Ford, and Moore (2022) reminded us that teachers, counselors, and administrators should all be working together proactively to inform all demographic groups of the benefits of the gifted program.

The “need to know” issue is more significant than a simple letter informing the parents about opportunities. A program needs to be implemented to ensure parents, grandparents, and other caretakers know what programs can help their child. It is an issue that impacts the children who are in the program who experience feelings of guilt and sadness because they are “in” and their friends, who should be there, are not because no one reached out to their parents. The responsibility falls to those who know—school employees. Each woman touched on the significance of this problem in her circumstances. The following are excerpts from the interviews that allow the participants

to explain why schools need to learn how to communicate better with the families of Black students.

**Tamika.** Tamika's story is unique in the way she was referred, but also similar to the others in the area of communication. There was never a formal meeting of recommendation or qualification. There was only a paper signed in the cafeteria and then a message relayed that Tamika qualified and would be changing classes. Tamika reflected on this lack of communication in her referral.

Maybe teachers need to really sit down with parents and talk about all the programs, like really explain them-gifted, special ed, everything. I think parents are just given permission slips and they want to do right so they sign them because they trust the teachers. That's why my mama signed . . . she didn't read that letter.

Tamika pointed out that her mom signed the paper without fully understanding what the program was because she trusted the teacher. Schools should not take advantage of this trust. There needs to be a way to make sure the communication is clear.

**Jordan.** From the beginning, Jordan's grandmother was aware of what was happening because she was a teacher in the system. However, there were others who may not have been aware of the gifted program because they never heard it. Jordan reflected on the make-up of her gifted class. She said,

It was weird that it was only kids from my class. Like, did any other class take the test? Were our scores the only ones really looked at and if so, why? Looking back, I can clearly see the problems.

Were the parents in the other classes aware of the opportunity? Jordan was very reflective of her career in school and the importance of her grandmother. She knows she would be in a different place if her grandmother had not stepped in and raised her.

I'm not sure where I would be without my G-Ma. She definitely made sure I had what I needed. I do not think the teachers would have communicated with my mom like they did my G-Ma because my mom would not have been able to be as involved as my G-Ma . . . I do not think she would have reached out to the school with any questions. She would have waited for the school to reach out to her.

This quote not only shows the importance of Jordan's grandmother, but also how Jordan believes that if she had lived with her mom, she would have missed out on the opportunities that she had in school because there would have been no communication.

*Akira.* Out of the three interviews, Akira was the most adamant about the need to improve communication. Perhaps it was because she had cousins who were the same age who let her know things others did not know, like how they missed out on the visit in fifth grade from the "White man." At the time, Akira may not have understood the underlying reasons this happened, but she did recognize the unfairness. She expressed concern about why her cousins did not get told about the gifted program to her mother, who told her to "take that chance and run with it." Akira knew her cousins could have kept up in the program, but they did not have the chance. She feels like it was because of the neighborhood school they attended. She said, "I hate that not everyone had the chances I had." She feels like all parents should be notified through school outreaches

and teachers should be able to help parents complete the necessary paperwork and “remove the handicap that society placed on them.”

What suggestions do Black women have to increase enrollment and retention in gifted programs? While each participant had something to say about increasing enrollment and retention, all the conversations pointed to improved communication with the families of Black students. First and foremost, the participants agreed that there had to be communication about the gifted program made available for all students. This communication needed to be focused on an explanation of the program and address the application processes. Black girls cannot be served in the gifted program if they are never given the opportunity to be in the program. To improve the experiences of Black girls in the gifted program in rural South Georgia, communication with the families has to be improved.

### **Conclusion**

In Chapter 4, I presented the portraits of three Black women who completed gifted programs while enrolled in school in rural South Georgia. In Chapter 5, I broke those portraits apart to demonstrate the development of four themes from their stories. The portraits provided a contextual experientially-based background for each of the connections to the lessons embedded in each theme (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). To gain a cross-case understanding of similarities between these women’s lived experiences in the gifted program, patterns from the data were analyzed to build themes related to the overarching research questions for this research. In the final chapter, I will provide an overview and discussion of findings, the connections with research and

theories, implications of the findings, and limitations and recommendations for future studies.

## **Chapter 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

When teachers are committed to teaching all students, and when they understand that through their teaching change can occur, then the chance for transformation is great. (Delpit, 1995, p. 166)

In this study, a dialogue was started. The dialogue centered on the experience of three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia. The outcome of this dialogue was in part dependent on the way the data collected was analyzed and presented. Eventually, the most important outcome of the dialogue will occur when we see how educators and stakeholders in the field of gifted education receive it. The previous chapters presented the data and the analysis of the data. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overall summary, a discussion of the study, and to add my voice to those of my participants when I discuss lessons learned and recommendations for future practices.

To accomplish the purpose of this chapter, five sections will be used. The overview section will review the study's purpose, contribution to current literature, design, and data analysis. The next section will discuss this study's themes and their connection to the theories used in the framework. I will then discuss suggestions based on the findings as they relate to gifted programs in rural South Georgia. The limitations of



this study will then be discussed, as well as recommendations for future studies. The last section will be a personal reflection of my final thoughts on the study.

### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study (Maxwell, 2013) was to explore the experiences of three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia. I saw a need to find ways to reverse underrepresentation in gifted programs in South Georgia and increase enrollment and retention to ensure Black girls were afforded the same opportunities and benefits as other students enrolled in the programs, and I believed the best place to look for strategies was to ask girls themselves. Data available from USDOEOCR (2021) indicated Black girls accounted for 9% of the student population but only 5.2% of the gifted population. Wright et al. (2017) presented a formula to determine the percentage of underrepresentation and using this formula, there was an underrepresentation of 37% for Black girls. Data obtained through interviews with three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years from rural South Georgia provided insight into ways to improve enrollment and retention of future Black girls, improve the gifted learning environment, and reach teachers and shareholders with the acquired knowledge from the participants' stories. Ideally, teachers and administrators will learn from these young women's stories and be able to create effective and practical solutions to the underrepresentation. In addition, this study identified actions that could be taken to meet the goal of increased enrollment and retention.

