

Being Gifted, Black, and Female: The Experiences of Minority Girls in Gifted and
Advanced Programs in Title I Schools

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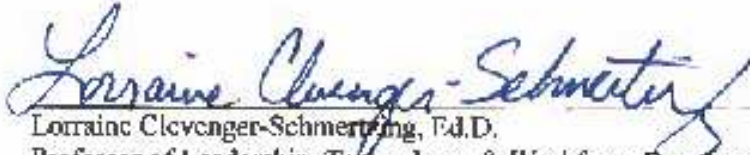
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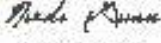
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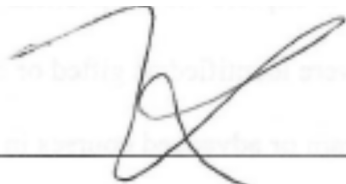
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs in Title I Miami-Dade County Public Schools using critical race theory as a theoretical framework to construct counternarratives, explore gifted programs as property of Whites, and address microaggressions committed against five minority girls in advanced programs. I also studied how the intersectionality of race and gender interacted to create a narrative profile of each profile. A bricolage of methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and research designs was used to explore the “wholeness” of these experiences. Black girls who participated were identified as gifted or on an accelerated track in elementary school, in a gifted program or advanced courses in middle school and the early years of high school, and participated in advanced programming in the latter part of high school. Each attended a Title I school in Miami-Dade County Public Schools at some point in their educational career and matriculated within 1-3 years of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using Siedman’s three-interview series, as well as single focus group and a focus group follow-up interview with each participant. In vivo, values, and descriptive coding were used for first-round coding and pattern coding for second-round coding. Narrative profiles highlighted the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs. Five themes and 16 categories formed from the study: being a token Black girl, being “woke,” resilience in the face of adversity, advanced programs as a vehicle to success, and the perception of the construct of giftedness.

Keywords: critical race theory, gifted programs, advanced programs, Black girls, Black gifted students, high performing students, intersectionality of gender and race

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my gifted daughters, Raquel and Aliyah, who live in a world where they must validate their intelligence, their disposition, and their beauty to assimilate. To you and all the gifted Black girls; break down every wall, shatter every ceiling, and exist outside of the boxes society tries to put you in.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I am an African American educator who, in a 17-year career, has taught gifted students in general education courses and an advanced studies course for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. I was in a gifted program through elementary, middle, and my early high school years. My daughter is also a gifted student, identified in kindergarten, and is now in ninth grade. We were among the few Black females identified for gifted programs in the largest school district in Florida and the third-largest school district in the nation. My experiences led me to have concerns regarding the underrepresentation of Black girls in gifted programs initially but later led me to broaden the focus of this study to racialized experiences of Black girls not only in gifted but also advanced programs. This concern prompted me to propose a dissertation to solicit the narrative accounts of gifted and advanced Black females in Title I schools in the Miami-Dade area.

I used a bricolage including narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to gather descriptions of experiences and counternarratives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) to tell the stories of these young ladies—stories that are missing from current literature. I embarked on this journey with critical race theory (CRT) as the lens through which I interpreted data and established expectations. As a result, I anticipated a need to address microaggressions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) with which these students dealt and the idea that gifted programs are the property of Whites (Barlow & Dunbar,

2010). At the core of the work is the recognition that the intersectionality of race and gender is constantly at work in Black girls' lives, as they navigate unfamiliar territory in gifted programs and advanced courses. These issues are essential to understanding the plight of Black gifted and accelerated children and need to be explored, but other systemic problems also make this work significant.

In this study, I explored the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs in Title I Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) using critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2016) as a theoretical framework to counteract the narratives of the majority. Counternarratives or counterstories illustrate the experiences of those “on the margins of society” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016, p. 133). Different types of counternarratives were explored by Solórzano and Yosso (2016) and include personal stories, other people’s stories, or composite stories. In this study, I focused on the personal stories of Black girls who participated in gifted and advanced programs with the understanding that one of my personal beliefs is that gifted programs and other exclusionary accelerated programs are the property of Whites. The argument proposed by Harris (1993) that Whiteness is a type of property was further developed by Barlow and Dunbar (2010), who added that those property rights extend to gifted programs. Gifted programs are theorized to be the property of Whites and are most often filled with White students. This notion of ownership sets up Black girls to experience microaggressions, which are “layered and cumulative forms of enacted racism” (Compton-Lilly, 2020, p. 1316) in advanced programs, which indeed happened and were part of the stories they told me. Intersectionality of race and gender interact to shape inequities, as discussed by Dixson

and Rousseau Anderson (2017). Although one cannot separate the influence of being Black and being a woman, I expected stories that demonstrated issues because of their combined presence to surface in interviews and possibly be more recognizable to me than they may be to the participants to explain further the context and importance of sharing participants' stories. Chapter I addresses the overview of the problem that begins with the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and advanced programs and reviews research questions that address the foundational tenets of CRT, including intersectionality and microaggressions, and how Black girls in these accelerated programs make meaning of their lived experiences. Furthermore, research goals are discussed to lay a foundation for the significance of the study.

Overview of the Problem

Black students are underrepresented in gifted programs nationwide (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Hines, Fletcher, Ford, Moore & Middleton, 2022; Hodges & Gentry, 2021; Hodges, Tay, Maeda, & Gentry, 2018; Luria, O'Brien, & Kaufman, 2016). Specifically in Florida, demographics for students in gifted programs, in 2022-2023, showed the underrepresentation clearly with less than one percent of students serviced being Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native, 7% Asian, 9% Black, 32% Hispanic compared to 47% White (Florida Department of Education, 2023). Despite the Florida Department of Education's efforts to recruit more *underrepresented groups*, this underrepresentation still exists. In 2002, the Florida Department of Education increased financial support for districts that followed specific criteria for identifying underrepresented groups for gifted and advanced services (Rule 6A-6.03019 Special Instructional Programs for Student who are Gifted, 2002). One of these criteria is

the screening and referral procedures for identification, which was problematic for multiple reasons.

In relation to the identification of giftedness, teachers and parents had not been adequately trained to identify the creativity aspect of giftedness, therefore, solely relied on *above-average* scores on standardized tests for identification (Allen, 2017; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Lakin, 2016; Luria et al., 2016). The 2002 criteria lowered the requirements for identification, but that was only part of the issue. Compounding this problem is that the definition of giftedness varies from state to state (Hodges et al., 2018; Luria et al., 2016; Montoya, Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo, 2016). The Florida Department of Education (2021) defined *giftedness* as a student demonstrating *superior intellectual development* (Florida Department of Education, 2021). However, the Georgia Department of Education (2021) defined the trait as being present when a person has a *high degree of intellectual ability* and/or *creative ability(ies)* and *motivation*.

With the variance in definitions of giftedness and the lack of teacher training for proper identification adding to the likelihood that disproportionate representation of minorities will continue, even with a financial incentive for schools to fix it, the importance placed on standardized test scores through the years further exacerbated that likelihood. Prior to Georgia's inclusion of creativity and motivation as measures of giftedness, giftedness was measured almost exclusively by scores on intelligence testing. Historically, Black students scored lower than Whites on intelligence tests (Luria et al., 2016; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Winsler, Karkhaanis, Kim & Levitt 2013). In addition, access to gifted programs and other advanced courses was noted by Vega and

Moore (2018) in a study on the barriers that Black and Latino males encounter in having access to gifted programs positively correlated with college readiness and acceptance. By not being identified as gifted, Black students are stunted academically and are not reaching their full academic potential (Hodges et al., 2018; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Wright & Ford, 2017). In other words, this posed a problem because many Black gifted students fall through the cracks because they are not being identified for gifted programs (Crabtree, Richardson, & Lewis, 2019).

It is apparent to Barlow and Dunbar (2010) that segregation is perpetuated through gifted programs because gifted programs are considered “property of Whites” and thus a vehicle to hinder Black students from receiving equal education. High IQ qualifications allow institutionalized segregation to persist evidenced by the underrepresentation of minorities in advanced programs. To mitigate the underrepresentation in gifted programs that exists, the Florida Department of Education enacted a rule in which minority students could qualify for gifted under either Plan A or Plan B (Florida Rule 6A-6.03019). Under Plan A, students fit most of the qualifications for giftedness according to a “standard checklist” and meet at least a 130 IQ point threshold. Some states have adopted a Plan B and universal screening to tackle the underrepresentation issue created by the phenomenon of low test scores (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Lakin, 2016). For Plan B, students must be English language learners, minority, or low-socioeconomic students with a 116 IQ point threshold (Special Instructional Programs for Students who are Gifted, 2002). However, states cannot combat other issues that hinder referral of Black students to gifted programs with legislation such as teacher biases that also manifest in the classroom.

In providing a reasonable argument for the marginalization of Black girls in gifted programs, Hérbert and Anderson (2020) argued that the prominent degradation of Black girls in gifted programs is related more to gender than race. This argument supports the findings of Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, and Leech's (2011) study, which were that teacher referrals for gifted programs are often influenced by gender. In their study, the researchers narrowed down a more extensive quantitative study of 189 teachers in Florida and Colorado to a smaller group of 28 participants. Participants were assigned to two different profiles of interest: Doreen, a Caucasian female profile, and Darin, a Caucasian male profile. The participants read a vignette on the two fictitious students and determined which student they would recommend for gifted services using a Likert scale. Bianco et al. (2011) explained that the teacher referral process they saw was gender biased because participants who were assigned the Darin profile were more likely to refer their candidate to the gifted program than the participants who read the Doreen profile. In addition, through increased interaction, like more instructional time and praise, the teachers in the study expected more from gifted boys than they did the gifted girls (Bianco et al., 2011).

Much like the findings from the Bianco et al. study, race and gender, Evans-Winters (2014) proposed, affected Black gifted girls in not only education but also socially and professionally. Socially, Black girls may experience microaggressions in the classroom related to both their race and gender. Stambaugh and Ford's (2015) hypothesis, regarding microaggressions, multiculturalism, and giftedness implied that gifted students are more likely than general education students to suffer microaggressions due to their exceptionalities within the gifted population. As a response to

microaggression, Stambaugh and Ford (2015) offered some ideas for counseling gifted students including learning what intelligence means to gifted students. More recently, Compton-Lilly (2020) described in her study on the longitudinal effects of microaggressions how students who lived in high-poverty areas and attended underfunded schools were more likely than Whites who lived in suburban areas to be subjected to microaggressions. The issue with microaggressions is that over time these aggressions helped to create a negative perception of self and affected the academic confidence of the eight Black students and their families in the study.

Microaggressions in the gifted and advanced programs can stem from a lack of representation, leading us back to the underrepresentation not only in gifted programs but also within the group that is identified as gifted. A total of 156,673 students were identified for gifted programs in Florida in the 2013-2014 school year, with 78,399 being female and 14,301 being Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Unfortunately, the data is not disaggregated further to determine how many students are both Black and female. This underrepresentation can also be seen in the literature as not much is evident in addressing the Black female, gifted population (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Barlow & Dunbar, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2014; Henfield, Moore & Wood, 2008; Hérbert & Anderson, 2020). However, the intersectionality of race and gender, the microaggressions committed against Black girls in gifted programs, and the idea of gifted programs as property of Whites create a unique narrative that should be told to create a holistic view of Black students in gifted and advanced programs. Even if high-performing Black girls are not identified for giftedness, they are still subjected to the same types of microaggressions as gifted Black girls, which is an important aspect of this

study since the participants are both gifted and high-achieving Black girls who were not identified for gifted.

Statistically speaking, Black girls are better represented in gifted programs than Black boys, but the latter dominate the literature (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Barlow & Dunbar, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2014; Henfield et al., 2008; Hérbert & Anderson, 2020). However, for Black or minority girls in gifted and advanced programs, race is confounded by gender; the intersection creates unacceptable, unnecessary, and unaddressed issues, and not knowing details of the girls' experiences leaves educators unable to address the problem effectively. The narratives presented in this work address the experiences in gifted and advanced programs in general and Black girls in gifted programs specifically. Narratives were constructed based on gathering data to answer research questions explicitly targeting the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs, their perceptions of the construct of giftedness, whether they were identified as gifted, and how the Black girls made meaning of their experiences. The subsequent section explores the researcher's goals in conducting the study following Maxwell's (2013) discussion on personal, practical, and academic goals.

Research Goals

In Chapter 2 of his book, Maxwell (2013) extensively discussed goals pertaining to conducting research. He claimed that personal, practical, and intellectual goals, helped determine the worthiness of a study and justify a researcher's efforts to complete it.

Personal Goals

Primarily, personal goals help dictate the study's topic and help to establish and maintain motivation to see the study to fruition. In this work, my personal goal stemmed

from being a gifted Black girl, raising a gifted Black girl, and teaching gifted Black students in M-DCPS. Choosing the qualitative approach also stems from one's personal goals. As a journalism major in my undergraduate studies at the The University of a Southern State, I was fascinated with storytelling. A qualitative approach allows me to lean on the skills I learned as a journalist to interview and elevate the voices of the unheard. Regardless of a researcher's personal goals, assessing how one's goals impact the findings must be completed or, at the very least, considered. Awareness of one's personal goals is more important than exclusion of them. Experiential knowledge can add color and insight to a study and provide motivation. The motivation to conduct this study is related to the lack of opportunities offered to minority gifted and advanced students in general. Peshkin (1988) acknowledged his *subjective I's* (i.e. personal beliefs, values, or bias that may impact the study) and explained how recognizing the ways they may impact the study and fuel the accomplishments of one's personal goals is important. By acknowledging my subjectivity throughout the process, I will be able to manage them. If left unchecked, my subjectivity can turn into researcher's bias, which threatens the reliability of my study.

Practical Goals

Maxwell (2013) defined practical goals as “meeting some need, changing some situation, or achieving some objective” (p. 28). Cautioning against relying on the abstract nature of practical goals, researchers are encouraged by Maxwell (2013) to truly understand how these goals impact their study. The practical goals for this study that stemmed from the academic goals are used to highlight the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs as a catalyst for change in policies and behaviors toward

Black girls in gifted and advanced programs. The contributions this study makes are linked closely to the practical goals. The research questions generated by practical goals can be included in the implications of further study or the conclusion of the dissertation. At the same time, the philosophical questions answer the *what* and *how* questions of the study. The practical goals can answer to *what end* or *what now* questions. In essence, the *what now* is a change in the perception of and the behaviors toward gifted or advanced Black females is the practical goals of this study. Using practical goals, such as a change in policy or student achievement, may not create answerable research questions, but should be considered, allowing the intellectual goals to establish how the study helps understand the topic further.

Academic Goals

Maxwell (2013) described five types of intellectual goals, which included:

1. Understanding the meaning for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in
2. Understanding the contexts within which the participants acted and the influence that this context has on their actions
3. Understanding the process by which events and actions take place
4. Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new, 'grounded' theories about the latter, and
5. Developing causal explanations (pp. 30-31)

Three of the five academic goals revolve around understanding the meaning and the context in which the participants acted. My academic goals for the study are three-fold. The first is to understand the experiences of Black girls in advanced programs

through the lens of critical race theory. Second, I also want to gain knowledge of the perception of giftedness from the perspective of Black girls in gifted programs. Lastly, I want to discover how the Black girls in gifted programs apply meaning to their experiences. The intent of this study, which is linked closely to the practical goals, is discussed in the next section.

Significance of the Study

This study was intended to provide a holistic view of the experiences of five Black females in gifted and advanced programs while at the same time contributing to a gap in the literature. Whereas the experiences of Black boys are covered extensively in the literature (Cooper, Burnett, Golden, Butler, & Inniss, 2022; Ford, Hines, Middleton, & Moore, 2023; Grantham, 2011; Whiting, 2009) this study explored the unique experiences of Black girls in advanced programs, thus building a more inclusive picture of the experiences of Black students in advanced programs. In addition, the stories of these Black girls can help to advise educators on how to support the development of gifted students. The study will also bring awareness to psychological and social-emotional issues and combat microaggressions that may become harmful to the Black girl's concept of self and educational confidence (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Barrie, Langrehr, Jérémie-Brink, Alder, Hewitt, & Thomas, 2016; Compton-Lilly, 2020; McKay-Jackson, Grumbach & Campos-Moreira, 2021; Morales, 2021;). Over time, these issues can build into life-altering macro/mega aggressions. By telling these stories, I hope to promote culturally responsive curriculum and policy reform through recommendations put forth from the findings of the study.

The pertinence of the research goals and significance of the study lies in its impact on the why of the study, which directly effects the research design, specifically the development of the research questions. Centered around the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs, the research questions discussed in the next section align with not only my desire to tell these unheard stories of Black girls that had been widely untold but also the academic goals of using CRT to understand these experiences, gaining knowledge on the girls' perception of giftedness, and how they apply meaning to their experiences. I developed three research questions and two sub-questions that addressed the research goals that I discussed in this section.

Addressing the Problem/Research Questions

Counternarratives are used in critical race theory to give voice to the stories of the oppressed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2016). Therefore, this narrative inquiry explored the “wholeness” of the Black female experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in gifted and advanced programs. Moreover, Kim (2016) chronicled that narratives allow researchers to juxtapose the world's reality to what it should be, much as counternarratives call into question the dominant narrative of Whites and recreate a reality that considers experiences from people of color (Taylor, 2016). In this study, in-depth interviews with five Black girls who were enrolled in gifted or accelerated programs and attended a Title I school in Miami-Dade County provided data to answer the following three research questions and two sub-questions:

RQ1: *Experiences in Gifted Programs*

What are the experiences of Black girls as they navigate the acceptance to and participation in gifted or advanced programs in Title I schools?

The broad concept of the study was to explore the experiences of Black girls, specifically high-school girls, in gifted or advanced programs. Being Black and female in a program, posited by critical race theorists to be designed for Whites (Barlow & Dunbar, 2010; Milner & Ford, 2005; Montoya et al., 2016), garnered a unique narrative. Not only were these Black girls trying to gain acceptance by their peers, teachers, administrators, and society, but they were also navigating their participation in the program and making meaning of their own experiences. In addition to experiencing racism or microaggressions, Black girls are also subjected to sexism and gender biases (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). To answer the first question, I had also to answer the following two sub-questions.

Sub RQ1A: Intersectionality. How does the intersectionality of race and gender shape the experiences of Black girls in gifted or advanced programs in Title I schools?

This sub-question narrows the focus of the study to one of the primary principles of critical race theory —the intersectionality of race and gender (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Black girls in gifted and advanced programs are faced with gender and racial biases. Critical race theory is an explanation of the presence of race as a construct that helps to explore issues that are confounded by both race and gender. Feminist theories were not included in the conceptualization of this study, because I wanted to prioritize the racialized experiences of the Black girls. Gender bias was previously established in the literature (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017), and attention was given to how race

intersected with it (Brah and Phoenix, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). However, it was not examined through the lens of feminist theories like Black women's thought (Hill Collins, 1990) or critical feminism (Rhode, 1990).

Sub RQ1B: Microaggressions. How do Black girls experience microaggressions in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools?

The premise that microaggressions against Blacks occur routinely in education is another principle of CRT (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Black girls face societal and teacher biases, manifesting in the identification stage for gifted programs, the classroom, and society (Anderson & Martin, 2018). These microaggressions can either be blatant or subtle and sometimes be disregarded unless acknowledged and explored. Compton-Lilly (2020) created 10 categories for microaggressions: threats, stereotypical assumptions, color blindness, discourses of fairness, ambiguity/confusion, White privilege, assumptions of universality, unfair/problematic treatment, environmental macroaggressions, and institutional/ideological macroaggressions. These 10 types of microaggressions are experienced by people discriminately, and I expected to hear of some of the microaggressions that fit into these categories in the narratives that were shared with me by the five Black girls in the study.

Microaggressions manifest in many forms, as found in Chapman's (2013) study, academic tracking of students as racial authorities, double standards, and race as unsafe spaces. Chapman (2013) conducted a study in four predominately White suburbs that share borders with a Midwest metropolitan area. The participants were 97 high-achieving students of color, 74 were Black students, and two-thirds were female. Chapman (2013) found that students in the study felt they were not supposed to discuss

race; however, when race and poverty were discussed in the classroom, they became the racial authority. Goings and Sewell (2019) explained other issues in the school because of underrepresentation. Blacks suffer from imposter syndrome and serve as racial ambassadors in their classrooms. For some students, these experiences can result in low grades and underachievement, leading to them being victims of microaggressions. At the very essence of the word, microaggressions are minor transgressions. However, what some people consider minuscule instances of racism have long-term psychological effects (Compton-Lilly, 2020). In other words, the effects of racism can impact a student's academic success (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017).

RQ2: *Construct of Giftedness*

How do Black girls in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools perceive the construct of giftedness?

The literature described giftedness as an abstract construct that can be defined not solely on the premise of intellect but also “creative or productive thinking . . . leadership ability . . . or visual and performing arts” (Marland, 1972, p. 8). Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2020) discussed other terms that were used to describe gifted students, which included: “brilliant,” “eminent,” “expectant,” “genius,” “precocious,” “prodigy,” and “talented” (p. 7) — terms intended to denote high performance. I was curious how my participants positioned these terms in their descriptions of giftedness. The girls’ perceptions of what makes them gifted and what being labeled as such means to them is vital to understanding their concept of self and academic confidence (Anderson & Martin, 2018). In addition to the impact on their academics in relation to their participation in the gifted programs, Anderson and Martin (2018) found that abstract

concepts like “perfectionism and stereotype threat may have a crippling effect on the psyche of Black gifted girls” (p. 20).

RQ3: *Making Meaning*

How do Black girls in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools apply the meaning they make of their experiences to life skills, social interactions, education, and beliefs about gifted programs and giftedness?

Merriam (2002) characterized storytelling as a meaning-making device. As vital as it is to tell the stories of the experiences of the Black girls in gifted programs, it is even more critical for them to make meaning of those experiences. For instance, Bell (1989) created Project REACH, which explored the experiences of high-potential elementary girls from different racial backgrounds to develop six dilemmas the girls experienced in the classroom. Bell explored them in her paper. Bell (1989) speculated that lower efforts and aspirations resulted from high-achieving Black girls losing self-confidence as they progressed through school. Stereotype threat, as Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Peternel (2010) reported, could be a way in which students in advanced programs make meaning of their experiences. In their study on the intersectionality of Black girls in schools, Andrews, Brown, Castro, and Id-Deen (2019) observed that many of the Black girls in their study were forced to conform to White norms in the classroom and extracurricular activities, resulting in a detrimental effect on their self-confidence, which was a direct effect of their experiences being a minority in these classrooms. The study, sponsored by the state Department of Education, a public policy firm, and a local university, explored the racialized school experiences of 70 Black girls in five public high schools in a large, urban Midwestern city. The researchers found that some of the Black girls in majority

White spaces, like advanced placement courses, thought their presence in these advanced courses created an unspoken environment with White counterparts, and this was not conducive to learning. These Black girls also indicated they had to prove themselves as truly Black among their own Black friends who were not in advanced programs. These girls reported that talking about their experiences was liberating for them. How these girls in advanced courses in Andrews et al.'s (2019) study made meaning of these experiences impacted other aspects of their lives.

The information garnered from the research interview questions could inspire policy reform and change in behavior toward minority girls in gifted and advanced programs. In their follow-up interview, the girls shared their wishes for the study's outcome, which included policy reform and culturally responsive literature.

In the current political climate, Black people are protesting for change in the judicial arena. Through the Black Lives Matter movement, “woke” ideology, and even the Me Too movement, Americans collectively have been clamoring for change. However, racial inequalities and injustices are found in all facets of society including educational institutions. A small percentage of students receive gifted services, and an even smaller percentage of those students are Black, or female, or both. Black girls in gifted and advanced programs have two distinct biases that people apply toward them — being a minority and being female — that may hinder participation in gifted programs. These biases play a role in post-secondary, internship, and career opportunities. As a result, underrepresentation is an issue that matters. Beyond the inequalities in identification, little research is being done on services received by Black girls and perceptions of Black girls presently in gifted programs, and how those experiences

impact the rest of their lives. The following section on the conceptual framework establishes my beliefs and experiences as I seek and share the narratives of my participants.

Chapter II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As an argument to justify why one wants to research an area of study, Ravitch and Riggan (2017) suggested that researchers articulate their conceptual framework or views of the circumstances related to their topic of interest. Maxwell (2013), several years earlier, expressed very similar ideas about the conceptual framework and its role in informing a study. He specified four components: experiential knowledge, pilot research; existing theory and research, and thought experiments. In this study, my experiential knowledge informed the goals for my study, and then I started reading the literature to learn more about critical race theory and what was already known about Black girls in gifted programs, after which, I began to blend the framework components and develop the research design. I started with the foundation of my study—my experiential knowledge of gifted programs and a pilot interview I conducted. In addition, I addressed the current literature on the concept of giftedness, the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs, CRT in gifted education, and challenges faced by minority girls in advanced programs.

Experiential Knowledge

My experience with gifted programs is three-fold: as a student, a mother, and an educator, although my interest in this topic was piqued over the summer, I enrolled in Dr. Schmertzling's Race, Culture, and Education course. Before the course, I had experiences

as a minority with ties to a gifted program at a Title I school. As a mother of a minority gifted student in a Title I school, and as a teacher of gifted and advanced minority students in various Title I schools, my experiences informed my dissertation significantly. Having personal knowledge of racialized experiences that my daughter shared with me, as well as my own experiences, fueled my desire to tell our stories and those of others.

My experiences with advanced programs and curriculum began in elementary school when I was identified as gifted based on my SAT scores, like most students identified as gifted in the study. I distinctly remember it being the third grade because it was the same year, I was inducted into a dance program at a neighborhood magnet school. I vaguely remember receiving an advanced curriculum through a program that was titled “academic excellence.” Instead of a pull-out program, I was exposed to an advanced curriculum particularly in math and science in a self-contained program. The girls in this study were exposed to both methods of delivery — pull-out programs and self-contained gifted classes.

In middle school, our gifted courses were held in a portable at the back of the school. I remember we played a lot of games. Throughout school, I was considered the smart girl, and that continued into high school. In high school, I was in the gifted cohort at a predominantly Black school. In retrospect, I am surprised that we had enough students for a gifted cohort unless the classes were double-coded as both gifted and honors. In my junior year, my father decided to transfer me to a magnet Tier I school. This move was a culture shock for me as I was accustomed to being surrounded by people who looked like me. My parents fought to get me into the Advanced Placement

(AP) program in addition to advocating for myself. I met with the AP Literature teacher and her concern was that I was not prepared to be in the AP program although I have been in advanced programs through elementary and middle school. In so many words she said that I did not have the prerequisite skills I needed to succeed in her class because of the education I received thus far.

My daughter had a similar experience when we moved to Georgia. When I went to enroll her in an elementary school in an affluent area, the gifted coordinator would not accept her Educational Plan from Florida. I even provided them with the results of the intelligence test administered by a licensed school psychologist, on which she scored a 160. By Florida standards, she qualified for gifted under what would be considered Plan A. However, the gifted coordinator in the Bibb County School where I was trying to enroll her wanted to retest her for the program. The gifted coordinator said that the district's policy was to retest students from other districts, but I was not convinced that the district would not accept the scores from an IQ test that a licensed professional administered. Affluent parents in Miami pay for their children to get privately tested, and the school district accepts their scores. I believed the same would be valid across districts and with other licensed professionals. Eventually, she was staffed for the gifted program after getting retested and achieving the same results as her original test.

As a gifted teacher, I was more aware of the bureaucracy governing gifted education than a general education teacher. Gifted teachers can either be certified or endorsed. However, a teacher can teach gifted students under a waiver if they do not have the credentials. Teachers have three years to get either certified or endorsed. In Title I schools, teachers may not have the credentials or the training to teach gifted

students which was the situation I was placed in when I was asked to teach a section of mixed-grade gifted students. The gifted teacher before me left in the middle of the year. There were not enough students who were identified as gifted to have pure gifted core courses, therefore, classes were double-coded as honors and gifted. Technically this loophole still satisfied the gifted students' educational plan which required the students to receive an advanced curriculum. However, the teacher if the teacher has not been trained, they may not be qualified to modify the curriculum to meet the gifted students' needs.

My experiential knowledge as a former gifted student, a mother of a gifted student, and an uncertified gifted teacher guided my questioning for my pilot interview. I know the educational jargon even if the participants did not and was able to ask them clarifying questions to understand their experiences in gifted programs better. Understanding how students are identified as gifted in M-DCPS, staffed for gifted, and delivered advanced curriculum made it easier for me to appreciate the journey of the girls as they navigated gifted and advanced programs.

Pilot Interviews

In conducting my pilot interviews, I learned a lot about myself as an interviewer, the importance of establishing the context of the interview, and the effectiveness of my questions. The first young lady I interviewed was a 16-year-old Black gifted student at a predominantly White school in the southern part of the county. She was identified as gifted in elementary school, was staffed in gifted classes through the early years of high school, and at the time of the interview was a junior in high school. After reviewing the interview transcript, I realized I explained in only one

sentence the purpose of my study. I asked the participant whether she knew about critical race theory, and when she replied in the negative, I did not clarify. The interview continued following the interview guide, but it seemed as if the participant did not understand the purpose of the study, even with prompting and anecdotal stories from me. Furthermore, I failed to ask her clarifying questions. She mentioned a racialized incident with the uniform policy in which White girls were not reprimanded for being out of uniform. Still, Black girls were reprimanded and or faced unfair consequences. However, the experiences she remembered and shared were unrelated to her experiences in a gifted program. Either the participant did not have any racialized experiences, or I did not provide enough information for the participant to relate her experiences within the context of the study.

I decided to conduct another interview even though the assignment did not require it. The first and the second participants had similar educational backgrounds in gifted programs, except that the second participant was a student in a Title I school. I prefaced the second interview with more information regarding the study and defined specific key terms for the participant. I integrated several check-for-understanding questions to ensure the participant understood what I was asking and allowed the participant to ask clarifying questions. This interview was framed to answer the research questions for the larger dissertation and intended to add information to the study and not just develop interviewing skills; it was successful. The participant remembered critical experiences in her educational journey regarding gifted programs and was able to relate her experiences to the context of the study. I unearthed a couple of themes through the course of analyzing her interview: the participant had experiences in gifted programs related to

race, and, in some cases, gender; other people whom the participant mentioned in her interview lauded the participant not only on her intellectual abilities but also her leadership qualities and athletic abilities; and the participant understood the questions and was able to share experiences related to them. These pilot interviews allowed me to test the waters with interviewing and tweak my semi-structured interview guide to garner the responses that helped to answer my research questions. The existing theory, discussed in the next section, helped to develop my research questions. Both pilot interview participants were invited to join the study once I received IRB approval, but only the first participant could fit the intensive interviews into her schedule.

Existing Theory and Research: Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed in the late 1980s, and early 1990s by a group of legal scholars, including Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Garnier, and Kimberle Crenshaw, as a response to delay societal action to civil rights legislation (Taylor, 2016). However, the Critical Legal Studies movement did not adequately address Black people's struggles in the 70s (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

Ironically to critical theorists, the promises set forth by *Brown v. Board of Education*, affirmative action, the civil rights movement, and other litigious actions toward equality were largely unfulfilled. Bell's *interest convergence* principle stated that in decision making situations, the interests of Black people would only be considered when they converged with the interests of Whites (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Taylor, 2016), thus creating an inequality that penetrates most components of society, which is not easily overcome or changed. For example, *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed to allay the foreign policy concerns that stemmed from

the treatment of Blacks in America (Taylor, 2016). As Taylor (2016) argued, legal segregation was replaced by de facto segregation in schools, and the courts are the gatekeepers.

As a result, CRT in education was spawned from the same frustrations with the unfulfilled promises of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the stagnation of the progress set forth by the Civil Rights Movement. In 1995, William Tate and Gloria Ladson-Billings published a seminal article applying CRT in education. Racial inequalities in the educational system are responsible, among other factors, for the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites in education (Tate & Ladson-Billings, 1995). Desegregation has only served to promote the privilege of Whites (Ladson-Billings, 2016).

Additionally, CRT calls into question the curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment, and school funding in favor of Whites and the inequalities created for Blacks and other minorities. The significant tenets of CRT that directly impact my study include counternarratives, the specific application of the prevalence of racism as seen in gifted programs that are essentially “property of Whites,” the continued infliction of microaggressions, and the consequences of the intersectionality of race and gender. These tenets are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Counternarratives

CRT employs storytelling, specifically, counternarratives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016), to combat a one-sided perspective of American history. Counternarratives allow critical theorists and others to infuse their experiential knowledge to transform the world by exploring new racialized realities (Ladson-Billings, 2016). The purpose of narratives in CRT is to expose and challenge the social construction of race and refute

notions of merit and colorblindness (Taylor, 2016). Chapman (2013) described colorblindness in the classroom as the “teacher’s avoidance of topics about race and the exposition of an equal = fair = equity pedagogical stance that influences individual relationships and behavioral consequences” (p. 614), which gives teachers the license to practice prejudice, race-based, and insensitive strategies under what they deem a pleasant-sounding descriptor of self. For Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2017), there are several ways in which counternarratives are used in educational scholarship. Counternarratives are primarily used as first-hand accounts of the racialized experiences of students, parents of children of color, and teachers of color.

Counternarratives are composite stories fused in fictional and actual accounts of “racialized experiences.” Finally, as analytical tools, stock stories can be used to examine CRT in education. Additionally, counternarratives are used in scholarship, not as an endpoint but as a starting point for further analysis. Counternarratives borrow from the oral tradition of storytelling in African-American culture. DeCuir-Gunby and Walker-DeVose (2013) demonstrated that counter stories are used in three ways: personal stories or narratives, other people’s stories or narratives, and composite stories or narratives. Counternarratives are used to tell other people’s stories or narratives from the lens of their experiences and often in their own words, about racism in United States institutions, like schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016). Theories like CRT can give voice to marginalized people. In my study, the experiences of the Black girls in gifted programs in Miami-Dade County Title I schools will serve as first-hand accounts as evidenced by the narrative profiles of each of the participants featured in Chapter IV.

Gifted programs as “Property of Whites”

According to Harris’ (1993) theory of Whiteness as property, there are four property functions of Whiteness: 1) the right to exclude, 2) the right to maintain rights of disposition, 3) the rights to status and reputation conferred by the property, and 4) the right to maintain use and enjoyment (p. 1731-1736). Critical theorists argue that gifted and other advanced programs were created to resegregate schools. The structure and implementation of gifted and advanced programs perpetuate exclusion, furthering the gifted status and reputation conferred to Whites (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Thus, these programs are considered the “property of Whites,” perpetuating Black second-class citizenship status (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Similarly, Barlow and Dunbar (2010) argued that segregation is perpetuated through gifted programs because gifted programs are considered “property of Whites” and, thus, a vehicle to keep Black students from receiving equal education. In the same manner, Ladson-Billings (2016) argued that Blacks had experienced a unique history with citizenship in the United States because they were “property transformed into citizens” (p. 23). Therefore, Whites are afforded certain privileges to which Blacks are not privy because they do not possess the same property rights as Whites.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions, as defined by Perez Huber and Solorzano (2015), are “a form of systemic everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place. They are: (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward people of color, often carried out in subtle automatic or unconscious forms, (2) layered assaults based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype,

accent, or surname, and (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological, psychological, and academic toll on people of color (p. 298). In CRT, racism or microaggressions are encountered by Blacks in educational institutions and society at large. The study of microaggressions challenges the idea that racism is only expressed blatantly and aggressively (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). In the macrocosm of White supremacy, microaggressions add to the context of racism. Racism is engrained and systematic in society even if people will not admit to seeing it or expressing it, according to Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2017). Therefore, microaggressions must be studied within the larger conversation of racism. In addition, microaggressions can take a toll on students' academic success, cognitive abilities, and social-emotional health (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017 McKay-Jackson, Grumbach & Campos-Moreira, 2021; Morales, 2021).

Black gifted females, specifically, can experience microaggressions because of their race compounded by their abilities (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Some examples of microaggressions based on giftedness include when a teacher says to a student: "That word is bigger than you are. Stop using big words. Are you trying to show off?" When a fellow student comments to a student who finished an assignment first: "Why don't you just slow down and let others catch up?" or "I can't believe you don't know that. I thought you were gifted" (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015, p. 194). According to Stambaugh and Ford (2015), these statements or questions send an unintended message that the gifted student is pretentious, has all the answers, or is only as good as what they know. Educational professionals can make certain assumptions about minority and low-income students in gifted education revolving around certain themes including alien in one's

land, ascription of intelligence, the myth of meritocracy, criminality/assumption of criminal status, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, and second-class citizen (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). In her longitudinal study on the accumulation of micro/macroaggressions, Compton-Lilly (2020) observed that microaggressions can seem benign but if it is constant and cumulative. It can create a burden, leading to stress, anger, and frustration. The CRT tenet of microaggressions informed the creation of research questions to solicit stories of the experiences the participants in the study may have live through. The questions that included microaggressions required the participants to reflect on their experiences and analyze whether smart remarks, questions regarding their intelligence, and childhood banter were really racially motivated.

Intersectionality

The tenet CRT, referred to as intersectionality, suggests that race intersects with other factors such as gender and sexuality and should be explored to address discrimination confounded by race and intersected by other aspects of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). In their analysis of Sojourner Truth's famous speech, "Ain't I am Woman?" Brah and Phoenix (2016) acknowledged that women are neither this nor that. Black women are neither bound by only gender or race, but both are inextricably entwined in marginalization with separate and interdependent acts of disempowerment.

In addition to exploring current literature on CRT in gifted education, the following chapter discusses the concept of giftedness and how to identify it. This chapter also define giftedness and explores giftedness from the student's perception and how others perceive giftedness. Additionally, it explores the current literature on the

identifying and underrepresenting of minorities in gifted programs. Finally, the literature on challenges faced by minority girls in advanced programs is discussed.

This qualitative study will examine the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs who attended a Title I Miami-Dade County Public Schools. I created counternarratives for each participant to better grasp their experiences in gifted programs and see how the idea of the program being the property of Whites impacts their time in the program. I also looked for microaggressions committed against these minority girls in their advanced programs.

Furthermore, I tried to determine how the intersectionality of race and gender interact to create their unique narratives. After conducting the interviews, I realized the impact of resiliency and self-efficacy on the experiences of Black girls in advanced programs. This study intended to add the experiences of Black female children in gifted programs to the currently male-dominated discussion in the literature. This study will hopefully inform educators how to circumvent psychological and social-emotional issues, combat microaggressions committed against minority-gifted students, and promote curriculum and policy reform. This literature review is composed of four sections: the concept of giftedness and what it means to minority children, identification and underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs, critical race theory in education, and challenges faced by minority girls in gifted programs, which include resiliency and self-efficacy.

Literature Review

Identifying the concept of giftedness

The Florida Department of State defined giftedness as "one who has intellectual development and is capable of high performance" (Special Instructional Programs for Gifted Students, 2002). Florida's definition of "giftedness" broadly encompasses the cognitive component but does not explicitly mention other manifestations of giftedness like other states. It is merely a variant of the federal elucidation. The Marland Report of 1972 set a precedent for gifted and talented children in the United States. It provided the first federal definition of gifted, which has remained largely intact for four decades (Jolly & Robins, 2016). The federal definition is multidimensional, including other facets of giftedness like creativity, leadership, and performing arts (Marland, 1972). The report mentioned that giftedness should be identified in multiple ways (p. 2). The Marland Report also stated that children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and potential ability in any of the following areas: 1) general intellectual ability, 2) specific academic aptitudes, 3) creative or productive thinking, 4) leadership ability, 5) visual and performing arts, and 6) psychomotor ability (p. 2).

As a *best practice* in the gifted community, Ritchotte, Suhr, Alfurayh, and Graefe (2016) supported the notion that multiple measures should be used to determine giftedness. VanTassel-Baska (2018) attempted to explain the uneven development of gifted educational programming as "a patchwork quilt" (p. 99) of policies as a result of the federal government ceding the governance of the structure and funding of gifted programs to the states. In Smedsrud's (2020) view, giftedness is a social construct and is thus subjected to variations in the definitions.

A standardized definition of giftedness is as elusive as the measurement used to identify it, but Subotnik et al. (2011) proposed that keywords in common definitions reference high ability and cognitive development. To paraphrase Subotnik et al.'s (2011) ideas about the comprehensive definition of the manifestations of giftedness in both children and adults, creative performers, creative producers, intellectual ability, and the psychosocial variables that play a role in the development of giftedness must be considered.

To qualify the term giftedness, McBee and Makel (2019) analyzed four definitions of giftedness and assessed their internal consistency by computing the giftedness rate implied by each. The four definitions analyzed were general cognitive ability, multiple criteria, Renzulli's Three-Ring model, and NAGC Position Statement (Childhood/Ability-Centric Variant). The researchers found that based on the differences in the definitions of giftedness, the number of gifted students is much more than the number of students identified as gifted. With the NAGC definition, the number of gifted students identified can be as high as 90%. On the other hand, definitions that have multiple criteria of giftedness can be less than 0.5%. Therefore, the definition of gifted to determine eligibility may play a role in the disparity between the number of gifted students and those identified as gifted. In addition, McBee and Makel (2019) found that verbal definitions may be internally inconsistent and lead to different results and implementation policies.

Compiling information from a National Association for Gifted Children conference, Olszewski-Kubilius and Clarenbach (2012) concluded, in their report, that a barrier to participation in advanced programs for low-income, high-ability students is the

concept that giftedness is "inborn, fixed, and unchangeable" (p. 9). However, many states include potential in their definition. Potential connotes that giftedness can be fostered with access to a challenging curriculum. However, underrepresented students may not demonstrate potential on intelligence tests and thus will not be identified to receive a challenging curriculum to enrich their learning opportunities. As a suggestion, Wright and Ford (2017) believed that states should adopt the word potential in their definitions and work to get children enrolled in rigorous early childhood programs that develop language, psychomotor development, and personal-social characteristics to prepare them for gifted programs. How others perceive giftedness is essential to the representation of Blacks in gifted programs, but how gifted students perceive giftedness and intelligence is essential to the motivation and academic success of the student. The following section will delve into the student's perception of giftedness and intelligence and how that affects their social-emotional well-being and overall academic success.

Student's Perception

Gifted students interviewed by Coleman, Micko, and Cross. (2015) indicated that being labeled as gifted can cause embarrassment, bullying, and disappointment for not performing as expected; however, the advantages include access to a more challenging curriculum and other educational opportunities. Coleman et al. (2015) surmised that having a gifted label has advantages and disadvantages for a child. Gifted students generally told Coleman and colleagues they wanted to be "treated as normal" (p. 362). Still, for minority students, the literature indicates the feeling of being different is amplified. (Coleman et al., 2015; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Snyder, Barger, Wormington, Schwartz-Bloom, & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013).

In their study of gifted students' perceptions of the gifted label, Meadows and Neumann (2017) found that contrary to the literature's suppositions that students either reject or accept the gifted label, students both accepted and rejected the label. The researchers interviewed 25 students in two eighth-grade U.S. History classes individually and in a focus-group setting. The researchers asked the participants about their definition of gifted, the differences between gifted and other courses, and how gifted affected them socially. For example, students in the study described giftedness as a "club" (p. 150) that anyone can join if they meet the requirements. Also, "64% viewed giftedness in terms of performance, and 36% viewed it as a trait" (p. 150). Finally, the researchers questioned how the difference in how gifted students define giftedness and how researchers define giftedness can impact a study, but further research is needed to answer their questions.

Black students accepting or rejecting the gifted label was broached by Ford et al. (2008), who found it was based on social variables that can impact student motivation and engagement. By accepting the gifted label, Black students were deemed as acting contra to the African American community's perception of success and may be considered conformist to the European American ideals (Coleman et al., 2015). Gifted programs, along with other programs of academic success, were equated with Whiteness for Black students. From Ford et al.'s (2008) perspective, the perception of "acting White" hinders Black students' educational opportunities. "Acting White" is defined loosely as "getting good grades, being intelligent, speaking standard English, dressing in certain ways, having White friends, and other attitudes and behaviors" (Ford et al., 2008, p. 222). "Acting Black" conversely is associated with "poor academic orientation, low intelligence, high aggressiveness, being highly antisocial and anti-authority, liking hip-

hop music (rap, specifically), and dressing in urban clothes (that is, clothes that are not considered acceptable or professional by mainstream standards)" (Ford et al., 2008, p. 223). In a descriptive and exploratory study of 372 Black gifted students in two school districts in Ohio, Ford et al. (2008) found that the Black students perceived acting White positively, and all but one student found that acting Black had negative perceptions.

Tan, Yough, Desmet, and Pereira (2019) explored middle school students' general beliefs about intelligence, beliefs about giftedness, and how the former and the latter were related. Based on the mindset framework, Tan et al. (2019) wrote that beliefs about intelligence and giftedness are related and are based on whether one has an incremental or entity belief about intelligence. The researchers surveyed 52 predominately White gifted students and included a vignette task about their implicit beliefs about giftedness. The six profiles in the vignette task highlighted children from different age groups to determine whether students considered an age in their attributions. Then, three sets of open-ended questions followed regarding their perception of intelligence and giftedness. The researchers found that more than half of the students perceived that giftedness was related to intelligence and motivation, but that perception was dependent on the child's age range with the ability to "grow intelligence" (Tan et al., 2019, p. 65) being more prevalent at a younger age.

Other's perception

Students' thoughts on giftedness are important, but there is also a body of work out there that addresses the perception others have of it as well. Florida State law allows for parents to dispute any issues related to gifted eligibility heard in a process called a special education due process hearing (Henry & Karanxha, 2018). One such case called

into question the validity of the school psychologist's determination of a 7-year-old child not being eligible for gifted versus a private psychologists' findings that the child was indeed qualified for gifted. The case considered the testimony of the child's gifted teacher and the general education teacher. The child "thrived" in the gifted teacher's class, and the teacher valued his independence. On the other hand, the general education teacher described the child as "distracted and inattentive" and disliked his "obsessiveness" with writing. The judge in the case valued a more holistic approach to determining the eligibility for gifted services, even considering the parent's input. The judge ruled in favor of the child receiving gifted services because the private psychologist had more experience testing children for gifted both as a school psychologist and private practitioner. This case highlights how the perception of giftedness and teacher bias plays a role in determining giftedness.

Additional work in this area is expanded on the foundational work of Russell (2018) who examined how high school teachers viewed giftedness and gifted education. First, Russell analyzed the teachers' assumptions about giftedness and gifted education, attitudes about giftedness and gifted education, and practices that referenced the policies and procedures currently in place regarding giftedness and gifted education. The researcher used a grounded theory study to provide seven high school teachers in a large suburban school district in Texas with an open-ended survey on various gifted practices.

The second phase of Russell's (2018) study involved an individual semi-structured interview. Four themes emerged from data analysis: inherent giftedness, classroom differentiation, training and programming, and advocacy for the gifted.

Russell (2018) found that some respondents thought giftedness had to be fostered to reach its full potential and that gifted children should be challenged. In addition, respondents believed that parents lacked the knowledge to truly advocate for their gifted children because they do not understand how giftedness manifests. The researcher also found that respondents' beliefs about giftedness mirrored the traditional criteria, but the lack of any gifted pedagogical backing is a concern. The perception of giftedness can create biases that along with other disparities can affect the identification of minority students in gifted programs which is discussed in the next section.

Identification and underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs

How giftedness is perceived in today's society plays an essential role in the identification of minority students. This perception leads to underrepresentation in gifted programs based on several factors, including disparities in intelligence testing scores, teacher biases in identifying and nominating Black students for gifted programs, and parents' lack of knowledge regarding gifted education. The literature concerning identification and underrepresentation will be discussed in the following section.

Specifically, Title I school's gifted programs historically underrepresent American minority students (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Hines et al., 2022; Hodges et al., 2018; Hodges & Gentry, 2021; Lakin, 2016; Luria et al., 2016; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Zhanova, Rule, & Stichter, 2015). Studies showed that disparities existed when identifying gifted minority students. Most states adopt identification criteria that include standardized and IQ test scores to which researchers attribute the disproportional numbers. Some states lowered the IQ point threshold for students considered English language learners and received free or reduced lunch to close the gap (Card & Giuliano,

2016; Lakin, 2016). Researchers cited the parent and teacher referral process as another contention (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Lakin, 2016; Zhbanova et al., 2015). Parents and teachers have not received the necessary training to identify minority students' giftedness. Additionally, cultural, socioeconomic, and language biases may exist that further hinder the process (Allen, 2017; Luria et al., 2016; Zhbanova et al., 2015).

States combatting the identification issue by implementing universal screening, usually in second or third grade was the focus of Card and Giuliano's (2016) study. The researchers used "de-identified longitudinal records of students who were enrolled in the District for third grade between 2004-2011" (p. 13679). A pre/post difference or interrupted time-series approach was used to analyze the data. Data was also analyzed from other districts as a comparison for the targeted district. After implementing universal screening, the researchers found that IQ test scores rose by eight percentage points, making it possible for more students to qualify under Plan B to be eligible for services. In addition, the researchers found that minority students, specifically Blacks and Hispanics, free and reduced lunch students, English language learners and girls were under-referred for gifted programs.

African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and English language learners lack proportional gifted representation (Allen, 2017; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Hodges et al., 2018; Lakin, 2016; Luria et al., 2016; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Warne & Price, 2016; Zhbanova et al., 2015). Researchers hold identification inequities responsible for this phenomenon, primarily when states implement intelligence as an identification criterion (Luria et al., 2016). A critical problem identifying gifted minority students, as stated by Zhbanova et al. (2015), is when

diverse groups do not historically do well taking standardized assessments. Teachers overlook identifying minority students earlier because standardized testing begins in third grade. However, researchers cite bias with standardized testing based on intelligence rather than creativity or critical thinking skills (Luria et al., 2016) as part of the problem. Furthermore, overlooking gifted minority students can have lasting effects on the child—including regression to the norm, boredom, or unhappiness, and limited gifted ability development (Zhbanova et al., 2015).

Some states lower the IQ threshold providing representational equity (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Lakin, 2016). Some states comply with laws that mandate non-disadvantaged students receive a 130-point minimum gifted standard IQ qualification score. However, economically disadvantaged students, specifically students receiving free-or-reduced lunch and English language learners, may qualify for Plan B's 116-point IQ threshold. Lakin (2016) cautioned districts and states against assessment tools and cut scores that produce false positives and false negatives. Low cut scores may increase the eligibility pool and tax district psychologists administering follow-up assessments determining whether the child requires gifted services. Conversely, high cut scores may overlook potentially gifted students. Lakin (2016) also suggested that high percentages of Plan A students who do not meet the threshold may get privately tested and subsequently placed. However, Plan B students, who do not meet the threshold, may not be able to afford private testing. IQ tests favor students who display solid academic skills, while the other criteria for giftedness - creativity, artistic ability, and leadership capacity - go primarily ignored or untested.

Zhbanova et al.'s (2015) explored the validity of identifying students for gifted programs through classwork rather than traditional methods that have been proven not to benefit minority students. The results of Zhbanova et al.'s (2015) study conjectured that an alternative identification method which uses special creativity and leadership curriculum materials would be able to identify students for gifted that normally would not be identified for gifted. Two minority students out of the eight elementary-aged children who participated in the African Animal enrichment program, the enrichment project used by participants in the study, were recommended for gifted services. The program included a pre/post-test instrument that measured their knowledge about eight African animals. Then, the eight students and other classmates took a sociogram survey based on the Alpha Project Peer Nomination Stimulation. The survey asked students to identify one to three classmates who fit predetermined roles. Additionally, identify three classmates with whom they would like to work and play. After their initial interview about the eight African animals, students were offered three levels of the instruction following Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model. Students read books about African animals, choosing one for in-depth study. Next, the 10 Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT) Breadth Thinking Skills were included with the enrichment lesson, and finally, students had to create an authentic project about what they learned. Throughout the process, the teacher took observational notes as well as the researchers. As a result, two Black students identified for gifted services were referred because of their intellectual and creative skills and leadership skills. The researchers found that this project focused on the student's leadership skills for referral to gifted services instead of just intellectual methods and thus identifying students who would have gone unidentified otherwise.

Creativity tests were used in Luria et al. (2016) study as an identification method because bias may exist with IQ tests where minority students score lower than Caucasian and Asian-American students. However, creativity may be challenging to measure and assess. In a meta-analysis of 54 studies framed around NCLB, which included 191,322,595 students, Hodges et al. (2018) concluded that identifying minority students solely using IQ scores can be based on race. Identification assessments, including the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT) and Raven Standard Progressive Matrices (RAVEN), have a purpose different from simply testing intelligence, which encompasses assessing problem-solving, reasoning, and observation skills. Creativity, as warned by Luria et al. (2016) is difficult to measure. Other identification methods included a non-verbal component of the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). However, in an article on the history of past efforts to address underrepresentation, Peters and Engerrand (2016), contended there is no score difference. Therefore, using a different test did not guarantee proportional minority gifted representation.

Also, Luria et al. (2016) and Lakin (2016) both agreed that bias might also exist using teacher nomination or referral. Academic ability, socioeconomic status, and the teacher's gifted perceptions influence teachers (Luria et al., 2016). Questions may arise regarding the teacher's reliability in identifying diverse cultural backgrounds, which Hodges et al. (2018) challenged in their study, even though teacher nomination did identify English language learners who underperformed on standardized tests. Student behavioral issues impact gifted identification because the teacher's gifted student paradigm does not match the child's disruptive behavior (Luria et al., 2016). Similarly American teachers, as depicted by Zhbanova et al. (2015) responded to a child's failures

rather than their giftedness. Language can also be a hinderance in identifying English language learners as gifted, but Allen (2017) stated that code-switching can indicate giftedness. Parental nominations are equally wrought with issues mostly because parental awareness of school initiatives is not equal among racial or socioeconomic groups (Lakin, 2016). However, the accuracy displayed using parental judgments regarding early identification is spot on, Zhbanova et al. (2015) found that standardized test performance later supports the parent's assertions. Both teacher and parent nomination, however, are cost-effective methods of identification.

Furthermore, universal screening constitutes a less cost-effective but arguably more successful identification method (Lakin, 2016). This method, however, is not prevalent nationwide. Instead, students referred by parent or teacher nomination or standardized test scores undergo screening procedures. However, universal screening entails that all students in a grade level are screened for giftedness. A student who is identified through this method then receives an additional assessment for placement. Card and Giuliano's (2016) findings showed a 174% increase in the odds of being identified as gifted among African Americans, Hispanics, females, low socioeconomic status, and English Language Learners. However, this method of identification is costly and taxing on district psychologists (Lakin, 2016).

Minority gifted underrepresentation persists as a problem in the United States (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Hodges et al., 2018; Lakin, 2016; Luria et al., 2016; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Zhbanova et al., 2015). Disparity exists regardless of the identification method (Hodges et al., 2018). However, universal screening and group-specific norms, as proposed by Peters and Engerrand (2016) could help close the gap. States,

nonetheless, rely heavily on intelligence, including standardized and IQ tests (Hodges et al., 2018). Zhanova et al. (2015) insinuated that minority students are most likely identified for special education programs rather than advanced programs, and that theory serves as a reason for underrepresentation.

Also, screening can occur only if student is nominated (Lakin, 2016). Parent nominations and teacher referrals are used widely in most districts because it is cost-effective but can be biased. Nomination and referrals, as cited by Card and Giuliano (2016) are a substantial reason for underrepresentation. Although the disparity is widespread and will take years to close, it is worth closing to provide equitable education for minority students (Hodges et al., 2018).

How giftedness is defined is imperative to increasing the underrepresented and underserved population of minority gifted students (Siegle et al., 2016). In their meta-analysis, Hodges et al. (2018) rationalized that if only intelligence measures were used to determine giftedness, students from underrepresented populations might not be identified because IQ tests are historically and racially biased. Teacher nominations may conform to a more narrow or traditional definition of giftedness (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Crabtree et al., 2019; Lakin, 2016; Smedsrud, 2020, Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

In their longitudinal study of Black males in Miami-Dade County Public School, Winsler et al. (2013) advised that Black children were less likely to be identified for and retained in gifted programs. Winsler et al. (2013) used data from the Miami-School Readiness Project to track the academic journeys of 6,926 Black males who participated in the project at age four and attended either an M-DCPS pre-K program or a community-based childcare facility then went on to attend M-DCPS schools. The authors discussed

the criteria for gifted classification in M-DCPS, which includes a Plan A and Plan B method of identification and the ideal that once a child is classified as gifted, the child is always considered gifted. In addition, the types of assessments that the researchers analyzed were discussed in detail and included Weschler, Stanford-Binet, DAS, and KABC. The researchers found that 453 (6.5%) Black males were identified as gifted between kindergarten and 5th grade. However, most of them were identified in first and second grade, the years where standardized testing began. Also, researchers noted that emergent literacy in kindergarten, children being older upon entry into kindergarten, and males from homes where a language other than English was spoken were early predictors of eventually being identified as gifted. Winsler et al. (2013) noted that longitudinal and qualitative research along the same vein of this study should be conducted.

In contrast, teacher biases affect the nomination of girls for gifted programs, Bianco et al. (2011) suspected, and may partially account for the underrepresentation of girls in gifted and advanced programs. To investigate this issue, they studied 189 participants who were P-12 teachers from Colorado and Florida. Teachers were randomly assigned one of two conditions: a Caucasian male student with gifted characteristics and an identically described Caucasian female student with gifted characteristics, then given six Likert-scale statements with a survey addendum at the end of the open-ended study question. The findings of the study suggested that nomination to gifted programs was influenced by gender. Thus, gender biases in teacher nomination of girls to gifted programs directly support my proposed study and is confounded by racial biases. It is this confounding issue that led me to use CRT as a theoretical framework. In the next section, current literature concerning CRT in gifted education will be discussed.

Critical Race Theory in gifted education

For the past two decades, CRT scholars in education have theorized, examined, and challenged the ways in which race and racism shape schooling structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, Parker, Solorazano, & Lynn, 2005, p. 3). Students coming from marginalized groups based on race, sex, and socioeconomic status have more negative experiences than White students, many of these students are low achievers and end up being placed in special education programs or are underrepresented in gifted and AP programs. Therefore, gifted educators need to provide more equitable educational experiences for their students and continue to look at CRT at a time when school leaders are asking what roles they can play in fighting microaggressions and intersectionality of race and gender.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) heralded in a new era of legislation to combat institutionalized racism (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in which the Court ruled that U.S. state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools are unconstitutional, even if the segregated schools are otherwise equal in quality. Although segregation in schools was abolished judicially, de facto segregation became embedded in the fabric of American education (Horsford & Grosland, 2013). Equal opportunity became a mantra of the civil rights era; however, this phrase did not account for the remediation that Black students needed to be on par with their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Horsford and Grosland (2013) maintained that Black schools during the school segregation era were safe havens for Black children to escape the blatant racial discrimination that was the byproduct of integration.

After *Brown v. Board*, a host of other issues with the education and achievement of Black students were created, including tracking and a higher percentage of students in special education programs. Arguing against school desegregation, Ladson-Billings (2016) cited that it only worked to the advantage of Whites. Critical race theorists like Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) believed that Black students are more segregated today than during the pre-Brown era. Desegregation has resulted in the loss of Black teaching and administrative positions (Ladson-Billings, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Black students, as cited by Taylor (2016), due to school districts offering neighborhood preferences, which perpetuated rather than abolished segregation, often chose not to or did not attend schools with Whites. Furthermore, advanced programs, like gifted, AP, IB, and honors, tend to re-segregate schools as they were created as a property of Whites (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). *Tracking programs* created tension in schools along with colorblind discourse (Chapman, 2013). As a result, Black students tend to remain on the lower track. On the other hand, Whites and very few Blacks are granted access to higher curriculum tracks like gifted programs.

Conducting focus group interviews with 97 high school students in four predominately White suburban school districts, Chapman's (2013) questions focused on high school, relationships, and academics. When students of color are the minority in class, other students consider them the racial authority when issues of race and poverty arise, which makes them feel even more marginalized. Students in the study also mentioned the unfair practice of double standards. Students of color who label inequities as racism were dismissed or punished by administrators.

As the primary researcher, Anderson (Hérbert and Anderson, 2020) used her

experiences as a gifted minority female student in Title I schools and her advocacy of equitable practices in gifted education to assert that there is a gap in the research concerning the experiences of gifted Black girls; specifically, the marginalization and intersectionality of Black girls in gifted programs. Hérbert and Anderson (2020) supported their assertions by using the theoretical frameworks of the critical race theory and using the Frasier's Talent Assessment Profile tool. In addition, they used an autoethnographic lens to share the ethnographic narratives of three gifted Black women with doctoral degrees and their experiences in K-12 gifted programs. The authors found that the participants' narratives supported the theoretical assertions in the literature regarding the barriers that Black girls have in schools. They also used the findings to develop tools for identifying and developing Black girls in gifted programs. Finally, the researchers recognized that more research needs to be done to address how Black girls' experiences are similar or different from those of Black boys.

The academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents in predominately White schools were explored by Johnson (2019) using critical race theory. The author argued that these experiences were shaped by racial identity, parental socialization, and school connectedness. The researcher used a narrative impurity methodology while interviewing 10 gifted Black females in predominately White schools in a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. The researcher saw themes in the narrative related to the following tenets of CRT: intersectionality, Whiteness as property, counter-storytelling, and resiliency. It was recognized that further research be done to explore other constructs of Black girls' identities, to conduct similar studies in other

geographic regions, to use mixed-method research design to quantify the data on racial identity, and to explore the experiences of gifted Black girls in other types of schools.

The following section will expound on the challenges faced by minority girls in gifted programs. These challenges are dichotomous for Black girls navigating the world not only as minorities but also as females. This disparity can cause issues with self-esteem and perfectionism. In addition, stereotype threat is present in and out of the classroom.

Challenges faced by minority girls in gifted programs

Minority girls face many challenges in gifted programs. Ford (2014) surmised that the success of Black girls is simply in their resilience. However, as early as fourth grade, high-achieving girls begin to lose confidence and start sliding towards the norm for acceptance (Bell, 1989). Girls tend to underachieve because it conflicts with feminine roles (Bell, 1989; Scott, 2014). These stereotypical roles also influence how girls are viewed in the corporate world (Mayes & Hines, 2014; Scott, 2014). Black girls are falling through the cracks (Ricks, 2014). Educational research generally focuses on two categories of participants: Black males and White females (Andrews et al., 2019). As a result, the plight of the Black girls is largely untold.

Before delving into the plight of Black girls in advanced courses, it is imperative to understand resilience as it relates to gifted Black youth. “Individuals who cope effectively with internal and external stressors are considered resilient” (Ford, 1994). Stressors can be quantified by frequency, intensity, duration and qualified the co-occurrence, kind/type, timing, and focus. Ford (1994) draws attention to the fact that resilience is specific to individuals and can be affected by culture. Being accused of

acting White is a barrier that Ford (1994) described which can cause social isolation and ostracism in gifted classes. Educators can nurture resilience in Black gifted students by providing them with role models and mentors that look like them and academic enrichment by older Black students. In addition, providing counseling to cope with navigating the differences between White spaces, being cognizant of Black student and White student learning styles, and practice social competence by learning to be bicultural (Ford, 1994).

Gifted Black girls must navigate three different environments as described by Evans-Winters (2014): male-dominated, White society, and their environments. Navigating successfully through these environments makes them resilient. The Female Achievement Model of Excellence (F2AME), a model created by Donna Ford, helps Black girls combat the microaggressions they may experience by "increasing resiliency, self-efficacy, racial and gender pride" (p. 16). The village approach is recommended by Rogers, Maxwell, and Robinson (2018) to teach high-achieving, low-income minority students. They pointed out that building resiliency in these students is influenced by "family, school, community partnerships, teacher perceptions; parental expectations, attitudes and approaches; and challenges" (p.47). In addition, resilient girls are involved in their community, religious organizations, or extracurricular activities (Evans-Winters, 2014). In his study of 10 Black male academic achievers and their families, Allen (2015) found that the boys' fathers played a significant role in encouraging resilience in the face of White dominance.

On the contrary, this resilience was also seen in Black girls. Often gifted or high-achieving Black girls are confronted with intelligence as property of Whites (Andrews et

al., 2019). In Andrews et al., (2019) study, many participants reported that Black girls do not belong in gifted classes. Conversely, Black girls may be accused of "acting White" by their group of friends (Coleman et al., 2015; Ford, et al., 2008; Henfield et al., 2008; Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010; Lee et al., 2010). This conformist attitude can cause Black students to feel alienated by their gifted classmates and by their peer group (Ford et al., 2008). The phenomenon of acting Black (Henfield et al., 2010; Henfield et al., 2008) also poses a problem in the classroom. White students who act Black are perceived as having an affinity for the culture, while Black students who act Black are considered ghetto (Henfield et al., 2008, p. 441).

Moreover, Henfield et al. (2008) reported five dimensions attributed to acting Black: academic/scholastic, aesthetic/stylistic, behavioral, dispositional, and impressionistic. There is a conflict with the effect of self-esteem in the success of Black gifted girls. Whether Black girls had high self-esteem or low self-esteem depends on their perception of their own racial identity (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2014). In her article about gifted Black girls and resilience, Evans-Winters (2014), expounded that self-esteem is based on a dual awareness of both their Black homes and White-dominated society.

However, Buckley and Carter's study (2005) about the Black girls' gender roles, racial identity, and self-esteem suggested that racial affiliations alone do not constitute high self-esteem. In the study, 200 Black high school girls from selected New York City public high school participants completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory Short-Form to measure gender roles and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale to assess how children feel about themselves. In addition, the RIAS-L was used to measure racial

identity. Black girls' self-esteem was based on the strength of their racial identity (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Girls that were proud to be Black and did not define themselves based on White standards had positive self-esteem. School counselors, Mayes, and Hines (2014) believed, may play a profound role in being an additional support system and helping navigate internal and external negative perceptions to perfectionism.

Additionally, studying the psychological effect of perfectionism on gifted Black girls has remained relatively unstudied (Anderson & Martin, 2018). Not only are Black girls affected by perfectionism in gifted programs, but the effects of perfectionism are also confounded by race. Perfectionism can range from normal to neurotic, marked by excellence and high expectations on one end of the continuum and depression and anxiety on the other end (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010; Margot & Rinn, 2016). The concept of perfectionism may be more robust in gifted children because of the standards they place on their academics (Margot & Rinn, 2016). However, those standards can be detrimental to their socio-emotional health (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010) and affect internal and external perceptions, achievement, and motivation (Anderson & Martin, 2018).

Furthermore, stereotype threat can also affect Black gifted girls in and out of the classroom. In their definition of stereotype threat, Inzlicht, Tullett, Legault, and Kang (2011) said that "the apprehension targets feel when negative stereotypes about their group could be used as a lens through which to judge their behaviors" (p. 227). Anderson and Martin (2018) concluded that being in a gifted program can be seclusive for Black girls because of underrepresentation. In examining how certain stereotypes had

a psychological effect on 144 Black girls, Barrie et al.'s (2016) study found that racial stereotypes negatively affect Black girls. Stereotype threat can cause fear of failure and limit opportunities for Black gifted girls (Anderson & Martin, 2018).

Black girls sharing their experiences in gifted programs will help to further explore and identify other challenges delineated in this section. Resiliency combats some of the obstacles – specifically loss of confidence, regressing toward the norm and navigating three different environments – faced by Black girls in gifted programs (Allen, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2014; Ford, 2014). Black girls often feel they do not belong in gifted classes (Andrew et al., 2019). Their peers may perceive them as “acting White” to assimilate into their adopted environment (Ford et al., 2008). Having an affinity to one’s race and culture builds self-esteem and resiliency (Buckley & Carter, 2005), but “acting Black” in a White-dominated environment may further alienate Black girls in gifted classes (Henfield et al., 2008). Exploring the intersectionality of race and gender will give insight to educators on how Black girls navigate these environments and the support that may be needed to facilitate their success. Perfectionism in Black gifted girls is confounded by their race, gender, and ability (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010; Margot & Rinn, 2016) and can affect their social-emotional health and academic achievement. The perception of how gifted Black girls view the concept of giftedness, among other things, is essential to keeping perfectionism and stereotype threats in check. Being underrepresented in gifted classes can cause stereotype threats (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Barrie et al., 2016), negatively affecting Black girls. These challenges' negative effects on the academic, emotional, and psychological well-being of Black girls in gifted programs can be detrimental to their development.

Research from the literature review explored in depth the definition of giftedness, how students perceive giftedness, and how others perceive giftedness. How giftedness is defined can determine how students are identified for gifted programs and explain the under-representation of minorities in said programs. The Marland Report of 1972 set the precedent for defining giftedness, but states chose to piecemeal the federal definition rather than applying the denotation as is (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). Potential should be included in the states' definition of giftedness (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012) because it means that more minorities may be identified. School districts also have the autonomy of deciding how students are identified (Luria et al., 2016) described how states lower the IQ requirements for ELL and low socio-economic students because minority students historically score lower than White students on standardized or IQ tests. Creative tests (Luria et al., 2016), creativity and leadership curriculum materials (Zhanova et al., 2015) and universal screening (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Lakin, 2016) were suggested as alternatives to traditional testing.

My study is being conducted through the lens of critical race theory. Whereas the conceptual framework section gave a cursory overview of the central tenants of CRT, I explored the current literature regarding CRT in gifted education in the literature review. Critical race theorists (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) argued that gifted and advanced programs were covered to explore the long-term effects of microaggressions committed against Black girls in gifted programs and challenges faced before entering gifted programs due to the intersectionality of race and gender.

In short, the following section will cover the methods, including research design, setting, participants, relationship with participants, and participant selection. In addition,

to discuss the methodology, which includes data collection, data analysis, data presentation, validity, and ethical issues.

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, a bricolage of methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and research designs was used to create what Ary et al. (2019) metaphorically described as a “quilt” (p. 387) with the bricoleur, or researcher, being the “maker of quilts” that weaves these concepts together. I used this approach to create a narrative that raised the voice of the participants in the study to a level at which their experiences could be heard. A bricolage, as defined by Kim (2016), “delves into multiple methods of inquiry as well as diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various research design elements” (p. 259). As a bricoleur, I was “willing to look through a kaleidoscope” (Kim, 2016, p. 260) that included aspects of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), Kim’s (2016) structure of stories, and CRT’s components of counternarratives (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017) to gather, analyze, and present interview data of the experiences of five Black girls who participated in gifted and advanced programs in M-DCPS in Chapter 4.

As a product of M-DCPS’ gifted program as a Black female, the mother of a gifted daughter, and a former gifted teacher in a Title I school, this study is very personal, which will be discussed in the final validity section of this chapter. Before that, I describe the research design of which I gave a preview in the paragraph above, but in the following section, I will discuss why a bricolage of Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000)

aspects of narrative inquiry, Kim's (2016) structure of stories, and CRT's counternarratives (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017) was appropriate for this study. Set against the backdrop of the melting pot that is Miami, the specific participant demographics were chosen as a result of my experiential knowledge. Data was collected using a demographic questionnaire, the Siedman (2013) three-interview series, a focus group interview, and notetaking and memoing. In this chapter, each phase of the research including how I presented the data in the next chapter is described in detail.

Research Design

Bricoleurs, in their creative weaving of various research designs, must be aware of each design's function and be able to justify how the elements fit together (Kim, 2016). Employing temporality and spaciality from narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the concept that stories have a beginning, middle, and end (Kim, 2016), and the usage of counternarratives in critical race theory (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017), I pieced together these elements as Merriam (2002) suggested for the purpose of creating stories to understand the human condition. Additionally, narrative inquiry allows researchers to act as an observer and shift their understanding within the context of the experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), making this an appropriate method for me to follow.

The participants, thus, shared narratives of their racially and gender-based experiences in gifted and advanced programs, microaggressions outside of the classroom, and the impact of these experiences on their academic journey. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed doing so within a "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 54), in which researchers would move forward and backward temporally and simultaneously

inwardly and outwardly within the context of location. This approach allowed the participants to delve deep into their personal stories, exploring the specific incidents of discrimination they faced and the broader societal and cultural factors that influenced their experiences. I uncovered the complex interplay between the past and the present. Through this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, a more nuanced understanding of the participants' academic journeys developed, highlighting their resilience and strength in navigating a system that often failed to recognize their unique talents and contributions. Participants were grounded in the present as they moved backward on the temporal dimension recounting between individual agency and structural barriers to their past experiences in gifted and advanced programs. Moving into the present, the participants applied meaning to their experiences and how they impacted them now and in the future within the context of school or the vast world outside of the classroom. In applying meaning to their experiences, participants described their inward feelings toward the systemic barriers that hindered their representation in accelerated programs and in recounting their narratives they exposed their values, attitudes, and beliefs toward the institutions and people who discriminated against them. The participants' stories shed light on the urgent need for systemic change in education, calling for inclusive policies and practices that address racial and gender inequities head-on.

Narratives are distinguished from stories by being bound by a linear temporal sequence, whereas stories can be arranged based on time, but the organization does not have to be chronological (Kim, 2016). Narratives help form stories that have a beginning, middle, and end. The girls in the study recounted narratives of their experiences, which I, as the researcher, put together to form stories that were shared in a

profile in Chapter 4. These narratives provided a glimpse into the girl's lives, allowing readers to understand their challenges and resilience. For instance, one participant, Gilman, shared a story recounting several racialized experiences in her IB Biology course. Each narrative unfolded like a thread in a tapestry, weaving together emotions, events, and personal growth. From tales of overcoming adversity like Alicia experienced in a predominately White school to stories of self-discovery that Denise shared about her lack of microaggressions related to gender, these narratives painted a vivid picture of the girls' journeys. As I delved deeper into their stories, I realized that narratives have the power to entertain, educate, and inspire. Through their narratives, these girls became more than just research subjects; they became storytellers, sharing their unique perspectives with me so I can pass them on. Compiling these narratives was enlightening and humbling as I witnessed the transformative power of storytelling. These stories served as a reminder that everyone has a story worth telling and that can foster empathy and understanding by listening to each other's narratives. In conclusion, narratives are not just mere accounts of events but windows into our shared humanity, connecting us in many ways.

Kim (2016) acknowledged that critical race theory relies on storytelling to “communicate the realities of the oppressed” (p. 44). In CRT, positionality is essential to the frame of reference for which stories are told and retold (Taylor, 2016). Merriam (2002) argued that stories are quintessential in understanding the human condition, which highlights the reason for choosing a qualitative method for this study. Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2017) elucidated that as a researcher using CRT, I need to employ counternarratives to document the experiences of minority students, parents, and teachers

that are counter to the experiences of the White majority. By soliciting counternarratives, I helped expose and analyze the dominate narratives of Whites for what they are, that is, one-sided. The counternarratives unfolded from the participants' depiction of their experiences. Through these retellings, the theme of being woke was clear, in which the participants expressed how they were aware of how societal conditions shape their mindset on how they navigate through life. This awareness impacted whether the participants chose to attend a predominately White institution (PWI) or a historically Black university or college (HBCU) and how they occupied White spaces. Delgado and Stefancic (2016) pointed out that counternarratives are used to "convey what life looks like from below" (p. 30). Although Black girls in gifted programs are at the top of the educational ladder, their voices are heard at the "bottom of the well" (p. 30). Counternarratives combined with narrative inquiry and storytelling helped to amplify these voices so they can be heard. The next section describes the setting and participants, including the process of selecting participants' ages and how they were selected.

Setting and Participants

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is a melting pot of cultures from the Caribbean and South and Central America. Nonetheless, Blacks in Miami-Dade are still a minority. Therefore, the setting and demographics of the population in Miami-Dade schools provided a pool from which I solicited volunteers for my study with 7 girls initially volunteering but only 5 completing the study.

Setting. Miami-Dade County is a diverse community set against the background of sun and beaches with over 2.7 million people (about the population of Mississippi) residing in over 2,000 square miles (about the area of Delaware). Miami-Dade County is

in the southeastern region of Florida. It is the largest, most populated county in the state and the seventh in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). Whites constitute 75.60%, and Blacks constitute 16.73% of the population (Miami Matters, 2020). Hispanics represent the largest ethnic population in the county, where 89.81% of Hispanics identify as White, and only 2.91% identify as Black.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools is the fourth largest school district in the nation, with 392 schools, 345,000 students, and 40,000 employees (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, n.d.). In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, minorities, including Blacks and Hispanics, make up approximately 91% of the population of students receiving educational services (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2020b). Only 12.2% of students in the district have been identified as gifted and received services (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2020b). Across the state, 47% of students in gifted programs were White (Florida Department of Education, 2023). Miami-Dade County has 27 Title I high schools across its nine regions.

Miami-Dade County has a rich history rooted in the Spanish, Bahamian, Cuban, and Haitian cultures. Henry Flagler brought the railroads to South Florida and enlisted Bahamians to help build it and the City of Miami (Grenier & Stepick, 1992). Blacks, specifically Bahamians, were reported by Grenier and Stepick (1992) to have been instrumental in incorporating the City of Miami with 162 votes out of 368 of the founding members. The authors further explained the government born from that incorporation was wholly White. However, Blacks served as the "economic backbone" of the city and its original manual labor force. Bahamians settled in Coral Gables in the

late 1800s, and later, Blacks moved into Colored Town or what is now known as Overtown (Grenier & Stepick, 1992).

Despite this, Blacks suffered brutal racism and segregationist policies that denied them the opportunity to enjoy the simple pleasures that attract tourists to the popular destination (Gosin, 2019). The economic, social, and political structures exclude Blacks. In the 1960s, Blacks fought for Civil Rights in the United States. Meanwhile, a significant exodus from Cuba following the overthrow of the government by Fidel Castro and the Cuban Refugee Program brought Cuban immigrants to Miami's shores (Grenier & Stepick, 1992). As a result, Cubans represent the largest ethnic group in Miami-Dade County, accounting for approximately 70% of all Hispanics in the area (Grenier & Stepick, 1992), and are considered a true ethnic enclave. As an ethnic enclave, Spanish has become a public language or lingua franca in Miami. Through language, culture, economic growth, and political success, the divide between Blacks and Cubans in Miami became a chasm that widened since Cubans first arrived in the United States via the beaches of Miami. As Gosin (2019) argued, White elitists perpetuated their arrival. Cubans hold a unique position in Miami-Dade County that is analogous to Whites' privileges elsewhere. Therefore, Cuban students populate advanced programming like Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, and other courses that prepare them for post-secondary education, mainly through gifted placement.

In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, once students are identified and tested as gifted, they are from that time forth considered gifted. Therefore, regardless of the grade level and based on the student's Educational Plan, the student should begin to receive gifted services. In high school, classes in the upper grades are not labeled as gifted but

can be double-coded to integrate students who need those accommodations. There are 14,863 Black high school students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2020a). In 2007-2008, the percentage of Black students participating in advanced-level courses was the lowest among all other ethnic categories (Whites, Hispanics, and Asian/Other) (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2008). Unfortunately, the number of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs was not available to me. As a M-DCPS employee and former gifted teacher, I am intimately aware of the limitations of the data collected regarding the demographics of gifted students in M-DCPS. Instead of this data, I had experiential knowledge as a student, a mother, and a teacher in M-DCPS with the privilege offered to certain minorities due to the makeup of Miami-Dade County and that minorities' status in government.

Relationship with participants. Initially, I thought to encapsulate the minority gifted and advanced experience by including Hispanics. However, the Hispanic experience in Miami-Dade County is not comparable to the Black experience. Hispanics, especially Cubans, receive preferential treatment in advanced programs because of their status in Miami's society. Therefore, I believe Hispanics will not have the same experiences as Blacks in advanced programs, leading to my relationship with the Black female participants. Blacks are discriminated against (Barlow & Dunbar, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2014; Hardeman, Hardeman-Jones & Medina, 2021; Herbert & Anderson, 2020; Milner & Ford, 2005; Montoya et al., 2016; Smith, 2022), experience microaggression in education and society in general (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; McKay-Jackson, Grumbach & Campos-Moreira, 2021; Morales, 2021; Stambaugh & Ford, 2015), and are underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs (Card &

Giuliano, 2016; Hines, et al., 2022; Hodges et al., 2018; Hodges & Gentry, 2021; Luria et al., 2016).

I still struggled to define the characteristics of the participants with whom I wanted to work. I was of two minds when it came to using middle school or high school girls: (a) the length of time the prospective participant was enrolled in gifted programs and (b) the maturity of the prospective participants in articulating their experiences in gifted programs. I thought first to use middle school girls because they would have been in the gifted program since elementary school. Students in elementary school can be in either all-day, pull-out, or push-in programs depending on the gifted population of the school. In middle school, students can be in all-day gifted or advanced courses or an advanced studies course. In high school, students can be in ninth and tenth-grade gifted courses. In the upper grades, gifted students are usually placed in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, an International Baccalaureate (IB) program, honors courses, or dual enrollment. The policy in Miami-Dade County Public Schools regarding gifted students is once gifted, always gifted. Students are not retested, nor is their gifted status reevaluated every year. High school students also have a vaster breadth of experience in gifted programs.

Technically, gifted students in advanced programs in high school still have Educational Plans that must be reviewed every year. Students who are in high school may be labeled as gifted but no longer have classes that are coded as gifted. These students, however, still receive modifications in their curriculum through the advanced curriculum of AP and IB courses, which satisfy their Educational Plan. However, AP and IB courses are a natural progression for a gifted student. These courses prepare students for post-secondary work. Students in these courses who pass the exam at the

end of the year can receive college credits. Thus, these students still fit the parameters of the study.

For further consideration in choosing participants, I was concerned about whether to bypass or include prospects of academically successful Black girls in MDCPS who were not identified as gifted but were in advanced programs. After speaking to my dissertation chair, I realized that these girls potentially had the same experiences as Black girls in gifted programs. They were often on the same accelerated track with gifted students primarily starting their accelerated courses in middle school. These courses were often double-coded to accommodate both gifted and honors students because of a lack of enough gifted students to staff an entire gifted section. Therefore, I decided I would include girls who were *advanced* although they were similar in not being identified as *gifted*, I eventually noted they had a different perspective on the concept of giftedness, which was a bonus in my work. Those perspectives were shared with me and all of the girls, regardless of their gifted status, shared what made them gifted. Although all the participants were not labeled as gifted, their academic adroitness can be credited by the participants to certain personality traits that coincide with gifted characteristics.

Another concern was determining whether high school girls could endure three 90-minute interviews. As I conducted my pilot interviews with two Black high school girls labeled as gifted, I realized that I had to adjust how I presented my study to the participants and framed my questions if I intended to use that age group. Therefore, developing the structured questions for my interview involved some creativity.

The first pilot interview that I conducted with a high schooler flopped, not necessarily because the student did not have any experiences, but because I did not

preface the interview with a sufficient explanation of my study. The questions did not garner the type of data the study required. With the second interview with another young lady of the same age, I adjusted the introduction to the interview. I changed the language to describe some of the vital information I sought in my study. That made a distinct difference in the type of information I received, and I decided I could use high school girls.

After deciding to use high schoolers, I wondered about using recent graduates. By going to the older participant, I could avoid the more strenuous research-with-minors approval process with the IRB, which in and of itself is not a problem, but it was going to add time to the process. Additionally, I would have been required to get approval from my district's Research Review Committee and the principals of each of the schools the participants attended, which again could be done but would likely delay my data collection and throw my preferred timetable off. Therefore, I decided to change the population of girls again to those who recently matriculated from a high school in Miami-Dade County and were 18 or over because they had more reflection time beyond that in the gifted program. It allowed for richer data related to the meaning of the experiences. Now in college or about to begin their post-secondary journey, the prospective participants can attach meaning to their experiences by being introspective and being able to identify microaggressions.

Participants Selection

Various purposeful sampling methods were used to form this homogeneous group of five participants. This type of sampling was used primarily to select *information-rich cases*, as Patton (2015) cited as a reason to engage in qualitative research. In addition, I

chose a homogeneous sample to ensure that the girls represented Black girls in advanced programs in MDCPS. For Patton (2015), homogeneous purposeful sampling is predicated on the researcher selecting participants with similar characteristics. The criteria for the Black girls in this study were as follows: identified as gifted or on an accelerated track in elementary school, participated in a gifted program in middle school and the early years of high school or advanced courses, involved in advanced programming in the latter part of high school; attended a Title I school at some point during their educational journey, and matriculated from a school in Miami-Dade County within 1-3 years of the study. Seven participants were chosen for in-depth interviews, but two did not complete the interview protocol. Therefore, five participants completed Siedman's three-interview series, participated in the focus group, and the focus group follow-up interview.

The original plan for selection was contingent upon the MDCPS gifted coordinator sharing a list of all the gifted Black girls who graduated from the 25 Title I high schools selected for the study. The MDCPS gifted coordinator was contacted via email, and follow-up calls were deemed necessary to further explain the criteria for prospective participants. While awaiting a response from the district's gifted coordinator, I contacted the vice principal of a magnet school with a high population of students who fit the study's criteria. Coincidentally, once I spoke to the gifted coordinator, she also recommended that I reach out to the administration of this school to provide me with a contact list of prospective participants because that school had the highest population of students that fit the criteria for the study. Unfortunately, the district did not have a database with information of all the gifted students in the district that was readily and

easily accessible to provide me with a district-wide contact list. The district office did not have access to individual student data either. Therefore, her recommendation was to contact that school directly as the school would have access to that information.

After reading the IRB approval from Valdosta State (see Appendix A), the school sent me contact information for approximately 30 prospective girls that fit the study's criteria. The contact information received was primarily for the parents since schools do not collect information for students, and all parents may not have emails on file. Therefore, I could only email approximately 14 parents in hopes of passing the information to their daughters. A couple of the emails were returned as undeliverable because the email was either incorrect or no longer existed. All printed and digital materials regarding the study included the IRB statement. The questionnaire included demographic and school background information and open-ended questions regarding their experiences as Black girls in gifted and advanced programs (See Questionnaire in Appendix B).

After a week of waiting for responses, I started calling the contact numbers on the information sheet that I received. Unfortunately, none of the numbers I received were for the students themselves, rather it was emergency contact information for parents and other relatives. I did not secure any participants in this manner. After further consideration, I decided not to limit the parameters of participants to only Title I high schools but broadened the search to girls who had attended a Title I school at any point in their educational journey. High-performing Black girls may decide in middle school to apply for a magnet program to increase their opportunities for acceptance into competitive post-secondary institutions and the amount of scholarship money they

receive. These magnet programs may not be housed within Title I schools and as a result, it may limit the quality of participants.

Since my initial plan for soliciting participants was unsuccessful, I created a contingency plan to reach out to the International Baccalaureate magnet lead teacher at a school with a population of students that may fit the criteria for the study. This method solicited fewer participants; therefore, the participants chosen for the in-depth analysis also participated in the focus group. This sampling method was not as ideal as the homogenous sampling and was dealt with carefully to ensure the study's validity. Although the former magnet lead teacher no longer served in that position at that school, she kept in contact with former students. She gave me a list of girls to contact, which I both texted and left voice messages giving them an overview of the study. One girl returned my call and agreed immediately. I asked her if she knew the other two girls, and she told me she knew one of them and would ask her to call me. After speaking to her, she also agreed. The third young lady also agreed, and I sent all three ladies a welcome-to-the-study email and a flyer to share with other potential participants. I advised the girls to create an alias and an email associated with that alias so that we could communicate confidentially and protect their identity. All three girls returned their questionnaires, but only two responded to my email regarding setting up their interviews. I interviewed the first two girls as I continued to search for other prospective participants who fit the criteria.

Approximately 4 months passed between the interviews of the first set of girls and the remaining participants. To solicit more participants, I spoke to a college recruitment officer who served in middle and high schools across the county. He suggested a girl

who recently graduated from a Title I school. After speaking with her and asking her preliminary questions to determine if she fit the study's criteria, it was determined that she fit all the other qualifications of the study, except she was never identified as gifted. I met another potential participant when she served as the keynote speaker at our eighth-grade commencement ceremony. After listening to her speech, I realized that she also fit the criteria but after a further conversation, she revealed that she was never identified as gifted. After further consideration and after a conversation with my chairperson, I decided to keep the two girls who did not qualify for gifted in the study. I then contacted the young ladies who participated in the pilot interviews. One of the young ladies agreed to participate. I spoke to another young lady an administrator at her school recommended, and she qualified for the study and agreed to participate. This young lady did one interview and did not do any further interviews due to her schedule. After scheduling the focus group with the other young ladies following her last two interviews, I lost her at the end of the interviewing process. I could not recruit any additional girls to replace her. There was a sense of urgency regarding scheduling the focus group because three of the girls were about to leave Miami to start their first year in college, one young lady was starting her senior year, and the last young lady recently graduated and was starting her first semester in law school. The same girls who participated in some parts of the study are listed in Table 1.

After taking into account the length of time the potential participants had been in gifted programs, the maturity levels of the participants, and the timeline of the study, I decided that the criteria for the participants would be as follows: girls in gifted or advanced programs, at least 18 years or older who matriculated from a M-DCPS school

within 3 years and attended a Title I school in elementary, middle, or high school. Using selective sampling, I secured seven girls to participate in the study. Of the seven girls, five completed the requirements for the study, I lost two girls due to their schedule. After I secured the participants, I began the data collection process, which is described further in the next section.

Table 1

List of Participants

Participant	Year of Graduation from MDCPS	Identified for Gifted	Method of Recruitment	Completed Study
Gilman Smith	2019	Yes	IB Coordinator	Yes
Stephanie Jones	2019	Yes	IB Coordinator	Yes
Tarisha	2019	Yes	IB Coordinator	No
C	2022	Yes	Pilot Interview Participant College	Yes
Denise	2022	No	Recruiter	Yes
Briani	2022	No	School Administrator	No
Alicia	2022	No	Researcher	Yes

Note: Pseudonyms were used for each participant. This chart denotes how participants were recruited for the study and whether or not they were identified as gifted in elementary school. All participants were placed in advanced or accelerated courses.

Data Collection

As the researcher on this study, I was the only interviewer and thus the primary data collector, I used an interview guide for each step of the Siedman three-series interview protocol (See Appendix C-E), the focus group (Appendix F), and the focus group follow-up interview (Appendix G). However, I also used a questionnaire that I

created with the intention of weeding out participants if I had a number of participants from which to choose. Regardless of the number of participants I solicited, I had each prospective participant fill out the questionnaire to get a sense of their experiences and determine how to proceed with the interview. I also gauged their knowledge of common phrases that are pertinent to study. If it were determined that their knowledge was limited, I would have to preface the interview by defining words and phrases relevant to their understanding of the interview questions. Prefacing the interview with the significance of the study is a lesson I learned from my pilot interviews. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this process as negotiating the purpose of the study.

While conducting this qualitative study, there were several data collection methods that I utilized. These methods included a questionnaire that included questions regarding the participants' demographics and also questions regarding the participants' racialized experiences in gifted programs, Siedman's (2013) three-interview series, notetaking and memoing, and a focus group discussion. Each of these approaches has its own benefits and drawbacks, and research questions under consideration informed the decision to use a particular method. In the next section, I thoroughly assessed the suitability of each method to ensure that the data collected is both reliable and valid.

Questionnaire. Patton (2015) likened a questionnaire to a photograph capturing a moment in time. In the same vein, I created a questionnaire for this study that recorded the participants' demographic data as well as solicited stories related to their experiences in gifted or advanced programs, which the participants considered "racialized" within their understanding of the study and how they applied meaning to the term. Questionnaires create a "fluid sense of development, movement, and change" (Patton,

2015, p. 60) that was evident throughout the study. The fluidity of the study's development was not necessarily apparent in the static demographics gathered from the participants' responses but the stories the participants shared initially in the questionnaire developed over the course of the interview series by asking probing questions that required the participants to be introspective about their experiences.

Initially, the questionnaire was created to gather demographic information about prospective participants to narrow the pool of respondents to only those girls who fit the study's criteria. However, because of the results of the sampling, the purpose of the questionnaire shifted slightly to collecting data not only to determine the suitability of the participants for the study but also to gauge the girls' ability to apply the label "racialized" to their experiences and to assist me in determining the limitations of the participant's understanding of the basic tenets of CRT. In doing so, I could preface the interview by defining critical terms for the participants before the start of the study by creating context.

The questionnaire was broken down into four sections. The first two sections were basic contact as well as demographic information. The questions under the educational information section were geared toward how the participant was identified for gifted programs when they graduated, the school they attended, the courses they took in high school, and the post-secondary institution they are currently or will be attending in the foreseeable future. The last section included one question regarding the participants' racialized experiences in gifted programs. By asking an open-ended question, I hoped to solicit stories that (a) determined whether the participant understood the context of the study and (b) were used as a starting point, which the participants

expounded upon during the interview process. With this purpose in mind, I gathered preliminary data with the questionnaire. Still, in the next section, I described another method of gathering data and collecting my thoughts, which included notetaking and memoing.

Notetaking and Memoing. Although the words notetaking and memoing are gerunds, both are active processes that allowed me to engage with the data cognitively before, during, and after the interviews. Throughout the interview process, I took notes on each interview for several reasons, including being present, writing down questions that may have arisen from the stories the girls shared, making connections between interviews, and noting trends. Furthermore, memos assisted in synthesizing the information gathered from notetaking, jotting down my thoughts as they occurred, and as first drafts for my writing. The following section will include how notetaking and memoing were integrated into the data collection process and examples of both will be included in the following section.