The research methodology for this study employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) to select three participants. Each participant had these characteristics-adult Black

woman, graduated from high school with less than 600 students in rural South Georgia, enrolled in a gifted program while in school, willing to participate in the study, and available for multiple interviews. Participants were selected after responding to a flyer placed on a college campus.

Once participants were selected, interviews were conducted following Seidman's (2013) three-interview series strategy. Interviews ranged from 45 to 75 minutes. Interview questions for each session were developed (Appendix E). The first interview was a "focused life history" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) in the context of their experiences with gifted education. The second interview concentrated on the "concrete details of the participants' present lived experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) in gifted education. Finally, the third interview allowed a time for "reflection on the meaning" (Seidman, 2013, p. 22) of their experiences in the gifted program.

The framework of this study is in critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). These theories provided the for the development of both the study's questions used in the three-interview series and guiding research questions:

- (1) What do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs during their K-12 school years in rural South Georgia have to say about their experiences and the meanings they made of those experiences before, during, and after enrollment in relation to their program's impacts on their lives and education?
- (2) What suggestions do three Black women who were enrolled in gifted programs while in high school in rural South Georgia have on how to increase enrollment and retention in these programs?

After interviews, memos and transcripts from interviews were coded with the two-cycle method for coding (Saldaña, 2016). In the first cycle, I began by using attribute coding. This allowed basic descriptive information to be marked on each participant. Next, in vivo coding provided an opportunity to focus on the “words of the participants themselves” (Saldaña, 2016, p.106). In vivo allowed insight into the way participants experienced the process and how they made sense of the experiences. While marking in vivo codes, magnitude coding was used to mark the positive experiences of the participants.

After completing the first cycle, the second cycle focused on reorganizing and reanalyzing the data (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding was used for this cycle which allowed codes from the first cycle to be grouped into a smaller number of categories that shared similar characteristics (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Saldaña, 2016; Seidman, 2013). The connections between these various categories were then classified as themes that reoccurred throughout the interviews (Seidman, 2013). From the patterns and codes from the transcripts, four themes were developed to answers to the research questions:

1. Family expectations created a drive in each participant to excel in the gifted program.
2. White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs.
3. Teachers’ suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall.

4. School employees need to learn how to better communicate with the families of Black students.

Once the themes were constructed, I analyzed them in relation to the theories that helped me frame the study. The four themes were examined using critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and Black feminist thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000). Each theme could be aligned with the theories of the study. Tables 6 and 7 help illustrate my alignment of the themes to the components of the theories. The alignment of the themes with CRT tenets can be seen in Table 6. Table 7 shows the alignment of the distinguishing features of BFT with the themes of this study. These alignments will be further discussed in the next section.

**Table 6**

*Summary of Themes Connected to CRT*

Themes	CRT Connection
Family expectations created a drive in each participant to excel in the gifted program	Tenet 1: Racism as the Norm Tenet 3: Interest Convergence
White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs.	Tenet 1: Racism as the Norm Tenet 4: Whiteness as Property
Teachers' suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall.	Tenet 1: Racism as the norm Tenet 3: Interest Convergence
School employees need to learn how to communicate with the families of Black students.	Tenet 1: Racism as the Norm Tenet 3: Interest Convergence Tenet 4: Whiteness as Property
Main tenets of CRT through the education system (Ladson-Billings, 1998)	

**Table 7**

*Summary of Themes Connected to BFT*

Themes	BFT Connection
Family Expectations fueled their positive outlook on the special privileges experienced because of the gifted program	Feature 1: Standpoint Feature 2: Oppression and Diverse Experiences Feature 3: Individual Viewpoint Feature 4: Challenge the Status Quo
White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs.	Feature 6: Social Justice
Teachers' suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall.	Feature 1: Standpoint Feature 2: Oppression and Diverse Experiences Feature 3: Individual Viewpoint
School employees need to learn how to communicate with the families of Black students.	Feature 1: Standpoint Feature 3: Individual Viewpoint Feature 5: Significance of Change Feature 6: Social Justice

Tenets of BFT (Collins, 2000)

**Discussion of Themes**

Each theme can be found in all three of the participants' stories. This section will begin with a short discussion of how these stories support the themes from this study followed how the themes are related to the current literature and theories used as a framework for this study.

**Theme one.** The most pronounced theme of the study was the first theme, *Family expectations created a drive in each participant to excel in the gifted program*. Every participant mentioned the role family played. Participants kept repeating phrases about family. Tamika just tried to "Be quiet and listen to the teacher" like her mom instructed; Jordan repeatedly commented throughout the interviews, "I wouldn't be who I am

without my G-Ma;” and Akira reiterated often that she always knew, “My mom wanted what was best for me.” These family expectations created an environment where the participants felt supported no matter what happened, however, they did not want to let their family down.

The benefits of high family expectation are included in research by Huff et al. (2005). Researchers discovered that when parents actively advocate for their child’s education, the child is more committed and successful. From their research, if the parent is willing to make the sacrifice, the students are more willing to do the same. This advocacy is also supported by Henfield et al. (2008). This promotion of academic engagement encourages students to continue in the program and can also ease the transition problems if any arise.

The participants’ insistence that things would have been different if they had not received support from parents highlights racism as the norm from CRT. Jordan’s phrase, “if it had been my mom and not my G-Ma, I would not be here,” shows an awareness of racism deeply embedded in the educational system. This is because Jordan believes that because her mom struggled with a drug addiction, her mom would have been viewed for her mistakes and Jordan would not have been given the same opportunities she received by being raised by her grandmother. Also, interest convergence is evidenced when parents have to take matters into their own hands and enroll their child in a school outside of their district in order to get the education they deserve, as was the case with Akira. The district alignment was not fair, nor was it equal. The “rich kids” were the ones that benefitted from this alignment, not the kids in Akira’s neighborhood.

A collective standpoint can be used to explain how the experiences in gifted education influenced the participants' everyday lives as individual Black women and now as a collective. Each participant's experience was different, yet they still experienced a sense of sadness for the students who were not given an opportunity to participate in gifted education. Also, the way each participant viewed what was happening during their years in gifted influenced their own perception of the experiences. Once problems started to arise in the program, Tamika stayed with the program because she wanted to make her mom proud. She had a negative perception of the program during those middle school years showing that oppression can create diverse experiences. Each of the participants found success in the gifted program and challenged the status quo in education. Their collective standpoint, now, is to help provide suggestions to afford the opportunity for other Black girls to do the same.

**Theme two.** Even though each participant experienced the second theme, *White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted programs*, their experiences were different. Tamika's experience is especially unique because she asked to be tested herself; therefore, she really knew little of the admission process. She did quickly realize the racial make-up of the classes was different than the school's make-up. Jordan experienced the admission process, but due to the way the classes were made-up, she did not experience a class change. She just had the opportunity to go to a pull-out class once she was enrolled in gifted. She did note that there were not many Black students in the gifted program. Akira's experience highlighted this theme the most. Her mother, a teacher in the system, sent her to the "rich school" in elementary school. This resulted in her hearing about the gifted program at the end of fifth grade. She later realized that her

cousins, who attended the neighborhood school, did not hear the same talk, so her cousins never had the opportunity she did. White privilege was not a term that was used in any of the interviews, but the description of the events mentioned fall under the definition of White privilege.

Through the interviews, it became clear that *White privilege influenced the overall enrollment in the gifted program* in each of the participants' schools. Research supports this finding. Two studies that stated that the reason so few minorities are enrolled in gifted education is related to the policies that are in place which are influenced by White privilege are Ford (2010) and Ford et al. (2020). Standardized tests are another factor that is influenced by White privilege and can affect gifted enrollment (Huff et al., 2005). Henfield et al. (2008) also discussed this issue by noting that many of the evaluations used to determine giftedness are bias to Whites. Jordan mentioned these tests in her interviews. She thought it was funny how everyone took one test to see if they qualified, but then she had to take more test to make sure the first test was correct. Akira felt like her cousins were not even given the opportunity to even test because of the elementary school they attended.

Through research and the interviews, I was able to clearly see racism as the norm and whiteness as property. The lack of a standardized testing procedure leads to a system that allows certain students whose families are aware of the program to enter, while others who may truly qualify are left out, because their families are unaware of the program. When tests are given, there are biases, that put Black girls are a disadvantage (Henfield et al., 2008). Each participant spoke of the disproportionate number of Black students in the gifted program when compared to their school. Once entering the



program, Tamika commented she “didn’t” know there were that many White kids in her school.” Whether it is intentional or not, it is an obvious sign of White privilege.

During interviews, each participant was concerned with the way students are enrolled in gifted programs. They expressed concern that some of their peers were missing out on opportunities that they received, and offered suggestions as how to improve enrollments for all students. Years after graduation, Akira was still upset that her cousins were not visited by the “White man” and provided information about the gifted program. Several times throughout Jordan’s interview, she spoke of acceptance being the key for all who qualified, no matter what area their giftedness. All three participants recognized the injustice seen with White privilege and the enrollment process and spoke on the importance of justice for not only Black girls, but all students.

**Theme three.** Another commonality between the participants’ interviews was *Teachers’ suppositions and subsequent behaviors made everlasting impressions on participants that impacted not only their performance in gifted programs, but their views on education overall.* Behaviors, attitudes, and levels of support from teachers varied, but whether they were positive or negative, they were powerful and influenced the meanings these Black women attached to their experiences. Fortunately, there were multiple teachers involved with each participant, and the participants clearly remembered their interactions with these teachers. It was in middle school that Tamika began to experience small microaggressions such as her math teacher grouping her and the other Black students together and telling them to “just try your best—I know this is hard.” Jordan found her teachers to always be very supportive, but in reflection wondered if it was because her G-Ma was in the system because, “I know I was a loud child.” Akira loved

learning, and it was the teachers who showed passion in their job that really motivated her to keep learning because “we were the most important part of her day.” These were all memories of experiences with teachers that impacted the participants.

Each participant was able to state the impact of teachers’ suppositions and subsequent behaviors which made everlasting impressions on them. Issues such as deficit-thinking, colorblindness, lack of culturally responsive teaching, and White Privilege impact how teachers treat minority students in gifted education (Ford, 2010; Middleton & Ford, 2022). This could cause some students to be uncomfortable with the program. Tamika experienced this in her seventh-grade math class when the teacher would tell her group, consisting of all the Black students, to just try the best they could, instead of offering instruction on how to solve the problem. Chang and Demyan (2007) discussed how stereotypes and teacher expectations could affect the way a teacher taught classes. As seen in the case of Tamika’s math teacher who, according to Tamika, did not believe she was capable of understanding the concepts being taught. In contrast to the bias views, Henfield et al. (2008) found that when the teachers established positive relationships with the students, the Black students were more comfortable in the learning environments. Jordan could not find fault with one of her teachers, it was obvious by listening to her that those positive relationships had been established. Another study that suggested the way students are taught could influence achievement was Joseph et al. (2017). This influence could be seen when Akira talked about her Biology teacher making the subject relevant to her life.

The underlying racism involved in teacher bias and stereotypes is undeniable when looking at research and data from this study. Tamika’s talked about being

personally affected by this racism, Jordan spoke about how she felt Serenity was overlooked, and Akira often wondered what was meant by Mercedes' comment about preparing for the real world. Finally, each participant spoke of the disproportionate number of Black teachers in the gifted program, possibly unknowingly creating an environment of White privilege and enhancing the idea of Whiteness as property.