Notetaking during interviews helped me process the participants' experiences to make the interview process intentional (Siedman, 2013). During my first interview with Gilman Smith (pseudonym), I established a system of taking notes in which I wrote down points that intrigued me and denoted questions that I had with a question mark at the beginning and end of the question. This process helped me stay present during the interview, and I wanted to revisit it. Some of the questions I asked during the discussion were to clarify the stories shared with me, like the meaning of LLC when Gilman spoke about the support systems she had at Southern State. If the opportunity passed for me to ask the question because it interrupted the flow of the conversation, then further

wonderings were developed to ask during the following interview. For instance, Gilman mentioned that she wanted to drop out of the IB program, but I did not have the opportunity to ask the question because she moved on to talk about how she wanted to be in the health science program. Before I asked the questions developed for my interview guide in the following interview, I asked the clarifying question regarding her reason for wanting to drop out of the IB program. I continued this practice with all the subsequent discussions.

Additionally, notetaking allowed for connections to be made between interviews. Alicia shared a racialized experience that was addressed at a school board meeting. I wondered whether Denise was aware of the situation since she served as the student representative of the school board at the time the issue arose. I decided not to address this in the next interview since it compromised the confidentiality of one of my participants. However, I received confirmation of their connection during the focus group where Alicia shared that she knew Denise and that she reached out to her when the situation happened. Similarly, Stephanie and Gilman attended the same school, and when I engaged in the notetaking process during Stephanie's interviews, I noted commonalities between their narratives.

Maxwell (2013) described research memos as a method to help researchers think through their ideas to reach an understanding, a reflective tool on the process, and the first draft of writing. Each time I spoke to my dissertation chairperson, I wrote a memo based on our conversation and the notes I had taken. For instance, I talked to Dr. R. Schmertzing regarding my concern that in vivo coding was deconstructing the participants' narratives. He directed me toward Maxwell and Miller's 2008 article,

“Categorizing and Connecting Strategies in Qualitative Data Analysis,” to assist me in making data analysis decisions, leading me to use three types of first-round coding methods. Throughout the participant selection process, I wrote memos to remind myself how each participant came to be in the study. I also used MAXQDA to write memos on emerging trends during coding. Gilman Smith, Denise, and Alicia had strong familial support, which I noted in the memo. Gilman and Denise made decisions about their educational journeys based on the opinions and suggestions of the mothers. Alicia had two big sisters whose educational path she followed and whom she leaned on for emotional support when she experienced microaggressions or blatant acts of racism. I made a connection while coding Alicia’s transcripts and decided to write a memo in MAXQDA.

The initial interview process took place over 7 months. Due to difficulty with soliciting participants and unforeseen events in my personal and professional life, the interview process took 7 months to complete from the first interview to the focus group. The focus group interview took place before the first round of coding the data from the in-depth interviews; however, some trends in the data were noted in the focus group interview question guide. Interviewing as the primary method of data collection is described in the following section.

Interviewing. The making-meaning process in qualitative research relies on storytelling (Siedman, 2013). Siedman’s (2013) stance is that telling stories is how humans have made meaning of their experiences throughout history. Interviews allow researchers to “enter into the other person’s perspective” and allow interviewees to express thoughts that cannot be observed (Patton, 2015). Interviewing is the best method

to extract these stories from a person's stream of consciousness and get them to open up and share with others. One interview, however, may have researchers treading "on thin contextual ice" (Siedman, 2013) because lack of context hinders the meaning-making process. To mitigate this issue, Siedman (2013) proposed a three-interview series to delve deeper into an individual's experiences "to place it in context and reflect on its meaning" (p. 19). The Siedman three-series interview protocol is ideal for this type of study because it allows participants to recall meaningful stories in context, focus on the details and then make meaning.

Siedman (2013) recommended a 90-minute format for each of the three interviews, which I attempted to adhere to with fidelity. Still, the third interview for most participants was shorter, particularly with girls who did not have any significant racialized experiences to engage in the making-meaning process. My initial concern with the amount of time for each interview was the strain on the participant's schedule since three participants were preparing to enter college and two were nearing the end of the semester. However, after the first interview, the girls said they looked forward to the subsequent interviews and thought the process was worth their time. However, the two girls who dropped out of the study cited that the constraints on their schedules were too demanding to continue. All seven are represented in Table 2.

Table 2*Interview Participation and Length of Interviews*

Participants	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Focus Group Interview	Focus Group Follow Up Interview
Gilman	100 mins.	102 mins.	112 mins.	151 mins.	31 mins.
Smith					
Stephanie Jones	81 mins.	65 mins.	58 mins.	151 mins.	21 mins.
Tarisha	-	-	-	-	-
C	104 mins.	55 mins.	40 mins.	151 mins.	20 mins.
Denise	92 mins.	73 mins.	62 mins.	151 mins.	33 mins.
Briani	66 mins.	-	-	-	-
Alicia	73 mins.	60 mins.	60 mins.	151 mins.	30 mins.

Note: The table illustrates the length of each interview for each participant. Five participants engaged in all three of the Siedman three-interview series and the focus group interviews. One participant started with one interview, and one agreed to interview but never started. The first interview was the longest as the participant and interviewer established a rapport, and the participants recounted their life history.

Another concern was being present throughout the interview process as Patton (2015) delineated in his Ten Interview Principles and Skills. All the interviews were conducted over the Zoom platform, which had become a familiar online video conferencing tool for communication through the pandemic but posed a problem with remaining present. Interaction via Zoom and the interactions in face-to-face interviews are often different. Still, it was difficult for participants to do as Siedman (2013) explained and “convey their presence, their consideration, their interest, and their respect, all without being patronizing” (p. 113) during a Zoom interview. Using Zoom made it difficult for me to notice the nuanced body language and facial expressions of participants who seemed distant. For instance, one of the participants chose to conduct

her interviews with her camera turned off. Therefore, I could only use her tone and vocal inflections as a gauge of the emotion that was intended behind her words. As the interviewer, I conducted the interviews at home, sometimes after a full day at work. To keep myself accountable for staying present, I took notes and asked clarifying and probing questions throughout the interview. I presumed one advantage of Zoom would be having video and audio recordings, which were useful.

After participants were chosen, formal interviews were scheduled via email within a 2-week window. Since the first two girls were away at college and the other three participants were located all over Miami-Dade County, I decided Zoom was the best interview option. The participants were allowed to choose their interview dates and times that fit the participant and researcher's schedules. I emailed the participants the Zoom link once the date and time were set for all three interviews in the series. To ensure that I differentiated my role within the school system and my role as a researcher, I purchased a professional Zoom account.

Interview guides (see Appendix C-E) were created based on the three research questions that I proposed that centered on the experiences of Black girls as they navigated advanced programming, how the intersectionality of race and gender impacted their experiences, their racialized experiences in these programs, how they perceive giftedness and how they made meaning of their experiences. In keeping with the basis of Siedman's three-interview series (2013), I explored the "participants experiences, place(d) it in context, and reflect(ed) on its meaning" (p. 20). As noted in Table 2, the first two interviews focused on building a relationship with the participants and painting a picture of their experiences using broad strokes, as evidenced by the interview questions

covering all of the research questions except making meaning. The latter interviews were focused more on the nuance of their experiences by painting a more detailed picture, and as noted by interview three on the table, making meaning of their experiences. The focus group confirmed the emerging trends from the individual data-gathering sessions. Interview guides are beneficial in systematically interviewing several people and deciding the topics to be covered (Patton, 2015). The interview guide was formatted with structured, open-ended questions to capture the participants' experiences in their terms but in a manner that garnered similar responses. The interview guide and structured interview "are by no means mutually exclusive" (Patton, 2015), meaning that the flexibility and casualness of the interview guide can be combined with the specificity of the structured, open-ended interview strategy. By creating open-ended questions, participants can interpret the questions based on their understanding and not limited by a "yes" or "no" answer. As the interviewer, I asked clarifying questions to fully understand their perspective or probing questions to garner deeper, richer responses (Patton, 2015).

Each new interview commenced with clarifying questions from the preceding interview that I developed after reviewing the initial transcripts from the Otter.Ai program and my interview notes. According to Siedman (2013), the interview process is cumulative. The interview questions for the interview guides were developed with Siedman's (2013) purpose for each interview in the three-interview series are focused life history, details of experiences, and reflection on meaning respectively. The types of questions varied as the interviews progressed (Patton, 2015). The first interview included background and demographic questions to peel back the layers of the interviewee as a person before delving into her experiences. Additionally, experience questions were

asked as an overview of the participants’ racialized and gender-based experiences in advanced courses and outside the classroom. The second interview included sensory questions as participants were asked to describe their experiences more. In the third interview, I asked more opinions, values, and feelings questions as participants made meaning of their experiences. I ended each interview with the opportunity for participants to share any additional information they believed was pertinent to the study. In Table 3, I show how the interview questions correlated to the research questions.

Table 3

Interview Questions Correlation to Research Questions

Interviews	RQ1 <i>Experiences in Gifted Programs</i>	SUB RQ1A <i>Intersectionality</i>	SUB RQ1B <i>Microaggressions</i>	RQ2 <i>Construct of Giftedness</i>	RQ3 <i>Making Meaning</i>
Interview 1	4, 5, 8	9	9	7, 10	
Interview 2	2, 3	5, 6, 7, 8	5, 6, 7, 8	2, 3, 9	
Interview 3					1, 2, 3, 4
Focus Group Interviews	4, 9	3	1, 5, 6	2	3, 4, 6, 8, 7
Follow Up Interview		2			1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Note: The table delineates how the interview questions correlated to the research questions. However, the interview guides were created based on the approach of Siedman’s (2013) three-interview series. The first interview focused on the participants’ life history, in which they shared their experiences in gifted programs and addressed the sub-questions for research question 1 and research question 2. The second interview went more in-depth into their experiences, again addressing the same questions. The third interview allowed participants to reflect on meaning; thus, the questions addressed the third research question, which asked participants to make meaning of their experiences. The focus group questions were derived from the trends observed in the individual interviews, with participants also sharing their experiences, and the follow-up interview, like the third interview in Siedman’s (2013) series, allowed participants to make meaning of their experiences.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) suggested beginning the analysis of the data during fieldwork. Fieldwork allows for insight into the topic and ideas to formulate patterns and themes in the data. However, I did not go in the field so I began making connections during interviewing, as noted in the Notetaking and Memoing section, but I did not start formally coding between participant interviews. I waited until all interviews were completed and transcribed. At the time, I served as Dean of Discipline and Testing Chairperson. The testing season was nearing, and I was preparing to administer all the assessments at my school, which made for early mornings and late evenings. Due to the time constraints with my job and the months between soliciting my second participant and third participant, I put aside the interviews I had transcribed and had to re-immense myself in the data that I had already collected months after the school year was over. Saldaña (2016) argued that coding is the analysis, but Maxwell (2013) discussed the value of thinking and memoing along the way as analysis as well. The cyclical process that involved multiple rounds of coding was needed to provide not only "a good story" but a "faithful account" as Kim (2016, p. 192) indicated, but also ongoing reflection on my part was needed as well to thoroughly process and retell the Black girls' experiences in gifted programs. Kim (2016) also suggested that one must understand qualitative research data analysis fundamentals to conduct a narrative inquiry. Qualitative data analysis generally involves reviewing qualitative data, reducing the data into codes, creating categories by linking codes, identifying patterns, and developing themes. This practice is evident in how I reviewed the transcripts and notes before each interview to

guide the flow of the subsequent interview, clarifying any lingering questions I had, and exploring any intriguing topics that were shared with me. For the first cycle of coding, I used *in vivo coding* to split the data using short words and phrases taken from the participants' own words (Saldaña, 2016); *descriptive coding* to do as Maxwell and Miller (2008) suggested and find connecting contextual components as well as more clearly identify topics, which is the way Saldaña (2016) used *descriptive coding*, and *values coding* to find participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview (Saldaña, 2016).

I initially used Otter.Ai, a web-based transcription program as a tool to transcribe the audio-recording files from Zoom. As I refined the transcriptions using the tape-recorded files, I began by marking text that stood out to me and took down preliminary jottings (Saldaña, 2016). For instance, the word "different" stood out to me when I was transcribing Gilman's thoughts about her gifted experiences. Denise described her experiences in advanced programs as "weird." Next, I jotted down any words or phrases that worked as a code on my actual transcription. For example, the words "different" and "weird" were used as code, and in the second-round pattern coding the two were subsumed in the pattern code "gifted programs being different." Saldaña (2016) suggested using brackets, capitalization, and italicized or bolded words to distinguish the text from these preliminary jottings. In addition, I wrote analytic memos to think through ideas that could be developed later (Maxwell, 2013), as I described in the Notetaking and Memoing section. These steps prepared me for what Saldaña (2016) referred to as the first or initial cycle of coding, which means the researcher's first of many attempts to formally work through the data with a particular focus.

First Round Coding. In vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) was used for the first coding cycle. In vivo means "in that which is alive" (p. 105). It is marked by the short phrases or words of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding is well suited for youth studies as it allows the researcher to attend to the children to tell their stories in their voices. One of the purposes of my study was to allow the Black girls in gifted and advanced programs to provide a holistic view of their experiences as Black children in advanced programs in whatever words they chose and couched in whatever stories they told. Initially, I began using the *splitter method* of coding, which essentially assigned a code to each line (Saldaña, 2016), and I was immediately overwhelmed. After speaking to a colleague about my goals for coding, she suggested using the *lumper method* (Saldaña, 2016). This method is applied by using more extensive text passages than a single line, thus lessening the number of codes and making it more manageable for me. I deleted all the codes I initially generated using the *splitter method* before generating any codes using the *lumper method*. Below is an example of coding text using the *splitter* versus *lumper method*.

Figure 1

Splitter versus Lumper Method

Splitter Method

Wow, it was ¹ it was really intense. Um, but again, ² it was like a loud few. I feel like ³ reflecting on it now, because I still want at the ⁴ end of the day, like, and I was like to ⁵ do what I wanted to do. And in the end of it, ⁶ we still had friendships, ⁷ people who were not IB students, who

Codes

- 1 "IT WAS REALLY INTENSE"
- 2 "IT WAS A LOUD FEW"
- 3 "REFLECTING ON IT NOW"
- 4 "END OF THE DAY"
- 5 "DO WHAT I WANTED"
- 6 "WE STILL HAD FRIENDSHIPS"
- 7 "PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT IB STUDENTS"

ultimately can vouch you know, like,⁸ we don't think of ourselves higher in that regard. Like, we care about our school. And maybe like, that could be a difference for some of us for⁹ different reasons, but I don't look at you differently because of that. Like, I just¹⁰ focus on what I have to do to get to this program and¹¹ get my IB diploma. (Gilman Smith Transcript 1)

Lumper Method

Wow, it was it was really intense. Um, but again, it was like a loud few. I feel like reflecting on it now, because I still want at the end of the day, like, and I was like to do what I wanted to do. And in the end of it, we still had friendships, people who were not IB students, who ultimately can vouch you know, like, we don't think of ourselves higher in that regard. Like, we care about our school. And maybe like, that could be a difference for some of us for different reasons, but I don't look at you differently because of that. Like, I just focus on what I have to do to get to this program and get my IB diploma. (Gilman Smith Transcript 1)

8 “WE DON’T THINK OF OURSELVES HIGHER IN THAT REGARD”

9 “DIFFERENT FOR SOME OF US”

10 “FOCUS ON WHAT I HAVE TO DO”

11 “GET MY IB DIPLOMA”

Codes

1 “IT WAS REALLY INTENSE”

2 “WE DON’T THINK OF OURSELVES AS HIGHER”

3 “FOCUS ON WHAT I HAVE TO DO”

In the example above from Gilman Smith’s first interview transcript, the *splitter method* generated 11 codes, whereas I generated three codes with the same data as the

lumper method. I was unfamiliar with MAXQDA to know that I could broaden the code to include a more extensive section of text. As I coded with this method, I again became overwhelmed with the number of codes. It caused me to think of the passage disjointly, which made me think I was losing context, so I called my chair for advice.

In my conversation with my dissertation chairperson regarding my concern that in vivo coding, although beneficial for noting the keyword choices of the Black girls in the study, was deconstructing the girls' stories and, in the process, context and meaning. He suggested I read an article by Maxwell and Miller (2008), "Categorizing and Connecting Strategies in Qualitative Data Analysis," to differentiate between similarity and contiguity. Similarity refers to an association based on resemblance. In contrast, contiguity refers to a connection that considers time and place in context (Maxwell & Miller, 2008) like temporality and spaciality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Maxwell and Miller (2008) analyzed these associations by looking at the neurological implications. Semantic and episodic memory relates to similarity and contiguity, respectively. These types of memories engage different brain areas and imply that remembering facts and recounting events involve two different processes. This is congruent with the differentiation that Siedman (2013) made between asking participants to remember an experience instead of reconstructing it. This led me to use the lumper method of in vivo coding to keep the stories in context while considering the temporal aspects of the interview data in preparation to write a narrative profile, which paints a picture of the participants' experiences in their own words.

Additionally, I decided to use supplemental methods of first-round coding "to capture the complex processes or phenomena in [my] data," as Saldaña (2016) suggested,

and in this case to encapsulate the stories that the girls told in context and to create *dimensions of categories* (Saldaña, 2016). I decided to use what other researchers described as *topic coding*, but Saldaña (2016) aligned with Wolcott's terminology as descriptive coding. Descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short phrase" (Saldaña, 2016) the topic of a text selection. Essentially, coding data in this manner can allow for the context of stories to be retained. For instance, this section of text from Alicia's transcript was coded as Carol City vs. Miami Beach, as Alicia described the differences in how she felt at each school.

I think that even though I had attended schools in the Miami Beach area, it was still a very big culture shock, a very difficult transition going from Carol City Middle to Beach High. I talked about this a lot with my older sister. I remember feeling very empowered at Carol City Middle, like I don't know how to describe it. My teachers just instilled in me this competence that was so unmatched. Like, I don't know, it was the combination of being surrounded by people who looked like me. The combination of being affirmed by my teachers, my educators, the administration, the sense of community that I had at Carol City Middle School, just everything, I felt very empowered as a student. And then I got to Miami Beach Senior High, where that wasn't necessarily the case, I didn't see many people who looked like me. The educators, although the curriculum was like, yes, advanced, yes, rigorous, but I felt like the educators didn't really I don't want to say invest, but I guess invest as much in building the personal relationship with students in the same way that my teachers that Carol City Middle School did. Like I felt connected to my teachers beyond just the academics. I remember

having conversations with teachers at CCMS, like Mr. Hossain saying, my English teacher at the time Ms. Ferguson, like before and after class, not necessarily related to academics. When I got to Beach High . . . rarely. I had that relationship with my teachers of color. So, like, Black women, like I had that same sort of relationship with those teachers, but I found that it wasn't to the same extent as it was at Carol City Middle School. So, I think that I was a lot more empowered. There were a lot more people who looked like me, I felt a lot more comfortable. And as a result, I feel like I definitely thrived at Carol City Middle School. That's not to say I didn't thrive at Beach High, it just felt like a more . . . it felt draining. I don't know, I didn't feel drained at Carol City Middle School. At Beach High, I was constantly drained, like tired, emotionally, and academically. But I think that, I don't know, you have to learn how to survive. And I feel like survival was definitely the theme of my time at Beach High. (Alicia Interview Transcript 2)

Through repeated readings of the transcripts and repeated listening to the audio tape, I made some initial notations regarding the similarities in values that the girls shared. I saw a benefit in adding values coding to the first-round coding. Values coding added a layer of nuance to the text by reflecting on “a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). Participants Gilman and Stephanie are Haitian American, and each participant expressed appreciation for her Haitian identity. Their shared Haitian culture was seen as a value for both girls. Following are samples from each girl’s transcripts that illustrate their value of Haitian culture.

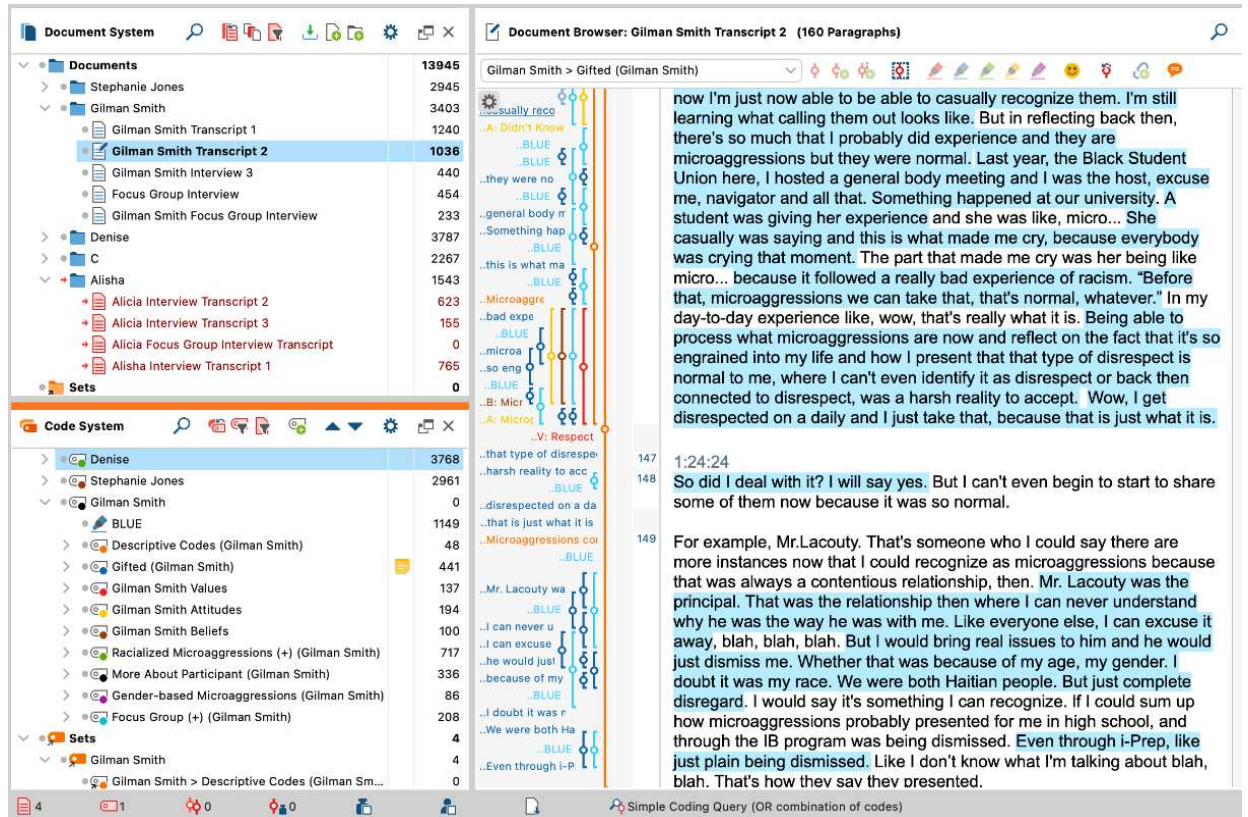
“I am very firm, and I am very accepting of my own culture. I wouldn't want to be anything else. I love being Haitian American” (Stephanie Interview 3).

“But I'm from North Miami, my day-to-day experiences is Black people, Haitian people all the time, in every space” (Gilman Smith Transcript 1).

The first round of coding was completed in MAXQDA, a data analysis program. I made the conscious decision when I switched to the lumpers method of in vivo coding that I would organize the codes revolving around the research questions which included gifted, racialized experiences, the impact of racialized experiences, gender-based experiences, the impact of gender-based experiences, demographic information and more about participants (see Figure 2 for a screenshot of first-round codes in MAXQDA). Coding that did not fit a specific category, I coded under Miscellaneous until in second round coding I could find a pattern within this section. In addition, since I was using Values coding, I also color-coded each participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs. The program makes it easy to color-code the different categories for the second round of coding. I color-coded words, phrases, and passages that piqued my interest and used them when analyzing and presenting the results. In addition, I used the memo tool within the program to write memos to start formulating ideas about categories and themes.

Figure 2

Screenshot of First Round Coding in MAXQDA



Note: The left-hand panel shows the organization of the document system. All interview transcript files were uploaded to the MAXQDA program and file folders were created for each participant. The bottom left panel illustrates the categories that I created to help organize the in vivo codes during the first round of coding, as well as the organizational system for values codes and descriptive codes. The right-hand panel illustrates the color-coded highlights I used for passages I included in each participant's profile.

The unique nature of the focus group interview which allowed the girls to recount their experiences with the other participants, interact with one another, and share new experiences or ideas that were not shared during the in-depth interviews, presented a conundrum in deciding how to code. I questioned whether I should analyze the focus group independent of the participants' individual interviews or whether I should add them to the data collected for each girl or do a combination of both. By doing the former, I had to analyze trends separate from the participant interviews that could be compared to one

another. By doing the latter, I added two data points—the focus group interview and the follow-up interview—to integrate into each girl’s profile. Being introspective about the profile and since I wrote a profile for one of the participants amid making this decision, I noticed that the profile lacked a clear beginning, middle, and end. I decided to add the data from the focus group to each girl’s profile. The data from the focus group was added to the related category created on MAXQDA, which added a layer of complexity and created a clear and concise narrative.

Second Round Coding. Before moving on to the second round of coding, I reviewed the preliminary codes, categories, and themes formulated during the first round of coding and analytic memoing. Pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016) or explanatory codes was used for the second round of coding. In the first round of coding using in vivo coding, the data was "split" (Saldaña, 2016) into multiple codes that originated in each participant's voice. The second round of coding required finding patterns among the participants within a participant's interview transcript and "lumping" (Saldaña, 2016) them together with those codes into meaningful units of analysis. Several cycles of pattern coding may be needed to par the data from codes to categories and then to significant themes.

As I was engaging in pattern coding, I began putting the codes into categories and developing themes in the process. The nature of the data collected within the “gifted” category lent itself to creating a concept map in Microsoft Word that visually presented the data collected from each girl in similar categories which included gifted experiences, other’s perception of giftedness, perception of giftedness, and impact of giftedness (see Appendix H-L for each girl’s gifted concept map). I also decided to compile the data

from each girl’s collective values codes to create a word cloud (Figure 3) and a values matrix (Table 4) to analyze the similarities between these data points. After applying one round of pattern coding, determining trends across the gifted hierarchical concept map for each girl, and analyzing both the values word cloud and matrix, I developed a preliminary list of categories and themes.

Figure 3

Values Word Cloud



Note: I inputted each girl’s values into the world cloud application, Wordcloudplus.com, and generated a word cloud. The larger the text, the higher the word or phrase frequency. The colors coincided with the word or phrase frequency with words or phrases in the same frequency range shaded the same color blue.

Table 4*Values Matrix*

Values	Gilman Smith	Stephanie Jones	C	Denise	Alicia
Success/High Standards		X	X		
Advanced Courses/ Gifted/IB Program	X	X	X	X	X
Family	X		X	X	X
Advocacy	X	X	X	X	
Good Teachers/ Black Teachers	X	X	X	X	X
Hard Work			X		X
Black Issues/ People	X		X		
Community Work			X	X	
HBCUs		X	X		
Speech and Debate	X		X	X	
Upbringings		X			X
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion		X		X	X
Education	X	X			X
Policy Work	X				X
Haitian Culture	X	X			
Culture	X	X			

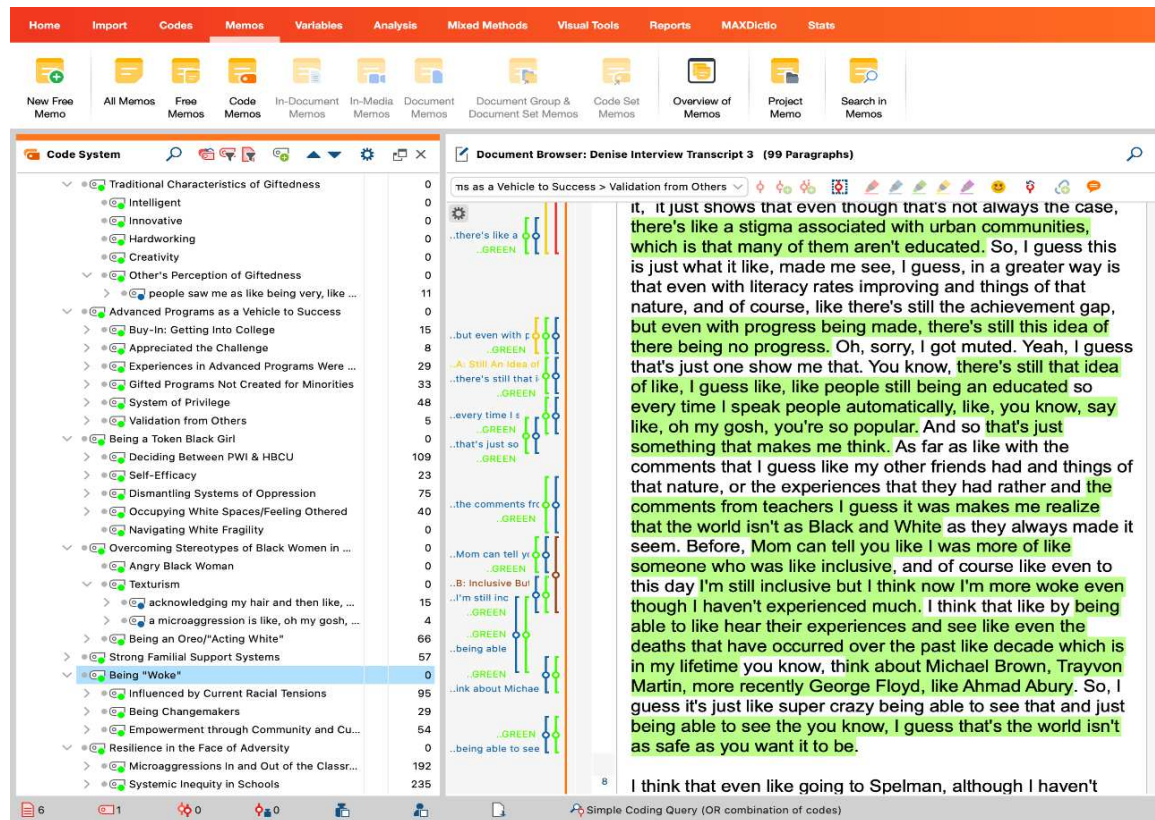
Note: The only values included in the chart were those shared by two or more participants. The Values Matrix correlated with the Values Word Cloud in Figure 2.

I decided to apply a third round of pattern coding using the preliminary list of categories I developed during the second round of coding. I created a code organization system in MAXQDA with these categories and the initial themes (Figure 4) and applied

the codes I condensed during the second round of coding to these categories. For each girl, I had a set of buckets for the categories and initial themes so that I could easily access the information for data presentation (Table 5).

Figure 4

Screenshot of Categories and Themes Organization in MAXQDA



Note: The left panel shows the code organization I used for the categories and initial themes that were constructed from the data.

Table 5*Shortened Themes, Categories, and Values Chart*

Shortened Theme	Categories	Values
Being a Token Black Girl	Deciding Between an HBCU & PWI Occupying White Spaces/Feeling Othered Experiencing the Stereotype of an Angry Black Woman Being an Oreo/ “Acting White”	Success/High Standards Advanced Courses/Gifted/IB Program HBCUs Hard Work Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy Work Education Good Teachers/Black Teachers
Being “Woke”	Influenced by Current Racial Tensions Being Changemakers Empowerment through Community, Culture, and Strong Support Systems	Advocacy Black Issues/People Community Work Speech and Debate Policy Work Haitian Culture Culture
Resilience in the Face of Adversity	Microaggressions In and Out of the Classroom Systemic Inequity in Schools	Black Issues/People Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
Advanced Programs as a Vehicle to Success	Buy-In: Getting into College Appreciated the Challenge Gifted Programs as System of Privilege Dismantling Systems of Oppression	Success/High Standards Advanced Courses/Gifted/IB Program Education
Perception of Giftedness	Other’s Perception of Giftedness Traditional Characteristics of Giftedness Non-Traditional Characteristics of Giftedness	Success/High Standards Hard Work Education

Note: This table denotes how the categories and themes correlate to the values garnered from the data of the participants after three rounds of coding.

Before applying any coding method to my raw data, I tested the coding method by conducting a type of self-created pre-test. I had the opportunity to code my pilot interview using the coding methods above to determine whether it would sufficiently answer my research questions. If it had not, I intended to employ what Saldaña (2016)

called "exploratory coding" (p. 73), where a researcher codes the data using different methods of coding. For example, it may be advantageous to code using in vivo: first on the raw data of my one of the interviews, then use a different coding method, and then compare the two. Coding allowed me to explore the outcomes of the different coding methods and determine which one provided a rich analysis of the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs in Title I schools and tells a whole story in the voices of the Black girls themselves. The next section presents and discusses the data and how I chose to present it.

Data Presentation

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasized the importance of understanding individuals' experiences through narrative inquiry. With this approach, I delved into the stories and lived experiences of participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Siedman's (2013) three-series interviews allowed me to solicit data centered on the participants' voices and unique narratives, allowing for a rich exploration of their experiences and meaning-making processes. Coupling narrative profiles in Chapter 4 with a thematic analysis in Chapter 5, provided a holistic approach that reflects the depth and complexity of the participants' stories. This dichotomous approach allowed the participant's voice to be heard while not suppressing my voice as the researcher in the process.

Closely related to voice, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) introduced the concept of signature. Initially, I wrote the profiles wholly in the participant's voice so as to not create a signature that would be "too vivid" and would overpower the voices of the participants. With this literal interpretation, I weaved together a narrative that left the

audience lacking context and in some cases color in developing the main character. My narratives lacked what in literature is called an exposition. A good story builds toward a climax by introducing the characters and setting the stage for the narrative that is about to unfold. Initially, my narratives fell flat because I lacked rich descriptions of my participants that would garner empathy in understanding their experiences. In including an introduction, in which I allowed the reader to formally become acquainted with the participants, I established myself as the narrator whose commentary was included in italics to distinguish it from participants words providing context. In creating this short narrative introduction to the participant, I also preserved the “participant’s signature,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148) in developing their stories. Another consideration in presenting the data is the question of the audience. Kim (2016) suggested reaching multiple audiences not wholly focused on the writer, the storyteller, or the reader but considering all three in “fostering narrative imagination” (p. 233).

With these elements of narrative inquiry, I began to create a narrative profile. Kim (2016) made a distinction between analysis of narrative and narrative analysis. The analysis of narrative is where the data is arranged around the development of themes. On the other hand, narrative analysis is where the data is arranged or plotted as a coherent story. This study leaned more toward the former. When I began crafting the profile from the transcripts of each participant’s three individual interviews, the participant’s contribution to the focus group interview, and the follow-up interview, I had to consider how to organize the data to create a cohesive story. Participants introduced their experiences in what Siedman (2013) called their “focused life history” (p. 21) and continued to add detail to enhance meaning-making throughout the interview process. I

would be remiss in separating stories that were fully constructed over the course of three interviews. Therefore, I did as Siedman (2013) suggested and transposed the pieces of the narrative while keeping in mind the context and the meaning. Through this process, I created a preliminary profile that I pared down to help “understand [the] experience[s]” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17) of Black girls in gifted programs.

To pare down the stories, I metaphorically cut the fat from the narratives, leaving behind stories that best reflected the experiences of the participants in gifted programs. In some cases, the fully intact narrative was 40 pages or more. I purposely cut stories that did not illustrate the participant’s experiences and how they made meaning of those experiences. Through this process, I left behind poignant stories that fully illustrated the experiences of the girls. For instance, I decided to cut a story that Denise shared about when she served as the School Board’s student representative. This story, although interesting, did not help the reader better understand the participant’s experience in gifted programs. However, I found it pertinent to include Denise’s comparison of her experiences at schools with different demographics, which was included in the final profile specifically because Denise could not recollect any racialized experiences. Through this process, I found the stories were disjointed and my weak transitions did not suffice in weaving together a cohesive narrative. I decided to add subtitles to demark unique sections. At first, these sections were titled with blanket names garnered from the broad topics I focused on during the interviews like Introduction to Gifted and Racialized Experiences. Later I changed them and used the participant’s words to mark the sections. For instance, in the section where Alicia spoke about her racialized experiences, I labeled it “The Little Microaggressions, the Little Comments, Everything

was a Problem.” Alicia opened up this section by describing her experiences in an elementary school where she eventually got kicked out because of what she perceived was the color of her skin. Finally, I added an introduction written in my voice that included how I met each participant and was rich with descriptions of the participants.

Chapter 5 was organized as a thematic analysis identifying recurring themes and patterns within the narratives. Detailed passages from the transcripts were used to support the theme. These themes were grounded in the participants' stories and aligned with the research questions. These excerpts were carefully chosen to highlight key themes, emotions, and turning points in the narratives. Chapter 5 serves as what Kim (2019) called “the coda” (p. 228) or the “oomph” (p. 229) that we want the reader to take away from our narratives.

In presenting the data gathered through narrative inquiry, we draw upon the foundations laid by Clandinin and Connelly (2019), Kim's (2016) insights in education research, and Siedman's (2013) concept of profiles. This data presentation seeks to honor the narratives of resilience shared by the participants, revealing the intricate interplay between personal experiences, educational contexts, and individual profiles. Through this narrative inquiry, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs and the impact on their lives.

Focus Group and Focus Group Follow-Up Interview. “Focus group interviews are typically homogenous” (Patton, 2015, p. 283). As a result, I invited all five participants who were recruited to participate based on belonging to a specific group in M-DCPS to participate in the focus group, and all participants agreed to participate. Variety in perspectives is the purpose of focus group interviews and reinforcing the

patterns that emerged in the in-depth interviews (Patton, 2015). Focus groups can also serve as a *checks and balances* (Patton, 2015) system for the data collected during in-depth interviews. All participants participated in a 2.5-hour focus group session and individual 30-minute follow-up interviews conducted on Zoom. The same procedure regarding data collection was followed, and the research statement for focus groups was read to all the participants before the focus group interview began. Participants were asked to use pseudonyms during the focus group interviews even though a couple of the girls knew each other by attending the same schools or mutual associations.

Once all in-depth interviews were conducted, I scheduled the focus group interview. The focus group gave a unique perspective to the narrative and allowed students with similar backgrounds to share their experiences. Participants could sympathize or empathize with other Black girls from different settings. All participants participated in the focus group, which was scheduled via an app called Meet Up. The app allowed each participant to input her availability and facilitated finding a convenient time for all involved. Participants were then sent the Zoom link for the focus group interview.

Questions for the focus group were developed based on the interview guides for the in-depth interviews and trends I noted in the participants' individual interviews. For example, all of the participants spoke about toggling between different environments: the environments they encountered in their gifted and advanced courses, in which they may be the minority, and their home and community environments. People thus perceived them as "acting White" or "being an Oreo." I questioned the girls on how this label impacted their lives. At the onset of the interview, the girls were asked to answer each question. For most of the questions, the girls jumped into the conversation as it moved

them, but I also prompted participants to add their thoughts. Participants were asked to introduce themselves with their aliases and to share their major or intended major to highlight the similarities in their chosen field of study. The girls commented on the similarities and hypothesized on the reason they may have chosen to pursue similar interests. The girls also shared their experiences, but unlike in the one-on-one interview, the other participants could hear their experiences and respond by adding a twist to the interview process (Patton, 2015). Their responses and reactions were expressed verbally, through body language, facial expressions, and the chat feature on Zoom using words and emojis. Each girl also consciously decided whether to attend an HBCU or a PWI, which they shared with the group. The focus group allowed the girls to “consider their views in the context of the views of others” (Patton, 2015). In the follow-up interview, we further explored their initial reaction to the stories shared by the other participants and any additional recollections that may have been jarred by the conversations shared during the focus group interview. As a culminating question, the participants were asked to share their wishes for the study’s outcome.

Recording and Transcribing the Data. Siedman (2013) recommended recording interviews to check for accuracy and to keep researchers accountable for the original narratives of the participants. Therefore, I used the record feature on Zoom to keep a record of each interview. One participant kept her camera off during her interviews, but the other interviews were conducted with the camera on. In addition, I used a tape recorder as a backup. I advised each participant at the beginning of the interview process about the tools that would be used to record the interview and was transparent in sharing that I wanted to capture their stories accurately to write profiles in their own words.

The Otter.Ai software was used to initially transcribe the interviews using the audio file generated from Zoom and later I refined the transcripts using the tape recording from my tape recorder. I listened to the interviews several times during the refinement process and corrected the transcript. Transcripts generated from Otter.Ai also had to be formatted and personalized for each participant. The backup recording proved beneficial in deciphering inaudible portions of the Zoom recording as the recordings from the audio tape could be slowed down or sped up to increase clarity. In addition, the tape recorder included a feature that helped eliminate any background noises or conversations that may have been captured on Zoom.

Before each in-depth interview, the participants read the consent statement for interviews, which was recorded to hold me accountable for taking this necessary step and to protect the confidentiality of the participants' identification by not having a written record of their participation. A copy of the tape recording was downloaded onto my password-protected MacBook. The audio and Zoom recordings were uploaded to my VSU OneDrive account in case the computer crashed. After the dissertation has been approved, transcription will be officially completed and both audio and Zoom and other data (eg. transcripts, observations, etc.) will be deleted from my MacBook 3 years after the conclusion of the study. All transcriptions are confidential and were kept in a password-protected folder on the my computer and uploaded to MAXQDA for coding during data analysis.

Validity

In a dissertation, ensuring the validity of research findings is paramount to establish the credibility and reliability of the study. Maxwell's (2013) concept of validity in qualitative research serves as a guiding light, offering a framework to assess the depth and accuracy of the conclusions drawn. As a foundational principle, Maxwell's (2013) approach to validity prompts researchers to critically evaluate the coherence, soundness, and trustworthiness of their investigations, providing a systematic path to ensure the robustness and integrity of the research outcomes. In employing Maxwell's (2013) principles, researchers navigate the complex terrain of qualitative inquiry, striving to ascertain the validity of their research, thus enriching the academic discourse and contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their field.

A validity threat discussed by Maxwell (2013) is reactivity. Reactivity is "the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). Reactivity is unavoidable as a researcher cannot help but influence the setting and participants simply through the research process. Kim (2016) cautioned against doing "backyard research" (p. 246). On the other hand, Kim (2016) suggested that backyard research is advantageous because of its convenience for the working doctoral candidate and because it helps researchers investigate what is going on in their own "backyard." Researching my school district may conflict with my role as a researcher. My experience with gifted programs and my position within the school district may influence how participants interact with me as the primary researcher. Throughout the process, I evaluated my reactivity or "reflexivity" (Maxwell, 2013, p 125) through analytic memos. Kim (2016) described reflective research as the researcher scrutinizing their involvement

in the study in the same way that they question the validity of their data. My position in the district may be used to create a rapport with the participants. However, that rapport should not be used to manipulate the participants. This rapport is essential in the interviewing process since three interview sessions and a focus group session were used to collect data.

Maxwell (2013) described an inclusive checklist for testing the validity of a conclusion and mitigating the effect of validity threats. The total time spent interviewing each participant will help to reduce my researcher biases and keep my subjective "I's" in check. Maxwell (2013) also suggested that intensive, long-term involvement will help another hypothesis I may not have considered because of my experiential knowledge of gifted programs. The Siedman (2013) three-phase interview protocol also garnered richer data. The specific focus and length of the interviews allowed the participants to warm up to me as the primary researcher and to speak more freely regarding their experiences in gifted programs.

Referential or interpretive evidence of validity may also be a threat. I conducted focus groups as a members' check. In addition, I also allowed participants to review interview notes, Zoom recordings (if applicable), and tape recordings. Maxwell (2013) warned that member checks are just evidence against the validity.

Maxwell (2013) suggested that a researcher should explain their biases. To address biases, Peshkin (1988) prescribed the idea that researchers should acknowledge their subjectivity throughout the research process. His reference to subjectivity in terms of the researcher's own experiences and values that affect a research study. The purpose of acknowledging one's subjectivity is not to exclude it from the study but to manage it.

As a result, I was able to first identify my subjective I's as the Mama Bear "I" and the Gifted Student "I;" however, I later added the Gifted Teacher "I" and the Future Administrator "I." Just like a Mama Bear, I am fiercely protective over my children. In this case, I am protective of my daughters' right to a challenging curriculum. When we moved back to Florida from Georgia, I fought for her placement into a gifted program. Although she could have attended the school where I taught, I enrolled her at another school where a gifted/advanced curriculum was offered the entire day, rather than one period or as a pull-out program one day a week. Currently, I am advocating for my youngest daughter to be tested and subsequently serviced for a gifted program.

For this reason, the same protectiveness I show over my children, I feel toward my students; therefore, I had to include the Gifted Teacher "I." A caveat to this is that I am not endorsed in gifted education, so technically, I have not been trained in the process of identifying students for gifted programs. As a gifted teacher, I am aware that no formal curriculum exists for gifted programs in middle and high school. Therefore, a teacher that has not been trained to teach the gifted population or does not have a point of reference for teaching advanced students, may struggle to find a challenging curriculum to engage students. I also added the Future Administrator "I" because I am aware, particularly in the school in which I taught last year, that sometimes teachers are given waivers to teach gifted in Title I schools with no experience in teaching gifted students. I am one of those teachers. I also know that there had not been a qualified, gifted teacher in the years prior to when I served as a gifted teacher. The year before I started teaching gifted students, the gifted teacher left in the middle of the school year without much notice. In previous years, teachers who currently teach at the school, served as gifted

teachers but were not certified, and thus were removed from the position. Therefore, the enrollment in the program is scant. At the elementary school level, the students are not serviced for gifted because they do not have a teacher.

By identifying my subjective “I’s,” I can address my possible biases. As a gifted teacher and prospective administrator, my knowledge of gifted programs guided me as I created my research design. My knowledge of how students are staffed and serviced helped me decide the age of the student I wanted to participate in the study. In addition, as I taught gifted, I know the threshold of information I can get from interviewing middle school-aged students. Therefore, I chose to use a different population for my study in hopes of getting broader, deeper, and more detailed responses. Thus, my biases strengthen my vested interest in my study. Not only does my experiential knowledge mold the framework of the study, but the pilot interview I did as part of my qualitative research class also allowed me to refine the study concept.

As a former gifted student in Miami-Dade County, mother of a gifted Black girl, and a gifted teacher, I recognize that the roles that I have played in my life can create a bias in my research. These experiences have shaped my notions of gifted programs in general, specifically those in MDCPS. As a mother of a gifted daughter, I have experienced gifted programs in Miami-Dade County and other states. However, I have had more significant interactions with the gifted programs at various schools and gifted students in different capacities in MDCPS. Additionally, I have been a teacher in a gifted classroom. Therefore, I have seen the decision-making process regarding gifted students from the administrative perspective. From the outset of this study, I have identified my subjective "I's" (Peshkin, 1988), which centers around my roles in gifted programs.

Maxwell (2013) described two threats that threaten validity: the data that fits the researchers' conceptual framework of the study and those that do not. These two threats can be encapsulated as researcher bias.