The experiences of these women with their teachers impacted their everyday lives as Black women and now as a collective helping to define that standpoint. Tamika needed to take time off from school, but was a successful office manager because of the work ethic she learned from her teachers, Jordan is not only enrolled in school, but is already a business owner because of the push she received from her teachers, and Akira discovered her love of biology in high school because of a teacher willing to take time and show her career opportunity that went beyond the textbook. Even though these are different outcomes, each participant recognized the role the gifted program had in shaping their future. The way each participant viewed how their teachers treated them ultimately influenced their experiences. Each of these women shared a common experience in the way relationships were formed with gifted teachers; however, their experiences provide for individual viewpoints. For example, Tamika had more negative experiences, especially in middle school, than the other two participants. She often felt like she was being judged by a different standard. Conversely, Jordan excelled, especially in debate, because of the encouraging actions of her teacher.

**Theme four.** All participants felt that *school employees need to learn how to better communicate with the families of Black students*. From Tamika's viewpoint, there was very little communication between the school employees and her family about the

gifted program. She stated several times that her mom “didn’t read that letter, she just trusted that the teacher was going to do what was best for me.” Jordan also had an opinion on this topic. She felt that “every student should be tested.” She believed if her mom had raised her, the communication would not have been the same as it was with her grandmother. Akira stated that she had an opportunity that her cousins did not have simply because she went to the “rich school.” She felt that this was wrong, and students in all the schools should have been given the same opportunity. Each participant felt strongly that with more communication before and after enrollment, more Black girls would enroll and stay in gifted education.

The lack of communication with families of Black students was common throughout all the participants’ interviews. This is a common problem which is mentioned in research by Ford (2020), who stated improved communication was a solution to the problem of low enrollment of Black students. Communication with Black families needed to be improved to increase not only enrollment, but also retention (Henfield et al., 2008). Akira mentioned that outreach in every school community should be a priority, and Tamika offered the common sense solution to just sit down and talk with parents about every program the school offers.

Underlying racism can hinder school employees from reaching out to parents. There is no accountability in gifted enrollment on the federal level (Ford, 2011; Ford et al., 2020), and, due to interest convergence, this lack of accountability will prolong the necessary changes needed to ensure that Black families are aware of all programs available. This lack of communication also highlights the view of Whiteness as property

in education. This became evident as the participants described of the disproportionate number of Blacks in the gifted program.

Being aware of how one's experiences and consciousness impacts the everyday life of the individual and as Black women collectively. Through the interviews, I realized that even though their experiences were unique, they were all connected to the common standpoint. Each of the participants recognized significance of change in the gifted program. Tamika spoke about how maybe her friend's life could have been different had she been recognized for gifted education, but she was never given the opportunity. While all participants agreed that communication was necessary to ensure equal opportunities for Black girls, Jordan felt the need to state that all types of giftedness need to be addressed when recruiting students for the gifted program. Teachers need to look at students as individuals, not as collective beings.

This section examined how the participants' interviews provided data that allowed the previously mentioned four themes to be developed. This section also focused on how the data from the interviews were related to the themes and how the themes were related to existing research and the underlying theories from the study, CRT and BFT. The following section will focus on the suggestions for how to improve the experiences of Black girls enrolled in gifted programs in rural South Georgia and how to increase enrollment and retention.

### **Suggestions**

This study sought to discover the experiences of three gifted Black women from rural South Georgia. The data collected covered the time before, during, and after their acceptance into gifted education. The following suggestions were taken from their

interviews as ways gifted education can be improved for Black girls in rural South Georgia.

Districts, schools, and teachers should work together to improve communication with Black families about available gifted services. The three participants in this study all acknowledged that they were fortunate because members of their family worked in the school system, and they also recognized that many of their peers did not have the knowledge their family members had because of their positions. Prior studies have also addressed the importance of districts, schools, and teachers being present in the community (Fletcher et al., 2022; Ford, 2010; Henfield et al., 2008). Suggestions given by participants on how to improve communications include making sure all families are aware of available programs by going into the community with information, working with businesses to allow school employees to talk with parents at their work place, and ensuring that all programs are fully explained before having parents sign permission for students to be tested/enrolled in the program.

Once communication is established with Black families, the importance of a support system will need to be understood. The three participants in this study acknowledged that their family provided a support system for them. Each participant noted that this support system provided encouragement for the success that was experienced. A family support system has also been acknowledged, through research, as a benefit for students who are enrolled in gifted education (Ford, 2010; Henfield 2008). Also noted in research is the lack of adequate resources that are available to schools that serve predominately low income, Black students (Fletcher et al., 2022) that can be used to help establish this support system. Through communication with Black families,

school employees can work together to ensure that families of gifted Black girls are aware of the support needed and have resources to provide that support. Suggestions given for this from the participants included parent meetings and tutoring services.

Teachers can be part of the support system if they understand the experiences of Black girls (Ford et al., 2023; Henfield et al., 2008; Middleton & Ford, 2022). During the interviews, each of the participants shared experiences they had with their teachers. Most of the experiences shared were positive experiences that made the participants feel supported and encouraged. There were a few that were not positive; and fortunately, the participants had support from the family to overcome those experiences. The participants suggested making sure the teachers understood the pressures of the gifted program and really got to know the students. This suggestion is supported in literature that addresses teachers being culturally responsive (Henfield et al., 2008; Middleton & Ford, 2022).

White privilege is a factor that affects enrollment in gifted education (Ford, 2010; Ford et. al, 2020; Henfield et al., 2008). Participants in this study also noted examples of White privilege in their enrollment process, such as limited access, limited testing, and a higher number of White students as compared with rest of the school. Suggestions offered by the participants for this study included making sure all students (and families) have access to the program, streamlined testing for all students, and educate Black families on the program and enrollment process—providing help as needed to complete any necessary forms.

These suggestions came from the three gifted Black women who participated in this study. Based on their experiences they gave ideas about ways they believed the experience for future Black girls in the gifted programs of rural, South Georgia could be

improved. These suggestions are limited to their knowledge. Just as these suggestions are limited, the study itself has some limitations and also recommendations for future studies. These will be addressed in the next section.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

The nature of qualitative research limits itself to the participants being studied (Creswell, 2014). This study is not an exception. The focus of this study was the experiences of three gifted Black women in rural, South Georgia. While each experience was unique, there were some commonalities between the participants. Each participant had a family member who worked for the school system. This is not the norm for students, whether they are enrolled in gifted or not. This study shows that having a parental figure in the school system can change the dynamics of parent/teacher relationships and increase the knowledge of available programs. Thus, the findings of this study are not intended to be generalized to all gifted students. Also, each participant also was from a rural, South Georgia community with selective demographics; therefore, the findings of this study should not be generalized to all locations.

A final limitation of this study is the number of participants. After a 6-week search for participants, only three participants met the qualifications to participate in the study. Through a review of literature, I discovered portraiture studies that were successful using a small number of participants (Berry, 2005; Howard, 2001; McCarthy, 2017). These three gifted Black women provided data that allowed the opportunity for four themes to be constructed. They also provided suggestions, based on their experiences that could improve the gifted experience for future students. However, having a low number of participants is a limitation to any research study.



Due to the exclusivity of the study, the following recommendations are made for future studies. It is recommended to continue to interview gifted Black women on the experiences they had while in gifted programs. By continuing to focus on these experiences, more data can be obtained that will help bring about change in the enrollment process and retention of Black girls who enter the program in the future. In order to acquire that knowledge of these experiences, more gifted Black women need to be interviewed, not only in South Georgia, but everywhere. Finally, by using the knowledge gained from this study combined with knowledge from previous studies, changes can be made, and the dialogue that was started can be continued.

### **Final Thoughts and Personal Implications**

When addressing the personal implications of this study, the original research goals were revisited. Maxwell (2013) suggested having personal, practical, and intellectual goals that motivated the study. I will list the implications of each of these goals in this section. The section will conclude with my final thoughts.

The personal goal for this study was to start a dialogue so I could learn from the stories of Black women who completed gifted programs in order to change the way I address issues Black girls may encounter in my classroom. Through the stories, I rediscovered the impact that teachers have on students and how important it is to make sure that, as a teacher, I share my passion for the subject and let all students in my class know that they matter. From simple changes that I make to ensure that communication is happening with parents and all students are acknowledged, other teachers could find insight and implement changes in their classroom, also. These changes would allow the

dialogue that was started with three gifted Black women to continue and inspire change in others.

Besides a personal goal, I also established an intellectual goal. The purpose of an intellectual goal is to gain insight into what is really happening (Maxwell, 2013). The information from the interviews provided me with a different perspective on how Black women experience gifted education. With this new insight, I am now able to ensure that I reach out to involve parents more in their child's education and improve communication with families. I now advocate for school-wide after hour parent meetings and even offer to meet with parents in the community. Realizing that parents want to be involved but may be unable to meet during school hours, changes the perception of a missed parent meeting.

The personal and intellectual goals are only two of the three. A practical goal was set that focused on accomplishing something (Maxwell, 2013). This study highlighted the experiences of three gifted Black women. Their stories can be presented to educators and policymakers to implement changes based on their experiences. Each of the participants shared ways that they think the programs can be improved, which include changes to the enrollment process and improved communication with Black families. Some of these suggestions were policy changes in the recruitment of students to the gifted program to ensure all students have the opportunity, teachers need to be trained in how to teach culturally diverse classrooms, teachers need to be passionate in their classroom and involve all students, and school employees need to be open to a variety of ways to communicate with families. Their dialogues can be used to start new a dialogue with necessary stakeholders about these ideas.

When starting this study, I wanted to start a dialogue. That dialogue was started with the three gifted Black women who volunteered to participate. From the interviews, a wealth of information was obtained. That information was broken down and reassembled so that I could tell their stories and share their experience with the hope of change. As I conclude this study, I am more aware of the stories and individuals that play a part in those stories. I realize there are more conversations to be started; and with knowledge acquired from this study, not only am I ready to start them, but I am ready to lead them.

## References

- A brief history of gifted and talented education. (2018). <https://dev.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/gifted-education-us/brief-history-gifted-and-talented-education>
- Adams-Byers, J., Whitsell, S. S., & Moon, S. M. (2004). Gifted students' perceptions of the academic and social/emotional effects of homogenous and heterogeneous grouping. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 48, 7-14. doi:10.1177/001698620404800102
- Baldwin, A. (1987). Undiscovered diamonds: The minority gifted child. In T. Grantham, D. Ford, M. Henfield, M. T. Scott, D. A. Harmon, S. Porcher, & C. Price (Eds.), *Gifted and advanced black students in school* (pp. 85-98). Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Berry, R. Q. (2005). Voices of success: Descriptive portraits of two successful African American male middle school mathematics students. *Journal of African American Studies*, 8, 46-62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819068>
- Bianco, M., Harris, B., Garrison-Wade, D., & Leech, N. (2011). Gifted girls: Gender bias in gifted referrals. *Roeper Review*, 33, 170-181.  
doi:10.1080/02783193.2011.580500
- Brah, A., & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5, 75-86.
- Brewer, R. M. (1999). Theorizing race, class, and gender: The new scholarship of black feminist intellectuals and black women's labor. *Race, Gender, and Class*, 6, 29-47.
- Briggs, C. J., Reis, S. M., & Sullivan, E. E. (2008). A national view of promising programs and practices for culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse gifted

- and talented students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 52, 131-145.  
doi:10.1177/00616986208316037
- Chang, D. F., & Demyan, A. L. (2007). Teachers' stereotypes of Asian, Black, and White students. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22, 91-114.
- Coleman, L. J., & Cross, T. L. (2005). *Being gifted in school* (2nd ed.). Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Crabtree, L. M., Richardson, S. C., & Lewis, C. W. (2019). The gifted gap, STEM education, and economic immobility. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 30, 203-231. doi: 10.1177/1932202X19829749
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.
- Delpit, L. (2012). *"Multiplication is for White people": Raising expectations for other people's children*. The New Press.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. The New Press.
- Elion, A. A., Slaney, R. B., Wang, K. T., & French, B. H. (2012). Perfectionism in African American students: Relationship to racial identity, GPA, self-esteem, and depression. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18, 118-127.  
doi:10.1037/a0026491