Kim (2016) also discussed that in data analysis, a researcher operates under the interpretation of faith that the participant's accounts are accurate and true. Also, the interpretation of suspicion makes the researcher skeptical of the participants' accounts. It allows the researcher to "decode" implicit meanings in their accounts. As a researcher, I kept these two theories in mind when I allowed participants to conduct member checks.

Ethical Issues

In my current position, I have access to specific student data. Accessing these records without any explicit permission from the school district may not only violate district policy, but I also believe it would be unethical. If the district's gifted coordinator or other district personnel gave me the documents in good faith, my methods would not be considered unethical. However, retrieving the information with full permission from the district was imperative.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs in Title I Miami-Dade County Public Schools using critical race theory as a theoretical framework. Counternarratives were used to explore the gifted programs as property of Whites. The microaggressions committed against minority girls in advanced programs explored how the intersectionality of race and gender interact to create a unique narrative. Telling the stories of these Black girls may help identify ways to circumvent psychological and social-emotional issues, and combat microaggressions that may become harmful to the

girl's concept of self, educational confidence, and promote culturally responsive curriculum and policy reform. In the current political climate, the Black girls' injustice experiences in gifted programs are just one of the many wrongs that need to be righted against Black children and Black people, in general. Continuing to ignore Black girls would prove detrimental to this holistic approach.

As a result, I embarked on a narrative inquiry study to explore the counternarratives of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs. Telling their stories in their voices would lend authenticity to the study. The study took place in Miami-Dade County, which is considered an ethnic enclave. Cubans are afforded privileges akin to Whites elsewhere in the country because of their political, social, and economic advantages. Therefore, Hispanics were not included in the proposed study. However, in the initial conceptualization, all minorities were considered for the study.

The criteria for the Black girls in this study were as follows: identified as gifted or on an accelerated track in elementary school, participated in a gifted program in middle school and the early years of high school or in advanced courses, advanced programming in the latter part of high school, and attended a Title I school at some point during their educational journey and matriculated from a school in Miami-Dade County within three years of the study. Seven participants were initially chosen for the in-depth interviews with five seeing the study to fruition, including participating in the focus group interview. Seidman's (2013) three-stage interview protocol was used to collect data regarding their experiences in gifted programs. All interviews were videotaped and tape-recorded. Zoom video conferencing was used to account for the fact that the me and the participants were in different cities. The data was analyzed using *in vivo*, values, and

descriptive coding for the first round of coding and pattern coding for the second round. A third round of coding was necessary to minimize the number of codes and to sort the codes according to the categories and themes that emerged from the data. The participants were selected with homogenous purposeful sampling. Questionnaires were used to garner information to guide the interviewing process.

In closing, this study elevates the voices of the unheard populations of underrepresented Black girls in gifted programs, the marginalization experienced by Black girls in gifted programs, and the tenets of critical race theory and how it applies to said experiences. Black girls are not only underrepresented in gifted programs but also in the literature. Researchers have focused on Black boys and White girls, with Black girls in gifted programs being largely unstudied. These girls' experiences helped provide more of a holistic view of Black students in gifted programs in Title I schools.

Chapter IV

NARRATIVE PROFILES

Siedman's (2013) three-interview series allowed for an intimate conversation to evolve between myself and the participants and a level of trust and comfort to develop prior to the focus group. Later, the words were "crafted into a profile . . . of a participant's experience" (Siedman, 2013, p. 122). The stories shared with me were carefully considered before each interview when I asked the participants to dig deeper into their consciousness to bring to the surface experiences that may be impactful to their lives, decisions, and educational journey. With this charge the participants recounted their stories or stories of others that allowed them to make epiphanies about their experiences along the way.

Each participant chose a pseudonym to protect their anonymity; I changed the names of key places and people that may serve as identifiers. In order to assist with the flow of the narratives, I added transitional phrases denoted by italicized words at times. I also found it necessary to "clarify a passage" (Siedman, 2013) by rewriting the question as a statement to make the context clearer in the story, denoted with italicized words. In addition, it may have been necessary to change the tense of a word or add words to the narrative to clarify the meaning, which is set off by brackets. I used, as Siedman (2013) suggested, ellipsis to denote an omission and deleted common conversation fillers such as

“uhms,” “ahs,” and “you knows” (Siedman, 2013). Subtitles were necessary for the flow of the narrative, for without them, the transitions seemed forced and contrite. As you read the narratives, you will notice that my voice was used minimally to amplify the voices and stories of the participants. This was very intentional, as it was important to ensure that I stayed as true to their stories as possible. I allowed the participants to introduce themselves to the audience as they introduced themselves to me during our interviews. The profiles are in the order in which the participants were interviewed, but otherwise, the order of topics within the profile is inconsequential. The subtitles for each section were created from quotes that summarized the section’s content. The last section was titled “Wishes for the Outcome of the Study.” The narrative from the last section was gleaned from the focus group follow-up interview, the purpose of which was two-fold—to conclude the narrative logically and to express in their own words their wishes for the outcome of this study. After each profile, I provided a reflective section on my thoughts. The order of the narratives is as follows: Gilman Smith, Stephanie Jones, C, Denise, and Alicia.

Gilman Smith

Meet Gilman Smith

When plan A had failed for me to recruit girls who fit the criteria of the study, I immediately reached out to a former colleague who served as the International Baccalaureate magnet coordinator for some years. I knew with certainty that she kept in contact with some of the students who passed through the program. She was analogous to a Mother Hen, too proud of her progeny to watch from a distance. Mrs. Burro was the type of educator who went to college graduations and got invited to weddings, so when I

asked, she immediately had several girls in mind that would be “perfect” for the study. At the top of the list was Gilman Smith. I remember Gilman in passing as a freshman at the large high school where I served as a teacher and then an activities director, but her face could have been one of thousands of children that I served over the years. At the time, she was coming in, and I was on my way out.

Like most millennials, I still believed in the power of picking up the phone to talk about important business but leaned on this generation’s preferred method of contact with Gilman. When I texted her, she responded right away, and I took that as a good sign that she was “really interest[ed],” which to me was a statement pregnant with possibilities. So, we scheduled a call for the next day after a meeting that was already on her calendar. She texted me to tell me that her meeting ended early so I could call her whenever I was free.

Gilman Smith answered the phone with a cool confidence that comes with decades of living, not a 20-year-old college student fresh out of the teenage woe-is-me-stage. Our initial conversation included all the niceties of people who vaguely remember each other. In the text, I introduced myself as just Viviana, but Gilman knew me as Ms. Smith. Once she put two and two together, the conversation flowed much easier; I was still a little reserved because of the dynamics of my authority, but not awkward. Our conversation after that was punctuated by exclamation points as her excitement over the study escalated. She agreed to be in the study, and we scheduled the first interview about 2 weeks later to accommodate her busy schedule and to give her the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire.

Gilman Smith, at the start of the study, was a senior at Southern State University majoring in Political Science. Out of all the state schools, Southern State is one of the most popular public institutions that Florida seniors choose to attend. Like most students in M-DCPS, Gilman was identified as gifted in second grade and was staffed in the program in third grade. Her entire world existed “within a three-block radius.” She lived and attended school in the same neighborhood for elementary, middle, and high school. As a first-generation Haitian American, she was immersed in her culture as if Port-au-Prince had been transplanted to 135 Street. The businesses bared signs in her native tongue, and the workers spoke Creole. Everywhere she turned, she ran into someone with the same high cheekbones and smooth dark skin and shared what she called a “stained identity” of being Haitian.

Gilman was undoubtedly a high achiever and was identified as gifted through her high standardized test scores. More often than not, standardized test scores are the measuring stick used to determine giftedness. You can’t even get your foot through the door if you’re not smart. Gilman believed her reputation followed her, but it was not being intelligent. In fact, she felt she was average in elementary school despite being in the gifted program. In fifth grade, there was a shift in her perception of her abilities, and she considered herself a “nerd.” Middle school brought a change in her personality in which people attached a “mean girl” persona to her. She described herself hesitantly, looking absently into the sky as she searched for the right words to pluck out of the ether when she settled on “kinda a bully” but not “really a bully because she wasn’t actively seeking to bully people.” The con of attending schools in the same feeder pattern is that it is difficult to shake the reputation that you’ve built. When the “mean girl” wanted to

run for Student Government in high school, students were convinced that she was still “unapproachable” and had “always been this person.”

Gilman’s countenance did not bear any traces of the maliciousness that her classmates described, but kids can be cruel, and years had passed since she had been “that” person. The soft roundness of her face and sharpness of her cheekbones are God’s contour that even the best makeup brushes could not replicate. She had a friendly smile that translated through the screen, and her tresses were a crown that haloed her head like a dark-skinned Catholic saint. Running for student government brought Gilman to the realization that being in the International Baccalaureate program made her different from the rest of the school. The rest of the school thought, “yeah, those are the smart kids.” She felt like “we’re walking around with IB on our backs.”

Growing up during the time of “Trumpism,” as she called it, Gilman felt that her dislike for Trump made her very passionate about things. Additionally, the Black Lives Matter movement and the advocacy she witnessed on social media encouraged her to empower herself to be active in social justice conversations. Her exposure to city government through a paid internship in high school, specifically seeing “people who looked like me in government making decisions,” led her to a major in political science. After law school, she is looking to pursue educational policy in Florida. Her aspirations are to push for “educational equity within the state.”

I usually conferenced with Gilman from the comfort of my bedroom on Zoom, but she chose to meet for the first interview in the public space of the student union. She had just left a meeting for an organization she was a part of, so her choice of meeting space was more about convenience rather than intention. In fact, all our meetings were at the

tail end of some meeting or event. In each interview with the exception of the focus group, I was met with was a smiling face showing a little wear from a long day and from the weight of being a college student trying to juggle academics, extracurriculars, and a social life. She recounted her experiences in gifted programs and how it impacted her life and post-secondary educational decisions.

Gilman Smith's Profile

"It was Different Every Year for Me." My name is Gilman Smith. I am 20. I have been in gifted programs since the third grade. I don't recall what year in high school that it kind of [fizzled] out in terms of gifted status, and at that point, I was a part of the IB program. [IB] is another type of acceleration program that my school offered. I remember my mom handled a lot of that conversation when I got pulled out to test. I don't remember that experience at all. I think I took that test in second grade. It wasn't that different. But in fourth grade, that's when I start to see, okay, we get pulled out at this time, or I have [a] different teacher that no one else has.

I went to Pioneer Elementary, and then River Run Elementary was built, which is closer to me, and they moved me over. I remember all those teachers. [All] my elementary teachers were at my high school graduation party. They were instrumental in my success. All of those women, and they're all Black women or women that were instrumental in my own development and advocating for me. I've been blessed with mentors around me. I really believe the way I developed is from seeing people advocate for me. My entire family did all the Pioneer's-- elementary, middle, and high. So, Pioneer Middle and then, ultimately, Pioneer Senior High were all on the same three-block radius. My mom has always been an involved parent. So, when I started at River

Run, my mom didn't want me to go there. I'm not sure why she wanted to pull me out and bring me back to Pioneer. I ended up staying there. I loved it.

It was different every year for me, honestly. I would go to a different work group within my teacher's class. I would always be with the same people, whereas, in the fourth grade, that was more, I guess, a pullout program where we were getting removed from our class. They started experimenting with you [going] here at this time of the day for your S.T.E.M., and then you go here for English and Social Studies. We were going to a teacher that no one else had. It didn't feel real. I remember that we had specialties, but I don't remember what mine was. There used to be a conversation in my house about me pursuing S.T.E.M. Maybe that was the reason why my dad wanted me to go the S.T.E.M. route. My mom told me to do robotics. I liked science but never gravitated toward that. It wasn't something that was screaming at me, per se.

Then for fifth grade, that was completely different because we had our own teacher. So, it was one teacher, and it was always like five or six of us. It was never a full class. When it [comes] to science-based things, we would get pulled out. We would go to the science teachers that were for the non-gifted kids. I never [liked hanging] out with those students, so I never really thought, oh, this is different. Then I was like, I don't see the rest of my friends, or they have bigger classrooms. Also, the behavior in those classrooms was different. If my teacher wasn't in class, we would get split up. It's a completely different experience. Kids would be able to talk and play and joke around. I would go there, and every time I would go there, I would get my money stolen, like every single time. These kids are different. I want to go back to my classroom because I don't know them.

It was so much experimenting *in education*. Even as a child, my teachers weren't quiet about it. I hated it. The last straw for me and my mom was i-Prep [a school created by the former superintendent to close the digital divide]. i-Prep was the most awful thing for me. I'm currently pursuing getting tested for ADHD now. I knew online learning for me was not it. I really do know myself, where I thrive, and where I will fall. They forced us in there, and they wouldn't let students leave even [at] my mom's request. I failed that class. I got my first "D" ever. I didn't know how to keep myself accountable. They're self-guided. I knew that wasn't something that I could do. There was a lot of experimenting that happened as I was going through some of those years, which impacted my experiences.

I never really understood the intricacies of *gifted* until I got into high school. Ultimately, we decided [on] Pioneer Senior High because that's where I already was. It'll be easier, and they did have an IB [International Baccalaureate] program. Now, being in high school IB, that experience is completely different. Your freshman and sophomore years that's considered pre-IB before you're actually [in] the diploma program. We did have a larger cohort at that point. Then, people started dropping out, and I couldn't understand that concept. I ended up never doing the school tour at Pioneer, but when they did come, they were asked, "Did you have Spanish, or did you have French?" If you did, then you were signed up for the IB program automatically. They were given a [piece of] paper to sign. If you ask them now, they didn't know what they were doing or signing up for, but it was an opportunity for them, so they did it.

It was more of the social aspects of it. You truly are secluded from other students at the school and the payoff for it wasn't apparent at the time. My friends can go hang

out after school, but I couldn't because I had homework and work. I guess the rigor was just too much because it still was a lot of them dropping out. I wanted to drop out. My mom was like that's not an option for you. Also just being able to have funner classes and have more control of my schedule. They want the same cohort to be taking all the same classes. So, there wasn't that much freedom for me. It wasn't really an option. So, I ended up staying there and then junior year and senior year is [when] it felt more real.

We were a multi-magnet school, and you can be in more than one magnet. Almost every elective is associated with a magnet, so I wanted to be in the health program. Being Haitian, I knew what health was. A lot of the IB students end up not being able to do several magnets. I was involved. I did HOSA [Health Occupational Science Association]. I went to the competition and all that. Again, the pattern was they couldn't do both programs, but because of the rigor of the schedule and when the health classes were, it just wasn't an option. I was asked which one [I] want to do. I [realized] I didn't want to study Bio words and stuff for the health program. I stuck with IB and ultimately had to drop out of health. Then, junior/senior year, all my classes became consumed by IB classes.

“Oh, I’m Black.” Being identified as gifted in the third grade at a predominately Black school, Gilman was surrounded by students with similar demographics until she realized that there was something different about her friend. Childhood innocence was the underpinning of her introduction to the construct of race, but it was not until high school that she understood the role race played in society.

I literally remember the moment where I was like, oh, I'm Black. I had a Cuban best friend, and we were holding hands. She is White, and I am Black. In that program,

she was the only Hispanic. Everyone else was Black. It was a mix of Haitians and Americans. It wasn't just Haitian. Every cohort that I had in elementary was small. Now, for middle school, IB was so expansive because in middle school, it does have a language class. Trying to analyze that and how gifted or IB that demographic was like for me, it wasn't something I noticed. In high school, we had a pretty, in my opinion at this point, now that I'm thinking back, a healthy split of Hispanics, and Haitians and Americans. I'm trying to remember if we had a White person. We had White Hispanics. My exposure to White Hispanics, like Venezuelans and Colombians, rather than Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, was something that I did notice in the IB program. When I noticed that there was more cultures present was having Asian students in our program when we didn't have any Asians at our school.

In terms of non-IB students, there's always that conversation about culture, and how similar we are, and how different we can be. So, I think that leads to just my own bias of not knowing the breadth of what our Hispanic population could be or our Black population even. Even Black Americans being at our school is still a minority because it's so dominated by Black Haitians. I was able then to be more aware of the differences in the Hispanic identity. I learned the difference between a White Hispanic and a Black Afro Latino. So, we have Columbians, Venezuelans, definitely Cubans. I had Asian friends. I think maybe because we had those cultural events that made it more obvious, but it didn't pose any issues.

I don't really remember anybody saying anything out of pocket. We were all pretty similar. I knew people who were Hispanic. I realized it's part of their culture. We had that cultural awareness because it was built into our curriculum. Amongst each

other, there wasn't so much when it came to our identities about race and culture. When it came to gender, I think that was a little bit more obvious. Colorism was an issue in my class. I can unpack that later.

I would say our teachers try to mitigate that as much as possible to a certain extent. We have very woke teachers, but I think colorism is definitely something that, like in any Black community, impacted our cohort without people even really realizing it. There was one conversation that we had about colorism and how a light-skinned identity can impact darker-skinned people in the room. One of our light-skinned friends made a whole ordeal about it. You do have privileges as a lighter-skinned person. You would have those natural leaders to remind us this deadline is coming up. If I would say something as someone who's darker skinned, my hair is [coarser] than theirs. I have a stronger personality, more assertive. If I say something, it's taken in a completely different way. If I say remember to do this, people are like I'm yelling at them, bossing them around. However, when she does that, as someone's who's lighter skinned, has a higher voice, looser hair, people say something like, "Oh my God. Thank you for looking out." It seemed [sweeter], adorable, kind. It was interesting for me to see that.

In middle school, I'm not gonna lie; I probably was mean until like the eighth grade. Into high school, I was a completely different person. So, my dad's in prison. He went to jail [when I was] *in* like 10th grade. I spiraled after that. At the time, I didn't really realize it was happening. My dad and I started to get really close. Then he just went no contact. I didn't know what was going on. I'm not really connected with his family like that, not that much. Me and my sister would speak. Finally, I called my sister, and I was like, "Why haven't I heard from my dad in two weeks?" We had just

spent Thanksgiving there. She was like “I’m not supposed to tell anybody unless they ask or whatever.” The day after I left, their house got raided, and he was arrested. No one told me. Mind you, my dad was a good person.

I never knew what my dad did for a living. I used to be suspicious. I just knew that he had a business. My friends used to joke that my dad was like in the Haitian mafia, but I thought it was a joke. I was like “What do you do?” And he was like, “Oh I own businesses.” I went to Haiti, and I got to see the business. It was a concrete business. I took pictures and everything. This is just all context for why I had been spiraling and how that [led] to other experiences. I look at my mom, and she’s mute.

I was at school when it happened. I was in Spanish when I saw my sister, walked out, and called my mom. She was like “He’s in jail.” Why is he in jail? My sister said, “trafficking.” At this point, I’m scared. When I hear trafficking, I think of sex trafficking. My father . . . there’s no way. She’s like “go look up his name.” It was drug trafficking and money laundering. My dad was always fresh. He was always traveling back and forth. I thought this was a businessman and now you’re telling me about this alternate life. Come to find out, I was the only person in my family who didn’t know about my dad’s life, even my other siblings knew. This [was] my 10th grade-year last semester.

In itself IB, pre-IB, you have to test out of your regular testing requirements. You still have to fulfill those with the state of Florida so you can focus on your IB studies. My testing schedule was like a week-long of back-to-back tests. We had EOCs [End of Course Exams] so almost every class had a test. I had a little boyfriend. I was like, “I don’t care about this.” But I did. I did care. I’m staying up extra late trying to do my

homework. I just remember I used to cry a lot . . . just like stress and anxiety from all the tests. Ms. Schmidt sat me down and was like, “You’re going through a mental health crisis right now.” When I talked to my mom and stuff, we never talked about therapy. When I asked for therapy, she was like, “Who is going to pay for therapy?” She’s against therapy. I think that comes with the stereotype of Black families not subscribing to that. I never really had the outlet when all that was happening to me. Ultimately, I passed all my tests but to the extent of myself.

“Stained Identity.” Gilman’s understanding of race and how it impacted other’s perception evolved from the childhood innocence of sweetly acknowledging her differences to the “stereotypical playground stuff” in middle school to being confronted with microaggressions in high school, and blatant racism in college. For some being confronted with a progression of more aggressive acts of racism may have impacted them negatively, but for Gilman she found pride in her identity.

In elementary and middle school, I think more so I probably experienced classism and, you know, elitism, and things like that, but not really racialized experiences. I’m trying to think back to how my gender impacted things because I’ve only recently been able to think about my identity as a woman, and how it impacts me as a Black woman but also as a woman. In elementary and middle school, beyond the stereotypical school kid playground stuff, I don’t really remember anything intense. However, in high school, I [felt] like that became way more relevant for me or maybe I just noticed it more, where it was like the personality traits that they would try to put on me.

In elementary and middle school, it’s the classic, school jokes. Kids just say stuff that they hear. We’re all Haitian, which was just the insane part of it. We have the

thickest accents. People be like yeah, I'm not Haitian. I wrote about this in my college essay. There was one time I think in second grade someone was asking for a translator for someone who speaks Creole. We [are] all Haitian. I remember I'd be like, I'm not gonna say that I speak Creole because I don't want people to try to say, "oh, Haitian this" or "Haitian that." There was almost like a stained identity even though we were all Haitian. I really cannot understand that. So, in elementary and middle school, I never per se could say I felt targeted as an individual, but more so that there was a disregard for the rich culture that we all shared. However, on Haitian Flag Day, everybody was Haitian. It allowed people to at least, you know, start finding pride in that identity.

Dr. Jean was the only teacher that taught IB Science, no matter what stage. I had her [during] my sophomore, junior, and senior year. That was the most racist experience because of where I'm from, I didn't have to think about racism. There were forces that were going against us because we were Black, but nobody was like, "Oh, you 'n-word'" or anything like that. It was awful until the end. [In] my sophomore year, initially, I knew about her and the horror stories. I would hear she doesn't communicate deadlines. I listen to other people's experiences, and I pick out their mistakes, and I try to apply them . . . The first couple of months were okay.

Dr. Jean, she would pick on our Haitian identities. It was crazy because her husband was a Haitian man, and her son was Haitian and visually Black. She has to be like a miserable individual. This is kind of where I started running for student government again and those personality traits that come on me of being aggressive or assertive. I was the loudest voice in my cohort to defend us because I grew up like that. This is not right. It started out as random comments. "Haitians have roaches in their

house.” “Everybody who lives on Sixth Ave. are in low-income housing.” My teacher should not be saying these things to me. She shouldn’t be calling me dumb and stupid, especially when I’m trying. It didn’t really feel like there was that space for us to speak against it, and so it just started impacting our work. It would get to a point in time, we would try so hard, and I was going to prove that lady wrong and I passed that test with a five [out of five]. I wasn’t being taught. I was given a worksheet and told to figure it out. We [got] together. We studied so hard. We would be at FIU [Florida International University] every day because we finally got our credentials there.

She would give us these bi-weekly tests we had to do. They brought in a University of Miami student to help our class. We finally came together to pass these exams. We were studying day and night, we started passing the test. [Do] you know what she said? We cheated. It was impossible to cheat in that class because she was watching us like a hawk. She switched our tests from IB tests to giving us AP tests. There’s [a] huge difference between IB and AP. I took an AP course and actually just forgot. It wasn’t my thing. IB and AP, people try to parallel them, but they’re very different. IB is very depth-based. AP is breadth-based. I took that one AP class, and I was not interested in it at all. This particular discipline was not building on my skills to be a world thinker. It was for me to pass this test and memorize Biology. I was like in this dystopia. I was like, “Mom, you have to . . . literally have to come to school.” *Dr. Jean* was like, “Yeah I don’t know how you guys passed this test?” It was a huge shock, not going to lie, but we dedicated [our] time to it. There were a couple of classes where I just walked out and I’m not that student. I’m not disruptive. I’m not disrespectful. My mom didn’t raise me up that way.

One time I walked out and went straight to Mrs. Burro, our IB coordinator. I called my mom, and she showed up. She was like, “I’m done hearing about this!” and we had a meeting. Principal Lafrance knew me because one thing about me was I was going to call my mom at Pioneer. So, they knew me and my mom. So, we had a meeting with him, Ms. Louis-Jean, Mrs. Burro, I think Ms. Schmidt came in, my mom, and me. I had a list of instances of things that she did wrong to us. She called us monkeys. She said Haitians were monkeys. She would talk about Trump. She would talk about classism issues between [aa school down South] . . . it starts with Miami in the school, but they had a robust IB program. She would talk about how the White kids there when she would visit, they were able to answer the questions, but here we can’t do nothing. She would talk about our culture.

I listed all that out. She went on to say, “She’s so disrespectful. She didn’t respect my authority.” When I simply would beg her to teach me. Just teach me, Dr. Jean. By the end of the meeting, Mrs. Burro would give reports because she had her back. There was no other teacher going to do her job. That was what she said. I’m sad about that because there should have been someone else to come to Pioneer to teach us. I do think it’s the result of our IB program performance. I think we were a low-performing IB program. I looked around at the resources we had compared to other schools. They had laboratories to look at [outer] space and really engage with the curriculum that they were learning. I didn’t have that. I barely had the accurate, up-to-date book. So, nothing ended up coming out of that. It was the most awful experience. I talk to students now here at Southern State, they went to schools with more White teachers. That was a common occurrence.

I feel like people pick on me because they think I'm strong enough to handle it. It's a title that I don't appreciate. Someone can attribute that not only to being a Black woman but being a woman. As you know, we are natural nurturers. We look out for everyone sometimes at the extent of ourselves. I think the environment that I was around encouraged that, and I kinda wish that it didn't because I don't want to have to be that strong to be honest.

In high school with that mindset and the abilities I had, compared to [my] peers around me, I knew if I went after something, I was going to get it, to a certain extent, in the most humblest of senses, not trying to be arrogant at all. There were times when I was like, I [wanted] this but no because people are going to look at it as if she just wants to do everything. I would literally dim that light. Now as someone at Southern State, I have to unlearn that behavior very quickly because these people here are ruthlessly going after what they want. It's almost like a defense mechanism that I've built around my identity as a woman, as a Black woman, where I can't come off too strong. Even when I go after it, I have to be mindful of how this person is going to take this. I am an assertive person. I know what I need to say, and I intend to articulate it that way. In high school, I wasn't mindful of my identity. I was mindful of the impact that I was having and I'm just learning that was because of those identities.

On the other hand, in debate tournaments I felt othered. I won't say I was racially discriminated against going to debate tournaments. There was something that differentiated you from those people. We would joke all the time, that's when I saw White people. I really didn't see White people like that unless it was my teachers. We would go to these predominately White schools because they have robust programs, and

they were really equipped to host. We would be the only group of Black people every time. We were different. We are others. They really wouldn't talk to us unless that connection was already made. We were trying our best and sometimes we just wouldn't make it. So, when our names [were] called, it was a huge deal. Debate had a one clap rule because it takes so long to get the awards. Anytime North Miami came, we would just yell and scream because we heard our name, and they had to deal with it because we barely heard our names.

At tournaments, we would be the only Black people amongst a Whiter crowd. We were essentially the only Black, predominately Black school that had a team until North City revamped their program and started coming as well. It was different the way we would talk to each other. The way we would laugh between rounds, maybe a little bit more, I'm not going to use loud to define us but flamboyant. You could just see the way that we interacted with each other. Whereas with them, they're dead serious, on their computers still prepping and we will be prepping, but kiking [laughing] throughout it all. Not to say anybody was directly rude to us. That's just the nuance of the situation where it was just us, and then there was them.

“I’m Passionate About Black People.” *From having to protect her identity to feeling othered, Gilman’s racialized experiences shaped the person that she has become and continues to influence the decisions she makes. Gilman puts race in her life in perspective because although racism was not prevalent in her formative years, she is constantly confronted by it in the educational setting, on social media, in pop culture and day-to-day interactions. She shared how race, and her racialized experiences impacted her life.*

I'm passionate about Black people. I want to see us thrive. I don't like hearing about slavery anymore. I don't like hearing about the intricacies of it. We went through so much. We were segregated like 60 years ago. People are alive who experienced these things. There are recordings of slaves. When you think about technology, trying to put that into perspective, the technology existed close enough to slavery. So, just knowing the atrocities that Black people not just Haitian people but Black people period over time have experienced solely based on the color of our skin just irks me. What about the content of people's characters? I stress people's moral compasses so much, their values and things like that, all of that is dismissed simply based on the color of someone's skin. I am proud to be an American as someone who comes from an immigrant family. My family risked their lives to come here and enjoy the benefits and privileges that I get to experience. I'm even engaging in these systems of oppression by going to college. That is a tool of the rich and bourgeoisie and privilege.

I talked about this with my friends, like appreciating differences rather than trying to water our identities down. So, the idea of assimilation. We don't all have to be the same. I don't want to be like my White peers. I like my differences and I should be empowered by them. I don't want my things to be forced on them either because it's not theirs. It's for Black people.

I didn't know what microaggressions were. Even now, I'm just now able to casually recognize them. I'm still learning what calling them out looks like. There's so much that I probably did experience, and they are microaggressions, but they were normal. Last year, the Black Student Union here hosted a general body meeting, and I was the navigator. Something happened at our university. A student was giving her

experience. She was casually saying, this is what made me cry because everybody was crying at that moment, “Before that *experience*, microaggressions we can take that. That’s normal in my day-to-day experiences.” Wow, that’s really what it is. Being able to process what microaggressions are now and reflect on the fact that it’s so engrained into my life and how I present that [that] type of disrespect is normal to me. I can’t even identify it as disrespect or back then connect it to disrespect was just a harsh reality to accept. Wow, I get disrespected on the daily and I just take that because that is just what it is.

It is hard to be able to recognize *microaggressions* in the moment and address them. The issue with microaggressions is unless you nip it in the bud right there, people are going to gaslight you and act like it didn’t happen. So, my original way to address them was avoidance. It’s not worth it. I have to pick my battles. I want my voice to be powerful when it’s necessary, where it’s like, “You said these bad words to me, and I need to address it now” versus [addressing] every microaggression. I feel like it dwindles the impact of my voice when I do speak up. I think it’s a way to keep me safe and ensure that when I need to use my voice it’s still that tool that’s there for me.

In my experiences because of how I exist within SGA, I don’t feel like I’m faced with that often with strangers. I say that because of the positions and influence, I have on campus; they have to accept that just has repercussions not because I’m out to get anybody but if I share these bad experiences that I have with someone it’s going to carry through our circles. So, I will say the status that, as I’m reflecting, on the status that I’m able to hold in my communities and whatever spaces I exist within, I might use the word commodify. I pick a status of influence intentionally to try to protect against that. It’s

like, you're not going to talk to me crazy because you know there's social consequence to that, in the humblest terms. I think in every space I go into; I do strive to be a player within. I strive to be a stakeholder, where how content I am should be of significance to you.

"The Strong Personality Thing." *In the accelerated programs in which Gilman participated, there were mostly women in the classes. However, some of the microaggressions she experienced were at the intersection of race and gender. Gilman juggled being a woman and being Black.*

We had a majority of women in IB. As women, we would be told, you know, the strong personality thing. With my advocate title, I could accept that I had a stronger personality than others, but I also felt there was a different standard that I always carried when it came to my other peers. So, I was pushed like that. Sometimes I feel like it was unfair because I was expected to be able to handle it. There was this one boy in my IB class. I was the person reminding people, "Hey we have to do so and so, so we don't get in trouble." He would try to poke fun at me for it. It was almost to the point where he was getting mean as someone, I called my friend. He would just say random things hinting towards me being an overachiever or depict me as the teacher's pet. I admit, I've always been the teacher's pet, and I'm not mad about it. He would just point those things out in a very negative light, even while I'm trying to help him because he would fall asleep in class all the time. Everyone else would allow it and laugh. They knew how much that would actually hurt my feelings. There was one day where I literally blew up on him in English class. Ms. Schmidt pulled us away.

She was like, “Why do you do this to her?” It boiled down to he always knew that I could figure things out and sometimes he just couldn’t. That was the most adult conversation I would say I probably had in high school. He’s like, “I’ll stop.” He left and we hugged it out and worked it out. Ms. Schmitz was like, “Sweetheart, you are always going to face this.”

[That] conversation that I had with Ms. Schmidt that one day on how I’m perceived because I am a leader and what that can look like to people *was very important to me*. It was always me being able to pursue something and get it, pursue something, and get it. It was perceived as arrogant, me literally just enjoying the fruits of my labor. As I’m fighting all these personality traits of being too assertive or too forthcoming and just loud and taking up too much space. It’s easier to celebrate those on my own and dim my light in that moment, because I can’t control how someone perceives that, which is something I’m grappling with. Even though I’m accepting that now, that’s not my responsibility or burden to carry but at the time, it really did feel that way.

“I’m Extraordinary.” *Gilman shifted the conversation from being Black and female to being gifted. For Gilman her perception of giftedness is just as important as how others perceived it. Gilman knew without a shadow of a doubt that she was special because of her intelligence but that was the norm. The way that she perceived giftedness determined the way she moved in educational spaces.*

I’m just able to accept that in certain contexts I’m extraordinary. I perceive these as normal things. That has always been an expectation in my house and then the expectation when I go out into spaces. I think it’s the fact that I have such an inquisitive mind, honestly. I want to know why things happen the way they do? What’s the impact

they have on things? Why did we come to this decision? What were the alternatives?
I'm a problem solver.

In high school, I loved calculus. I loved it, and it was hard. It was challenging, but I like a challenge. I was that gifted student where if I'm disinterested or bored, I'm going to fail. I think it's me being able to see a challenge in front of me and [having] to fix it. I've never been able to do a Rubik's cube so I'm not going to say I'm that type of gifted student. I am very curious to learn why things happen the way that they do. I also think an innovative mind is what adds to my giftedness. I think that aids in my critical thinking ability. In an academic sense, what I think makes me gifted is my ability to critically think and analyze and synthesize information. My interdisciplinary skills are high where I can take my skill set to somewhere else and still be successful in that regard.

I think there is something to be said about what giftedness looks like for Black people, or people of color and minorities versus, White people who have the privilege and access to things. I recognize the society I'm in, and how there are even more extraordinary people, which is why it's hard for me to see myself as extraordinary. Amongst my peers at Pioneer, I am brilliant. It's hard to call myself smart, sometimes, but brilliant? Then here, at Southern State, amongst people who have had access to laboratories and extern opportunities, and these spectacular field trips. The way that they're able to excel is different and the way that we're able to excel *is different* because we haven't even been able to push that envelope. So, I think sometimes when it comes to the comparison of what is the standard definition of giftedness, and then to be able to

expect Black people who have that lack of access to meet that standard is definitely something that should be addressed.

“Giftedness as a Weapon.” *Gilman’s perception of giftedness differed from the standard definition of giftedness. The label of extraordinary related to not only to her intelligence and the way she presented herself in the classroom but also to her personality. Her giftedness impacted her performance in the classroom and her awareness of the world around her.*

This one might be a little bit different from my perspective because I feel like I almost, weaponize is the best word, but that’s what I can find right now. I use my giftedness for academics as a safety net. So, I divert a lot of my energy to external experiences because I don’t intend to be a political scientist. I like politics. I like to understand how it works, and my major teaches me those things. While my extra experiences have helped me to supplement the policy knowledge I would need to know. So, with all that being said, when it comes to my academics, I get the A, the A-, the B+, I’m cool with that. Instead, I don’t study all the time. I’m not that person. I could sit in a room and in a classroom, and I always thought, if I get it, I get it. If I don’t, I don’t. So, when I don’t get it, I don’t put in the extra effort to go get it because I know what I do [have] already is enough to keep me above average. So, I almost use it like my safety net. I say that because the energy I’m allowed to give to academics allows me to give more to my external experiences, which I have accepted benefit my career a lot more as someone who wants to work in politics.

If anything, my academics emboldened me. I’ll say that Dr. Jean talking down on me for IB Bio is what made me go study every weekend because I had to show society,

“Ya’ll are wrong, and ya’ll should know you’re wrong and that should be proven by me being exceptional.” Honestly, I had to say that was kind of toxic but that did motivate me through my academics because I do like a challenge. I will say that is how my giftedness manifests. I get bored. I do fall into that stereotype of a gifted student. I don’t really intend to prove it to other people. It’s really bad because this is how I go through college. I could get a 4.0 but that’s not my priority. I weigh my external experiences based on how my career actually works because that is how my giftedness manifests. That was a challenge I could look [forward to]. I needed that challenge in the classroom. IB History was my favorite subject because it was so complex. So, there are so many layers to it. Whereas not going to lie, IB Math Studies got easy. IB Pre-Cal was hard but a fun challenge, but IB Bio was kind of more memorizing, and I don’t have the best memory. I like to learn, analyze, [and] critically think not just know.

I think IB helped me so much to prepare for what college is now. It’s 10 times easier. The things that they said we would never get away with in college, Jesus, I probably could get away with less. There are a lot of skills that I would not have gained if I wasn’t in such a rigorous program. When it comes to the balance of my critical thinking ability, I think those programs stressed that so much rather than the test. There were times during pre-IB, where we had to test out of all our regular requirements, I was learning for the test. I wasn’t learning for enrichment. I wasn’t learning to push the bounds of my thinking. I think with me picking a humanities major, what I gained prepared me to be able to not have that learning curve that a lot of my peers have. At Southern State, people don’t just come out with a 3.5 GPA, even in Political Science, which is honestly one of the easiest majors on our campus. I think that is what allowed

me to be successful on all my external opportunities because it's so easy. I can give it a little less attention.

I think exposure is definitely one of them because we got to learn about why things are. We had this one class called Theory of Knowledge. We would try to speak to our friends about the complexities of what we were learning. It's like we can't even start the conversation. It was so out of this world. Now when I talk about principles and theories, I understand how to apply those things in the real world, not just in academia. So, being able to process and analyze real-world situations as they're happening. I'm a podcast person now. I listen to contemporary news all the time. My career is people, networking, etc. . . . I can keep up with those conversations, even if I don't know what they're talking about. At least I know enough about their discipline to smile and nod when appropriate. I think it helped me to understand why it's important to know about the relevant things going on. Understanding that there's a standard for etiquette. I don't walk into a situation willy-nilly because there might be a culture that exists there. What else? Exposure to leadership training. I've been to so many leadership development programs. I don't want to do any more leadership development.

Education is another one for me. I went through a period where experimentation in Title I schools was so obvious. I think i-Prep was built, the superintendent's project, literal project, was built during my time in elementary school. It is literally an experiment. To be so blatantly aware of those and just hear my teacher's conversations and their frustrations, has always been building up that spirit. The education system wasn't designed to do a couple of things. One, allow for the autonomy of the student. Parents should be active in decision-making, like giving them the opportunity. That

parent might not always know what's going on. Listen to kids, we know what's going on. We aren't dumb. We might not be able to articulate it to everyone when it comes to administration, but I knew i-Prep was bad for me. I should have been listened to genuinely. Furthermore, it was meant for White people. It wasn't designed to accommodate different cultures and how those manifests in learning styles, the way we engage, the things we care about, the examples that should be on our test to make sure that we don't get distracted or bored.

Wishes for the Outcome of the Study. *Gilman expresses her results for the study.* I think it's going to impact . . . I don't even want to just say Black girls the most. Well, I think it's going to impact students the most. I hope there is a significant impact on educators and how they interact in this space and serve as advocates for their students. I don't foresee it being in front of students so much, but I would hope that as an educator when people see the study, they'll need to be more intentional about how [they] interact in space[s], or serve as advocate[s] for [their] students, or create the space for [their] student to be themselves and succeed. I know for me in my program because I did exceptionally well compared to my peers that often translated into, for other people, that I didn't need support, or I didn't need guidance. It wasn't that I didn't need it, I just wasn't getting it. So, I just had to figure it out. I wish that that burden wasn't placed so heavily on high achieving students. I think it is a disservice. . . . So, all that to say, I hope the impact will be more on educators and how it is they choose to behave in special education.

Reflections on Gilman Smith

Gilman's wishes for the outcome of the study mirrored her own desires to be treated like everyone else. Gilman did not want to be considered different from other students and that included the amount of support that was provided to her. Although she toggled the line of being Black, being gifted, and being female, she just wanted to be "normal." In her narrative, she described how IB students had a target on their backs that marked them as different. That difference not only set them apart from their friends that were not in gifted or advanced programs, but it carried a stigma that was too heavy for her to bare and thus her wishes is that this study will help alleviate that burden from other students. Surprising enough her wishes were not for a change in policy, as a Political Science major, but a change in behavior which may be more difficult to resolve.

Gilman attended predominately Black schools all of her life. Although she was exposed to advanced programs, she alluded to the courses, especially at her high school, being watered down because she was at a Title I school. The programs that she participated in did not hold the same weight as programs at Tier I schools with more resources and better trained teachers. She experienced racialized microaggressions with her IB Biology teacher in which she showed resilience and eventually passed her IB exam. She also showed resilience in her personal life when her father went to jail in the middle of a very difficult period in her life. Although her racialized experiences in a K-12 setting were limited, she experienced other types of discriminations including classism and colorism. In the school setting, she found comfort being surrounded by students who had a shared identity but outside her community at extracurricular events she felt

“othered.” Being “othered” was not so blatant as racism or microaggressions, but a general feeling that she did not belong. In college, she had to navigate White spaces at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) and struggled between the perception of being strong opposed to being an angry Black woman. Throughout her narratives, I was impressed that regardless of the situation Gilman stayed true to herself. She did not let how other perceive her define her rather she used her experiences to define who she wants to be.

Stephanie Jones

Meet Stephanie Jones

Stephanie Jones was one of the “perfect” girls that Mrs. Porro recommended for the study. Mrs. Burro described her as one of a group of girls who were “very vocal” during their senior year of high school. Whether being “vocal” in the context she said was a good quality for a high schooler is up for debate, but that characteristic seemed ideal for a qualitative study participant. However, I had to determine first whether Stephanie fit the study’s criteria, and most importantly, whether she would agree to participate.

Whereas Gilman responded immediately to my text message and agreed to participate, it took some time for Stephanie to commit. After texting her an overview of the study, she responded the next day by saying she “would love to learn more” and was available to speak to me. I was super excited to share (noted by the preceding superlative) and called her immediately as if I was afraid that a minute difference would change the trajectory of her response. I wanted to lock her in as I had Gilman, and my secret weapon was my identity because, like Gilman, I only introduced myself as Viviana.

By introducing myself in this way, I wanted to differentiate myself from the authority that came with the title of Ms. Smith, so the participants could build a rapport with Viviana. After I used my ace in the hole, I completely sold her.

At the end of our meeting, I asked Stephanie to send me a text message with her email address. As I awaited her response, I started my interview series with Gilman. I texted her several times to send me her email address, but I did not receive a response. As a last resort, I asked Gilman to reach out to her since they both attended the same high school and perchance, they knew each other. In fact, they were best friends in high school, and she said that she would reach out to her as soon as our Zoom ended. Three weeks later, I finally received a response. Turns out she was awaiting a response from me. She emailed me weeks earlier, and her email was sitting in my junk mail inbox. I thought she had changed her mind, but it was a misunderstanding. We made plans to start the interview series the next day.

Before the beginning of the interview, I gave Stephanie the option to keep her camera on or to turn it off during the interview. It surprised me in the first meeting that I was greeted with a black screen with a picture of a smiling young lady whose curls were contained in a side ponytail with tight tendrils framing a bright smile that lit up the screen. The voice through the speakers was poised, almost rehearsed like a beauty pageant contestant during the final Q & A session. Stephanie's cool confidence that Stephanie displayed during our sessions spoke volumes to her future career aspirations of being the superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Stephanie chose her words carefully, and her diction was so clear that her transcript from Otter. Ai was the most accurate.

Stephanie was raised by Haitian-American parents who instilled in her the value of education. Her mother and siblings attended post-secondary institutions, and these examples inspired her to attend a post-secondary institution. Although her father did not complete college, he pushed her to achieve greater. Her parents' socioeconomic status afforded her more opportunities and resources than other children in her community. These opportunities helped shape her into the person she is today. Attending North Miami also helped shape her future.

Now Stephanie is a junior at the University of a Southern State, and I silently did a Gator chomp because I am also a Florida Gator. Stephanie was not necessarily active in student government or civic organizations. However, she found her heart for service on UF's campus. She serves as the president of her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, vice president for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the external affairs director for student government. Her involvement in civic and service organizations is driven by her desire to ensure equity in education. Her ultimate goal is to return to Miami-Dade County as the superintendent of schools.

Stephanie Jones Profile

“This Was Going to be my Way Into College.” *For Stephanie, being in advanced programs served one purpose: to get into college, but she only realized that later in her educational journey. In the beginning, though, Stephanie spoke about identification with gifted programs almost as a perfunctory progression in her development. It was almost as if the gifted curriculum only had meaning for her when she was accepted into the International Baccalaureate program.*

Hi, my name is Stephanie Jones. I am 21 years old. I graduated from . . . Pioneer Senior High School in May of 2019. I started gifted programs in third grade and from there I completed gifted programming until the [end] of my high school career. I was identified [as] gifted through my grade point average and through my examination scores. I took a variety of courses.

I went to WJ Brennen Elementary School, which stands for William Joseph Brennen Elementary, and I went to Pioneer Middle School. I was introduced to pre-IB in middle school, but the actual work for it began in high school. Since the seventh grade of middle school, my advisor had spoken to me about possibly joining this program and what I need[ed] to ensure that I am accepted into it. It was more so a recommendation. So, students who are accepted into it [must] be recommended by an advisor. In order to stay within it, there is a contract that is provided once you enter high school. My ninth-grade year, we received a contract that you must obtain this level of GPA, you must maintain a certain level of passing classes, and you must excel in your FSA reading and mathematics exams in order to stay within the program.

For my middle school years, my advisor actually requested me to be part of the IB program. In order to be in the IB program, you need a recommendation, or you need to have exceptional examination scores and GPA [grade point average] to stay within the program. If you are in the program, there is a reevaluation each year to see if you are still qualified to be in this program. It's very rigorous, and once you meet a certain grade point average or examination score, reconsideration for the program is requested. I was in the IB program, and I started off my high school year being in AP World History, and from there, I participated in IB English, IB History, IB Mathematics, and TOK, and so

on. TOK stands for Theory of Knowledge, which is a class that basically lets you go through different theories and different aspects of knowledge and basically questions where theory and knowledge comes from and how do we acquire it.

With the IB program, the way I was able to maneuver through the program was understanding that this was going to be my way into college. I understand everything that was at stake. It was more so I needed to pass these classes and exams and have a full ride to college. That was my mindset. By the blessings of God, that was the outcome of it. I'm attending the University of a Southern State without having to come out of pocket and actually getting paid to go to school. That very much is a blessing.

I will say when it comes to demographics, my teachers and the teachers that taught me, even down to the books that we were reading, it wasn't people who looked like or people who had the same ethnic background *as me*. I think that's where the disconnect also comes from. When it came to programs like IB, advanced, or AP, it wasn't teachers who looked like me or teachers who had the same ethnic background. Sometimes, when it came to classes where we're learning about Theory of Knowledge and stuff like that, we didn't have different types of authors . . . who came from different types of cultures. We're learning this information, but it doesn't fully resonate because there's certain racial and ethnic gaps.

“It Allowed Me to Acquire Things in a Different Way.” *The demographics of the gifted programs in which Stephanie participated were not that different from the population of the rest of the school. Stephanie attended schools within the same geographic area as the community in which she lived; therefore, the demographics were not that much different from the people she encountered on the streets of her community.*

On her questionnaire, in fact, Stephanie mentioned that she had little to no racialized experiences in high school because of this reality. However, she was eased into the diversity of the wide world outside of North Miami by being exposed to one or two students who were not Black in high school. The homogeneity of her learning and living environment did not extend to the curriculum of the accelerated programs she participated in nor the experiences she had in those programs. The bulk of her racialized experiences, as she described on the questionnaire, were in college, where it is a part of her everyday life. She said, “From hearing racial slurs to sitting in buildings named after White supremacists and experiencing microaggressions, racism isn’t blatant but ingrained.”

The demographics of my early years in the gifted program [was] a predominantly minority-based [elementary school], middle school, [and] high school. There [were] very few people who [identified] as White American or Caucasian. So, my classrooms did look like people who looked like me and had the same racial backgrounds as well. I will say going into high school, I was in classrooms with people with the same racial and ethnic backgrounds as me with the International Baccalaureate *program*, that is for students across the world. When meeting students who are part of this program from different cities, from different schools, I [realized] *Pioneer* was just the exception when very few schools get an opportunity to have this program. Very few schools who do have this program are full of minority students. I [realized] that this isn’t a resource or program that is open to all types of students.

In gifted, we were placed in different classrooms. All gifted students will be in the same class. There was no intermingling. There will be specific block periods for

gifted students for specific content areas or [subjects]. If you were gifted in reading or language arts, your block periods would only be periods 1 and 2, and they wouldn't interchange. So, if you were gifted, you had to make sure that you were able to be in those periods. If you can't, then you won't be considered for these programs.

Middle school was more inclusive as the gifted students weren't excluded from one class period. When it came to coursework or certain requirements, the gifted students had a different types of workloads and different types of requirements for examinations and grade point averages. I would say that was the only difference. Being in gifted programs, I got considered for AP because I did exceptionally well in Civics. I was considered in a pool for AP World History, which was a recommendation as well. I will say that is the difference. Certain students don't get the opportunity to get recommended for certain AP courses, while certain students do.

In middle school, it was hard to see *the difference in the quality of teachers that the regular students had as opposed to the quality of teachers that the gifted students had* because there were gifted teachers teaching regular classes and honor classes. With high school, the line [became] a little less blurry. I will also say the content of what teachers who are teaching IB programs or honor programs is heavier. So, they are entering classrooms with having to know different perspectives and knowing that they are teaching students of different demographics. It makes the content much more diverse and more complex. So, I do believe that is what's different. I think the quality of teachers does change, but it's not drastic. I do think that the quality of teachers changes depending on what school we're in. So, personally, I believe the quality of teachers that Pioneer Senior High School had compared to schools that weren't Title I was vastly

different. But within Pioneer, I don't think the IB teachers and honor teachers greatly differed.

I believe when it comes to looking at my advanced classes in IB programs compared to students who aren't taking those classes, *there were marked differences in the way my classes were taught as opposed to the regular classes*. Students who were taking classes that weren't IB or advanced they were learning to pass an exam at the end of the semester. I truly believe that in IB and advanced programs, we're learning to just grow as an individual going into the real world. The IB program has [a class called] Theory of Knowledge. There were two big assessments, *but* the information and knowledge that we acquired went far greater than the exam that we had to take. Some of the resources I gained, I'm still using in my college education. I could also say that the levels of readings I had in my English classes and the level of math problems I had in my math classes, or the levels of experiments I was doing in my science classes is stuff that I'm using at a collegiate level. I believe some of the things that I learned in those programs in high school are far greater because they went beyond just taking the exam. It was assessing the person that you are.

Personally, I would say, I was able to see more of my history in English classes. I think it also shaped me to be the person that I am now. I am more well versed and I excel more in history and reading. I think when teachers put students in a box to have only certain types of materials presented, students aren't actually growing. I think when my history classes and reading tests provided those different opportunities to learn from different types of authors, different types of creators, and different forms of knowledge, it

allowed me to acquire things in a different way and assess knowledge in a different way as well.

“My First Experience.” *In high school, Stephanie’s microaggressions barely scratched the surface of racialized experiences. However, Stephanie was woke enough to recognize her experience as being race-related but realistic enough to know that her experience did not compare to others. In college, nonetheless, she was confronted with racism so blatant that she could not mistake it for anything else.*

The demographics of my teachers, I would say, were very apparent. I believe I only had one teacher that identified as African American. The rest of my teachers were individuals who identify as White American or Caucasians. We had one teacher to identify as Latino, and that was our Spanish teacher. My apologies, I retract my statement from earlier, my biology teacher also identifies as Latino. There’s a difference between Latinos who identify as White Latinos and . . . Afro-Latinos. That was a great case of that. She played a very harmful role in encouraging things like colorism or separation in African American communities when it came to our education.

My Biology teacher made a lot of snarky comments. She showed favoritism to students who were of Latin descent and students who were fair-skinned. I would say that it created an interesting divide in that classroom specifically because students who were of Latin descent received a rite of passage for a lot of things even when they weren’t doing exceptionally well in academics. They knew that if they were in that class, she [would] look past certain things. I will say for myself, who was fair-skinned, going into her classroom, her notion was that I was possibly part Latino because of my last name. *She asked whether I was Hispanic.* Things like that. You could also see where her

intentions were. I do think it wasn't something that she was intentionally doing. I think it was something ingrained in her own lifestyle. I think it was more so that she was [creating] a community for people who were of the same ethnic background as her rather than creating a community of students who are in the same program.

I remember a time when I was in my science class. I believe it was 11th grade. The way our class was set up, I sat near the teacher. It was one day, I think I tried a new method with my hair. It was very loose curls. She came up to me about my hair. She's like, "Oh, it looks very nice. You should do your hair like this more often." In high school, [there was] a phase where I just had my hair in ponytails. Honestly, I thought that was a very cute hairstyle. In my head, I was like, "Okay, what is she talking about?" She literally passed her hand through my hair; I never realized the extent of how damaging that is to Black culture and Black women. This is one of the things that really triggered [me] moving forward after learning more about it. I'm very cautious. I really like my personal space.

When it comes to touching my hair, my face, *and* even just touching me in general, I don't want anyone to feel comfortable enough to disrespect me at the end of the day. What the texture is doesn't make me any different from the next person whose hair texture is different. I was at a Walmart . . . one day, and a lady literally walked up to me saying, "Can I touch your hair?" That shouldn't be something someone's comfortable saying or doing. Nobody goes up *to someone* saying can [they] touch [someone] else's hair. I never understood where that [came] from. Honestly, it's just people not appreciating culture. In their head, they think they are, when in reality [they're] just being offensive.

At USS, I had different experiences. This particular situation happens on a daily basis at USS. I was leaving campus, and I had a University of a Southern State shirt with my organization's letters on it. A Caucasian lady came up to me, and my friend was like, "Hey do you go to school here?" In my head, I was like, okay, I have a University of a Southern State shirt on. My backpack has the University of a Southern State, and I'm just coming from a student studying area. I was like, "Yes, we go to school here." *She said,* "Oh, are you sure? Do you go to Sante Fe?" I was like, I'm literally on this campus with the University of a Southern State shirt. I don't need to lie about where I'm going. So, I said, "No, ma'am. Is there anything you need? I do go to school here." It was very interesting because she was asking for help from us to find the bookstore, but you're trying to discredit the fact that we, as Black students, even go to school here. You're asking for help. I don't think she even acknowledged, "Hey, you're literally displaying an act of microaggression and you're asking someone that you're doing this to for help?"

My very first time in college, it was my first week on campus . . . me and my friend were walking to a store, it was store across the street from campus. A Gainesville resident was on a bicycle, and he was circling around us. He started saying racial slurs like monkey, the "N" word, and so on and so forth. This really can't be happening right now. My temper did go up, but, at that moment, this is a grown man and I'm a 5'2 woman. There's just no way that I could do anything about it right [then]. So, he eventually went off. In the heat of the moment, I just felt very sad. It was a sadness that you don't even cry. This is just life. This is how certain people treat others, and he doesn't know me. That was my first experience in a whole new city *that* I'm about to start in the next four years of my life. This kind of set an eerie tone for me.

The day just went downhill from there. In the moment, me and my friend were walking away super-fast because we didn't know the extent of how dangerous this man could be. When we got on the bus to go back home, I realized my ID, my school ID, and even my cards were gone. We were walking away from the man, and it fell. Then I get a call when I'm halfway home like, "Hey, are you Stephanie?" It was an officer, and he was like, "Yeah, we have your stuff. A student found it, and they left it for you." It showed me there was still some good on campus. Even though everyone may not treat you well, there are some students who actually understand. There's no reason to be mad with anybody. There's a brighter side; I don't need to look at this fully negative. That really set the tone for me. I went into summer semester; I was just very cautious. I didn't go out late because I didn't know . . . how Gainesville residents were. I just took time to adapt to the area. That was my very first experience on campus. This wasn't a microaggression; this was blatant, and it was right in my face. I always hear stories [of] people getting called certain things or people getting treated a certain way; it's not until it really happens to you right in your face that you realize how hurtful it can be.

"I'm One of the Few African American Women in my Program." *Race and gender converged for Stephanie as early as elementary school and into college as a Political Science major. She described how race and gender in elementary school shaped how she later navigated those situations in college. Nonetheless, it did not prepare her for being one of the only African American women Political Science majors at USS.*

I believe things like race and gender also play a role within this program. I personally witnessed this in elementary school. I was one of, I believe, five elementary girls that were accepted into the gifted program while the class was mainly full of boys. I

will say going into middle school and high school, that changed a little bit because as academics progressed and grade levels increased, women were more present in the education system and in gifted roles. I will say starting at an early age, that was provided to young girls. I will also say even race played a role in this. I believe Pioneer Senior High School is probably one of the few minorities based high schools that even have an IB program or a gifted program, an honors program, an AP program, and even dual enrollment. I know friends who went to different schools who don't have access to those programs or very limited resources for those programs. I believe that played a very big role.

I will say in my S.T.E.M.-related classes, the men tend to get praised more for their work. You can see that even with group leaders, the males, even though they made a small percentage of the gifted program, always seem to be the ones leading certain things or assuming that they always have the right answers. It was actually very telling that there is a stigma that men should just do S.T.E.M. When the results from the IB test came back, I believe all, except probably one or two of the IB students that identify as women, passed. The majority of the males who were in the IB program didn't pass. I think it was very telling. You can be smart in S.T.E.M., but you also need to be smart all the way around when it comes to IB. You shouldn't just put your focus on a stigma that is placed on you.

I will say it was a bit harder to see the *convergence between race and gender* in high school due to the students who did exceptionally well [being] students of color and women. I will say the women in my program did exceptionally well. They had the top scores in general. I believe, if not all, almost all students passed and got their IB degree.

It's different for the male population in my program; not everyone received their degree. I will say it was very different in high school, but I will say in college, it's more apparent.

I am a political science major, and women in politics isn't something that America is fond of. I believe I'm probably one of the very few if I'm not mistaken, probably 10, out of my whole program . . . are African American women. So, I will say my classes [consisted] of hundreds, and I'm always probably one of two or one of three African American women in my class. Politics is a very hard topic and a very touchy topic even though college students are more culturally aware and in tune with what is going on in the political atmosphere, there [are] still students who state things that are racially insensitive. I believe that was my experience with political science in general. Some of my other peers, they don't experience it to the same extent because certain courses just have more African American women. When you're in a course where you have to talk about racism and politics, even my classes right now, I'm taking African Americans in Politics and the way the students talk, you can see that [with] certain things that people are trying to beat around the bush. They're certain students who are blatant with what they want to say and aren't considerate that this is life [for] *some* people.

I think a great point for this conversation is the class I took this Fall semester . . . about abortion laws. The conversation about abortion laws is very sensitive. Certain comments that were made were very unwarranted or very inconsiderate. It reflects the reality of life; we have males who are dictating what women should do with their bodies or the laws that are placed on women's bodies. You can see the reflection of that within our education system, specifically my college. Students will say certain things. I

understand where this is coming from, but I just don't agree with it. What someone does with their body isn't something that you should agree with. This is something that someone chooses to do.

When there are women *in the Poli-Sci* program, the conversations are totally different. I think the perception of even the things we do in class, like discussion posts, are drastically different. It shows when we talk about laws, specifically abortion. *There are* two drastically different points of view of how it affects different . . . genders. We're in a class to learn about how laws affect people, how to fix things, and for people to still not understand that you may not agree with this ideology, at the end of the day, that is not something that you're affected by. A lot of men in this course don't think like that. They think more so on how it affects me because politics is always in favor of men. They never really get the understanding this is far greater than yourself. Because my classes are majority men who identify as White or Caucasian, they don't realize the extent of how the system of politics affects people who are in the minority.

A good way to look at this, *was through* a discussion post. I'm Haitian-American, and a student made a comment about . . . Haiti [being] the first independent Black nation. A person was trying to make a comparison, saying that though it was an independent Black nation, it really didn't mean anything to the progression of Black people. They said that Haitian Americans speak Haiti when it's Creole. I stated a comment about that, and they weren't receptive. They believe when they say something that they're right. I think that's the biggest thing I see. They try to control the conversation as well. They think that their voices always have to be heard when certain conversations don't, in my opinion, warrant their opinions.

I think that when we talk about things that are related to women, Caucasian women, Hispanic women, and Asian women, they all realize how it feels to be a minority. I think they're more vocal about things. I think when they realize that they're part of the minority, it allows them to speak up about certain things. In my African American Politics class, we were talking the intersectionality of African American women through the analysis of Fannie Lou Hamer. During that class, all the women were speaking more, but when it was just about African Americans, they weren't speaking as much.

Being in a male-based program really does push me. I live on the ideology that if you really want to do something . . . It's a quote from Tony Morrison, "If you want to read a book, and it hasn't been written yet, you must write it." I really take that philosophy to heart. There are so many things that need to be done in life. There are so many things that African American . . . women can do, and certain barriers make it harder, but it's not impossible. I'm one of the few African American women in my class; it showed me that my career aspiration is obtainable although I'm the only one here, I can start something for someone else. I really believe that if someone chooses to push to get something, you're gonna get it. That's really how I take those experiences. I really do want to make an impact on the education system. I want to be one of the first African American superintendents in the county.

"Certain Things Have Become a Norm." *Striving to break the stereotypes placed on Black people by society, Stephanie chooses to be aware of the social injustices around her. In being mindful, she can ensure that she does not perpetuate those*

stereotypes. Although she attends a predominately White institution, her activism leans more toward the Black Student Union than SGA.

It's a bit harder for me to stop and think about the examples of blatant and racialized experiences. I think it's also just because certain things have become such a norm in life. When it happens, it is hard to process it and understand it for what it truly is at that moment. I know there was a point in time it was the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, and I just started doing more in-depth research on certain things in the past. Little things like learning about the meaning behind the ice cream truck song or learning why watermelon is stigmatized by African Americans. I do realize that because I haven't experienced certain things, I didn't take the time to make meaning of a lot of racialized experiences. When there are certain things that have been a part of racial experiences, when there has been a part of the racial paths and stereotypes that are placed on minorities, it allows me to think about life a little bit more in-depth. I am cautious about certain things that I do because I don't want to feed those stereotypes. I also want to educate individuals on those stereotypes.

I will say these *racialized experiences* allowed me to think about things and reflect on things in my day-to-day life more thoroughly. It also allows me to take into consideration and take into account what people say. When I was growing up . . . certain things flew over my head, and I never [had] the time to analyze and take into account what was actually meant by certain statements. Knowing the meaning of certain things when comments are made, I am more aware of where it come from and how to properly respond to [them] now. It also allows me to push for certain things more at my college. Currently, I make sure that I occupy as [many] Black spaces as I possibly can and operate

spaces on campus that help with the leadership and changes taking place in *student government*. Also, I ensure that I'm part of an agency that ensures that all student organizations, especially minority student organizations, are getting the funding that they need, and that equitable resources and representation are always shown on campus. I think those experiences shaped me to push myself more to do certain things and to actually try to change things. I know all things aren't possible but making sure that I'm in a place where I could at least make small [substantial changes].

These experiences, in a sense, fuel me to continue to strive for the things I want in life. There are a lot of comments that were made in high school, at USS, and even on a daily basis, and I'm in a mindset where I just want to prove people wrong. I'm representing this campus in various leadership roles, receiving Dean's list back-to-back and ensuring that . . . the evidence shows that I deserve to be here . . . that I'm more deserving to be here actually. In a sense, I don't try to let it faze me too much, but rather, I take those negative comments and those false stereotypes and use *them* to push myself to be better. I will say it really does push me to make sure that I excel at my academics. Throughout the past three semesters, I just ensured that my grades were up. I don't think I was ever short of an A minus. I also ensured that [although] the empty comments that women shouldn't be in Political Science, or comments about African American individuals are made; I'm still representing my different identities at a high standard. I continue to push on for the best . . . and I'm pushing myself to be more than what people say and label me to be.

During my first week at the university, the experience with the Gainesville local *impacted me the most*. That put a different perspective on what life looks like as an

African American woman. I never experienced direct microaggressions or direct racism until that day. So, when I experienced that, it allowed me to think that this was the reality of some people every day. Some people's experiences were far more traumatic than what I experienced. It helped me to just think if I'm going to be in this atmosphere for the next four years of my life, I have to make something greater of it. Honestly, the first semester of college wasn't the best. I was really looking into transferring schools. I was almost halfway through my UM application and was like, "Okay, I'm probably just gonna transfer back home where I feel more comfortable, where there are people that look like me, people who are more respected with different cultures." I shouldn't let the words of one person affect the things that I can accomplish. Years later, I'm still here. It really shaped the drive that I have. I make sure that everything I do, I do at my best and make sure everything I do with all my heart.

I identify as Haitian American. I also acknowledge that I am African American. If we're talking about America . . . in general, when it comes to civil rights activism, when it comes to trying to get certain things passed, when it comes to affirmative action, we are trying to ensure that individuals who identify as African American are getting the equitable rights that they're trying to receive. I don't think it's lost on me to understand that I'm also African American. Although certain people who are African American don't identify with any other ethnicities, there are certain things that we as a collective are trying to push forward. So, being part of different ethnicities shouldn't stop that.

I think it also comes from just people's upbringings. Actually, growing up Haitian American, my parents are Haitian; they would not identify themselves as anything else. They were born in Haiti. They grew up most of their lives in Haiti, and

they take offense when someone calls them African American. I truly understand where that comes from because, at the end of the day, you should be confident, and you should be firm in who you are. If you are a Haitian American, when someone takes that away from us, you're not respecting me as a person. Even people who identify as Jamaican and someone call you African American, you're trying to take away their identity. Something they hold dear to their heart. I do understand where that comes from as well. I do think the disconnect is once we start making these labels used to separate individuals. At the end of the day, we are part of a bigger thing, and that is the Black race. We all should come together as one. It's a sticky situation, but it's one that I also understand because I know my kids growing up would not call my stepdad or my mom African American when [they] know that they are Haitian.

How I handle microaggression committed against me is a work in progress. Not all the time, but I'm able, for the most part, to assess if someone truly means where they're coming from or is it really just bliss and ignorance. For individuals who are willing to learn, I do take the time to tell them this is not appropriate; you should probably change how you say this or learn about what you're saying and how this affects people. For students [whom] you could tell this is something that is rooted in their mind, and they truly believe what they're saying, for the most part, I just let [them] be. There are certain things that are really out of my control. It's something I'm learning to do and . . . to do much better. Certain comments [that are] made, I know in my head that I'm just angry and if I say anything, it won't be received very well, or the receiver won't take it as me being very receptive to the information they've received.

Outside the school setting, I think I'm more open to [calling] out people *who commit microaggressions*. I think it's also because I know for a fact that there won't be any extreme repercussions on how I address it. *At school*, sometimes, I have to censor myself because I don't truly know how my teacher perceives certain things or . . . how my classmates will end up acting toward me. While in the real world, if someone does say it, I'm probably never going to see this person again.

“Giftedness is a State of Mind.” *Being identified as gifted at a young age, Stephanie spent almost all of her educational career classified in this way. Giftedness is usually described as a characteristic that one possesses, but Stephanie had a different perspective.*

I think *giftedness* is a state of mind. Personally, I don't think it is about having the smartest IQ or having the best grades, or the highest GPA. It's the willingness to challenge your own perspective and grow as an individual. I'll say one thing about me over time, and something that many can attest to is I'm very open to understanding different perspectives because, at the end of the day, there's not only one person's way of thinking. There's no right way of thinking. There are different people in the world. There are different perspectives people need to address and understand to progress society. I think that will separate students who are gifted and students who aren't. Students who are willing to acquire knowledge in all aspects and all levels.

I believe *my giftedness* is perceived as a good thing and can also be perceived as a bad thing depending on who it is coming from and their idea of giftedness. Some people believe that a gifted student is solely based on the statistics of students like GPA and examination scores. While some people believe that it goes far beyond that. I think the

perception is based on how someone themselves perceives giftedness to be, if that makes sense.

I think society as a whole focuses on the quantitative aspect of *staffing for gifted* rather than the qualitative . . . and holistic aspects. I think that plays a huge role because I believe there are students who are more than capable of being part of programs like this but aren't provided the opportunities or the resources to get in. To be gifted and to have that state of mind and being able to acquire knowledge and look into different perspectives is not something that a test could assess. A test isn't the only way for students to learn. That is something I also learned over time, and wanting to be part of the education system. I'm an auditory learner, so taking examinations is not my favorite thing. That even shows on my exam scores for IB exams, where I had to listen to things or that I actually had to speak; I did exceptionally higher than the exams where I actually had to read something. If a school is trying to assess what's gifted or not, they should also be able to assess and provide examinations that touch on all learning profiles rather than just one.

IB is probably the one time that all of those learning profiles are even addressed. Students who are outside of those programs never get the opportunity to even test those skills and know them. I couldn't internalize the type of learner I was until I got into IB. I had to take these big exams dictating whether I was going to college or not. Getting them to realize I'm an auditory learner, and this is how I'm going to pass those exams, while other students knew they just had to memorize these things and then select some answer choices and pass the end of the course exam to go to the next grade. While with IB, we are provided with a wide range of options, from creative projects to oral exams . . . to

writing papers, to ensuring that all types of learning are addressed. To get in, you need to already have grades and you need to utilize the exams that are provided to get in. Then once you get in, you could get to address your learning profiles.

“Changed My Perception.” *Others would describe their giftedness through an intellectual lens. However, Stephanie believed that giftedness is generally a state of mind. Being in gifted programs afforded her opportunities that she may not otherwise have been given. She described how gifted programs benefited her.*

I don't think I would change my decision to be in a gifted program. I'm very appreciative of everything I learned from the program. I will say it did allow me to look at things in a different scope. If I wasn't in the gifted program, there wouldn't be certain conversations that I have. There wouldn't be certain things that I know about. I think students who aren't part of the gifted program, there's certain things that they just aren't a part of, and certain things they do get left out of. I think being able to be a part of this program and taking the time to utilize what I know to probably give back to the community to those who aren't part of these programs who may benefit from this resource or knowledge. I think that was very beneficial, and I wouldn't change that. I probably *will* still pursue what I'm pursuing and probably still take college education in general serious[ly].

I believe gifted programs prepared me very well for college. The way that they were able to do so was we stopped learning just to pass exams but [learned] to actually internalize the information and understand how the information impacts our day-to-day lives and how that information is part of a greater picture. Most students, when they take their exams or take courses, their main goal is to pass the class and just pass the exam. I

really stopped looking at grades, and that honestly made my grades even better. With my papers, I try to find a bigger connection.

Currently, I have a, I would say, great GPA. I'm more than capable of being in my school's honors program, but I actually never took the time to apply for the honors program. When I was looking at the options and looking at my academic curriculum for my collegiate years, I came to the realization that a program doesn't define what gifted is for you. I know many people are part of the honors program, which is brilliant. Their minds are amazing. It was also students who were part of the honors program that are doing just as well as people who aren't part of the program. I think it really just changed my perception. In middle and high school, I thought I [would be] smart if I was placed into these programs. Coming into college, it came to light you're not the label that the program gives you. You can be just as great even if you're not part of that program. I think that shows a lot because my perception of giftedness is not being the smartest person in the room. It is being a more open-minded person who is able to take things and analyze them from different perspectives. A person who takes the time to have empathy for other people's feelings . . . and is culturally aware. A person who knows how to be inclusive. I think that really shaped my perception. GPA doesn't define if you're an honors student or not.

I think the programs [allowed] me to be a more open-minded person. Personally, from my own experience, I noticed a big shift in my attitude and just my perception of things in general, my problem solving, and the way I perceived life. Honestly once I went from middle school to high school, it's a big change. Even some of my friends, if you ever speak to them, would attest to that. I just became more open-minded. We

learned so much [in the gifted program]. We [were] put in settings where we have to listen to other people's perspectives and understand their reasoning behind it. Now when things happen on my day-to-day basis, I may not be fond of the situation, or the situation may hurt me. I always take a step back and think "Okay, why did this person do this?" I think it's personally a good habit every night. I just take time to reflect on what I did in a day and was I just in any of my actions or were there any actions that I did that probably was not perceived by the person very well.

Wishes for the Outcome of the Study. *My wishes for Black girls in the gifted program* are to keep pushing through. Grades and GPA don't always matter. Once you start learning . . . for yourself and for the benefit that knowledge can provide you, it'll pay the best interest. You're never going to get the perfect grade; you're never going to get A's on everything. If you've taken the time to actually take in the knowledge . . . and apply it to real life, not only just exams, then you are doing what a gifted student is supposed to do. Once that mindset of taking in information only for exams or for assignments comes out of people's heads, it makes things just a bit better. That's one piece of advice I'll give. I'll say it's okay to not fully know everything that's going on. It's okay to fail at times. Success isn't everything, and success looks different.

One thing during my first year of college that I took a lot of interest in its understanding how an African American woman at a PWI is very different from an African American woman at an HBCU. I think it goes deep into stigmatized stations that are put on HBCUs and also resources and funding. I think their experiences of college vary vastly.

I think this study will impact women who are currently in high school making that transition. Women who are currently in high school are seeking college degrees. I think it's just because the main part of a gifted program doesn't really stop in high school, even though colleges and universities don't have those labels. They play a significant role in shaping how each one of us views the world and, what we want to do with our lives, and how we interact with individuals during our college careers and after. I most definitely think the target audience that will be most affected by the study is high school women, but I do think that this is something that's very eye-opening for individuals who may be seeking to place their children in gifted programs and want to learn the impacts of gifted programs. It also may impact students who aren't placed in gifted programs.

One change I would like to see is more opportunities for students, minority students specifically, to get the opportunity to be a part of the gifted program. I know I mentioned this a lot, but I really think resources and availability are key problems. There are only a select few schools that have resources where they could be on campus and taking AP classes or taking IB classes or be in high classes that are considered gifted. I think implementing more resources where students have the ability to choose and have options. I think the quality of teachers that are placed in Miami-Dade County Public Schools has been on the decline. I think in order to receive a high-value education, we need high-value teachers. I think that starts with the recruitment process. Understanding that being a teacher is not just a role someone has to fulfill but also impacts students for the rest of their lives. I think that's where it really starts with in order to truly equip gifted students, we need to have teachers who are willing to equip them.

Reflections on Stephanie

Stephanie felt, at times, in gifted and advanced programs that she was not supported. In high school, she felt a lack of support particularly when applying for college. She believed that other students should have this support. Stephanie also placed high value on quality educators and credited a high school history teacher for fueling her passion for history. Although Stephanie is a Political Science major, she aspires to be a Superintendent of schools in the very county in which the study was conducted. Her values and her future aspirations in education influenced her desire for more representation in gifted programs and an increase in the quality of teacher training.

The racialized experience that Stephanie had in college impacted how she chose to navigate White spaces at the PWI (predominantly White institution) she attended. I would not venture so far as to say that the experience was a catalyst for her involvement in Black organizations, but it indeed influenced her participation. Stephanie found a sense of community with the Black student population in college which was something she did not need at her predominately Black high school. Involvement in these organizations encouraged her to be a changemaker. As one of the only Black women in a Political Science program, she experienced being the token Black girl which led to gender-based microaggressions by her male classmates. Stephanie also felt that microaggressions and racism had become the “norm” and that it was hard to identify them. The way she chose to deal with microaggressions depended on the situation and whether the person she was addressing would change. Even in her manner of addressing microaggressions, she advocated for change. For her sake and ours, I pray that she achieves it.

C

Meet C

For a couple of years, I have watched C grow up casually strolling on her mother's social media, hearting her accomplishments like a proud Internet Auntie. I met her mother at a professional development she facilitated in instructional technology years ago. After the PD, we decided to keep in touch for a reason lost to me now, but I am glad we did. We would comment on each other's posts occasionally, but that was the extent of our relationship. When it was time to complete my pilot interview, I remember seeing a story on C's mother's social media, doting on C's accomplishments. I immediately contacted her mother regarding the study to gauge whether C qualified.

Her mother responded with two words- "great topic," and I was hopeful she would allow her to participate. In testing the waters to narrow down the specific age group I wanted to interview, I interviewed a high school-aged Black girl in gifted programs for my pilot interview. Since C was under 18 years old, I wanted to ensure her mother was fully aware of the nature of the interview. C's mom gave me her and C's email addresses for me to send them the Zoom invite. After rescheduling a few times, we finalized our meeting date and time.

On the interview day, I inboxed her mother to ensure the interview would still occur. It was a stormy night in South Florida with torrential rain in which visibility was veiled by curtains of water. I knew that C was getting off work, and I was worried that the rain would change C's mind about participating. Our meeting was scheduled via Zoom, but we just talked over the phone as she rode home with her mom because she had not made it before our scheduled time.

C was adamant in our first meeting that she had no racialized experiences at her high school. I gave her time for reflection. One of the only stories she shared, did not involve her but highlighted the disparity between how the administration applied the dress code rules to Black and White students at her predominately White high school. Her responses did not garner the data necessary for the pilot interview. Therefore, I decided to solicit another participant.

Desperate to recruit more participants, I contacted C, who had just graduated from high school. Although her declarations that she had not personally experienced racialized experiences had not sufficed for the pilot interview, her contrasting perspective would add an interesting layer to the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs. I expected that when I spoke to her, she would give me more of the same as her first interview; what I did not expect her to say was that, “being surrounded by White people for four years really does something to you, and I could not do it anymore.” This led her to pursue a post-secondary degree at Johnson University, a historically Black college or university.

Her passion for “excellence and truth and service,” Johnson’s vision for its “diverse, talented, and ambitious students,” was cultivated in 7th grade when she decided that she wanted to attend this illustrious university. She lived by this motto even before she knew what it was. By doing community work with her local Jack and Jill of America, Inc. Chapter. Like Issa Rae, she was “rooting for everybody Black” by joining her school’s Black Student Union and Caribbean Club at her school. She is passionate about children and volunteers with a daycare, working on reading and writing as a camp counselor.

C is motivated by a “fear of failure,” which is evident in her ability to set goals, but her biggest motivation and passion is social justice issues. So, she is majoring in Legal Communications. She wants to be a lawyer, and in high school, she led the Mock Trial Team as the president. The story that follows is not filled with experiences that happened to her personally, but they impacted her life and decisions.

C Profile

“I Really Didn’t Like My High School.” *For the interviews, C joins me from the comfort of her bedroom. Her dog periodically seeks her attention by issuing a yelp, for which she quickly apologizes, and I just as promptly reassure her that it is perfectly fine. Sitting crisscrossed apple sauce on her bed, she works on her laptop as I ask her questions.*

My name is C. I’m 18. I graduated from Stony Coral High School on June 6, 2022. I went to a predominantly White high school, and I am not White. I took mostly all advanced classes. I would say all advanced classes, and that made me even more of a minority in an already minority setting. I was in the Visual and Performing Arts Academy at my school, in the chorus program. There already wasn’t a lot of us, even though we did have a Black teacher. He was a Black male teacher, which was probably the first experience that I’ve had having a Black male as a teacher; that was something other than P.E. We also had a Black assistant principal as well. Throughout high school, all of my teachers were White except my chorus teacher. Personally, I didn’t really like my high school. I didn’t have a bad high school experience. It was mostly just my school itself that I didn’t like due to the environment of the school, which was a big part

of the reason why I decided to go to an HBCU [Historically Black College or University] for college.

When I was going to do the gifted program, I had to take a test. I took that test in the second grade. I want to say it was a school or something, and there was a lady. I didn't know what the test was for. I just knew it was a test. I remember I had to identify pictures of what they were. I remember having to identify a picture of a dolphin. [That's] the only thing that sticks out to me that I remember that I had to do. Then, the gifted program started in third grade. The way that they did it, we would have our regular classes, and then we would go to gifted classes for math and science. I remember in science class, we did a lot more experiments and stuff like that than the kids in the regular classes would do. I don't really remember much about math.

I graduated with a 4.9 GPA [grade point average]. My unweighted GPA was 3.8, almost 3.9. *I was in the top 25% of my class.* My school has an IB [International Baccalaureate] program. They do class rankings based on weighted GPA. They have heavier weighted GPAs because they take more classes that are worth more because a lot of them will take AP [Advanced Placement] classes on top of their IB classes. A lot of their GPAs were in the fives which to me I feel is kind of unfair because I didn't have the opportunity to get my GPA that high because of the simple fact that they have more room *in their schedule* to take those higher-weighted classes. If it wasn't for the IB kids, I'd be in the top 10%, but because of the whole IB Academy, I was in the top 25%.

I didn't want to do IB. To me, the level of coursework, not even the level of coursework but the amount of coursework that they have to do. You have to take IB tests on top of AP tests if you choose to take AP, and then if you don't pass the test, you don't

get your IB diploma even if you did well in the classes. Basically, all the work you do doesn't count for anything. I just felt like, personally, I didn't want to do it.

"They Felt Superior." *C felt strongly about the predominately White high school she attended, but her experiences in predominately White schools started as early as preschool. For most of her educational journey, C attended school with students who did not look like her.*

The school I went to for preschool, Trinity Fellowship, was a private school. It was mostly White. The other school I went to was mostly Black. It was in a predominantly Black area. Middle school was predominantly White, but there was still a decent number of Black kids there. The majority of my friends were Black. Then, in high school, it was really majority White and Hispanic. I think the demographics of our school is White. Black is only like 8% or something like that. It was a really, really, really low number.

My high school is horrible, and the kids are too. For the students, I knew because of the stuff that I've seen. The little Hispanic girls who walk around saying the N-word all day. There was this one girl; the stories about her kind of started blending together because I just heard so much. She would do weird, racist stuff. If my friend had braids, she would say, "Oh, I love it when you guys wear your hair like this." Who are you guys? Trumpees, there was a whole bunch of them at my school. It was mostly the Hispanic kids, which makes sense because of where we are. I feel like a lot of the Cubans here are very racist. There was a lot of Cubans at my school. So, it kind of just went hand in hand.

I have no idea why they are like that. Some people say it's because they see themselves as White, not Cuban, but as actual White people. They feel superior. There's this one girl in my class. I don't know if she knew what she was saying and if she meant to say it or if she genuinely was ignorant. We had Senior Skip Day, and we went to the beach. All of the seniors in Miami-Dade County, we were at South Beach for the whole day. It was just a whole bunch of kids. We talked about schools and certain areas. She was like, "Oh, I'm scared to go over there because it's so ghetto and so ratchet." I don't know if she realized that what she was saying sounded so stereotypical. I don't know if she did or if she was genuinely ignorant. I think she was just ignorant.

"The Lady Didn't Even Look at my Grades." *Not only did C experience microaggressions from students, but she also had an incident with the administration in which her parents had to get involved. The most memorable takeaway from that experience was her mother's statement that the lady never looked at her grades before fitting her into a stereotype. Although this was only one of the very few experiences she had, it molded, along with other microaggressions she witnessed committed against her classmates and friends, her perspective on attending a predominately White institution for college.*

There was one time in my freshman year there was a girl. It was me and my friend, there was this girl who neither of us liked. There were two of them. One of them was Hispanic, one of them was Black, but she was always in trouble. So, her being Black doesn't have anything to do with it because that girl stays in trouble. One of them said I wanted to fight the other. I asked the girl about it at lunch. She was like, that wasn't true. It was the Hispanic girl; I asked her about it. We cleared the issue up. It was

whatever. The assistant principal called me and my friend down later that day and said that there was an altercation in the courtyard. She said that somebody came and reported the situation and said that it looked like it was about to be a fight because my friend put her hair up in a ponytail while we were talking to her. It wasn't even like that. It's because we live in Florida, and it's like 100 degrees outside. We were just casually having a conversation. It was like me, and you are talking; she's standing off to the side, just listening. She wrapped her hair up quickly. It wasn't even anything major. We told her what happened, and that was the end of it.

The next day, I got called down saying I have CSI, which is indoor suspension, because she talked to somebody else, and they said that wasn't the case. I called my parents. Obviously, they came down to the school and had a very heated conversation with the CSI lady, and I got taken off. The lady has not talked to me since that very heated conversation with my parents and the assistant principal. They made me write a statement on an official statement paper explaining what happened even though I literally told her. It was a statement that you have to sign, which I didn't sign. She did that when my parents weren't there. So, that was a whole big thing. I remember my mom every time she talked about the situation, she would always say the lady didn't even look at my grades. The principal had to step in, and when he came, he pulled up my record. He was like, "Oh, she's a straight 'A' student." The part that sticks out to me because my mom always says that the lady didn't even look at my grades. She literally just looked at the situation of two Black girls and a little Hispanic girl and a girl saying somebody wants to fight her, and automatically we're the culprit.

"I Tried to Just Ignore Microaggressions." *Although this was only one of the microaggressions that she shared, she was not singing the same tune that she had during the pilot interview in which she adamantly declared that she had never personally experienced microaggressions. She described the impact that racialized experiences had on her.*

I won't say *racialized experiences* really had a tremendous effect on my life. I had to just choose not to interact with certain groups of people unless I had to due to those experiences. It never really made me feel any type of way on a larger scale. I decided to pick and choose who I dealt with, and I never really let it get to me in the long run because it wasn't something that was worth making a big deal of.

Normally, I tried to just ignore *microaggressions*. It just doesn't feel like it's worth [trying] to pick a fight with because nothing's going to really be done about it; at least at my school, that's how it would have been. I know in the situation with my assistant principal, my mom was working in the school district at that time. She was working downtown. If it hadn't been solved with my school, she'd have taken it to a higher level because she was already there. I just try not to deal with them at all. I'll have one or two friends in my class that I talked to, but other than that, I ignored it.

More than likely, *there will be a difference in how I would deal with someone outside of the classroom*. Yes, I probably would have said something. In school, it wouldn't have really made a difference because I probably would have gotten in trouble for picking the argument. The issue wouldn't have been solved. Outside of school, I definitely would have said something. I feel like outside of the school setting, I could get my point across better and not have to worry about repercussions. The people [whom]

I'm engaging with probably would feel uncomfortable, but you brought it on yourself. So that's your fault. They probably will distance themselves or want to talk, but I wouldn't want to talk to you after that, so I wouldn't really care.

For example, the situation about the supposed fight made me feel angry because how are you going to accuse me of something I didn't do when I'm telling you that I didn't do it. Then, the fact that it took my parents to have to get involved and caused a big scene just for them to back down and actually listen to what I was saying. It made me feel like I'm a kid. At the time, I was 14 or 15. At the end of the day, I still have a voice. I feel like my voice should be heard. I [have never] been the one to hold my tongue, and I just say what I want to say, which I do have to work on addressing how I say things. It kind of helped me to not be so soft-spoken in a sense and be able to defend myself more when it comes to situations like that. It made me realize that a lot of schools don't really care about their students; they care about their image. That was something that people have always said that I heard around school, but that situation just solidified the fact that it's true. They don't necessarily care about their students; they care about how they're seen. There are certain things that they'll sweep under the rug and certain things that they'll try to keep hidden just so they can keep their image clean and keep bringing students to the school. In my opinion, [from] a person of color's point of view, specifically a Black female, I wouldn't recommend that school to anybody. I tell people all the time when people ask me how my experience was. I tell them, honestly, I hated it. I didn't have a bad high school experience. It was just the way that my school was. There were certain things that just ruined it for me. I feel like if I was in a different

environment, it would have been better. That's part of the reason why I decided I wanted to go to an HBCU because there were certain things I didn't want to deal with.

I can't really say that *being in a gifted program* really had that much of an effect on me academically. I had strong grades throughout high school. I graduated with a really, really high GPA. I think that when people look at me, if they don't know me, they don't realize how smart I actually am. I think they may have some type of perceived notion about me just based on stereotypes and things that they probably hear or see, not even me specifically but just in general. I think that once people see my abilities, what I can see, it comes as a surprise. Because I think they don't really expect that from people who look like me. Especially when someone who looks like me is doing better than you in school, has a higher GPA than you, has a higher-class rank, higher test scores, and things like that.

"I Had to Speak Over Him to be Heard." *C's experiences were not only racialized, but she also had gender-based experiences.* It's this one boy specifically that I'm thinking about from my senior year when I took AP Lit. I don't know if it's like because he's a boy and he's macho. I don't know what it is. I just always felt like I had to speak over him to be heard. I don't think he was doing it on purpose. I don't think he realized what he was doing. It's like you have to defend everything you say with him. It just got really annoying. He was just always talking, and nobody really got to share their opinion. Then, if you share your opinion, there was always a counter. In all my other classes, I always was a standout student. I did good. My teachers never made me feel doubtful in my abilities. They were always there and good teachers.

My [reason] for not liking him was not necessarily stuff discussed in the class's curriculum, but conversations [he] would have to the side. Specifically, I remember we read "Heart of Darkness" in my Lit class, which is a book about the European, the Belgian, colonization of the Congo. It talks about a lot of violence toward the natives. It talks a lot about racism and how the Congo natives were seen in the European's eyes. They were seen as savages. It wasn't a racist book, but it highlighted racism. I really didn't want to read this because I know how these kids are, but it was a really good book. In the midst of reading that book, I remember him having a conversation where they were talking about something like slavery and hardships. Immediately after, he started his own conversation. He was talking about Jewish people and how he really admires Jewish people because they came from the Holocaust. They came from nothing. They came together and built everything up, and now he wishes more groups of people who faced hardships would do that. I know my teacher heard the conversation because, one, he sits in the front of the class, and two, he's very loud. To me, that would be the time when you step in and say something. Don't just let the conversation continue. It was more like that than stuff that happened with the teaching. The only thing that would happen within the teaching is you would say something, and then he would try to either talk over you or try to counter you. Most of the stuff he said that rubbed me the wrong way were conversations that were happening outside of what we were learning.

The other kids in the class were part of his friend group. [They were all Hispanic.] I think one person in particular *agreed with what he said* because of the comments that he's made about other things. I remember they were talking about migrant farmworkers that come down and work the fields that are down by where we

live. Most of them come from poor South American countries. His girlfriend's family owns a nursery, and they have migrant farmworkers that work at the nursery. From my understanding, people who usually come are people whose bloodlines are more native than White Hispanics. His girlfriend and girlfriend's family, they look down on them. Even though [they're] all Hispanic, which is kind of weird. You all come from the same place, but you're looking down on them because they have a different background.

"I Do Better in Higher Level Classes." *C shifts her conversation to her giftedness.* I personally feel like I do better in higher-level classes. I took an honors science class, and it was an interesting class because I liked science . . . I just didn't feel challenged. I wasn't really putting in a lot of effort, and I was still making straight A's. I don't really like that because it makes me try harder. It forces me to actually try. I need that push. That's just how I am who I am. As a student, I need the push to do well. I feel like I do better in those [high] stress classes, which pushes me to do better. I always do really well in those classes.

My giftedness would obviously be my intelligence and how well I'm able to do in school. I'm able to do well in high-stress situations when it comes to taking difficult classes. I thrive in that type of environment. I think it has to do with that and then also the way that I like to give back to others to help when it comes to school. Mostly, what I did was work with preschool-aged kids, helping them with reading and writing. Now, I work at a summer program where I teach sixth graders social studies. So, not just being smart but also using what I know to give back and to help others.

The course load *in advanced courses* wasn't surprising. The amount of work I had to do wasn't really like a shock to me because I was pretty much already doing that

level of work in regular school. It wasn't something that I had to get used to. The only thing I would say is that it helped especially with learning for AP specifically. I would say learning how to write essays in short periods of time because I can write one fast, and it'll still be good. So, taking AP classes helped with that. I think just being able to work at a fast pace and not get overwhelmed.

"School Was Never Something That Was Hard For Me." *Gifted programs* kind of force you to think outside the box and come up with things that you wouldn't think of regularly, like solutions or just ideas that you wouldn't regularly have. I learned how to be independent when it came to school. I know if I need help, I could ask for it. A lot of the times, it would just force me to try to figure things out for myself.

My giftedness played a part in my academic achievement because I've always done well in school. School was never really something that was hard for me. I did learn how to try harder when I got to the more advanced levels because it wasn't something that I could not listen to or not study. I had to learn to adjust to that. School has always been my thing. My personal successes can be owed to the stuff that I did outside of school within the community, [not] necessarily things that had to do with academics. You have to have good grades to win scholarships, but a lot of times, they look at [your] impact on your community.

I saw in my middle school *that the way people are brought up played a factor in their educational journey*. It was a magnet school, but you didn't have to be in a magnet if it was your home school. It's in Flamingo Bay, but they have to take the kids that live in Sea Crest because I guess they have to have a certain . . . diversity quota. They will take the kids from Sea Crest, which is the Black area, and bus them into Flamingo Bay.

A lot of them were in the regular classes, and they were always in trouble. They were always goofing around. I think that does play a big role. I think it's because their parents weren't really pushing them when it came to school. I compare it to how my parents . . . stayed on top of me with school. My one responsibility is that I absolutely had to do good. I know for many of them, that wasn't the case; their parents didn't care. I know that because we were friends. Their parents were just like whatever about it as long as they weren't absolutely failing.

My parents were able to put more resources into *my education* because they didn't have to worry about another kid. They were able to focus more time, more energy, and more money on me. It's not like they had to worry about a second kid. I didn't want to feel like they did all that for me to just throw it away. It'll feel like a waste. They did a lot for me when it came to my education and making sure that I was doing good in school. It would feel like I'm letting my parents down if I didn't succeed or reach my educational goals.