- Fletcher, E. C., Hines, E. M., Ford, D. Y., & Moore, J. L. (2022). From a bag lunch to a buffet: A case study of a low-income African American academy's vision of promoting college and career readiness in the United States. *Journal of College Access, 7*(1), 11-29.
- Ford, D. Y. (1995). Desegregating gifted education: A need unmet. In T. Grantham, D. Ford, M. Henfield, M. Scott, D. Harmon, S. Porchè, & C. Price (Eds.), *Gifted and advanced Black students in school* (pp. 23-37). Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Ford, D. Y. (2010). Underrepresentation of culturally different students in gifted education: Reflections about current problems and recommendations for the future. *Gifted Child Today, 33*(3), 31-35. doi:10.1177/107621751003300308
- Ford, D. Y. (2011). Closing the achievement gap: Gifted education must join the battle. *Gifted Child Today, 34*(1), 31-34. doi:10.1177/107621751103400110
- Ford, D. Y., Grantham, T. C., & Whiting, G. W. (2008). Culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education: Recruitment and retention issues. *Exceptional Children, 74*, 289-308. doi:10.1177/001440290807400302
- Ford, D. Y., Middleton, T. J., Hines, E. M., Fletcher, E. C., Moore, J. L. (2023). Theories and models: Anti-racist, culturally competent counselors for Black gifted and talented students. *Gifted Child Today, 46*(1), 63-69.
- 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. doi:10.1080/15210960.2020.1728275
- Fordham, S. (1993). "Those loud Black girls": (Black) Women, silence, and gender "passing" in the academy. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 24*, 3-32.

Georgia Department of Education. (2018a). Enrollment by ethnicity/race and gender.

[https://oraapp.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte\\_pack\\_ethnicsex\\_pub.entry\\_form](https://oraapp.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethnicsex_pub.entry_form)

Georgia: Department of Education. (2018b). Georgia resource manual for gifted

education service 2018-2019. <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Documents/Gifted%20Education/Georgia-Gifted-Resource-Manual.pdf>

Georgia High School Association. (2021). Reclassification GHSA 2021.

[https://www.ghsa.net/sites/default/files/documents/reclassification/GHSA\\_2021\\_Classifications.pdf](https://www.ghsa.net/sites/default/files/documents/reclassification/GHSA_2021_Classifications.pdf)

Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement. (2022). K-12 Public schools report card. <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/K12ReportCard>

Gifted education in the U.S. (2018). <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/gifted-education-us>

Glei, J. K. (2022). Axis space. <https://pin.it/5AqWybD>

Grantham, T. C., & Ford, D. Y. (1998). A case study of the social needs of Danisha: An underachieving gifted African American female. *Roeper Review*, 21, 96-101. doi:10.1080/02783199809553938

Grantham, T. C., & Ford, D. Y. (2003). Beyond self-concept and self-esteem: Racial identity and gifted African American students. *The High School Journal*, 87, 18-29.

Henfield, M. S., Moore, J. L., & Wood, C. (2008). Inside and outside gifted education programming: Hidden challenges for African American students. *Exceptional Children*, 74, 433-450.

- Hopf, S. C., Crowe, K., Verdon, S., Blake, H. L., & McLeod, S. (2021). Advancing workplace diversity through the culturally responsive teamwork framework. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 30(5), 1949–1961.  
[https://doi.org/10.1044/2021\\_AJSLP-20-00380](https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-20-00380)
- Howard, T. C. (2001). Powerful pedagogy for African American students: A case of four teachers. *Urban Education*, 36, 179–202. doi:10.1177/0042085901362003
- Howard, T. C. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. Teachers College Press.
- Huff, R. E., Houskamp, B. M., Watkins, A. W., Stanton, M., & Tavegia, B. (2005). The experiences of parents of gifted African American children: A phenomenological study. *Roeper Review*, 27, 215-221. doi:10.1080/02783190509554321
- Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Children and Youth Education Act of 1987. (2022).  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/senate-bill/303?s=1&r=9>
- Joseph, N. M., Hailu, M., & Boston, D. (2017). Black women's and girls' persistence in the P-20 mathematics pipeline: Two decades of children, youth, and adult education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 41, 203-227.  
doi:10.3102/0091732X16689045
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021) *Critical race theory in educations: A scholar's journey*. Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what is it doing in a nice field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11, 7-24.  
doi:10.1080/095183998236863



- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 47–68.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. Basic Books, Inc.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. Jossey-Bass.
- Local. (2017). School leadership team data and minutes.  
<https://www.brooks.k12.ga.us/o/middleschool/page/strategic-goals>
- Local. (2019). Regional educational service agency end of year report.  
<https://sites.google.com/cpresa.org/cpresa/about-us#h.ts78neuzyrob>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Mayes, R. D., & Hines, E. M. (2014). College and career readiness for gifted African American girls: A call to school counselors. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 4, 31-42.
- McCarthy, K. W. (2017). Full circle: A portraiture study of three successful indigenous educators and community leaders who experience personal renewal in their practice of cultural restoration. *Education Studies Dissertations*, 125.  
[https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1125&context=education\\_dissertations](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1125&context=education_dissertations)
- Middleton, T. J. & Ford, D. Y. (2022). An implementation of culturally responsive protective factors to meet the needs of girls of color in gifted and talented education. *Gifted Child Today*, 45(2), 117-121. doi:10.1177/10762175211070053

- Moore, J. L., Ford, D. Y., & Milner, H. R. (2005). Recruitment is not enough: Retaining African American students in gifted education. In T. Grantham, D. Ford, M. Henfield, M. Scott, D. Harmon, S. Porchè, & C. Price (Eds.), *Gifted and advanced Black students in school* (pp. 295-322). Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—One's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-21. doi:10.3102/0013189X017007017
- Pollock, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Everyday antiracism*. The New Press.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason and rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Smith, F. (2022). TeachThought. <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/52-favorite-inspirational-quotes-for-teachers/>
- Taylor, E., Gillborn, D., & Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *Foundations of critical race theory in education*. Routledge.
- Title I status for public schools in Georgia counties. (2021)  
<https://www.zipdatamaps.com/counties/state/education/map-of-percentage-of-title-1-status-public-schools-for-counties-in-georgia>