I would not change my decision to be in a gifted program because I feel like if I wasn't, I would have allowed myself to slack off in school. I wouldn't have done as well as I know that I could have. I probably would have gotten distracted by my friends. I think the difficulty level of the classes and fast pace forced me to stay focused. I know it's going to help me when I start college in the fall. It's also kind of just helped in other aspects like work and stuff. I wouldn't change being in the program at all.

I think I probably would have started being more focused a little earlier. When it comes to being ready for college and testing with the SAT and the ACT, I probably would have started taking it a little more serious[ly] a little early on. I was super stressed

about testing the summer before my senior year and then right in the beginning and making sure that I had everything ready. I think I would have taken more classes that I would have enjoyed instead of classes that I felt like I had to take. I wanted to take an African American history class, but I didn't really have space in my schedule for it because I wanted an extra AP history credit. I think instead of worrying about the credits and all that; I would have allowed myself to expand more to take classes that I wanted to take.

Wishes for the Outcome of the Study. *C shares her desires for the results of the study.* It'll probably help young Black girls the most. I would say Black students in general, but mostly Black girls, seeing as it was all girls. I think that even though we all have shared experiences, males tend to have a little bit of a different one. It's not exactly the same. They tend to have it a bit easier . . . not necessarily in the classroom but dealing with administration. It might be a little easier for them to have their voices heard. I don't know why that is, but that's just stuff I saw in high school.

I would like to see more action taken when things are going wrong in schools. I heard a lot of stories about how these girls were basically harassed and bullied, and nobody did anything because of who the person was, and I think that's unacceptable. Regardless of who you are, if you're doing things like what they were doing to those girls, then it's some type of action that needs to be taken, whether it be a teacher or a student, something needs to happen. You can't keep having these people in these places because nothing is ever going to get solved. They're just going to keep doing the same thing. So, some type of actual action taken against these people, whether it be a

suspension or firing them, or them being expelled from school; something has to be done.

Reflections on C

When I initially met C, during the pilot interview, I thought that on paper she would be a perfect fit for the study. She attended a predominantly White high school, in the southern part of the county and she was in gifted programs since elementary school. However, C was adamant, at that time, that she had not experienced microaggressions in school. After a year and a half later of maturation and retrospection, she changed her opinion, and she had a lot of say of the school she attended. She recalled an experience in high school in which she was wrongly accused of wanting to fight someone. With that experience she felt as if she was stereotyped and that her clean record as a straight A student had not been considered. Her wish for the outcome of the story was for people, like the counselor who stereotyped her, to receive repercussions for their actions. Later when she heard the stories of the other girls during the focus group, that solidified her reasoning.

When I considered C for the study, I thought her stories would add a nuanced perspective to the collective narratives of the Black girls in the study. I did not anticipate her perspective changing from the pilot interviews. Although C only shared a couple of microaggressions that she could remember, it was a lot more than she identified at the pilot interview. I felt like more than anyone else her tone read through her narratives. She was resolute in the way she felt about her high school experience and exhibited resilience in the way she navigated the White spaces. However, she was so exhausted with trying to navigate these White spaces and playing the role of the token Black girl

that she chose to attend an HBCU for college. Although she appreciated the challenge offered by gifted and advanced programs in these spaces, she felt as if a big piece of the puzzle she needed was representation; with her peers, her teachers, and her school administration.

Denise

Meet Denise

I learned about Denise through a community partner who was housed at the middle school in which I worked. Before Mr. Hernandez, who represented a local HBCU [Historically Black College or University], joined the CCMS tribe he was in blue and gold country, an inner-city high school almost at the other end of town. The Indians and Bullhorns are fierce rivals, and the rivalry is ingrained early, but I was not held against him. Mr. Hernandez was received with open arms by both adults and children alike. One day, in casual conversation, I explained my dilemma when soliciting participants. He quickly responded by saying he had a prospect for me. Denise was about to graduate as the valedictorian of her high school class, a distinction given to the with the highest grade point average in the class. Additionally, she served as the school board's student representative and immediately I was intrigued.

After Mr. Hernandez determined whether she would be interested and if it would be okay to give me her number, I texted and gave her a one-liner about the study. She responded that she had never been formally identified as gifted. At this point, I already had the conversation with Dr. Schmertzinger, and he thought that including girls who were high-performing but were not identified as gifted would add an interesting perspective to the study, so I further pursued contact with her. She immediately agreed to participate.

In her questionnaire, Denise also said she had not experienced racialized or gender-based microaggressions. What makes her interesting, however, is that she attended the most diverse schools of all the participants. She started and ended her educational career in city schools, but in between, she attended a mixed elementary school and an all-girls, predominately White middle school. Although she grew up with middle-class parents, she lived in the heart of the inner city.

An interesting fact about Denise is that she is mixed; I did not find out about that information at the start of the study. She mostly identifies as Black. Her parents are her biggest motivation and support, but although they pushed her to excel academically, her motivation was internal. Having recently graduated from college, her brother is a role model, but she credits God and stepping out on faith as a catalyst for her decision.

When I met Denise on Zoom, a warm metallic smile on a brown face framed by wispy curls greeted me through the screen. She spoke in definites like she never doubted a word she said, but she did not know or could not remember. She was not afraid to say so. One thing that she was adamant about was her lack of racialized experiences that affected her personally. That was not to say that she did not witness or was not able to identify racial injustices but that she did not experience them herself. Denise was extremely woke, though, and her narratives told of educational disparities that she experienced at the diverse schools she attended.

Denise Profile

“They Never Tested Me Again.” Hi, my name is Denise. I recently graduated from Miami Sunshine Senior High School on June 6. Ever since I was in elementary school, I was always in advanced programs. I went to a local pre-K in Overtown. Then,

for kindergarten, I went to North Lake Elementary School. I think that school [is] a Montessori. Needless to say, it provided me with a lot of opportunities. I was able to do things that were out of the box. I remember my teacher literally brought chicks, and we were able to hatch them. It was a different experience that really opened my mind to how broad the world is aside from academics.

Then, I went to Foreign Language Elementary for elementary school. In my fourth-grade year, I ended up scoring a perfect score on the FSA [Florida State Assessment] math. I was then introduced to Duke Tip. It's a program in which they try to put all the academically inclined students together. I was never actually able to commit to it because I had other commitments. I joined an organization called the National Achievers Society, where I was the president of my 12th-grade year. [It] really focuses on students who are academically advanced, too, providing them with the resources that they need, like SAT prep, community service activities, and things of that nature.

To be honest, they did test me *for gifted*, but I don't remember when. I don't know if it was second grade or third grade. From my understanding, I don't think I [was] classified as gifted. Even though the following year, I got a perfect score *on the math test*, they never tested me again. I didn't reach the benchmark. I remember doing the test a bit, but I don't remember it being multiple-choice. I just remember sitting in front of a teacher, and they were asking certain questions. I remember them showing me a picture of the Venus Flytrap, and they were like, "What is this?" When I went to FLE, we were at Bunche Park. I remember going to a trailer they had on campus that was our library. The psychologist sent me down. I remember she was African American, and she had dreads in her hair. She had clips, and they were so scary because they were like crab

claws. I was like, why does she have crab claws in her hair? I just remember asking those questions and things of that nature.

I would say specifically middle school, that's when I saw the difference. I went to Successful Ladies Preparatory Academy. It's in Little Havana, not too far from the Marlins Stadium. I think it's number seven in Florida. It's ranked pretty high. I went there, and I was given honors classes. When I entered sixth grade, I was given sixth-grade mathematics with a majority of the other students. I guess because I was so advanced in that class, they ended up putting me in Algebra, which is a ninth-grade class. They put me in that my seventh-grade year, and I was the only other Black student besides my best friend to be put into that advanced course. I'm just seeing how that class really did lack diversity. That's what really made me pay attention to it. I've been in it pretty much all my life. When I transitioned to seventh grade, I was put in Algebra. I skipped pre-Algebra. I did Physical Science seventh grade, and in eighth grade, I did Bio and Geometry.

Then, for high school, I went to Miami Sunshine Senior High School. I decided to leave for high school because I wanted more of a co-ed experience. In addition to doing honors classes in middle school, in high school, I began doing AP. Then, I also did dual enrollment at Miami-Dade College and Florida International University. I ended up graduating high school with over 83 credits. I actually completed the requirements for my AA [associate's degree] 11th grade year.

I did the medical magnet program from the ninth through 11th grade. Then in my 12th-grade year, I decided not to because I was no longer interested in medicine. I already completed the required years for a cord, and I'd already gotten two certificates

already. There was nothing left for me to do in the program because I didn't do CNA. Had I done CNA, which are certified nursing assistant, they would have made me an LPN. But because I didn't do CNA, there was nothing else for me to do.

I started dual enrollment ninth-grade_year. I took so many that I can't even tell you which ones. I guess, like ninth grade, I did Environmental Science dual enrollment, college Algebra, and English Composition I. It was so many over the years that I forgot. As far as 12th grade, I did all dual enrollments. The classes at Sunshine are very limited. I ended up doing early admissions at Miami-Dade because I had already gotten my associate's, I began working towards college credit certificates. In December, I received my Digital Marketing Specialist certificate. Two months ago, I received my Small Business Management certificate. I was still taking dual enrollment courses, but instead, they were counting toward certification programs. So, I was able to fulfill both of those.

I got into Georgetown, Vanderbilt, Emory, USS. I'll say that those are the more competitive ones that I got into. Then UM, UCF, SSU, Stoffer, iCad and Johnson. I wanted to go to a very prestigious school because I've always been interested in breaking chains. I felt like going to an Ivy League was the only way in which I could do it. These predominantly White institutions would provide me with these opportunities because I do notice the difference. The same reason why you chose USS; that was the same way I was when it came to me choosing my school.

I am going to Stoffer. The reason I'm going to Stoffer; it's not because of me, it's because of God. I was never interested in going to an HBCU. I'm super happy, and I'm grateful because God has his hand in this. If Stoffer accepts the credits, *I am going to college as a junior.* I spoke to the counselor; they told me that the max *credits accepted*

will be 60. They would at least take 2h years, but I guess I'm going to see what they end up counting it toward because I did it at Miami-Dade. It's incomparable to Stoffer classes. They may end up just putting them as electives rather than them being core courses. They're going to do a course audit.

I'm studying Political Science, and I want to minor in Spanish. I chose Political Science because of my involvement, and just being able to advocate for my community is something I realized that I have a passion for. People have always said that I'm a good public speaker. Maybe being a politician would be extremely great for me since it just seems natural [to] me. In addition to that, I am also interested in business. I want to own my own company. I took a few business courses, too. Then I want to minor in Spanish as well because I've always been interested in learning every language. When I was in middle school, I was accelerated. FLE helped since they gave us those foreign language courses. Even though I wasn't able to speak it fluently, I was able to pretty much say what I [needed] to say. I guess I lost those skills [by] not taking Spanish since eighth-grade summer. I would want to continue maturing that way being a second-language speaker.

“No Negative Experiences in the Classroom.” *Denise's educational experiences were diverse, but she was always an academically advanced student. Although she tested for the gifted program and did not get in, she was cohorted with gifted students as classes in M-DCPS are usually double-coded when schools do not have enough students for a gifted unit. Historically, in M-DCPS, students are identified through high test scores, and what was interesting is that she was never tested again, although she received a perfect score.*

I remember when I got the perfect score. It was me and another boy in my class. When we went to the ceremony, we were the only two Black students there. That was a different experience. I know it is like a rarity to get a perfect score. I think there were less than 10 of us. We were in the same class, same grade. Out of all the students in grades three through five, we were the only ones there. I've always had experiences like that.

I can definitely say that FLE was a very diverse center. It really presented me with new cultures. It made me value culture a bit more. I don't remember ever having any negative experiences in the classroom. I do remember having different teachers and being able to assess their dynamics. I remember second grade; I swear I did absolutely nothing but play outside. In fifth grade, they tried something new, which was having the fifth graders do like half of the day with one teacher and then half of the day with another teacher to prepare for middle school. That was a bit different.

Successful Ladies Preparatory was very different. Something that I didn't like is that I noticed that many of the minority students were grouped into the same classes, and those classes [were] intensive classes. A lot of my friends were in those classes. That's something that was really disheartening to me. I don't know if it was racially motivated or anything of that nature. One thing I can say is that the gifted students and the students who were in these higher courses were of other races, the more dominant race. When I joined the National Junior Honor Society in seventh grade, we had our induction ceremony. I was the only other girl in my grade level who was Black to join it. That was pretty weird. In the grade above me, which was eighth grade, there was one other girl. There were probably 30 or 40 girls being inducted, and only two are Black. I was one of

them. That was something I didn't like because I knew that there were other intellectual, Black individuals. I guess seeing that lack of patience and lack of diversity really made me think differently about a lot.

Successful Ladies' was more of a predominantly White and Hispanic school. It was just weird to see as the years progressed, the number of minority students began to dwindle, especially [as] they began flunking out. Something about Successful Ladies' is once you get a "D" or "D" twice, they'll just kick you out of the school, or they'll put you on academic probation. A lot of the other students who attended Successful Ladies ended up leaving. It was really sad; not only were most of them placed in these remedial courses, but they were also being removed from the school. It was a blessing and a curse because it enlightened me [about] the lack of diversity that exists, especially when it comes to advanced and accelerated courses. It was disheartening to see my peers not being in these higher courses.

[In] my sixth-grade year, we started out with 200 students. The graduating class of Successful Ladies' last year, which would have been my graduating class, only had 20 students and one student was Black. It was only one Black student who remained there, who graduated out of those 20. She actually told me that she regrets not leaving. A part of her regrets it, and a part of her doesn't. She was able to do things that she didn't expect herself [to be] able to do. She gained knowledge of the microaggressions they may use. So, I think that it provided her [with] more of a cultural experience of knowing that America isn't as perfect as we make it seem. Our parents try to shield us from these microaggressions and racial incidents that people face on a daily basis. She regrets it

because it puts so much stress on her that it wasn't even required. She doesn't think she was supported the way she should have been.

Ninth grade is when I had the greatest range of students in *my classes at Sunshine*. I was taking accelerated classes like Chemistry Honors. Most of the students at Sunshine weren't taking Chemistry; they were taking Bio. Those who didn't take Chemistry, they grouped them together, but they came from different areas, if that makes sense. It was just a little weird because even though we were accelerated, that was my most diverse year. After that, they literally just started grouping I-Prep kids together in all the classes and all the AP and dual enrollment classes. I wasn't really able to experience or learn the terrain of the school in its entirety because of how they grouped us.

I was noted as being the valedictorian of Miami Sunshine. My unweighted GPA was a 3.9, and my weighted was a 5.1. Taking all those accelerated courses helped boost my GPA. Being put in those environments in which I was able to take those higher courses was ultimately beneficial for me in that way because it helped propel me onto a different playing field. Being in those advanced classes helped me excel academically. Ever since I was in middle school, I was put into a competitive environment in which I was taking those high school courses. Once I got to high school, I started taking college courses; to me, it was no big deal.

I knew I had to study and do all these things. It didn't always come easy. Everyone has a testimony. I can say for me, sophomore year, I took a math class, and I ended up getting a "C," and I thought I was going to die. It was 79%. The teacher was not going to help me or anything. I was so sad because I was like that was my first "C." I didn't understand how this could happen. In the end, it ended up encouraging me. Even

though in these advanced classes, I didn't always get an "A," it just helped make me stronger and wiser. It helped push me, and after that, I'd never gotten a "C" or "B" ever again in those AP and those advanced classes. It made me stronger, and it made me work harder. It gave me grit.

"No One Has Ever Directed Microaggressions at Me." *Although Denise attended diverse schools, she was adamant she did not experience racialized or gender-based microaggressions. Experiencing microaggressions and witnessing microaggressions are two different things. The fact that she was reflective about her experiences and still felt as if she had not experienced racialized microaggressions made me secure in her assessment.*

I'm trying to think if I've ever had any *racialized* experience. I'm *having* a very hard time. I even asked my mom, and she couldn't think of any instances. That's not to say I didn't have issues because I do, but none of them were racially motivated, or at least I don't think they were. Then, in relation to my gender, Successful Ladies was an all-girls school. They more so [tried] to emphasize women empowerment. I don't ever remember being discriminated against because of my gender, either. People, of course, try to compare me. I remember my third year; it was me and another boy, and they would always compare the two of us.

Something I get called out on all the time, and it's become normal, is speaking in a proper manner. I know that it's a microaggression. It's just like, "What are you assuming that people who are African American can't speak properly or something?" That's the thing; it is not even just White people. It's also people in my community. They'll tell me I'm an Oreo: White on the inside, Black on the outside.

Those are two things that I've heard on numerous occasions. I was always that token Black child. At the school board, people were always like, "Oh my gosh, you just speak so well. You present yourself so well." I know that it all ties back into that speaking well, but it's just something that I heard so frequently in every meeting, always. Of course, it is a compliment, and I'm grateful for it, but it just comes back to that perspective of what would you expect me to speak like, sound like, or be like. I remember when I became an advisor, people were like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so happy you did this because people need to see that at Sunshine, not everyone who comes out is ghetto or raunchy. People do come out and they are *educated*."

What was also really interesting was seeing that some of the teachers were racist at Young Women. No one has ever directed microaggressions at me as a sole person. What we're alluding to has been done on a statewide, districtwide, and nationwide scale. We see it. This one teacher made one of the students say the "N" word. It was a White person. They just didn't want to say the word. Then [the teacher] said that it doesn't mean anything, and God knows it means a lot. It was brought to the principal's attention. The teacher was put on paid leave, but then she was brought back. There were a lot of instances with that teacher in which there has been some sort of discrimination involved.

For her to have diminished the meaning of it, honestly, just brings me back to what's happening now. I think it was the governor of the state of Texas saying that he wanted to change the word slavery to involuntary servitude. Me, I think it was what she was doing here. She's trying to diminish the effect of the word, what it did, and how it was used for. It's so derogatory when you start telling people that it's not and, in a sense,

they're trying to change history. So that's honestly how it makes me feel. I felt it was weird for her to say that it didn't mean anything and for her to force someone to do that.

“Hypothetically Speaking.” *Hypothetically, if I was ever confronted with microaggressions in the classroom,* it depends on how I feel because I feel more expressive than others. There may be occasions in which I'll actually be like, “What do you mean?” Or there may be occasions in which I just keep to myself. I would say, for the most part, I always try to be respectful. If someone disrespects me or says something that's negative, I don't know. I do always try to be respectful, so maybe I'll just wait until the day is over. Then I'll go to them after, and I'll say, “Oh, that wasn't appropriate.” For example, I can give you one.

Tenth-grade year I was in art. We had a substitute teacher. She said she was running for commissioner or something. Needless to say, there was a Hispanic girl, and she had purple hair. She had weave in. The lady was like, “I don't understand why you're doing this, you're conforming, you're not embracing your true culture, your true identity?” We're all like, “What true culture? What true identity?” She wants that purple hair, then let her do that. So that was something we had to emphasize. Who the hell are you? One of the things that she said that was crazy, too, is that one of the girls in our class, her name was Diamond. She told her that she had a stripper name. We were all just like, how could you say something like that to a child? It was really weird. She was just on a roll. The girl literally left to the bathroom crying. People see clothes and hair as something more than it has to be, but quite frankly, it's just a form of expression. So, for you to judge someone because they are expressing themselves that way, that threw me. I

told her if she really felt that way, you could have pulled her outside rather than, first of all, embarrassing her in front of the entire class and, secondly, judging her.

If I was confronted with microaggressions outside of the classroom by people I don't know, I think it would depend on the person. I believe that not all battles should be fought. That's not to say that I'm not going to say anything because, of course, but it's just like, how will I react? So, whether I'll just tell them off or I'll just keep it polite and polite. It all depends on [whom] I'm talking to and then what the environment is, and then how badly I want something. I do know that sometimes you have to sacrifice things to get someplace, especially when you're in environments with people who don't look like you or act like you. So, I would say it depends on the person. I would probably just pull them aside and say that wasn't appropriate.

There's a stigma associated with urban communities, which is that many of them aren't educated. Even with the progress being made, there's still this idea of no progress. The comments from teachers, I guess, made me realize that the world isn't as Black and White as it always seems. Mom can tell you that I was more of someone who was inclusive. I'm still inclusive, but I think now I'm more woke even though I haven't experienced much. I think that by being able to hear their experiences and see the deaths that have occurred over the past decade in my lifetime: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and most recently George Floyd, [and] Ahmad Aubry. I guess it's just super crazy being able to see that and just being able to see that the world isn't as safe as you want it to be.

Experiencing blatant racism was an aversion that I had to attend a PWI for college because I figured that in attending them, I'd have to face those things. That's not something that I want nor pray that I will have to experience. Either way, it still occurs.

To hear that those things have occurred and that they still are occurring it does hurt me. It makes me sad although there has been so much progress, there's still so much more to occur.

Also, students would say like, "What is the texture of my hair?" People were always obsessed with my hair. I know a microaggression is like, "Oh my gosh, your hair is so long." For my hair, it's always super interesting. When I was in middle school, people would assume it was a weave. I think that it also deals with the culture that we're in now because a lot of girls wear wigs and extensions. So, you don't even know if it is their real hair or not. I've experienced people asking me if it's my real hair and being enchanted with how it looks when it gets wet. The curls are larger, and it looks all silky and stuff. It comes back to this idea of Eurocentric ideals being promoted rather than traditional African American features being appreciated. You can look at someone else who may have coiler hair, and people don't really like it. They'll be like, "Oh, you need to do something with it" if they're wearing it in an afro." You and I can do this (*points at loose curly hair*), but the people who have tighter coils may not be able to. They acknowledge my hair and then disapprove of their own; it makes me think, why is that the case? It's because of our culture and because of the way that we've been brought up and raised.

Being called an Oreo makes me think of when people talk and their language and dialects, more specifically, African American vernacular. I guess it just comes to play with literacy rates being low. Then, the schools always being in urban communities because they automatically attribute these people to not being successful and intelligent. Even looking at the pipelines, a lot of these more prestigious schools are being created

because they want to not only diversify their schools and their workforces but also want to solicit these talented people to give them an opportunity. That more so relates to the idea of Blacks not being able to do anything. It makes me think of the stigma of our community. The fact that I speak properly, I have to be White rather than Black. I find that very weird because there are educated Black people. Even for those who may use African American vernacular, they are still educated. It's just a language barrier. At the end of the day, it's still a form of communication.

Attending Black schools all your life or even White schools becomes more normal. You're not able to see the differences in experiences that you may have seen in a different environment. I didn't know prior to going to my high school that there weren't enough textbooks in a class or there weren't enough seats. You don't have to worry about rats running around. A rat fell on a teacher's head in someone's class at Sunshine. Someone defecated in my Physics classroom, so we weren't able to go to the classroom because it smelled so bad. They did it in a cabinet. It was very weird.

There was a high rate of turnover at Sunshine. I had maybe three teachers that were still there. But for a lot of my peers, that wasn't the case. It was hard for them to secure a recommendation letter because it's your senior year, and they're asking [on] your college applications to choose the teacher that you had for over three years. For us, we can't do that because all of our teachers are gone. That's something that I saw at inner-city schools. In middle school, I don't think I even lost a teacher at all. That's not to say that I had them every year, but that's just to say that there's truly a difference. The more a teacher knows you, the more likely they are to work with you and to work with your

learning habits. They're able to learn your style and try to implement it in the classroom setting. I can say that was difficult because it was like you're starting over every year.

There's an emphasis on college preparation earlier at predominantly White or Hispanic schools. When you go to Black schools, there's not an emphasis, and that's something that I tried to change too. I was on the EESAC [Educational Excellence School Advisory Council], and I was a student representative. They said we were going to create an elective or something for SAT preparation. Did they do it? I don't know. Aside from the resources that are given, there's a different focus. I know that I was mentioning it before, a lot of students aren't focused on college. A lot of those students waited until the last minute, and they weren't able to get in anywhere. They had to go to a local community college because they waited until the last minute because they didn't know how to submit an application. They didn't do their FASFA. They didn't write their essay or professional statement. They didn't study for the SAT. A lot of students will fall asleep during the state assessment. No one fell asleep in my middle school unless they were finished. Even when they were finished, they were still checking it.

“Educational Wherewithal to Succeed.” *Denise then described her perception of giftedness even if she was never identified as gifted.* What makes me special? I will definitely say that I'm a hard worker. I'm very interested in always pushing myself and ensuring that I have the educational wherewithal to succeed in all spaces. I'm about making sure I have a diverse perspective. I think that Successful Ladies' and Miami Sunshine definitely helped to cultivate that. I'm super excited about going to Stoffer. I think that's something relatable to being able to interact with Whites and Blacks, and that's something I have. What does it mean to be gifted? Or how do I exhibit that gifted

attribute? I would say my willingness to just be equipped for society and make sure that I'm engaged academically. Even with dual enrollment, just starting as early as I did. I've always been that way, trying to ensure my academic success. At Sunshine, they'll put you in any and every class that was not me.

Over the summer, [Stoffer] had me read *Overground Railroad*. It was a really great book. I was able to learn about the struggles of Blacks aside from just Jim Crow and Black codes, traditional things you learn in history class. I was able to learn so much more, like why there is an achievement gap and the school-to-prison pipeline. I know that going to Stoffer will definitely cultivate a new understanding of the Black experience, and it'll make me more equipped for society. I was confident in my skin, but I wasn't that confident. I knew I was a Black girl. I knew I had curly hair. I knew I was proper; some may say White. I still lack that appreciation for myself.

Over the past few years, going to Sunshine made me more comfortable with how I am because I was able to see more people like me. I was never really in those environments. I mean, FLE was pretty diverse, but going to Successful Ladies was very different. So, just being able to go to Sunshine and also being able to go to Stoffer, I know that it'll definitely help me in numerous ways.

"It Is So Exclusive." I would say for gifted, I see it as a program that offers students accelerated courses, and they provide students with a more supportive environment in which they're surrounded by individuals who are just like them. Since they're pushed to succeed and exceed their own expectations and the state standards of what a child should know. They are set to exceed those. For others' perception, they probably see it as something greater than it probably is. It comes to exclusivity because

it's so exclusive. A lot of times, people may not work as hard. My mom always says it too; when you give a child a label, especially when you tell them they're in remedial courses, they automatically try not to try, if that makes sense. Paper-wise, they are not as intelligent as others. They don't put their best foot forward. That's what people see when it comes to gifted programs. If they're not selected for those advanced courses, they don't try. It ends up hurting them.

I just see it as basically a name that's given to a group of students who are given these accelerated courses. For other people, they see it as something that's . . . I don't want to compare it to God, but just something that's extremely amazing. That's why a lot of students don't try when they are put in those remedial courses. They were spoken to like imbeciles even when they weren't. Once you tell someone that so many times that you're in a remedial course, they begin to internalize that and actually believe it. Words are so important.

At Sunshine, a lot of people, I don't want to say, idolized me, but they saw me as being something more than I was, especially when it came to academics and stuff. I guess, like, even with the I-Prep program that I was in and the other students who were in it, too, people saw it as some modern-day segregation type thing. We were both speaking about it; they separated us. We weren't really able to interact with the other students. I remember my dad told me that when he went to *Sunshine*, the magnet students didn't even interact with the other students during lunch.

When I see someone else is better than me because, at the end of the day, there are people who are going to be better, brighter, smarter, prettier, but when I see someone else who is that way, it makes me work harder. It motivates me because it allows me to

see that if someone else did it, then I can, too. That pushes me, but for some other people, it discourages them.

At my high school, people would only see me as [an] academic person. Whenever I would go out and enjoy myself, they always felt that it was nearly impossible, which is something I really disliked because, at the end of the day, I'm still a person. I'm still someone who wants to engage socially. Aside from that, that's something too when you go to school, you only see one part of a person. You don't get to see that other part. Even with certain clothes that I wear. There are times in which I covered up because there's a time and a place for everything. For me, I was able to learn that and also implement those practices at a very early age. When I wear showy clothing with my friends or something like that, they would automatically be like, "Oh my gosh. Denise, no." That was something that I really disliked.

“Advanced Programs Showed Me a New Perspective.” *Denise was not identified as gifted, but she has participated in advanced programs since elementary school. These advanced courses showed her a new perspective that she would not otherwise have experienced. The advanced program prepared her for college, and it changed her educational trajectory.*

I wouldn't change my decision to be in advanced programs, especially at my high school; I didn't really have any other options. I would say that being in them not only allowed me to enjoy high school for what I had to offer, but it also pushed me. It allowed me to take classes that I wouldn't have taken otherwise. It allowed me to learn new things, things that aren't taught in high school. It was really great in that way. I was able to graduate with my Associate's degree, which is something I wouldn't have been able to

do had I not taken accelerated courses. I think that's something that's good to do: challenge yourself. Something that I've always been adamant about is challenging myself because, quite frankly, you only live once. You only have one brain. If you don't use it, it will die. So, I've always tried to push myself to try to learn anything. That's something that advanced, accelerated courses taught me, and I always enjoy being around people who were older than me because I get to learn from them. It would make me uncomfortable being the youngest person in the room. It was still good because I was able to interact with older individuals. People say that I'm very mature.

Advanced programs prepared me to go to college because of how strenuous some of the assignments were and then also having to balance both academic life and civic engagement. I think that it prepared me in showing me that I'll have to balance both. Once I get on campus, I also want to be involved in organizations as well. I would also say it is just having to study more. Having to take more tests every year, write more essays, and then also knowing that in addition to doing all these things, I also have to go to club meetings. I think it helped me in that way. Something else is that the classes that I took forced me to engulf myself in studies that I wasn't particularly interested in. For example, I remember ninth grade being in AP Human Geography. I had no idea that I was interested in until I took it. I had the opportunity to take the course at Georgetown University. I would say in these more accelerated programs, they gave me the opportunity to take different courses that I wasn't always interested in. It showed me a new perspective on life and caused me to gain greater knowledge. Rather than being so focused on one discipline, I was able to focus on multiple. I think that adds to making me a better person and opening myself up.

I would say no, *I would not change being in advanced courses*. I took classes with the gifted students anyway. I don't think it really changed. My classes literally said the same thing as some of the other individuals in the class. We were literally in the same classes, getting the same assignments. It was the same thing in high school. I didn't notice the difference. Some of my friends in high school were labeled gifted, doing the same thing. Honestly, I just see it as a title. I never saw it as something that made me feel less than *others*. I just saw it as being something that would have been nice to have, not something I needed to have because I knew that I was excelling. Then, at a certain point, you just forget about it.

I remember when I went to this *Sunshine*, people had preconceived notions of who I was. People always thought that I was this very bougie, sadidy person. Someone who drinks Starbucks every day and who traveled from the beach to the inner city to go to school. Even though that wasn't the case because I literally lived two minutes from the school. I don't know how I would change that. That's just how some people saw me. I always had friends to talk to. I genuinely enjoyed high school. I didn't have any negative experiences.

Academically, I would change being less involved, but I don't regret being as involved as I was. I'm happy that I did what I did because it made me into the person that I am today. Everything pretty much just happened for a reason, even with the gifted program. It just comes to show that you don't have to be in a gifted program academically. I wasn't in one, but I still did amazing. I guess it helps to inspire others, and that may be why God didn't let me get in. Things happen for a reason and a season. That's just to show others that you don't need a label in order to accomplish something.

Wishes for the Outcome of the Study. Your school doesn't determine your success because I know students who attended predominantly Black schools in urban neighborhoods all their lives but still did amazing on standardized assessments. You grow up hearing the stigma of urban schools, which is that kids aren't very smart. That's something that I learned that wasn't true in going to Sunshine, and I'm very appreciative of that. The world continuously perpetuates all of these ideas or ideologies we ultimately adopt but aren't true. I'm happy that by going to my high school, I was able to see that and notice the differences that the Black community is very educated. It's educated in its own way. It has its own culture. It has its own community, even with the vernacular it uses. It just all adds to us being unique. It's a good thing because that's what makes America what it is. America is supposed to be this diverse place, and although it always hasn't supported diversity in some way, it still doesn't. I think that in being able to take all these classes and read all these books, I've been able to learn why these things exist. It made me into a more woke person.

Denise finishes expressing her thoughts on who would be affected by this study. I really think that it would affect Black children or at least young Black women at that. People our age, people in middle school, that are right before us because they'll get to see this is the world that you're living in. When I was at Successful Ladies, I was living in a world in which I didn't really understand the disparities that the non-White community faces. This study will help people see that there are still atrocities that are affected our community to this day. I would definitely think that young Black girls will be affected by this the most. For many of them, they haven't experienced *racism*. For our parents, they have a greater understanding. For our grandparents, they have an even greater

understanding because they lived during that time, and they know that racism is something that's taught and it's carried on.

When it comes to the results of this study, I know that change takes time. First of all, there is more diversity in higher ed classrooms. It's really needed. I think that it shows people in our community that they can do better and be better. I would also [say] *it can help promote* more access to resources. Even with some students . . . [having] to get tutors, it serves as a barrier for the low-income individuals whether they're non-White or White. They can still be in those classes without fearing they're going to fail. I would say even teachers providing more inclusive textbooks and things of that nature. The history textbooks [are] often skewed to reflect American history that is just about White rather than African American history. When our children [read] it, all they see us is as former slaves and people who are trying to survive rather than people who did survive. I would love to see more of that. I would love to see more conversations about the importance of embracing one's true identity. Someone mentioned that all skin folk ain't kinfolk. I think that's because they don't have an understanding of who they truly are. It's that feeling of inferiority because that's what they're taught. I think that it all ties back to the textbooks. I'm pretty sure they do it intentionally anyway . . . I would definitely say there needs to be a new focus on that.

Reflections on Denise

Denise's lack of experience with microaggressions did not hinder her from seeing and experiencing the disparities first-hand of attending various schools in which the resource and technology gap was very apparent. In essence, she was "woke" to the disparities that she experienced in the school system. Although, "no one. . . directed

microaggressions towards [her],” she was able to identify microaggressions directed towards others and call them out. Her wishes for the outcome of the study, leaned heavily on representation both in the classroom and in the curriculum. She attended a predominately White all-girls school for middle school. Minority girls in Title I schools may not get into these programs and for those that do, tokenism and isolation may drive them out.

Denise chose to attend a neighborhood magnet high school rather than a Tier 1 high school in a more affluent area, I believe because she wanted to prove that the stigmas associated with students in these types of schools was wrong. She was going to break the mold or like another student mentioned, break the chain. In being the token Black girl mostly all her life, Denise learned how to navigate White spaces. However, she still feared experiencing blatant racism and ironically chose to attend an all-girls HBCU. Despite her lack of experiences, she equipped herself with tools and strategies to use in case any microaggressions were ever directed at her. Although she was never identified as gifted, she excelled academically and where there was no path to follow, she blazed her own trail.

Alicia

Meet Alicia

Alicia’s ebony skin glistened in the sun at the press conference in front of the school board building. In the background, a smiling poster-sized picture of my smiling daughter looked on at the proceeds, a tableau of the present and the future on HDTV. The image of my daughter prompted my co-workers to show me the video, but it was the young woman whom the press conference was honoring that kept me watching. Not only

was she an alumnus of the middle school where I worked, but she was also accepted to all Ivy League schools. Her picture and story floated around on social media for a while, and the news of her accomplishments was also discussed at North City Middle. All her former teachers and staff there when she attended were so proud that she once walked the halls of NCMS. Coincidentally, we were looking for an 8th-grade promotional ceremony keynote speaker. One of the teachers suggested Alicia, and I agreed Alicia had just graduated from high school and lived and grew up in the same neighborhood as our students. For all intents and purposes, she was perfect to be the speaker.

I reached out to her regarding speaking at the promotional ceremony, and she was honored and excited to speak to the students at her middle school alma mater. When she arrived at the ceremony, I expected a timid teenager, but a confident young adult came in her stead. The black pencil dress she wore was business enough for the adults in the audience to take her seriously. Still, she paired it with a Fushia riding jacket, and her waist-length dreads demonstrated enough youthfulness for the students matriculating into high school to relate. Her speech was equal parts eloquent and colloquial, and I was intrigued by her story.

After the ceremony, I contacted her about being part of the study. She agreed to interview after returning from her fellowship in Ghana two weeks or so later. When she returned from her time abroad, we scheduled the interview immediately. I had to schedule the interviews around her summer internship, but we finally settled on times and dates. My youngest daughter at the time was cheerleading, so while I waited for her at practice, I would interview Alicia in my car on Zoom.

Alicia's passion for policy work and education was evident in the activities she chose to participate in in high school and the types of courses in which she was enrolled. Alicia wants to empower "marginalized communities" and "people who look like me." Her belief in empowering others is what motivates her to succeed. In high school, she was part of Student Government as class president from freshman through junior year and senior as Student Council president. In addition, she was on the Math Honor Society and speech and debate, where she had "a lot of racialized experiences." Surprisingly, she also played flag football on her school's team.

Alicia credits her older sister, Tracey, for making the most sacrifices for her. Her sister gave up her acceptance to Princeton to raise her younger siblings. Her sister ended up attending the University of a Southern State for college. Her other sister also attends USS in pharmacy school. Their Nigerian mother instilled the value of education in her and her siblings. Her brothers are also academically astute. Alicia's father was a part of her life. Unlike some other participants, Alicia had many racialized experiences at a predominately White high school, but her first confrontation with racism and microaggressions began in elementary school.

Alicia Profile

"I'm on my way to Hartenford." My name is Alicia. I graduated from high school in June of 2022 from South Shore Senior High. I moved to Miami in first grade. I started off at . . . North Seas Elementary. That is a school in Miami Beach. It's predominantly White. I came from New Jersey. Both of my parents are Nigerian. There were born in Nigeria. So, I'm a first-generation American. Then, I transferred over to Sunnyside K-8 Academy, which is a school near Little Haiti. That school had a mix of

White people, Haitian people, and so on and so forth from Sunnyside. The location where I was living changed, and so North City became my homeschool. I was at North City Middle School for one year in eighth grade. I made it to South Shore Senior High, and I was accepted to the Scholars Program. In my junior year of high school, I entered the International Baccalaureate Program, and I graduated with my IB [International Baccalaureate] diploma. Now I'm on my way to Hartenford.

I've been in advanced classes for as long as I can remember. I'd say the distinction I found truly started when I was in middle school because I was not categorized as gifted. I wasn't tested. I remember also in fifth grade being in those advanced classes. So, I would say as early as elementary school, I've always been in the advanced, the honors, but never categorized necessarily as gifted. For FSAs, [Florida Standardized Assessments] I had mostly fives, and then I had fours here and there. I can't remember. I remember things like the FCAT [Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test], but I don't remember my scores. I remember FCAT in the second grade.

In high school, I was part of a program called the Scholars Program for my underclassmen years. So, for freshmen year and sophomore year, all of my courses were honors courses, with the exception of two AP [Advanced Placement] classes that I took. In my freshmen year, I took one AP class, and that was *AP World History*, but the rest of my schedule was honors courses. So I was in Honors English, Honors Geometry, Honors Biology, and so on and so forth. My sophomore year, my schedule was also full of honors classes. This time, I was seeking two AP classes: AP Human Geography and AP English Language. In my junior year, I started my first year of IB, the International Baccalaureate program, and so my entire course load, for the most part, was IB classes,

with the exception of AP US History and AP English Literature. And then, finally, in my senior year, again, my entire course load was IB classes, and my elective was AP US Government and Politics.

I will be attending Hartenford University, and I'm studying Government with a focus on Social Policy. My ultimate goal is to do policy work, and so I'm hoping to empower disadvantaged groups through policy. I think that the reason I chose this particular route is because of the specific focus on policy. I know that Hartenford has political science, but I'm not necessarily interested in political frameworks. What I'm interested in is how tangible policies can be used to affect change.

I did get publicity . . . for the achievement of getting into the [all the Ivy League schools]. I would see the comments. There's a lot of positivity, but there [were] also the people who were like *she got in because of affirmative action, she only got in because she was Black*, like those comments. My sister says that I focus too much on the comments than I should have. It's hard when I'm getting tagged in things not to look at what I'm being tagged in. Immediately after the press got crazy, I probably did spend a lot of time in the comments than I should have. It's not something I really paid attention to, and when I do, I'm more focused on love as opposed to hate.

"I Felt Very Empowered as a Student." *In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, students can attend their home school that is districted for their neighborhood, or they can apply for a magnet school. High-performing students in inner-city schools attend schools in other areas that may offer them opportunities they may not be privy to in their neighborhood schools. Recently, M-DCPS has offered parents flexibility in choosing the school they want their child to attend. However, magnet schools still have limitations*

magnet schools because of the application process. Students have to apply for magnet programs through an online application process. Certain requirements must be met to apply, like a minimum grade point average or grades, exposure to high school curriculum in middle school, or an audition or portfolio of work.

I chose South Shore for a couple of reasons. The first is my sisters both went to South Shore because they were older than me. When we moved to Miami, that was the school they went to. I had already grown an interest in South Shore. I think the second reason why I chose South Shore was the Speech and Debate program. I knew it was a very good program, and I wanted to be a part of it. When I actually got to South Shore, I realized that there were so many different programs that I could take advantage of that didn't necessarily exist in places like North City Senior High, which was my home school. So, the IB program *and* the Scholars Program. I just felt like there were a lot more opportunities at South Shore compared to my home school, and that goes back to the disparity between access to resources and affluent communities versus nonaffluent communities.

I think that even though I had attended schools in the Miami Beach area, it was still a very big culture shock, a very difficult transition going from North City Middle to Beach High. I talked about this a lot with my older sister. I remember feeling very empowered at North City Middle; I don't know how to describe it. My teachers just instilled in me this competence that was unmatched. It was the combination of being surrounded by people who looked like me. The combination of being affirmed by my teachers, my educators, the administration, the sense of community that I had at North City Middle School, just everything. I felt very empowered as a student. Then I got to

South Shore Senior High, where that wasn't necessarily the case. I didn't see people who looked like me. Although the curriculum was advanced, rigorous but I felt like the educators didn't really . . . I don't want to say invest, but I guess invest as much in building personal relationships with students in the same way that my teachers at North City Middle School did. I felt connected to my teachers beyond just academics.

I remember having conversations with teachers at NCMS. When I got to South Shore High . . . rarely. I had that relationship with my teachers of color, *specifically* Black women. *I* had the same sort of relationship with those teachers, but I found that it wasn't to the same extent as North City Middle School. I think that I was a lot more empowered. There were a lot more people who looked like me; I felt a lot more comfortable. As a result, I feel like I definitely thrived at North City Middle School. That's not to say I didn't thrive at Shore High; it just felt more draining. I didn't feel drained at North City Middle School. At Shore High, I was constantly drained, tired . . . emotionally and academically. I think that you have to learn to survive. I feel like survival was definitely the theme of my time at Shore High.

The programs I was in . . . I feel the program itself is sort of a bubble. We're sort of not necessarily integrated with the rest of the school. *The program* was predominantly White, but the school itself is a mix of predominantly White and Hispanic. Sunnyside was sort of a mix. I remember my classes being very representative of that mix. I remember having classmates that looked like me. If anything, White students were the minority. So, my classes were full of Hispanic people and Haitian people, and I had like one or two White people in those classes, but for the most part, it was a mix.

IB is like a cohort. You're around a cohort of about 60 kids. So, you're with the same kids for the entire two years. There were two *minorities*. I was there, and then there was another girl, and she was mixed. She's Liberian, half Liberian, and half German. We were the only Black girls in the program. The thing is, the program is sort of split up. Yes, there are 60 kids, but you're sort of grouped with the same kids in the classes. She wasn't in many classes that I had, and I wasn't in many classes that she had. We were sort of split for the most part. So, in most of my classes, I was the only Black person and the only Black girl.

Whenever we were talking about slavery or the Civil War. "Alicia, I'd like to hear your perspective." Unnecessary things like that. It was my elective on the issue of affirmative action and being surrounded by White, privileged, tone-deaf people who can't conceptualize the experiences of people who don't look like them. Having to feel that burden of stepping up and showing them that there is another side. Otherwise, the conversation is dominated by narratives that don't allow space for the experience of people of color. I can't fully remember everything, but I do remember constantly having to feel the burden of being the voice for Black people in spaces where I was the only Black person.

I want to say that, no, *I didn't have to assimilate to fit into the spaces at South Shore*. I mean, to some extent. I remember having two coaches, which I'm having to be very intentional about certain things that I said. Making jokes or references that nobody around me understood because they're uncultured. I think that I also maintained a lot of the different parts of my identity. I think that I was also very intentional about doing those things. My witty ways, my snarky comeback is just a lot of the flavors of my

personality. I definitely maintained those things. I think that I had to compromise some parts of my identity. I also made sure that I retained a lot of the big elements of who I am.

I don't think I ever wanted to transfer. I think that I had tunnel vision. I knew what I wanted my end goal to be. I was prepared to face all the challenges, roadblocks, and obstacles that came my way because, in my mind, it was all going to be worth it when I achieved the end goal. I was able to achieve the end goal of getting into the colleges of my choice, not having to pay for college, things of that nature. While it was hard, I knew that it would all be worth it in the end.

“The Little Microaggressions, the Little Comments, Everything was a Problem.” Unlike the other participants who had to think for some time about their experiences, Alicia had a list prepared of experiences she had since grade school. When she returned her questionnaire, she listed all her experiences and during her interviews, she recounted her stories.

There are two big things that I can remember from before I got to high school. The first one [is] from North Seas Elementary. There weren't many Black people at North Seas. I think there [are] layers. The fact that we are one of the few Black people on campus, but also, in terms of the socioeconomics that make up the students who were at North Seas Elementary School. It was predominantly rich kids who lived on Miami Beach *with* rich parents. When my family first moved to Florida, we did live [in] Miami Beach for about a year or two, and then we moved to the Biscayne area. I vividly remember, my brother and I, weren't kicked out, but we were told we were not allowed to come back to school. The reasoning was that we lived too far. We were not in the

school zone, but the manner in which the administration went about it, it was like they were pushing us out. They were citing little reason as to why my brother and I couldn't attend school anymore. We would get there early. The doors were open, and we would sit in the cafeteria. There were just little nitpick things that the administration there would do. The little microaggressions, the little comments, just everything was a problem when it came to me and my brother. In so many ways, it felt like we were being targeted as a result of our race and our socioeconomic status in comparison to our peers.

Another thing that I can remember before high school, and this is something that continued into high school, were the comments. This is by my Black peers, specifically at Sunnyside, being called an Oreo. Saying that I speak White, but I'm Black. Just being in the middle. Not being accepted by the people who look like you but also by the people who don't look like you. You're Black, but you speak White, *and* you act White. You are reading a book when other people are playing sports, things like that. I feel like the Oreos, the "you're talking like a White girl," or even when I was around White people, being called . . . not ghetto but in a way "ghetto," it was just very much I couldn't exist without being too much or too little for whoever I was surrounded by. *That* often led me to sort of isolating myself on my academic journey and making very superficial relationships with the students around *me*.

Most of the relationships I made with people throughout my educational journey have been very surface-level, like study buddies. I don't want to say associates, but people who I'm in extracurriculars with, people who are in my classes, and we'll just talk here and there about assignments. Nothing went deeper than just the academics and

extracurriculars. I would say [mostly], my relationships with my peers were not very deep.

I wrote down a couple of things . . . that happened in high school. The first one is being singled out on issues/topics that were related to race. An example that I can give . . . I can give many examples, but this one happened most recently within my English class. We were reading a poem by Sylvia Plath. She used the “n” word in her poem. It was the stares that I got from my classmates. It was the teacher calling me out and saying, I know this word makes students like Alicia feel uncomfortable, and the stares that came with it. It was the students waiting for my reaction and me having to stay composed and being hyper-aware of the fact that I had a lot to lose. My reaction to those comments and to the little instigations would produce more harm than good. I wasn’t even asked the question. The teacher just straight said, “I know this word is sensitive and may make people like Alicia feel uncomfortable.” She was very clearly calling me out as the only Black person in the room.

The second thing is conversations about tokenism. This took place in my philosophy class last year. We were talking about tokenism in a philosophical manner. My professor called on me and said, “Alicia, I want to hear from you because you are tokenized.” He proceeded to say that I was tokenized around campus and that I was at the forefront of one of my teacher’s political campaigns to show that he, quote, “likes Black people.” I’m a person who likes to observe and take things in before I speak. If I do decide to speak, I’m definitely not the first person to raise my hand. I like to sit back, see where the conversation is going, and then add what I have to say. Particularly with the tokenization issue, I came into the class late. I’m just getting settled in, and

immediately, my teacher calls on me and asked me my perspective because I'm tokenized. I don't think in that situation, I would have spoken. I was forced to speak because he sorts of called on me and put me on the spot. I was asked, "How does it feel to be tokenized?" When I am singled out to speak, it's because I probably wouldn't have shared a perspective.

Tokenism, or at least the way we were talking about it in philosophy, is just the practice of doing something to avoid criticism or to create the appearance of or effect that people are being treated equally. I feel like it downplays the work and merits that people of color earned to get to the spaces that they were in. For example, my philosophy teacher [said] that I'm tokenized because I'm the student council president or that I earn certain things because of the color of my skin. I was part of the campaign that I mentioned earlier, to make it look like the individual running for office like Black people. The token Black girl.

My teacher was running for school board. He asked students to be a part of his campaign in terms of canvassing around the neighborhoods and attracting potential voters. The teacher would have dinners, and at those dinners, he would make speeches, ask students to speak, and take pictures with students. There was this picture that was circulating around social media, which is everywhere, and I was standing next to the teacher in that photo. I'm pretty sure that's the photo that my philosophy teacher who made the comment about tokenization was referring to when he said that I was front and center in the campaign to show that my teacher liked Black people.

At the moment, I remember . . . I feel like the way I should describe this is the feeling of being naked and a bunch of eyes being on you. I remember not knowing how

to react to that moment. I remember feeling as though I had to answer his question. I couldn't get upset at the moment because I would be characterized as an angry Black woman. I remember answering his question about tokenization and what my perspective on it was. I remembered immediately afterward because this was when we were in Zoom University. This was a Zoom class. I remember logging out of the class, and I remember crying. I remember calling my sister and not being able to describe what I felt. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't articulate why in the moment. I walked her through the entire event. I remember my older sister getting very upset about it and telling one of the counselors at my school. I remember having conversations with my counselor afterward and then ultimately having to have a conversation with that teacher. I was told that I had to have a conversation with him. I also remember having to navigate White fragility because my counselor is also a woman of color. I remember going over with her my approach to the teacher- the positivity sandwich. To say like, "We've known each other for so long so I know this is never your intent." The negative of how it made me feel and then sandwich that in with another positive.

He told me he sees what I mean and that it wasn't his intent to make me feel that way. I told him I *made* a little positivity sandwich. I know it may not have been your intent, but this is how it made me feel. He apologized. We weren't besties afterward. I think he sort of realized that he had done some sort of harm, and he acknowledged it, which is a good thing. This happened in my junior year. At the time, there were no other Black administrators. In my senior year, I did have a Black administrator. This is not necessarily related to education, but there have also been racialized experiences that have

happened in my senior year. I've been able to work with that Black administrator specifically to create real change within the school.

My school hosted a mental health expo, and the students were very involved in helping it come together, as well as external stakeholders like the PTSA [Parent Teacher Student Association]. The 5000 Role Models [a group of minority boys] is a group that exists on my school's campus. I'm sure it exists in many places. The 5000 Role Models were the first group there, setting everything up *for the event*. The 5000 Role Models at my school is composed of mostly Black boys, and there are maybe like two Hispanic people within the program. They were there from the very beginning, helping to set up, then lunch came around. The PTSA was giving out, mind you, the PTSA is full of White rich moms. They were giving out food, and then it was time to get to the 5000 Role Models. One of the parents made a comment. I didn't realize I had to feed these 5,000 Black boys and refused to feed the 5000 Role Models and fed students who didn't even help make the expo come together. I remember hugging my Assistant Principal, the Black one, as she broke down into tears. It was her first year there. She transferred from Aventura High. I'm sure that was a culture shock. After the fact, the administration actually came together to buy the boys Pollo Tropical. So, after the fact, they were served, but at the moment, they were not.

The parent was letting a group of Black boys go hungry while she fed students who didn't even participate in making the showcase come . . . to fruition. *It was* very upsetting. I worked very closely with that administrator to [pitch] Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training to the School Board. We went through all the requirements it took to become a volunteer with M-DCPS, and then we pitched that the Diversity, Equity, and

Sensitivity trainings be embedded within the requirements. I remember writing letters to my school principal as well as the PTSA and the school board about the incident and how it made the populace feel on behalf of being the student council president, but also as being a Black person on campus watching my fellow Black people being denied food when everyone else was eating. *The assistant principal* actually texted me when I got back from my fellowship in Ghana, and she said the PTSA [had] basically been put on hold. They are not allowed to proceed with operations until the situation is addressed, and changes are made within the organization.

I remember writing a letter to the PTSA. I know that the president was addressed because oftentimes, the president is the one who takes responsibility for the actions of the organization. I don't know if that parent was ever individually addressed, but I do know that their comment caused a lot of harm. I don't know if the boys heard it. In having conversations with them after the fact, they mostly focused on how it made them feel that other people were allowed to eat, and they were told that they couldn't eat. I know the other students, particularly students in student government, heard it because they also brought it to my attention. I know of the parent's child. I don't have day-to-day interactions with them. Many of my peers have parents who are on the PTSA. I remember how awkward it was when there was essentially a battle with my administration, plus me, against the PTSA. Then, the awkwardness that manifested in my relationships with the students who had parents on the PTSA.

I don't think that there's a scenario where I would have addressed the parents after the fact to their faces. I was even hesitant to say something to the admin. I was even hesitant to address them through the letter because I feel like the types of people

who are on that PTSA were pretty powerful within the community. It definitely took a lot for me to face that fear in a sense. I don't think there's a scenario where I would have done it [at] the moment. Had I addressed them [at] the moment, I probably wouldn't have been very respectful or held myself together. I wouldn't have been so composed. It's just my tendency to observe, take things in, take a step back, and then react. I don't think there's a scenario where I would have just immediately reacted. After the fact, addressing them through the letter is something that's very characteristic of me.

When I said I didn't have deep relationships with people, I mean my relationships didn't necessarily extend outside of school, and they didn't know much about my personal life. I'm thinking of this one relationship I had with someone whose parent was on the PTSA. Before the incident, we were very . . . playful. We'd say hi to each other. We had conversations about how our day was going. We talked about our assignments. We talked about sports because he was an athlete, and I was an athlete. Then, the incident happened. I remember it being awkward. For a while, we didn't really talk. He always felt the need to explain to me that his mother wasn't a racist. He always felt the need to say that he wasn't a racist. When he tried to be playful about it, I could tell that he was very much serious.

“Balance Between Passionate Versus the Angry Black Woman.” Another thing is trying to strike a balance between being characterized as passionate versus the angry Black woman. I think that speaks very true to the intersection of being Black and being a woman within predominantly White spaces. In all of my classes, I feel like, guys, particularly White guys, can come across as passionate, and they're labeled assertive.

When it comes to me being passionate about something, I'm labeled as too emotional, too angry, like the angry Black girl, and that's true across the board.

Then . . . I guess it's just like this feeling that I was never able to shake. I think it's going to take a while for me to shake it. Just being hyper-aware of the burden that comes with being a Black woman in White spaces. The code-switching, the labels like Oreo, you talk like a White girl, but also the reverse when my peers around me who were White were speaking in a way that can be labeled as the ghetto or ratchet. Then they're told they're speaking and acting like a Black person, and just the emotions that come with it.

This happened [in] my sophomore year. My school, and particularly the people in the programs that I was with because, it was very much full of White, privileged people. One of my friends posted a video of me for my birthday. The comment was something along the lines of, "Alicia is the baddest," or something like that. "Happy Birthday." You know, those comments that people make for their friend's birthdays. I was told by this student that I would never amount to anything or get my dream job because I was a Black woman. Comments like that, I think, take a toll on my psyche. It's just being hyper-aware of all these things that I feel has played a huge role in my academic journey. He commented on something initially, and I remember replying back to him. I think he said, "She's a dumb ass B-I-T-C-H." And then I remember replying back, "Who's accomplished more than a White supremacist? Tell me more like a privileged White supremacist. Tell me more."

He clapped back with this long paragraph. I took a screenshot of the comment that was made. He said, "Just to let you know, slut, that you are a Black girl. That means

you will probably not get your dream job or anything related to it. If you are lucky, you won't get a wage slave job, and you will get a \$10 an hour job instead of making practically minimum wage for a job that you hate for a life that you hate. Wishing deep down inside that you tried harder in school or went for a different degree, but you will be a broke nine-to-five wage slave, and you can do anything about it, but then you try to save up or take a loan for a school to go to for some kind of arts after you gave up on the political job. You will not succeed there either. You will fall back down as a wage slave with a five-to-nine-hour job. Also, what I said before about you being a Black girl is not a racist comment. In fact, it is no way derogatory, so you can cry to that B-I-T-C-H of a friend you have and complain. Furthermore, statistically, being a Black girl slash woman, you are a girl because you're an effing B-I-T-C-H makes you a lot more unlikely to get your dream job, as I said before." He ended it with, "Have a nice day. Feel free to comment back on my phone grammar and make any marks you need to."

In the moment, I laughed at it. I definitely felt feelings of anger. I was definitely upset, but I think that in many ways, over time, I became desensitized to a lot of the comments that were made about my race, slash gender, by the individuals who I was in school with. There were lots of instances of subtle racism throughout my time in school. This obviously was a lot more explicit. I do think that over time, just having all of those instances of microaggressions and explicit racism, you just become desensitized to it. I laugh about it now. I laughed about it before, but I think, in many ways, I don't feel hurt about it. I think that the fact that I am not hurt about it says a lot about the trauma and harm that has been done.

At the very beginning of my speech and debate career, at least *the type* of debate I did, we competed in the National Speech and Debate Association. Speech and debate is split into two categories: speech, which is the more emotional, creative side, and debate, which is the more analytical, research, and argumentation. I remember at the very beginning of my speech and debate journey being told that I should not be a part of debate; rather, I should be part of the speech side. I was told that I was emotional when it came to making arguments. I was just, in many ways, pushed away from debating. I remember just having to push back against my coach, having to prove to my peers that I was good enough to be on the debate team. The emotions that came with that. I remember several times wanting to quit debate because you walk into tournaments, you walk into rooms, and you're the only Black person or the only Black girl.

I was the only Black person on my entire speech and debate team. Just feeling like there's no one there who can relate to you. The comments you get from your teammates, the judges who are judging you. Just all the microaggressions. It was very difficult for me to persist in debate. I think debate taught me a lot. It was one of my favorite activities. It was also one of the activities that I think definitely took a hit to my confidence at some points. I felt in many ways more empowered being surrounded by people who looked like me and just being able to learn and express myself within that safe space. I don't think I've ever felt as though I had a safe space in debate during my time in high school.

I would say that *speech and debate* was the primary one *that made me feel othered*. I think that in things like student government or like EESAC [Educational Excellence School Advisory Council], I mean, I don't think I felt that in other

extracurriculars. The reason why is because I was sort of . . . I don't want to say running things, but I was in that position as president, so it came with a level of respect. That respect I sort of had to work harder for in things like speech and debate. I didn't really feel it much in my other extracurriculars. *I held office in Speech and Debate* in my junior and senior year. I still think that even while holding office, I still had to prove myself. I think it got better certainly in my senior year.

My freshman year up until my junior year, it was constantly like I had to prove myself. Not just to myself but also to my peers and to my coach, who constantly felt like . . . I didn't belong on the debate team. It's the little things *my coach did that made me feel this way*. The type of debate I did was called public forum, and it's a partnership. My partners were always White males, with the exception of one time when it was a White girl. For the most part, my speech and debate coach would not look at me when he was giving feedback. He would be talking just to my partner about what we could do to improve. He was the first person who told me, "If you're going to be this emotional, you might as well switch event and go to speech." I was just being passionate about my arguments. It's funny because later in my senior year, that same passion was used to characterize me as a very persuasive speaker. It's funny; the things he didn't like about me that made me this angry Black girl later became the things that made me a great speaker. [I] constantly [felt] left out in many ways, like the other participant said, othered, or that I didn't belong. He was just concentrating his efforts on the White males on the team.

The number of girls on the team kind of evolved or devolved. By my senior year, it was just me. I was the only girl. In my junior year, there were three girls. In my

sophomore year, COVID played a role in that, but there were four girls. My freshmen year, there were five girls. Every year, there were less girls. Actually, in my freshmen year, there were two Black people on the team: me and another Black girl. After that, it was just me.

I think, in many ways, I tried to be the person I wish I had. I knew that by remaining in speech and debate, I can serve as that sort of representation, that face that could welcome other people who looked like me into the program. In addition to wanting to be that catalyst, I genuinely love the activity of debating. It's something that I've loved for a long time. What I realized throughout my academic journey is that there are always going to be spaces in which you're not welcome, but it's important that I allow myself to take up space within those activities and communities that don't necessarily welcome me. These programs are working the way that they were intended to work. I am someone who likes to shake the room, shake the table, and show them that we do belong. People like me definitely belong in those spaces.

"I Certainly Pick my Battles." *Although Alicia feels as if minorities should occupy White spaces, that does not mean that she has always felt welcomed. The running theme with all the participants was about occupying White spaces and navigating White educational spaces. Attending a predominantly White school and participating in speech and debate, which is dominated by White students, put Alicia in the position to always feel as if she did not belong. She was the most resilient because this was her reality daily.*

I've always been aware that I didn't belong, necessarily, or that the spaces that I was in weren't built for me. I think before, I was a lot more afraid of shaking the room,

shaking the table. Over time, I've become more confident in the fact that I don't belong, and that the spaces that I occupy are not meant for me. I'm okay with what comes with that. I think before, I was afraid of the repercussions that might come with challenging the spaces and the people in the spaces that I was in. Now, I definitely feel comfortable doing so.

I think that my response to microaggressions has evolved. I think that in the beginning, I probably was someone who would let it slide. I wouldn't have a reaction or a response. I think now I'm a lot more vocal about calling it out. The example I'll give, I talked about this a bit yesterday, where a student basically equated speaking in an educated, proper manner with being White and speaking in a ghetto manner with being Black. The girl was speaking in a ghetto manner. He was like, "Why are you acting like you're Black?" I said, "What does that mean?" I called him out. I feel like I challenge people now. I force them to confront the fact that they are being micro-aggressive and they are being implicitly racist. I'm much better at being vocal about it, but before, I was very passive in my response to microaggressions.

I certainly don't respond to every microaggression that comes my way. If I did, I'd be arguing with people all day, every day. I've learned to be intentional about what I respond to and how I respond to it. I think that people who are repetitively micro-aggressive are those who I intentionally challenge when I see it happen. If it's someone who does it here and there, I think that I try to be intentional about the way I address it. So, what was actually said . . . do I think that the person had malicious intent when they said it? I think that there are a bunch of things that I factor in when I decide to have a

response. Is it worth responding to? Is the person just a brick wall, and they're just not going to receive what it is that I'm saying? I think that I certainly pick my battles.

The reason why it's so difficult for me to think about racialized experiences outside of the classroom is because honestly, when I wasn't in the classroom . . . I wasn't necessarily surrounded by people who didn't look like me because I live in Miami Gardens. I would come back to my safe haven where people looked like me. I don't think I handle *microaggressions committed against me by people outside of the school setting* the same for every person. I'm a firm believer that in order to create real change, you have to work your way to a certain point, and so I found that when it comes to people who have higher authority or people who are in spaces that I wish to be a part of, I found, or I find that I tend to bite my tongue a little bit more than if it's someone . . . I don't want to say who's inconsequential, but someone who doesn't have the same authority or someone who is not a part of the spaces that I seek to occupy. Once I have solidified myself in a space, I'm a lot more comfortable in addressing and challenging the people in those spaces. I feel like until I work my way up that ladder, it's very difficult for me to confront those people, especially because I don't want to ruin [my] chances of being able to occupy that space before I even get there. When I've solidified my place, I'm going to call you out. I feel like I've sort of hesitated to call out the microaggressions.

The racialized experiences that I've had and the way it's impacted me is kind of complex. I think, in many ways, the racialized experiences have made me . . . I don't want to say less sure of myself, but I do want to say they've made me more hesitant to share my thoughts and opinions when it comes to being in the classroom setting. Oftentimes, my thoughts and opinions are right. It just makes me fearful of confirming

what many of my peers think of me, as though I don't belong, as though I'm not as smart. I'm a little bit more hesitant to share my perspective. I think that the racialized experiences have also, in sort of an opposite way have, empowered me to remain in those spaces so I can be that representation. For other people to want to infiltrate these spaces that were not meant for us but that we definitely deserve to be in.

I think that has sort of been the impact on me as it relates to the educational space, as it relates to the professional space because today, while I was on my internship. I interned for the mayor of Miami Beach. I was thinking about our meeting while I was there. Someone made a comment when they found out I was going to Hartenford. They were like, "Oh, Hartenford is tough." As though I don't have the ability to persist in spaces like that. As it relates to the professional space, it has also sort of motivated me to take up space, to sort of embrace that I don't look like those around me and be okay with it but also fight and advocate for inclusion [in] these spaces to welcome people who look like me. That's how it sort of impacted me on an educational and a professional scale.

I have learned that there is power in stillness as an initial reaction. I think that that stillness, especially as it relates to the interaction with the PTSA and just external stakeholders who were implicitly racist and explicitly racist. Honestly, I think that that stillness, as an immediate reaction, sort of gave me the opportunity to reflect on what they did and sort of make meaning of it. When I did have a response afterwards, it was intentional. The response afterwards was more powerful than me just lashing out as an instinct. Afterward, I was able to coordinate with my administration and reach out to the school board in order to have real, meaningful, targeted change. I think that experiences like that have taught me that there's power in sort of waiting, reflecting, and being

intentional about how I react to situations because, ultimately, that period of stillness can give me a lot of clarity on the steps that I take moving forward. So, I think that specific scenario certainly taught me that.

I think the biggest thing has been reflecting. I think, just moving forward, the path that I wish to take is to just tap into the power of stillness and not react immediately. In my trial-and-error phase that was high school and middle school, I think that it has been not immediately reacting that gave me the results that I wanted, whether it was having conversations with my philosophy teacher after the fact and not immediately at the moment addressing PTSA after the fact. It is those scenarios and those situations where I've had the intended impact that I wanted, which was essentially facilitating the other side and seeing where they went wrong in their encounters with me and people that looked like me. I think that just reflecting on those experiences, and how they made me feel and not shying away from those emotions that come with being degraded or put down by people who don't look like me has been really important in establishing clarity for myself on an individual level but also clarity for the empowerment and the work that I wish to do as it relates to the future. I think just reflecting and taking time to truly think before I react has been really important in making meaning of my experiences.

“I Like to Exist in the Gray Area.” *Alicia was never formally identified as gifted. Given her academic achievements even at an early age, Alicia should have been recruited for gifted services. However, from when she attended North Beach to when she attended Morningside, she could have been overlooked. In addition, both schools were probably fully staffed. They did not have to actively recruit students like inner-city schools that may not have enough students for a unit and must identify students that*

could be tested for gifted through test scores and teacher recommendation. Parents bypass the school system, in predominantly White communities and privately test their children for giftedness. Private psychologists can cost hundreds of dollars, and that is something that Alicia and her family did not have.

I would say that I'm someone who likes to think outside the box. When it comes to the way . . . I approach situations in academia but also outside of academia. I think that's just my interpretation of things, and my analysis of things is not typical. That's how I would describe the nuance. I like to exist in the gray area. That has played a role in my educational successes, particularly when it comes to writing, and a lot of the programs that I was a part of had to do with writing. The way that I would approach answering things, a lot of my teachers and educators told me that I did it in a fresh way. In a way that they haven't seen. I'm not the type of person who approaches things in an out-of-the-box manner, but it doesn't make sense. I'm someone who tries to think uniquely but has warrants and reasons to back it up. I think that sort of helps me be successful when it comes to writing things. I think that being creative has certainly helped me throughout my four years.

I think that I sort of think differently. I've been told that I think differently. I think that I carry this sense of confidence [in] myself, even if internally, I may feel a little bit hesitant. I think that while there are people who attempt to downplay my intelligence or tend to downplay me as a student, and as an individual, I do think that the majority of people that I'm surrounded by do have a level of respect when it comes to me in an educational sense because of the way that I carry myself in educational settings. Yes, there are racialized experiences. Yes, there are people who are explicitly and implicitly

racist, but I do think that the way I carry myself in educational settings, because I know what I am capable of when it comes to academics, makes people have a level of respect when they do approach me.

"I Was Excelling in Those Rigorous Programs." *Alicia was not identified as gifted, but she considered herself as gifted. She credits the advanced programs she was in with preparing her for college.*

I think that the programs that I was a part of certainly prepared me well for the track that I'm going on, particularly being a part of the IB program. A lot of the work that we did was writing-based. I know that when I get to college, a lot of things will be writing based. The programs that I was a part of definitely prepared me well.

I think that in a lot of the spaces that I was a part of in high school, I was in the minority, and I think that that will continue to be the case as I venture off into the professional positions that I want to be a part of. I think that I will be occupying spaces that are predominantly White and predominantly male. I do think that, in some ways, the program that I was a part of prepared me well for the demographic groups that I'll be a part of as I head into my future. I think that the rigor of the work that I was completing will also prepare me for the future because I will continue to be part of rigorous programs.

I would absolutely not change being in advanced courses. I feel like being in these spaces is me reclaiming my power. I think that had I left the International Baccalaureate program, I left advanced classes, it would be them winning, them affirming their belief that I am not able to handle the rigor, and them affirming their belief that I'm not smart enough to persist in advanced classes. So, in many ways, it's me

taking back my power. It's me using the advanced courses and the programs that I'm in as a platform [for] where I want to go and not allowing the negativity to cloud my judgment or cloud my reactions and actions. I don't regret remaining in advanced programs at all. I think that a lot of my successes thus far, but also as it relates to going into the future, will be and have been catalyzed by my time in advanced courses.

Could I have done anything different[ly]? Probably. But would I? No. I think a lot of the negativity that I received was because not only that I was in rigorous programs, but I was excelling in those rigorous programs. That brought a lot of positive attention, but also a lot of [negatives] and a lot of naysayers. I think that the only way that I possibly could have avoided that negativity and those racialized experiences was by downplaying myself and not excelling in the programs that I was in and not even being a part of those programs in the first place. That is not a pathway that I ever [wanted] to pursue. I could have done something differently, but I wouldn't have.

I wouldn't say that I regret any of the educational decisions I've made thus far because I wouldn't be where I am today without having made those decisions. I remember when I was transitioning from North City to Shore, a part of me felt guilty. I was, in a way, not selling out but, in a way, selling out. Having to leave this environment to attend a predominately White school in a rich area. A part of me grappled with that. I definitely don't regret anything because had I not made those decision, I wouldn't have been in the best position possible for me to get admitted into an Ivy League or have the educational opportunities and experiences that I did have. So, I definitely don't regret it.

Wishes for the Outcome of this Study. I think it is my hope that this study reaches not necessarily the young people who look like us because I think we're already aware of our experiences. It's my hope that this study reaches the educators and the people who don't look like us; that way, they become aware of their actions but also the implications of their reactions as it relates to us, and how we've internalized a lot of the things that have had impacts on us in an educational setting. It's my hope that it reaches educators, those in educational institutions, but also those who don't really look like us. I definitely want young women of color to read the study and be able to learn from the study and learn that they can make it through and be successful. I feel like those who need to read this study the most are probably those who don't necessarily look like us, so they become aware.

I honestly just hope to see more representation. The topic of representation is also something that stuck with me from the focus group. How the things that we read, the characters in the books, none of them look like us. If they do, they're always the villain or antagonist. I want people's awareness to become more clear. I want them to realize the implications of their actions and realize that they are being racist because it's sort of become normalized to us. We don't really realize it sometimes when people are being implicitly racist. I think it's true on the other side of the coin, where the people who are doing things and saying things don't realize that they're being racist some of the time. I think it happens both ways. My hope is that awareness increases, representation increases, and ultimately, that the people who do look like us that are reading this study feel empowered and understand that they can make it through.

Reflections on Alicia

Alicia attended predominately White schools and was a minority not only in the classroom but also the extracurricular activities in which she chose to participate. Her experiences as the token Black girl in almost every setting in which she chose to engage influenced her wishes for more representation in schools and in the curriculum. She mentioned her final thoughts that the same way racism had become so normal, that people that are committing these acts may not realize that their comments are racist. To combat this phenomenon, she recommends an increase in awareness. Interestingly enough, she wanted both Whites and minorities to read this study: one for awareness and the other for empowerment.

Of all the participants, Alicia had the most experience with racism in its purest form. She exhibited resilience whether it was when she was gently pushed out of her elementary school on a technicality or when a classmate called her a Black bitch. In addressing microaggressions and in just stating her opinions in class, she had to battle the stereotype of being an angry Black woman. This stereotype also permeated her involvement in speech and debate. The manner in which she confronted microaggressions depended on the circumstance and the person committing the microaggression. The first time I heard Alicia speak I was mesmerized by her confidence and the manner in which she carried herself and I questioned whether the people that committed microaggressions against her were just intimidated by her presence and what it signified.

Conclusion

As I was listening to the narratives of the girls, as a gifted Black female myself, I empathized with the girls. Nostalgia set in, and I was triggered by the conversations that I heard. The blatant acts of racism that Stephanie and Alicia shared were shocking, but it was the microaggressions, the little comments, that were made to the girls that were the most concerning. Gilman shared several comments that were made by her IB Bio teacher and how she used her platform and authority as a teacher to share these hateful thoughts. Denise shared a story that was recounted to her by a friend and the nonchalant manner in which the teacher responded. C, shared comments made in the classroom by a Hispanic boy and how the teacher did nothing. Gilman mentioned that microaggressions were so “normal,” and the normality made it difficult for her to identify microaggressions. All the girls spoke about deciding whether to respond or ignore the microaggressions. At the conclusion of the focus group, I was moved to tears as I spoke to the girls of their resilience and the hope that I had for the future with them at the helm.

In Chapter 4, the participants shared narratives about their experiences as they navigated through gifted and advanced programs. The participants shared their educational journey from when they were identified for gifted or advanced programs through their matriculation from a Miami Dade County Public School. The two participants in college at the time of the interviews shared their collegiate experiences, too. Chapter 5 will start with a discussion of the themes formed from the participants’ experiences.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF THEMES

This chapter examined the themes that formed from the participants' experiences in gifted and advanced programs in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Five themes came to the fore during the coding process as follows in their shortened form: (1) Resilience in the Face of Adversity, (2) Being "Woke," (3) Being a Token Black Girl, (4) Advanced Programs as a Vehicle of Success, and (5) Perception of the Construct of Giftedness. The themes were an umbrella to capture the 16 categories, which were deeper units of analysis, and each umbrella included more than one subtheme. I used values coding to strengthen the categories and themes, as demonstrated in the Themes, Categories and Values Chart (Table 4). The values, beliefs, and attitudes were not deduced in second round coding, instead they served as confirmation of the pattern coding that resulted from second round coding. Before presenting the themes, I shared the stories of each participant by carefully crafting in Siedman (2013)-style a profile in the participant's own words to open the interview data to analysis and interpretation by the reader of the profile.

Although Saldaña (2016) stated themes are an *outcome of coding*; themeing the data occurs when a researcher pulls together what was learned from the data to make a statement about a finding, belief, attribute, or construct that the researcher considers important and analyzes portions of data with a thematic statement rather than a short

code. As I was doing the second round of coding, I began to form preliminary themes grounded in the data, which is a strategy suggested by Patton (2015). Taking an initial inductive approach to analysis, I established preliminary themes and deductively applied them to confirm the “appropriateness of the inductive content analysis” (Patton, 2015, p. 542). I applied a second round of pattern coding using the preliminary lists of codes as categories and continued to refine them as I sorted the codes into categories and themes. I referred to the literature to determine if the themes were consistent with what other researchers found in their studies and to verify the terminology used. These confirmations led to further refinement of the themes, which will each be presented independently in the following sections and supported by direct quotes from participants and/or coding analysis done by me. The themes will be italicized throughout this discussion for clarity and emphasis.

This chapter will explore themes found in the experiences of Black girls in advanced programs in M-DCPS Title I schools that relate to experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs, the intersectionality of gender and race, microaggressions in the school environment, perceptions of the construct of giftedness, and making meaning of significant experiences. Each theme includes a condition or situation and a behavior which indicated how they handled it. Below the condition is italicized and the behavior is underlined. Five themes and 16 categories will be discussed and associated with the values codes I assigned to sections of transcripts that demonstrate each theme. Ultimately, after several iterations of themes, I settled on five dominant themes:

1. Resilience acted as a catalyst for academic success as the girls navigated and occupied White spaces that were not built for them, overcoming microaggressions and systemic inequities.
2. Labeling themselves as “woke,” *the girls recognized racial tensions and educational disparities*, yet they were empowered and inspired to seek leadership positions to bring about change.
3. *Considered the token Black girl*, the girls learned to occupy White spaces in which they felt “othered,” while simultaneously experiencing the stereotype of being deemed an “Angry Black Woman,” considered an “Oreo,” or “Acting White,” and at the same time having to decide whether to attend a PWI or an HBCU for college – a decision which was influenced by the degree to which they wanted to assimilate into society at large or be surrounded by other Black students in a controlled environment.
4. *Recognizing gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success* due to its connection to college entry, these girls also recognized (or described) the programs as a system of privilege not originally intended for them, yet they appreciated the challenge and opportunity to dismantle the system of oppression by not just participating in these programs, but excelling in them.
5. Valuing success, hard work, and education, the *construct of giftedness* as defined by participants far exceeded the traditional trait of “intelligent” and represented their “innovative,” “open-minded,” “out-of-the-box,” “creative,” and “inquisitive” thinking and “problem solving” characteristics.

The discussion of themes will start with resilience in the face of adversity since the tenets of critical race theory were so prevalent in the data.

Resilience in the Face of Adversity

The initial theme and what I realized about each participant mirrored clearly the tenets of critical race theory: “Resilience acted as a catalyst for academic success as the girls navigated and occupied White spaces that were not built for them, overcoming microaggressions and systemic inequities in the process.” This should not have surprised me since it was used as a lens through which I framed this study, nonetheless it did. This resiliency was strong and powerful. Not only for them, but as an encouragement for me as well.

First and second round coding revealed that all the participants showed resiliency in whatever situation they found themselves. “Resiliency is a term used within social work, psychology, and health professions to indicate positive adaptations to adversity, trauma, or stress” (Goodkind, Brinkman & Elliott, 2020, p. 317). Repeatedly, I saw these girls find positive adaptations to negative circumstances they encountered in educational environments whether it was being pushed out by an administrator at a predominately White school, being degraded in a predominately Black school for being Haitian American, having their voice diminished because of their age while serving as the student representative on the School Board, or being the only Black female in a Political Science course.

Evan-Winters (2014) suggested four criteria for identifying Black girls for gifted programs in her research on resiliency: “(a) recognize and name support systems; (b) adapt to middle class schooling (e.g., bicultural student identity); (c) actively resist and

challenge racial, gender, and class oppression; (d) and has the potential of transforming herself, community, and society through education and self-empowerment” (p. 27). The participants embodied these characteristics even if they were not identified as gifted. They were able to lean on their support systems while attending Title I schools but also Tier I schools such as Denise and Alicia. They adapted, resisted, and transformed as needed to be successful in school. This is evidenced by Denise as she moved from a predominantly White all-girls school to a predominantly Black school. It was evidenced by Gilman as she and her debate team members navigated the predominantly White space at debate tournaments.

Ford (1994) simply defined resiliency as the ability to bounce back. Gifted children are susceptible to negative peer pressure and isolation in advanced courses, which can either be a detriment to their success or a catalyst for achievement (Ford, 1994). *Resilience acted as a catalyst for academic success as the girls navigated and occupied White spaces that were not built for them, overcoming microaggressions and systemic inequities.* Although high intelligence is not a prerequisite to resilience, being in a gifted program implies a level of intelligence that can be an asset for children when it comes to coping with societal pressures (Hu, 2019). Regardless of the experiences they had, the participants showed repeatedly that they could rise above negativity specifically as it related to: *Microaggressions Inside and Outside of the Classroom* and *Systemic Inequities in Schools* (Figure 5), further exacerbated the need for participants to be resilient. They did not create the negative spaces and behaviors but they had to develop a way to turn them around and not dampen their enthusiasm for achieving their goals in the face of adversity.

One of the value codes that identified data this theme was Black People and Black Issues, which was short for the strong emotions regarding Black people and Black issues evident in participants' narratives. Gilman Smith stated, "I'm passionate about Black people. I want to see us thrive." These were clear and present in four participants' narratives when they articulated microaggressions they experienced in the classroom and outside the confines of an academic environment. Stephanie Jones shared her knowledge of the history and legacy of Black people at The University of a Southern State and through her involvement in the Black Student Union and her sorority, she was working to make changes on campus. Although C stated she had limited racialized experiences, she empathized with her fellow participants during the focus group interview. "It was honestly surprising to hear that and the fact that it was happening, even though it wasn't necessarily happening close to me because Miami is so big, but we're in the same school district."

Approximately 350 schools comprise the Miami-Dade County Public School District, and the demographics of schools within 5 miles of each other can vastly differ and are reflective of the neighborhood for which they serve in many instances. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was another code I used to represent specific comments where participants' passions for working toward DEI and their beliefs that others should value and prioritize it were made clear. Segments of transcripts coded DEI were tied to this theme also. Of all the participants, Denise attended the most diverse school environments. She attended a predominately Black elementary school for her primary grades and a mixed school for upper elementary. After that, she attended a predominately White all girls middle school then a predominately Black high

school. She shared that “it was a blessing and a curse because it enlightened me of the lack of diversity that exists when it comes to advanced and accelerated courses.” Being in different environments afforded Denise the opportunity to see the inequities in schools.

As a result of an incident with the Parent, Teacher, Student Association [PTSA] not feeding the 5000 Role Models, Alicia developed a DEI course with her Assistant Principal and proposed that to the M-DCPS Board to be shared with district volunteers. She noticed the need for this type of course following a microaggression she witnessed at her school. Similarly, C shared that the fact that microaggressions are “so normalized has definitely affected the way that I address those situations, especially in high school, because I felt like there wasn’t a point in saying anything.” School administrators not addressing these microaggressions could be considered a microaggression in itself. In the following section, I explored the microaggressions the participants experienced in the classroom and in the outside world and how they made meaning of those experiences, and clarify the resilience they displayed for overcoming the hurdle of microaggressions.

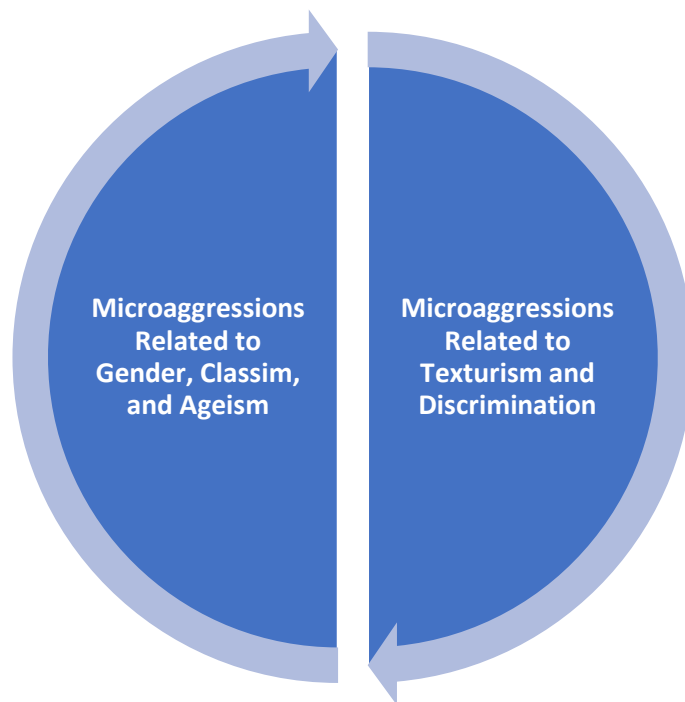
Microaggressions Inside and Outside of the Classroom

Microaggressions Related to Schooling. In my pilot interview, the term the participants struggled with the most was microaggressions. Where the young ladies were familiar with blatant acts of racism, they had trouble wrapping their minds around these minor transgressions. In the second pilot interview, I ensured that I prefaced the interview with an explanation of key terms and examples of microaggressions I experienced as a Black girl in gifted programs. I shared with them an experience I had in

a predominately White high school, where the AP teacher told my mother that I should be transferred to a regular class because I was going to fail her AP Literature course since I came from a predominately Black school. Figure 5 shows two categories of microaggressions relative to specific encounters participants experienced both inside and outside of the classroom. In sharing this experience and others, the girls were reminded of comparable experiences whether they directly happened to them or to others around them for which they previously lacked the language to identify them.

Figure 5

Microaggressions Inside and Outside the Classroom



Note: In the course of coding the transcripts, several types of microaggressions related to schooling were revealed. These microaggressions were evident not only in the classroom (gender, classism, and ageism) but also in other settings (texturism and discrimination).

Whether or not the participants understood these exclusionary behaviors at the beginning of the interview series, they had a clear understanding after the interviews were

under way. Gilman Smith admitted that she didn't know what microaggressions were in high school. "Even now I'm able to casually recognize them. I'm still learning what calling them out looks like." Denise had a "very hard time" thinking about any racialized experiences that she had inside or outside of the classroom. She continued by iterating, "I even asked mom, and she couldn't think of any instances. I mean, that's not to say I didn't have issues because I do, but none of them were like racially motivated or at least I don't think they were." C agreed that she had "never had any direct issues, it was more stuff that [she] heard from other people." Stephanie Jones also stated, "I never experienced that until that day, like, direct microaggressions or direct racism." However, this phenomenon of not being about to identify microaggressions could be a result of them being so common that they are no longer offensive. Alicia, on the other hand, was fully aware of what microaggressions were and the difference between microaggressions and blatant racism.

Alicia suggested that "there's layers" to microaggressions that were committed against her at an elementary school in an affluent area. Compton-Lilly (2020) described 10 categories for microaggressions in her longitudinal study on the effects of microaggressions of which unfair/problematic treatment is one of the categories. Alicia and her brother were treated unfairly by being asked to leave the school even though their only transgression was coming to school early. Both her and her brother showed resilience in this situation by continuing to excel in whatever school environment in which they were placed.

I vividly remember my brother and I, we weren't kicked out, but we were told we were not allowed to come back to the school. And the reasoning was that we

lived too far, we were not allowed to come back to the school. But the manner in which the administration went about it, it was like they were pushing us out. And they were citing little reasons as to why my brother and I couldn't attend the school anymore. We would get there early. I mean, the doors were open, and we would sit in the cafeteria. There were like the little nitpick things that the administration would do, like the little microaggressions, the little comments, just everything was a problem when it came to me and my brother. So, in many ways, it felt like we were being targeted as a result of our race, and our socio-economic status in comparison to our peers.

In another instance she shared a story of blatant racism where she recounted an experience that she had her sophomore year. "I was told by a student, and again, the money also plays a role, the influence of their parents ... I was told by a student that I would never amount to anything or get my dream job because I was a Black woman." In a follow up interview, she went more in-depth into the experience describing the context.

So, one of my friends posted a video of me for my birthday... The comment was something along the lines of, 'Ashley is the baddest' or something like that. Like Happy Birthday, you know, those comments that people make for their friend's birthdays . . . I think he said, 'Yeah, she's a dumb ass B-I-T-C-H.' And then I remember replying back, 'Who's accomplished more than a White supremacist? Tell me more like a privileged White supremacist. Tell me more.' And he clapped back with this long paragraph.

The long paragraph that followed described Alicia as a “slut,” a “nine-to-five wage slave,” and a “B-I-T-C-H” in several instances. He further denied that his comments were racist and that “in fact, it was in no way derogatory.” He stated that because she was a Black girl, she “will probably not get [her] dream job or anything related to it.”

Gilman Smith was being honest in stating that she did not know what microaggressions were but,

. . . being able to process what microaggressions are now and reflect on the fact that it’s so engrained into my life and how I present, that type of disrespect is normal to me, where I can’t even identify it as disrespect or back then connected it to disrespect, was a harsh reality to accept. ‘Wow, I get disrespected on the daily and I just take that, because that is just what it is.’

This was a concept that resonated with all the girls during the focus group interview. One such instance of disrespect in the classroom was from her IB Biology teacher who taught her Science for 3 years. In those 3 years, Gilman exhibited resilience in the manner in which she persisted in that space. In Gilman Smith’s words,

She was the only teacher that taught IB Science, no matter from what stage. So, we had somebody in my freshman year, they ended up leaving, so then I had to have her. That is the most racist experience... Where I come from, I didn’t have to think about racism. There were forces that were going against us because of where we were, but nobody was like ‘Oh you “n” word’ or anything like that. That wasn’t a thing for me until Dr. Jean, where she would pick on our Haitian identities. It was crazy because her husband was a Haitian man, who she

would pick on in our class and talk about and her son was Haitian, and visually Black.

Later, throughout the interview process, it was revealed that Dr. Jean identified as Hispanic but was married to a Haitian American. Although some Haitian Americans can be fair-skinned, her husband and son had a darker complexion. The population of the high school in which she taught, and where her son once attended, was primarily Haitian American. Gilman shared that,

She would talk about our culture things like the fake fruit that they would put on their table because “we were too lazy to get real fruit and real flowers.” She would make fun of their home environments “saying that we have roaches in our house. All these different things that have nothing to do with IB Bio.

Although through marriage, Dr. Jean was immersed in the culture, Gilman believed that she had no right to make fun of it.

Conversely, C attended a predominantly White high school with a high Hispanic population. She experienced microaggression when an Assistant Principal called her and her friend down to the office because one of the girls said she wanted to fight this Hispanic girl. Although she and her friend resolved the matter, the Assistant Principal called her to the office. “She said somebody came and reported the situation and said that it looked like it was about to be a fight because my friend put her hair up in a ponytail” as if she were about to fight. After the girls shared their side of the story with the Assistant Principal, they thought the matter was resolved. However, according to C:

The next day, I got called down saying I have CSI, which is indoor suspension, because she talked to somebody else, and they said that that wasn’t the case. So, I

called my parents. Obviously, they came down to the school and had a very heated conversation with the lady over CSI, and I was taken off . . . I remember my mom; every time she talked about the situation, she would always say, “The lady didn’t even look at her grades.” The principal had to step in and when he came, he pulled up the record. He was like, “Oh, she’s a straight-A student.” She literally just looked at the situation of two Black girls and a little Hispanic girl and there had been a girl saying somebody wants to fight her and automatically, we’re the culprit.

Although Denise never experienced microaggressions related to race directed towards her; however, she shared experiences that were impactful to her that she heard from others. One such incident that her friend shared with her involved a cooking class that her friends attended at Successful Ladies Preparatory. She stated that:

Two of my minority friends went to the class and the teacher, I think he was a chef. He just came in to teach the class . . . He was telling a story and the story was about him talking to a Black man. He was like “Oh my gosh, your hands are so dirty. Why are they so dirty?” And he was like, “You need to scrub your hands.” The man, I guess he went to the bathroom. He washed his hands. The chef was like, ‘No, your hands are still dirty. They’re still so filthy. Why are they so filthy.’ Then I guess he started laughing. He was like “Oh yes because you’re Black.” My best friend and my close friend, they were like, what? Mind you there were the only two Black girls in that class and he told that story. I guess he thought it was funny. They were just like, they ended up speaking to him and they were like that’s not appropriate to say, that was so rude and all this stuff. So,

he ended up apologizing the next class. He was like, “I’m sorry if you thought it was rude.”

Stephanie Jones did not experience blatant racism until college. She experienced some instances of microaggressions in high school but nothing that raised any red flags. However, while at the University of a Southern State in her first week on campus, a Gainesville resident on a bicycle circled her and her friends and called her racial slurs like “monkey, the “n” word, and so on, so forth.” Stephanie Jones felt helpless and sad because she shared that:

This is a grown man and I’m a 5’2” woman, there’s just no way, I could really do anything about that now. So, he eventually went off. In the heat of the moment, I just felt very sad. It was a sadness that you don’t even cry. This is just life. This is how certain people just treat others and he doesn’t know me. I really just got onto this campus. That was just my first experience. Wow, I’m in a whole new city. I’m about to start the next 4 years in my life and this really kind of made an eerie tone for me.

Although Stephanie's experience was not in a classroom, it occurred in what would be considered a safe haven at the University of a Southern State. The experiences in and out of the classroom related to race ranged from microaggressions to blatant racism, as evidenced by Stephanie’s narrative, and they experienced resilience as they handled the situation. Participants also shared microaggressions related to gender, class, and ageism.

Microaggression Related to Gender, Class, and Ageism. Not all the microaggressions were race-related. Initially, intersectionality was developed to address

the legal marginalization of women of color. Still, now, it has expanded to include “others who sit at the intersection of two or more categories” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016, p. 26). Microaggressions related to gender, class status, and age also impacted the participants. Gilman Smith shared that in elementary and middle school her experiences had more “to do with classism, and you know, elitism and things like that, but not really racialized experience . . . Again, in elementary and middle school, you know, the stereotypical school, kid playground stuff.”