- U.S. Census Bureau (2019). QuickFacts: [specific counties for the setting].  
[https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/GA,earlycountygeorgiairwincountygeorgia,turnercountygeorgia,bakercountygeorgia,brookscountygeorgia/RHI12 5219](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/GA,earlycountygeorgiairwincountygeorgia,turnercountygeorgia,bakercountygeorgia,brookscountygeorgia/RHI125219)
- U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights data collection (2021). State and national estimations. [https://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimations/Estimations\\_2020\\_21](https://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimations/Estimations_2020_21)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. (2013). U.S. female population. <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/whusa13/population-characteristics/pdf/usfp.pdf>
- U.S. Geological Survey. (2022). Georgia geologic regions.  
<https://ga.water.usgs.gov/olympics/coastalplains.geol.html>
- Valencia, R. R. (Ed.). (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. The Falmer Press/Taylor & Francis.
- World Population Review. (2021). Changes in population.  
<https://worldpopulationreview.com>
- 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*, 45-6.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1137997.pdf>
- Young, J. L., Ero-Tolliver, I., Young, J. R., & Ford, D. Y. (2017). Maximizing opportunities to enroll in advanced high school science courses: Examining the

scientific disposition of black girls. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, 13, 174-183.

Young, J. L., Young, J. R., & Ford, D. Y. (2017). Standing in the gaps: Examining the effects of early gifted education on black girl achievement in STEM. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 28, 290-312. doi:10.1177/1932202X17730549

**Appendix A**  
IRB Approval



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

**PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT**

---

Protocol Number: 04180-2021

Responsible Researcher(s): Christine Hiers

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Richard Schmertzing

Project Title: *Giftedness Through the Eyes of Black Females.*

---

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:**

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator ([irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu)) before continuing your research.

---

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**

- *Upon completion of this research study all collected data must be securely maintained (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.*
- *Exempt protocol guideline permit the recording of interviews provided the recording is used to create an accurate transcript. Once the official transcript is created the recording must be permanently deleted from all recording devices used.*
- *The research statement must be read aloud at the start of the interview session. Participant's understanding and their willingness to participate, must be confirmed (recorded) by the researcher.*

*If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

---

*Elizabeth Ann O'phie*      *06.03.2021*  
Elizabeth Ann O'phie, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.  
Please direct questions to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or 229-253-2947.

Revised: 06.02.16

## **Appendix B**

### Volunteer Flyer



## Participants Needed for Doctoral Student Research Project

### Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to discover the shared experiences of Black women who completed gifted programs in rural high schools in Georgia. By participating you may help us learn more about experiences in gifted programs and improve learning experiences for young Black girls. You could help with future recruitment and retention of Black girls in gifted programs.

**Are you at least 18 years old and a Black woman who completed high school while enrolled in Gifted and Advanced classes?**

**I need YOU! Upcoming Black students need YOU!**

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Christine Hiers at [cwhiers@valdosta.edu](mailto:cwhiers@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. 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](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).





## **Appendix C**

### Introductory Letter

Christine Hiers  
8996 Dry Lake Road  
Quitman, Georgia 31643  
229-412-0756

Greetings,

My name is Christine Hiers and I am a student from the Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development department at Valdosta State University. Thank you for contacting me about participating in the study. I am truly interested in hearing about your educational experiences.

I am attaching a questionnaire that I hope you will complete to let me know a little more about you. The criteria for the study include being a Black woman from South Georgia who was enrolled in gifted classes while in secondary school. Requirements for participating include telling me your stories in a series of three interviews, which will be recorded. I would then transcribe the interviews, let you validate the data, and then use that data in my research. I would keep your identity confidential and use a pseudonym with all information.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not and are free to drop out at any point without any consequences. If you'd like to participate, please complete the attached questionnaire and email me at [cwhiers@valdosta.edu](mailto:cwhiers@valdosta.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

## **Appendix D**

### Questionnaire

## Giftedness Through the Eyes of Black Women

### Questionnaire

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “*Giftedness Through the Eyes of Black Women*”, which is being conducted by Christine Hiers, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to discover the shared experiences of Black women who completed gifted programs in rural high schools in Georgia. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the experiences of Black women in gifted programs. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing future recruitment and retention of Black girls in gifted programs. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 4.5 hours. The interviews will be audio taped in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older. Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Christine Hiers at [cwhiers@valdosta.edu](mailto:cwhiers@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. 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](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

Name:									
Address:									
Phone Number:									
Email:									
Preferred Method of Contact:									
High School and Graduating Year:									
At what grade did you begin gifted classes?									
How were your gifted classes designed? (Select all that apply)	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">A. Pull-Out Service</td> <td style="width: 50%;">B. Gifted Classes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C. Honor’s Class</td> <td>D. AP/IB Classes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E. Other</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	A. Pull-Out Service	B. Gifted Classes	C. Honor’s Class	D. AP/IB Classes	E. Other			
A. Pull-Out Service	B. Gifted Classes								
C. Honor’s Class	D. AP/IB Classes								
E. Other									
What is your college status? (Select one)	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">A. Freshman</td> <td style="width: 50%;">B. Sophomore</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C. Junior</td> <td>D. Senior</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E. Graduate</td> <td>F. Never Enrolled</td> </tr> <tr> <td>G. Other</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	A. Freshman	B. Sophomore	C. Junior	D. Senior	E. Graduate	F. Never Enrolled	G. Other	
A. Freshman	B. Sophomore								
C. Junior	D. Senior								
E. Graduate	F. Never Enrolled								
G. Other									
Would you be available to meet with me three times for about 90 minutes each if you decide to participate in the study?									

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to name of researcher at VSU issued e-mail address. This study 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](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

## **Appendix E**

### Sample Interview Questions

## Interview #1 Sample Questions

(In the nature of qualitative studies, interview questions will evolve as the interview progresses.)

Thank you for coming today. To start, I would like to ask you a few questions about your life history.

1. Tell me about your family.
2. Can you describe the schools that you attended as a young girl?
3. Thinking about your school experiences, walk me through a typical day you would have experienced.
4. How many other Black girls do you remember being in your classes in elementary school?
5. Describe how you got involved with gifted education.
6. How many other Black girls do you remember being in your gifted classes?
7. In what subjects do you consider yourself strong? (Math, English, Arts, etc.)
8. Describe the support you received during school from your family. How did your family respond to you being in the gifted program?
9. What were your friendships like for you in school? How did your friends respond to you being in the gifted program?
10. What kind of support did you receive in school? (Ask questions in order to expand answers to include school, teachers, friends, and family.)
11. What kind of support have you received in college? (Ask questions in order to expand answers to include school, teachers, and family.)
12. How did your participation in gifted education prepare/help you for college?
13. If you have older or younger siblings, how did they experience school? What is your reaction to their experiences?

## Interview #2 Sample Questions

(In the nature of qualitative studies, interview questions will evolve as the interview progresses.)

Thank you for coming for the second interview. Today, I would like to ask you questions based on the experience you had in the gifted program.

14. Describe the referral process for being enrolled in gifted classes.
15. Describe the first days of your enrollment in the program.

16. How were your classes designed? What were the dynamics like between the people in the program?
17. What about other Black girls in the program? How did this number change any throughout your time in the program?
18. How did the design of classes change as you moved from elementary to middle to high school?
19. How did the support you received from family, the school, and friends change as you moved through elementary, middle, and high school?
20. Describe any special relationships you had with teachers in the gifted program during your school years? Explain how those relationships impacted your performance in the program?
21. Describe any special relationships you had with friends in the gifted program during your school years? Explain how those relationships impacted your performance in the program?
22. Describe any memorable moments (good and bad) that you have from your time in the gifted classes? Describe those moments and how they affected you and your participation in the program?
23. Describe your experiences as a student in the gifted classes as compared to students in your school that were not enrolled in the classes?

### Interview #3 Sample Questions

(In the nature of qualitative studies, interview questions will evolve as the interview progresses.)

Thank you for coming for your last interview. Today, I would like to have you reflect of your experiences and how you made meaning of these experiences. I would also like to hear any ideas for change you may have to offer.

24. What did you think about being referred to the gifted program? How did those thoughts and attitudes change over the years? Why/why not?
25. How were you served as a gifted student? Again, how did those thoughts and attitudes change as you went through school? Why do you think that is so?
26. How did you view yourself in the gifted classes?
27. Describe your reaction to the percentage of other Black students, specifically girls, in the program?

28. Explain whether or not you missed out on something in school because you were enrolled in gifted classes? If you did, what did you miss out on? If you did not, why would others students say they did?
29. How did your views of being in the gifted program change as you went through school? What were the experiences that caused these changes to occur?
30. What do you view as being benefits of completing the gifted program? How did these experiences benefit you through the program?
31. What do you view as being challenges of completing the gifted program? How did theses experience challenge you through the program?
32. How did being enrolled in gifted classes change you as a student, person?
33. What are some recommendations that you have for recruiting more Black girls to gifted programs?
34. What are some recommendations that you have for retaining Black girls once they are enrolled in gifted classes?
35. Do you have anything else to add about your experience as a Black girl in rural communities in the south that may help other your Black girls in similar situations?



## **Appendix F**

### Introduction and Requirements

Thank you for coming today. I want to start by introducing myself. I am Christine Hiers and I have been in education for over 25 years. Most of those years were spent at Brooks County Middle School, a small rural school in South Georgia. Recently, I started working with the gifted program and quickly noticed the disproportionate numbers of Black girls being enrolled and completing the program. I want to share the experiences of Black women who have completed gifted and advanced programs in South Georgia in hopes of bringing about changes.

In order to complete this research project, I need Black women who graduated from high school within the last five years, attended school in rural South Georgia, and completed gifted and advanced classes. You will need to volunteer to tell me your stories in a series of three interviews, I would record them, transcribe them, let you check them, and then use that information in my research. I would keep your identity confidential and use a pseudonym with all information.

This is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. I will need you to sign these consent papers before starting and then we will work on a schedule of times that you are available to interview.

Thank you.

## **Appendix G**

### Interview Protocol

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “*Giftedness Through the Eyes of Black Women*”, which is being conducted by Christine Hiers, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to discover the shared experiences of Black women who completed gifted programs in rural high schools in Georgia. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the experiences of Black women in gifted programs. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing future recruitment and retention of Black girls in gifted programs. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 4.5 hours. The interviews will be audio taped in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Christine Hiers at [cwhiers@valdosta.edu](mailto:cwhiers@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. 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](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

## INTRODUCTION

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Christine Hiers. Thank you for coming. This interview involves three stages. The first one will focus on your life history. The second one will focus on your experiences in the gifted program. Finally, the third one will focus on your experiences and how you made meaning of those experiences. At that time, I would also like to hear any ideas for change that you may have. The purpose is to get your perceptions of your experiences in each of these interviews. There is no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

## TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS

If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will transcribe the interviews and allow you the opportunity to verify the contents.

*Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to name of researcher at VSU issued e-mail address. This study 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](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).*

## **Appendix H**

### Recorded Consent to Participate

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “Giftedness Through the Eyes of Black Women”, which is being conducted by Christine Hiers a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to discover the shared experiences of Black women who completed gifted programs in rural high schools in Georgia. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the experiences of Black women in gifted programs. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing future recruitment and retention of Black girls in gifted programs. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 4.5 hours. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Christine Hiers at [cwhiers@valdosta.edu](mailto:cwhiers@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. 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](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).