Stephanie Jones faced subtle acts of exclusion as a woman in a Political Science major at the University of a Southern State. “I think also it’s just a double standard that women received. Women shouldn’t be in politics or politics affect women in a different sense than males. So, when it comes to discussions, certain things aren’t considered, or certain things aren’t addressed.” Specific topics seemed to garner dichotomous conversations, such as abortion laws. In all of the situations that Stephanie described that happened to her as a Political Science major, she exhibited resilience as she dealt with the males and the other non-Black women in her classes. In Stephanie’s words:

It shows a lot when we talk about laws. So, like, specifically abortion laws. There are two drastically different points of view of how it affects different genders. We’re in a class to learn about how laws affect people, how to fix things. You may not agree with this ideology at the end of the day, this is not something that you’re affected by. I think a lot of the men in this course don’t think like that. They think more so on like, how does this affect me? Politics is always in favor of men. They never really get the understanding of okay; this is far greater than yourself. Because my classes are majority men who identify as

White or Caucasian, they don't realize the extent of how the system of politics affects people who are of the minority group.

Alicia was confronted with several instances of subtle acts of exclusion at a predominately White high school. In debate she was a double minority which impacted the way she thought about occupying White spaces. Gifted or advanced students who are double minority, particularly in Alicia's case, a Black woman, "do not fit into the traditional societal or school mold academically or socially" (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015, p. 194). Within the debate class and throughout her high school career, Alicia broke the mold. This incident happened to her freshman year in her debate class.

We were having a topic analysis in class about one of the resolutions of the month. I want to say it had to do with the pharmaceutical industry or something related to that. I remember raising my hand to share my perspective and one of the male students in that class said to me, "Oh, be quiet and go back to the kitchen." I was like, what? Then he said at least I didn't tell you to go back to the cotton field . . . I felt in that moment . . . embarrassed, infuriated. I remember because my freshman year, I was taking the bus. I was taking the bus from Miami Beach to Miami Gardens, like the Metro bus. I was doing that until my senior year. I remember like walking to the bus stop and being very emotional about it. I was very upset.

In an effort to understand White privilege, Stephanie had a conversation with her Theory of Knowledge teacher who identified as a White woman. She had to explain to her teacher that:

Although she was a woman and indeed a minority, they would not have the same opportunities in the American social system. When it comes to being an African American woman, you are faced with a double minority. Our teacher identifies as White American or Caucasian and a woman. We were talking about basically being a double minority and how coming from a lower socio-economic background has barriers that are harder to overcome. A comment that was made by the teacher was, “Well, I came from a lower economic background as well, and I am a woman as well.”

Stephanie further explained that:

it was a comparison of different social classes, and it felt genuine that she was trying to understand. We understand that you are of a lower socio-economic status, and that you are a woman, and you do face your own sense of stereotypes and oppression in this system, the social system that America created but it is not the same.

Gilman Smith had an encounter with a male student in her class which caused her to have an emotional breakdown. Her teacher had to step in the middle of the verbal altercation that ensued about her being a teacher’s pet, which she admitted she was.

He would try to poke fun at me for it. It was almost to the point where he was getting mean . . . from someone I called my friend . . . He would say random things like hinting towards being an overachiever or depict me as the teacher’s pet. Which I admit, you know, I’ve always been the teacher’s pet, and I’m not mad about it. He would just point those things out in a very negative light, even while I’m trying to help him because he just would fall asleep in class all the

time. Everyone else would allow it and laugh. They knew how much that would actually hurt my feelings . . . There was one day where I literally blew up to him in English class . . . So, I'm just jotting down my little reminders, and he just had a slick remark. I was like, 'Why are you so mean?' I just literally exploded. Ms. Schmidt pulled us away.

For Denise, ageism was an issue that she dealt with particularly as she served on many committees where she was the youngest person. She was the student representative on the School Board and often she was required to wait until all the Board members spoke to share her thoughts and opinions on any number of board items. "I guess when I did speak, some of the board members, of course they appreciated my thoughts. But others, you know, pretty much didn't. So that was something that was always interesting." Denise also served as the youngest member of the student government board in 10th grade.

The rest of the members were in the 12th grade. I remember this one girl; she was the vice president, and she did not like me. I don't know why she didn't like me. She questioned every decision that I made, but at the end, the advisor still listened to me because, and that's not to say that everything I said was right. It's just the fact that in everything that she questioned, or she negated, the advisor still approved what I said. It was just kind of like you're doing all of this, and you're doing it for what, and that's how I felt . . . I literally went to one of the class officers who was here . . . I was like, I just don't understand why she treats me like this. She's always questioning decisions. She was like, "Denise, you know, I

don't know if you realize it or not, but you're in the 10th grade, you're doing things that she wishes she would have done.”

Classism, ageism, and gender-related microaggressions were not committed exclusively by White people but also by people of the same race and ethnicity. The girls showed resilience in situations that demonstrated the additional microaggressions. Despite the microaggressions they experienced whether it was connected to race, gender, class or age, the girls continued to excel. Texturism, which is directly related to the texture of one's hair, was another microaggression that was committed by both races. However, it was most memorable when committed by White people because it could be considered as a form of discrimination. Discrimination is directly related to race.

Microaggression Related to Texturism and Discrimination. Another interesting experience that the participants had was with *texturism*. India.Arie featuring Akon proudly proclaimed, in her 2006 Billboard hit, “I am not my hair” to signify that her hair does not define her. Wearing their natural hair can make a significant impact on how people perceive them and comes with implicit biases of its own which Akon described in a verse in Arie's song,

Had 'em give me lil' twist and it drove 'em crazy (crazy)

Then I couldn't get no job

'Cause corporate wouldn't hire no dreadlocks

Then I thought about my dogs from the block

Kinda understand why they chose to steal and rob (Simpson, Sanders, Thiam,

Akon, & Ramsey, 2005, verse 1)

Later on, *texturism* can impact their professional experiences as hair biases and discrimination (Rowe, 2022) may persist in the White spaces that they wish to occupy in the future. People of other races committed these microaggressions. I questioned whether *texturism* be considered a microaggression if it were committed by people who looked like them. This may be a philosophical point to argue another day. Still, it is worth mentioning here because it was a phenomenon that the participants said impacted their lived experiences and caused them to become resilient.

For Stephanie, *texturism* and the effects of someone having the audacity to invade your personal space to put their hands in your hair is “damaging” to Black women. Rowe (2022) dramatically shares her findings from research in an ethnodrama entitled “Tangled.” In the monologue, Beryl, a 32-year-old higher education professor, shares her internal and external conflicts with having locked hair in a professional space. Beryl laments,

Now, you can see why I’m so particular about people wanting to run their hands through my hair. Other than the fact that I don’t want to be on display like Sarah Baartman or be subjected to generational trauma, I carry and absorb everything in my hair until the next wash day. (Rowe, 2022, p. 4)

Stephanie talked about her experience and how it affected her at that moment. Later in the interview, after recounting the experience with her teacher, she mentioned that she had other instances in which people literally asked her whether they could touch her hair.

That shouldn’t be something someone’s comfortable saying or doing. I do remember a time when I was in my science class, I believe it was 11th grade. The

way our class was set up, I sat near the teacher. It was one day; I think I tried a new method with my hair. It was like very, very, very loose curls. She had come up to me, she was talking to me about my hair. She's like, 'oh, it looks very nice . . . You should do your hair like this more often. In high school, there's a phase where I just had my hair in ponytails. Honestly, I thought it was a very cute hairstyle. So, in my head, I was like, 'Okay, what is she talking about?' She literally passed her hand through my hair. At the moment, I never realized the extent of how damaging that is to Black culture and Black women . . . This is one of the things that really triggered me moving forward after learning more about it, I'm very cautious. I really like my personal space. Now when it comes to touching my hair, my face even just touching me in general, I don't want anyone to feel comfortable enough to disrespect me like that.

In her focus group follow up interview, Alicia mentioned that she did not consider people wanting to touch her hair as racialized. In self-reflection, she shared "I think the focus group certainly made me think about experiences in another way because I didn't really consider the hair thing a racialized experience until after the focus group." She shared that the experience with the hair garnered so little thought that she couldn't remember how she felt and the impact now that she had a change in mindset.

I think it goes back to some of the things that I've said before about how you become desensitized, and so you don't really know what to feel, or you don't really feel, at least as it relates to me. I think it was just sort of a realization that implicitly, those things were racist. As I reflect, and as I'm introspective about those things, it's crazy to me that some of the subtle forms of racism go unnoticed

by me. That's something that's very hard to grapple with I think, just the fact that I'm losing touch with what is racist on an implicit, micro level.

As a Black student at a predominately White school, C described how people touching her hair "unprovoked" was her "pet peeve."

It bothers me so much. I hate it when people touch my hair unprovoked ... I went to a predominantly White high school. There was definitely a time that a girl went to my friend and was like "Oh, I love it when you guys wear your hair and braids like that." What do you mean by you guys? What do you mean by that? Why would you even say that? You could just say, "I like your hair." The rest was literally just uncalled for.

Conversely, she described how Black people had asked her what she was "mixed" with when she wore her hair straight. "Why does me having long hair imply that I'm mixed? ... I think that ties into what she was saying about colorism and racism, and I definitely agree with that."

For Denise, the majority of the comments about her hair came from people who looked like her, even her family members.

It was always super interesting too because even when I get in the water, my family members are going to be like "Oh, my gosh Denise is it really like this?" . . . I remember when I was in middle school, people would, you know, I guess assume its weave. I think that it also deals with the culture that we're into now because a lot of girls wear wigs and extensions, so you don't know if it's their real hair or not. I've experienced that people ask me if it's my real hair. Then also being enchanted with how it looks when it gets wet because the curls are larger,

and it looks all silky and stuff like that. I think that it comes back to this idea of more Eurocentric ideas being promoted, rather than traditional African American features being appreciated.

Whether it is texturism, ageism, classism, gender-based microaggressions or microaggressions related to race, the girls learned to identify them and were resilient in addressing them. By identifying the microaggressions, the girls are recognizing these minor injustices but by calling them out, or in some cases ignoring them, they are taking back their power.

Calling Out Microaggressions Inside and Outside the Classroom. Regardless of the microaggressions that the participants experienced, each participant was asked to share how they would handle microaggressions in the classroom and outside of the classroom. The degree to which they would “call out” a person on their transgressions depended on their familiarity with the person committing the microaggression, the setting in which the person committed the transgression and their position of power at the time. Alicia stated, “I certainly don’t respond to every microaggression that comes my way because if I did, I’d be arguing with people all day, every day.” The other participants had similar sentiments. Another criterion for determining whether she would address a microaggression is that Stephanie stated, “If someone truly means where they’re coming from, or is it really just bliss and ignorance? If they really don’t know and individuals are willing to learn, I do take the time to tell them, ‘Hey, this is not appropriate.’” Her resilient approach was grounded in her ownership of recognizing the other person’s problem and intentionally choosing whether to respond.

C suggested that she would ignore microaggressions committed against her by other students in her school because “it just doesn’t feel like it’s worth it to try to pick a fight with it because nothing’s going to be done about it at my school. That’s how it would have been.” C showed her resilient approach by strategizing when and how she would call them out but maintain respect for them at the same time, so her actions did not embarrass but improved or taught. Hypothetically, Denise said the way she handles these microaggressions depends on how expressive she feels at the time. “I do always try to be respectful so maybe I’ll just wait until the day is over. Well maybe not the day is over, but the class period is over and then I’ll go to them after, and I’ll say oh, that wasn’t appropriate.” She gave an example where she had to call out a substitute teacher on behalf of another student. The teacher made a comment about a Hispanic girl who had purple weave in her hair. The teacher told the student that she was not “embracing her true culture.” The girl left the classroom crying.

People see clothes and hair and all these things . . . it’s just a form of expression. So, for you to judge someone because they are expressing themselves in that way, that’s just what really threw me. I told her ‘That’s something if you really felt that way, you could have pulled her outside.’ You could have had that conversation, rather than first of all embarrassing her in front of the entire class and secondly judging her.

Microaggressions being so normalized was a concept that resonated with all the participants during the focus group interview. Dixson and Anderson (2017) described the concept of macroaggressions that lead to “acts of subordination.” “It is macroaggressions that permits the microaggressions to persist without effective means to challenge”

(Dixson & Anderson, 2013, p. 44). In one of her interviews, Gilman Smith said that dealing with microaggressions was so normal that she had a hard time recognizing them and knowing when to address them.

It was hard to be able to recognize them in the moment and address them, then it already passed. The issue with microaggressions is unless you nip it in the bud right there, people are going to gaslight you and act like it didn't happen. So, my original way to address them was avoidance. It's not worth it, I have to pick my battles. I want my voice to be powerful when it's necessary where it's like, you said this bad word to me, and I need to address it now versus if I address every microaggression. I feel like it dwindles the impact of my voice when I do speak. I think it's a way to keep me safe and ensure that when I need to use my voice, it's still a tool that's there for me.

Her strategy for handling microaggressions was to pick her battles and not take on the responsibility of another person's behavior and inappropriateness every time she sees or hears it. She also recognized that if she gave too much input, people would be less likely to take her seriously when it was really important.

Most of the young ladies agreed that they would handle microaggression committed outside of the classroom, a lot differently than if it was committed at school. C stated, "I feel like outside just based on how my school was, I feel like outside of the school setting, I could get my point across better and not have to worry about the repercussions." For Denise, again speaking hypothetically, it depends on the person who commits the transgression.

I think it just all depends on who I'm talking to and then what the environment is, and then how badly I want something. I do know sometimes you have to sacrifice things to get someplace, especially when you're in environments in which people don't look like you.

Dealing with microaggressions outside of the school setting, would depend on many variables for Denise including the environment, the person committing the microaggression, and the social repercussions of responding.

Alicia felt the same way. She didn't feel like she would handle microaggression the same for every person. In her profile, she spoke about the "power of stillness" and did not immediately react. In that stillness, she was able to analyze the situation and decide on the best course of action." That way, when I did have a response afterwards, it was intentional. And so, the response afterwards was more powerful than me just lashing out as an instinct." She also made decisions on whether to respond based on her position of power in the space in which she was occupying.

I'm a firm believer that in order to create real change, you have to work your way up to a certain point. So, I found that when it comes to people who have higher authority, or people who are in spaces that I wish to be a part of, I found, or I find that I tend to bite my tongue a little bit more than if it's someone . . . I don't want to say who's inconsequential but someone who doesn't have that same authority, or someone who is not part of the spaces that I seek to occupy. I think once I've solidified myself in a space, I'm a lot more comfortable in addressing and challenging the people in those spaces Until then, I feel like I've sort of hesitated to call out the microaggressions.

Microaggressions is just one aspect of situations in which the participants were forced to be resilient and to continue to be educated in spaces that were not built for them. In being able to identify and acknowledge microaggressions outside of the classroom, the girls were “challenging the dominant ideology” that Solórzano and Yosso (2016) laid out as one of the five elements of the perspective of critical race theorist. Using CRT methodology in the next section, I examined, through counter-storytelling, “how students of color experience and respond to the U.S. educational system” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016, p. 137). The participants in the study were able to identify systemic inequities that they experienced in schools and how it impacted their lived experiences.

Racialized microaggressions were not the only type of microaggressions that the girls faced as they navigated through gifted and advanced programs. The girls were also confronted with microaggressions inside and outside of the classroom including microaggressions related to gender, classism, ageism, texurism, and discrimination. In identifying microaggressions, the girls demonstrated resilient strategies that others could adopt to address the microaggressions. These strategies would be discussed further in Chapter 6. As they navigated these programs the girls also identified the systemic inequities in the different school environments in which they found themselves.

Systemic Inequities in School

Valencia (2010) questioned the mindset of whether there were at-risk students or at-risk schools. Recently, there has been a shift in focus from the student’s deficits where conversationists blame parental environment, student behavior, cultural competence, etc. for students’ academic failure to more focus on the inequities in the schools. The

concept of student deficits is so ingrained in the institutions of education that there are at-risk schools all over the nation, including M-DCPS. Valencia (2010) furthered this anti-deficit argument by asserting that “it is morally unacceptable and scientifically indefensible to hold students and their parents accountable for academic success if schools are structured in such a way [promoting inequalities] that thwart optimal learning” (p. 117).

M-DCPS was recently named the third largest school district in the nation with over 350 diverse schools. Some students attend schools within the same feeder pattern as Gilman Smith and Stephanie Jones. “My entire family did all the North Miami’s elementary, middle, high,” Gilman shared. Her capacity to speak about inequities in schools is extremely limited because the demographics of the schools she attended were similar. Since all of the schools she attended were Title I schools, they were afforded the same resources. Of all the participants, Denise attended the schools with the most diversity in its population and resources. For elementary school, she attended a predominantly Black school for her primary grade and a mixed school for the upper grades. For middle school, she attended a predominantly White all-girls school, and for high school, she attended a predominantly Black Title I school. Alicia also attended schools with diverse populations. Since Denise and Alicia attended the most diverse schools, they had the most diverse experiences.

Denise shared that in regard to resources “with middle and high school . . . , it made me realize that on an education level, there is a difference based on the school you attend.” Denise shared the differences in resources primarily between her middle and high school.

Something that I just disliked about that school, Miami Sunshine Senior High, is first of all the infrastructure. So, the fact that it's built like a prison. The second thing is the lack of resources there. I remember 10th grade when I was taking Pre-Cal, there were like over 40 students in one class, and we had to share textbooks. Some of the students didn't even have desks and that was something too, a lot of the classes were overcrowded. They began removing AP classes because they were putting students into classes who weren't prepared . . . They're putting kids in these classes without ensuring their success if you get me. They're doing it to meet a quota to say, "Oh yeah, we have AP Physics' but not realistically thinking long term and thinking whether these kids are going to pass the AP exam." They're putting them with teachers who aren't, I guess adept with the materials that need to be taught. So, these teachers are trying to learn it at the same time they're trying to teach it.

Conversely, at Successful Ladies Preparatory, there was a difference in resources. Whereas Successful Ladies Preparatory serves 343 students in grades 6-12, Miami Sunshine Senior High serves 1,410 students in grades 9-12. The low number of enrollment and the exclusivity of Successful Ladies Preparatory make it easier to provide students with supplemental resources that Miami Sunshine may not be able to offer its students as a Title I school.

At Successful Ladies Preparatory, they provided us with a MacBook. We had it all the way from sixth to eighth grade just in attending the school. So, they closed that resource gap. If you didn't have a laptop at home, they ensured that you would have it, and Miami Sunshine even though they're serving a group of

individuals who reside in an urban community . . . that wasn't the case. Although Successful Ladies Preparatory caters to a more affluent demographic, they still have the resources to give, while Miami Sunshine that catered to the more poor demographic, they couldn't even give it, even though that's where it was really needed. That was really sad.

Alicia also described a difference in resources at the high school she attended opposed to the predominantly Black high school that she would have attended if she were not in the IB magnet. Title I is very specific when it comes to what the funds can be used for and in schools with teacher shortages and low-test scores, principals opt to spend those funds on teacher or interventionist allocations. In Tier I schools, the students and programs may be supported by parental donations and fundraising through the PTSA and booster clubs.

When I got to South Shore, I realized that there were so many different programs that I could take advantage of that didn't necessarily exist in places like [my home school]. So, like the IB program, the Scholars Program. I just felt that there were a lot of opportunities at South Shore compared to my home school and that goes back to the disparity between like access to resources in affluent communities versus non-affluent communities.

Denise explained the difference in the culture of the schools and the expectations of the students at her middle school versus her high school.

I can say that my middle school, it was more of an emphasis on academics. At my high school, there was an emphasis on academics, but they also cared about your home life too. I can say many teachers were more of like, or at least tried to

adopt the role of a fatherly figure. I can literally think of one teacher from my high school who literally called himself ‘Pops’ and that’s because he was just . . . a caring person. At my middle school, that was never the case. I can say that each environment has different cultures and with those cultures, I guess an emphasis on different things. I was saying that at my middle school, there was an emphasis, even at an early age on the future and at my high school, they were just trying to get those students out not even caring about post college. Although we did have a cap advisor who was amazing, they understood that these kids had greater struggles and that many of them didn’t aspire to go to college. They were just trying to meet them where they were. Although my middle school, they were trying to push them to be more and greater.

For Alicia, the sense of community that she felt at her predominantly Black middle school differed significantly from the “culture shock” she experienced at South Shore Senior High. Being “surrounded by people who looked like me” and “the combination of being affirmed by my teachers, my educators, the administration, the sense of community that I had at North City Middle School . . . I felt very empowered as a student.”

Then I got to South Shore, where that wasn’t necessarily the case, I didn’t see many people who looked like me. The educators, although the curriculum was advanced, yes, rigorous, yes, but I felt like the educators didn’t really . . . invest as much in building the personal relationships with students in the same way that my teachers at North City did. I felt connected to my teachers beyond just the academics. I remember having conversations with teachers at NCMS . . . before

and after class, not necessarily related to academics. When I go to South Shore . . . rarely. I had that relationship with my teachers of color. So, like women . . . I had that same sort of relationship with those teachers, but I found that it wasn't to the same extent as it was at South Shore.

Alicia's resilient approach related to the school situation was to seek comfort and rapport from teachers that looked like her. Teacher representation in schools is an important facet that the girls discussed in their wishes for the outcome of the study. While Stephanie's awareness that advanced programs were not always offered in Title I school, showed that she demonstrated the wherewithal to know that there were differences in these schools.

Although Stephanie never attended a Tier 1 school, she recognized the disparities in the types of programs like International Baccalaureate, Cambridge and other advanced programs that were not offered at Title I schools. She observed that "schools that aren't Title I are more prone to have these programs and resources." Gilman's statements regarding the teachers at Pioneer High labeling the IB program as low performing helped to solidify the claim that these advanced programs were not built for Title I schools.

We were. It was just the reality of it . . . It probably did add to it, being that we were Title I. But we had a shrinking program. Every year, our numbers got smaller. Every year, or every couple of years, a subject would drop. We used to have kids who did HL [high-level] Math Studies, and then they were like, nope, we're not even giving you the option anymore. We're going to cap ya'll at SL [standard level] because it's too hard. So, we had all our classes picked out for us

already. They chose when it was explained to us . . . the easiest courses you could have in IB.

Despite the resources they were offered in the schools in which they attended; the girls were resilient by being successful in these environments. Stephanie, Gilman, and Denise attended Title I schools for high school. In visiting or attending Tier I schools, they were aware of the disparities that exists between these disparate environments. Alicia attended a Tier I school for high school but attended a Title I school for middle school and recognized the differences not only in the resources she received but also how representation impacted how she navigated gifted and advanced programs. C's parents surplanted her lack of support in schools with a private tutor. Although this is an effective strategy, parents in low-income areas may not be able to afford a private tutor. These inequities in the schools in which the participants attended impacted the way they saw the entire educational system and by extension the world in which we live. This awareness is what led them to being “woke” and leads us into the examination of the woke ideology in the narratives of the young ladies in the study.

Being “Woke”

The term “woke” is a colloquialism that was popularized by the Black Lives Matters Movement and the Me Too Movement to indicate “an awareness of the specific injustices and abuses targeting the African American community” (Babulski, 2020, p. 74). By being “woke,” the girls were giving credence not only to their awareness of racial tensions around the world but also of the educational disparities they witnessed in the public school system. In waking up from the narratives of the majority, the participants spoke about being empowered to be changemakers in their schools and

communities. The “woke” ideology has led these girls to seek leadership positions where they can be impactful, whether it is serving on the Black Student Union on the campus of The University of a Southern State or as a Student Government president at their high schools, and in some cases just occupying White spaces not built for them. Hence the second key theme of: *Labeling themselves as “woke,” the girls recognized racial tensions and educational disparities, yet they were empowered and inspired to seek leadership positions to bring about change.*

As changemakers, the participants valued advocacy. They learned to advocate for themselves and for others in their schools and communities. Although C did not have a lot of microaggressions committed against her per se, she advocated for her fellow classmates and their experiences impacted the way she saw the world. Alicia advocated on behalf of the 5000 Role Models all the way up to the School Board in which she solicited Denise’s support as the student representative on the School Board. Stephanie was passionate about the dire situation at the University of a Southern State regarding the declining enrollment of African American students. Through the Black Student Union and her sorority, she advocated for something to be done to recruit and retain more minority students.

Community and policy initiatives go hand in hand with advocacy. When the participants engaged in the focus group interview, one of the first questions asked was for them to introduce themselves and to share their current or future major. All of the girls were seeking careers in fields related to political science or social advocacy. Stephanie confirmed this by her statement, “I do think because we came from similar backgrounds and we all had overlapping . . . experiences, we were able to kind of find a route that was

similar.” Alicia stated in her first interview, “I am very passionate about policy work, and so a lot of the activities and things that I did in high school are related to that. C found opportunities to give back to her community through national organizations like Jack and Jill of America, Inc., and she volunteered to tutor school-aged children.

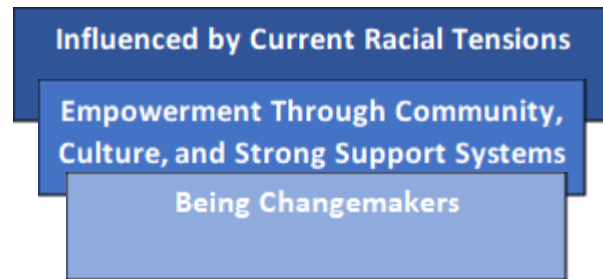
Primarily, the change that the participants wanted to enact through their empowerment was in the Black community and concerning Black issues. The value they placed on Black matters and Black people, in general, was a catalyst for them to contribute to bettering society. However, they also valued their culture. Stephanie and Gilman were proud to be Haitian American. In their communities they embraced their Haitian identities and struggled to stay true to that identity while occupying White spaces like Speech and Debate. Denise and C both chose to attend HBCUs because it fostered Black culture and created a sense of community.

Evan-Winters (2014) in her assessment of resiliency literature and gifted Black girls, found that certain criteria helped to promote resiliency included parents being involved in their child’s education. The implications are that having a support system empowers the girls as they move through the educational system. Gilman, Denise, and C emphasized the importance of their parents’ influence in their educational decisions. Although Alicia’s parents were not as involved in her life, she was raised primarily by her older sister who made tremendous sacrifices to ensure she was supported through high school. Stephanie spoke about her upbringing with regard to education and its importance.

The three categories that correlate to this theme of “being woke” (Figure 7) were: *Influenced by Current Racial Tensions, Empowerment through Community, Culture, and Strong Support Systems, and Being Changemakers.*

Figure 6

Being Woke



Note: The theme Being “Woke” acknowledged the girls’ awareness of the racial injustices that persist in the world and how these injustices moved them into action. Additionally, their families served as a support system on which they leaned to help them navigate through an educational system that might not have been built for them and also in occupying White spaces. The girls were strengthened by their community and their culture.

The discussion of the categories will be ordered to reflect the process one may take to enact change. First, I will be discussing the current racial tensions that influenced the girls, followed by how those racial tensions and other variables led to the participants feeling empowered through their community, robust support systems and culture, and finally, how that empowerment led to them being changemakers in their communities and schools.

Influenced by Current Racial Tensions

Gilman Smith credited 2020 with being an influential year in her physical and emotional development because of COVID-19 and the summer that succeeded that with the Black Lives Matter movement. Being “woke” made her aware of the racial tensions

at the time and led her to a political arena in which her involvement could enact change. However, the stress of these events impacted her health and her mental state.

I had an internship at the time. My senator is very active, and he organized a protest. I organized it alongside the staff and whatnot. I was going through a huge health issue at the same time . . . It was one of the most stressful periods of my life. One of the symptoms was excruciating headaches, like, can't even open my eyes type of headaches, but I was still on Zoom organizing. I was like this is insane. Then after George Floyd, then the rise of Breonna Taylor's story coming back up, and then even more and more and more all at the same time. My dad was like, "You can't change the world if you're dead." That's very morbid. I wasn't about to die . . . I was like, you know what? You're right. I'm trying to address everything that was happening . . . I cannot internalize the work I do.

For Denise, the death of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, more recently George Floyd and Ahmad Abury made her "more woke although [she hasn't] experienced much." Gilman shared Denise's ideals about how the death of innocent Black people shaped her outlook on life.

Life isn't always all peaches and rainbows, you know. So, I think it shaped my perspective on things. Again, being mindful that I was being formulated during like Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman in high school . . . But as Black people we carry the burden of identity. I realized that, you know, that burden could then be a barrier.

Along with the racialized events that took place in 2020, the participants

displayed a general disdain for Donald Trump and his policies. C described a Hispanic teacher in her school as being “the type of Hispanic that would vote for Trump” to qualify the dislike that she had for her. In addition, she stated that there were a lot of ‘Trumpees’ at her school, which were primarily Hispanic. Denise’s attitude was that Trump’s motives were not good after she watched a Netflix documentary about him. She described him as “homophobic,” “racist,” and “discriminatory towards disabled people and towards women.” After Trump lost the election, Gilman questioned what she was going to care about now that Trump was out of office. However, her dislike for him led her to choose political science as a major at Southern State University. Keeping up with politics and being able to have conversations of current events, led the girls to being “woke.”

At the University of a Southern State, Stephanie often experienced microaggressions when questioned about whether or not she attended the university. She believes that racism is ingrained at USS because promises of equal opportunities for minorities were not fulfilled by the university, and the history of the school is stained by racism.

Once the first Black student got admitted to his campus, a list of demands was made to increase the student population of African American students to 12%. Honestly, that was all the way in 1968. I don’t think we ever even reached 12%. I think over the years is slowly has been decreasing. So, the presence of African American students hasn’t been that active on campus. With the morale of African American students being so low because of the environment, most of us just want to graduate and get their degree and go. Once individuals see African

American on campus, I think it really just like shocks them. How are they still here?

This awareness of the world around them forced them to seek spaces in which they were empowered to make changes. Those spaces were in their physical communities or the metaphysical communities they found among like-minded individuals. Stephanie and Gilman found empowerment in their shared culture as Black Caribbeans in Miami. Stephanie was “awoken” by the experiences she had and it moved her so much she wanted change. All the girls found empowerment through the strong support systems they had to help them make educational decisions and lean on during times of crisis.

Empowerment Through Community, Culture, and Strong Support Systems

During the focus group interviews, a camaraderie was forged between the participants. The girls were guarded at the beginning of the focus group about sharing their experiences. By the end of the interviews, they supported each other through the chat, verbal confirmations, and non-verbal affirmations. The focus group created a sense of community of “woke” individuals with similar experiences and similar aspirations. Not only were the girls empowered by their own communities, but they were empowered by the community that the focus group created. They were more “woke” by talking to each other and by sharing their experiences and broadening their awareness of the social injustices not only in the world but in their own community. Alicia said that the focus group:

. . . [gave] me hope that there are people like us who are trying to use our experiences for the better. I was not surprised by the fact that our experiences

were similar because we're all high-achieving women of color. I wasn't surprised that we had parallel experiences. I was surprised and pleasantly surprised, actually, by the fact that we all are interested in pursuing similar fields of work. I think it's interesting because experiences are sort of your greatest teacher, and it's funny how we've all had similar experiences, and as a result, we're using the things that we've gone through to help shape a world where those who look like us, who are younger than us, don't have to experience those same things.

C agreed that it was "refreshing to be able to hear everybody's different views And to hear what everybody had to say and to hear that you're not alone in the struggle." She continued with,

I think that we all have some sense of a shared experience. Some of us just had it worse than others. I know that my experience wasn't nearly as bad as some of the stuff that they went through. I think that as a collective, there's just certain things that we all experienced together, within schools and just within society.

During the interview, Denise congratulated all the girls for their accomplishments. She shared similar sentiments with all the participants about how beneficial the focus group was to them.

I really do want to congratulate each and every one of you on all that you've been able to accomplish. I know that we each come from different walks of life. In the end, we all share one common thing and that is that we are Black women trying to change the world and do amazing things.

Gilman thought the focus group was great and appreciated "just the way we were

able to support each other as we also reflected on those experiences as we went through the questions.” Gilman also noted that their experiences influenced the girls to choose college majors in which they can enact change. Hérbert and Anderson (2020) argued that Black girls who “displayed high levels of racial pride scored high on total self-esteem and self-concept (p. 87).” Gilman stated that “just seeing successful young Black people, women, and hearing how similar life experiences we have, but nonetheless, the grit that we all maintain.” This grit is what Hérbert and Anderson (2020) referred to as self-esteem. Gilman continued,

I think another thing I would say specifically that resonated with me was our career aspirations and how similar they are. I think that comes from our experiences and us wanting to make a difference in them. That’s why I decided to do what it is I want to do. I think politics is interesting and I know policy is what governs. So, I want to mix in politics and policy.

Stephanie was particularly moved by Alicia’s story and her perseverance in the face of insurmountable microaggressions.

The young lady that is currently going to Hartenford. Her stories touched me a bit more and was the most shocking to me because she is from the same city I am. Miami is mainly known for its deep-rooted culture. It has a mountain of diversity that it brings in, and to hear there are schools, high schools, where there’s deeply rooted racism . . . allowed me to reflect on how racism looks different based on a school basis and it’s not just city-to-city.

For Alicia, empowerment is one of her passions. She stated, “I’m passionate

about empowering people who look like me. I'm passionate about empowering marginalized communities, and helping people realize their potential." Finding comfort in the support of their community, the girls were empowered to help the very communities that supported them. Their love of their community had awoken a desire to give back. Alicia found a sense of community during the focus group. She mentioned that she found it was interesting,

. . . how woke everyone at this conversation was . . . there are always going to be people of color and high achieving faces, but not all of them are necessarily aware of the disparities . . . It was very refreshing to see that and the young women who were on the call being able to sort of think critically about our experiences in educational settings, but also in the real world, and how being Black women, in those spaces, has impacted us. So, I think that that was very surprising as well. Being Black in Miami is nuanced by culture particularly due to the Caribbean influence.

Culture, as defined by Howard (2010), is "usually tied to a group's ancestral homeland or place of origin" (p. 53). Culture is pivotal in differentiating Black Americans from Caribbean Blacks. One of the most prominent Black Caribbean cultures is Haitians. Many Caribbean Blacks do not consider themselves Black American but claim their culture over being American. Howard (2010) described the complexity of culture as being shaped by many variables, which include "geography, immigration status, generation, social class, gender, family history, migration patterns, language, and religious affiliation" (p. 53). Cultural identity adds a layer of awareness of issues that may only be unique to a specific culture. Being Black is deeply rooted in generational

trauma associated with the American slave trade and discrimination as a result of being second-class citizens but being Haitian has its own historical context and its own set of discriminations. Gilman and Stephanie both have an affinity for their Haitian culture. Gilman stated, "I'm from North Miami, my day-to-day experiences is Black people, Haitian people all the time, in every space." However, she was teased in school for being Haitian, which she later described as a "stained identity."

So, in elementary school, middle school, I never per se could say I felt targeted as an individual, but more so that there was a disregard for the rich culture that we all shared. However, on Haitian Flag Day, everybody was Haitian. Everybody was Haitian. I'm so happy our schools enforced those types of celebrations because it allowed people to at least start finding pride in that identity.

Stephanie also shared that identity with Gilman. She was very proud of being a Haitian- American but agreed that there was a "very negative stigma" attached to Haitians and Cubans. Nonetheless being from the Caribbean is "praised" in Miami and "culture is very celebrated." She acknowledged that although she is Haitian American, she knows that she is African American. However, other Caribbean people like her parents would not "identify themselves as anything else." Stephanie's acknowledgement of her racial affiliation shows her awareness that race and ethnicity are two different constructs. She continued,

They were born in Haiti. They grew up most of their lives in Haiti, and they do take offense when someone calls them an African American. And I truly understand where that comes from because, at the end of the day, you should be confident, and you should be firm in what you are. If you are Haitian American,

when someone takes that away from us, you're not respecting me as a person. Even people who identify as Jamaican . . . If you are Jamaican and someone calls you African American, it's like you're trying to take away their identity, something that they hold dear to their heart.

Montoya, et al. (2016) article on cultural capital to theorize the role that parents play in accessing gifted programs. White parents with access to networks are knowledgeable about access to gifted education and thus impact their child's educational development. White parents use their privilege to make their presence known in schools, and that visibility, in turn, extends to their children. Parental involvement is noticeably lacking in Title I schools. Black parents may not know how to navigate the educational system nor have the time to be as involved in their children's education. The girls in the study, however, had parents and family members who served as their advocates and were familiar with navigating the educational system. Mayes and Hines (2014) posited that college and career decisions are "shaped by the collectivistic culture background of these girls" (p. 34), and they may include parents, in this case, in their planning.

Gilman valued her mom's opinion about the school she attended, the programs in regarding the issue with Dr. Jean. Her mom set high expectations for her, and "it was [her] mom who had the school test [her]" for giftedness. Hérbert and Anderson (2020) discussed a mother's impact on Black girls' trajectories, mainly by holding them to higher standards. Gilman also valued her upbringing as an only child. She had other siblings on her dad's side, but she was her mother's only child, and thus her mother was a "very active parent." Her mom helped her make decisions about enrolling in IB and going to college, and she was even in her apartment at American University when we

conducted the focus group. Gilman's mother was aware of the value of education and what a good education would mean for her only child. Her mother advocated for her when a new elementary school opened up in her neighborhood and her mom wanted her to stay in the school which she currently attended. Gilman's mother served as her advocate and it can be argued that the way she fought for her daughter's access to more challenging curriculum served as a model for Gilman to later emulate with her own advocacy work.

So, when I got started at River Run, my mom didn't want me to go there . . . I'm not sure why she wanted to pull me out and bring me back to Pioneer. So, in the summer during the transition, she went there to do all the paperwork, and I forgot her name now, but the principal was there, and she walks in. She gave my mom a speech. My mom talks about this all the time, and she literally gave my mom a speech. She was like, "Listen, I want to do something great with this school; your daughter excels. Just give me a chance, give me a year . . . and if you don't like it, you can leave." She snatched the paper out of my mom's hand, and she gave me the chance to thrive at this school. I ended up staying there. I loved it.

Denise's mother also helped her make educational decisions. A lot of the decisions that her mom made were of convenience to accommodate her position as a teacher at M-DCPS. Denise's mother knowledge of the school system informed the educational decisions she made for her daughter. "I went to North Lake Elementary because my mother worked at Lakeway, so it was really close, and she just took me there." She attended Foreign Language Elementary because her brother previously attended the school, and it was also close. When she went to Successful Young

Women's Preparatory, it was because her mother had a conversation with her sister's best friend mom who recommended the school because her daughter attended the school and had a good experience. Later she attended Sunshine because her mother worked as an Assistant Principal at the local elementary school, and they lived right down the street.

I was always interested in going to a private school. I was never interested in going to an urban school . . . because I never had that experience. So, needless to say, when I was applying, I didn't even apply to a private school. I applied to SEA Academy on Key Biscayne, Miami Canal, TurnKey, Sunshine. I think that's it. I was accepted into all the schools. The only one that waitlisted me was SEA Academy at Key Biscayne. They said that it was because they were trying to cater to the students at Key Biscayne, who live on Key Biscayne. Once they either accepted or declined the school, they would accept me. My mom was like, "No, you're not going to be anyone's second option. If they wanted you they would have selected you."

C's parents "stayed on top of [her] with school." She further explained that her only responsibility was that she "had to do good" in school. She compared her parent's support to how some of her Black friends' parents "just didn't care." C, too, was an only child and felt that "they were able to put more resources into it because they didn't have to worry about another kid. They were able to focus more time, more energy, more money on me." Her parents motivated her to do well.

I don't want it to feel like they did all that for me then I kind of just throw it all away. They did a lot for me when it came to my education and making sure that I

was doing good in school. So, to me, it would feel like I would be letting my parents down if I didn't succeed or reach my educational goals.

Alicia was a "first generation American." Both of her parents are Nigerian, and she was born in Nigeria. Her family situation is complicated. Her father had "never been involved in the situation" and her mom is around now but "there was a while where there was just a lot of instability. So, my sister sort of stepped in to keep everything together." Although she was absent for a portion of her life, her mother instilled in her and her siblings the value of education. Alicia valued her education and her upbringing and acknowledged the correlation between the two. Evans-Winters (2014) discussed the importance of resilient Black girls having a female role model that promotes excellence in education in their lives. She chose South Shore not only because of the speech and debate program but also because her sister attended that school and was successful there. This same sister became a guardian for her and her siblings.

I think the person that has made probably the most sacrifice for me is my oldest sister She's given up a lot for me to be in the position that I am in today, including her acceptance to Princeton and just so many other things. She's definitely been someone who's made a lot of sacrifices for me and my family as a whole.

Gilman found like-minded communities in college to ease her transition from her community in which her "day-to-day experiences is Black people, Haitian people, all the time in every space" to see "all these White people I never seen before." At her orientation at Southern State, she joined a Living-Learning Community. The LLC that Gilman chose to join focused on social justice, a topic for which she was passionate. She

chose this group specifically for their awareness and sensitivity of racial issues. She felt a certain amount of safety in participating because the group shared the same values. Mayes and Hines (2014) suggested that school counselors should help them transition from high school to college by introducing them to college outreach programs such as the LLCs at Southern State.

At some point, I got to get closer to my LLC. So, I did a social justice LLC. I knew going there. I was like, I've never had to make friends ever in my life. So, I love to have to find a vehicle for me to make friends. And the group essentially was like people who are passionate about social justice issues. So, I knew I wasn't going to be around any racist. That was a primary concern for me going to a PWI was, I didn't want to feel like I was in danger. And that was a very diverse group of identities. Like, again, different with Miami, I have never really interacted with the LGBTQ + community, trans people like being introduced to all these concepts and like how to be sensitive to these identities as well.

Gilman believes that “all skinfolk ain’t kinfolk” to signify that not everyone that looks like you may not have the same values, attitudes, and beliefs. Denise cited Candance Owens as an example of this statement personified. She stated, “they just don’t even see her how she criticized the Black Lives Matter movement, and she was a Pro-Trump supporter.” To sum up this statement from her perspective, “it’s extremely important to understand and realize that the individuals who look like us aren’t always going to be our number one supporters.” This statement also resonated with C. She cited an example that she saw on a HBCU Shade Room page.

The stuff that you see on there is insane There's one specific post that I saw today, and it just randomly came up on my timeline. It was from somebody that went to Johnson, which is really, really bad because the school that I'm going to. They basically said that they don't understand how people feel bad about slavery, because if were a businessman or woman you would want free labor, too. It just makes you think, where do people get this from? How do you think like that?

For Alicia, she realized that empowerment must be intrinsic. She realized that although she found a shared community at North City Middle School, "Now it's time for me to learn how to find that empowerment within myself I'm very cognizant of the fact that in the spaces I will be in in the future, I won't necessarily be empowered by those who look like me." When the media got wind of her being accepted into all the Ivy League schools, she received positive and negative comments, particularly on social media. "There's a lot of positivity, but there were also the people who were like, affirmative action. She only got in because she was Black." In this situation, she found comfort from her family, who admonished her for paying attention to the comments and her friends who commented back. However, even in that situation, she had to find the power to not "take that to heart." Being empowered through community, culture, and strong support systems led to the girls wanting to be changemakers in their communities and schools.

Being Changemakers

Part of being "woke" is not only being aware of the racial prejudice and discrimination occurring in the world but, according to the definition the girls in the study

adopted, it is also being empowered to make changes. Part of C's discontent with her high school was that although people complained, no changes were made. "It really surprises you to hear that all that was happening, and nobody did anything about it." All of the participants made an impact on their schools and communities by assuming leadership roles. Denise described that she chose a political science major "because of [her] involvement and just being able to advocate for [her] community is something that [she] realized that [she has] a passion for." Furthermore,

All throughout high school, I did SGA, which is student government. Then, I also did DSGA, which is district student government. In those positions, I was not only able to advocate for the individuals at my school site but also across the district. I had the privilege of representing students and then advocating on their behalf. In addition to that, I also served as a Youth Commissioner. I was able to go to the meeting of the commissioners of Miami-Dade County and just speak about the issues that we face. In addition to that, I also focus on facilitating webinars for individuals in my community. These webinars may be focused on the importance of mentoring, mental health, and also financial literacy.

C served in organizations in school and civic organizations in the community.

Her "wokeness" and her future aspiration informed her decision to join specific organizations. The organizations in which she participated, fostered her desire to pursue other avenues of doing community work.

I was a member of Jack and Jill of America, Inc. In my chapter, I served in a leadership position all 4 years of high school. My freshman year, I was Protocol Chair. My sophomore year, I was the Charter Treasurer, Junior year, I was the

Chapter Vice President and Senior Year, I was the Chapter President. At school, I was the President of my Mock Trial Team my senior year. My junior year, I was the secretary, and then my sophomore year was the first year that I had joined the club. I want to be a lawyer so that's why I joined that club. I was a member of the Black Student Union, of course, and also a member of the Caribbean Club in my school.

Alicia served in many different leadership capacities at her high school as well. When the situation occurred with the 5000 Role Models at her school, she leaned on the support of a Black administrator "to create real change within the school." They pitched the idea of including a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion course as a part of being a volunteer in M-DCPS. Initially, she became very involved in speech and debate in middle school. Additionally,

I also served as the class president from my freshman year to my junior year, and then my senior year, I was elected Student Council President. I was also part of flag football, Math Honor Society, Health Information Project (HIP). I served as my school's student EESAC representative.

Gilman Smith decided to run for student government at the end of her junior year. She expressed that "they had a gap where we didn't have a student government. We kinda wanted it. I wanted to do it. I want to work on all these programs, so I ran for it." She ended up winning the election. She also served in the Student Government Association (SGA) at the collegiate level. One of Gilman's values was leadership. She sought out leadership positions in order to make changes at her

school. Throughout high school and college, she served in a leadership capacity in the organization she served.

That was a lot of pressure in terms of just knowing what to prioritize, whether that was academics, or leadership, or having it be both. In the classroom, I was always selected to be a leader and whatnot, which that's cool, but it definitely impacted how I would then interact with my peers. People would then think I felt entitled to certain things because I was getting them even though I wasn't asking for them . . . Now in college, I ended up being a student leader, burnt myself out my last semester but thankfully because of my experience at high school, I was able to recognize that I'm not going to keep doing this.

Stephanie Jones participated in change making organizations at the University of a Southern State. She "was part of the Black Student Union for three of those years." That organization ignited a passion for advocating for Black students at the University of a Southern State (USS). She valued the Black legacy at the university and sought to increase enrollment. In addition, she served on other civic-minded organizations.

I'm currently serving as Vice President for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the University of a Southern State. I'm currently the president of my sorority of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. I also worked in student government as the external affairs director. Some things about me, my involvement centers around finding different ways to ensure equity in education and equity and resources for minority students.

In the future, Stephanie aspires to be the first Black female superintendent of M-DCPS because “there’s something far greater than myself, and something that I can leave for my children and my children’s children. To do that, she had to position herself to enact change on that level.

I did want to work with educational policy but did not want to work as a teacher. I do believe this, in order to make the change, you have to part of the system that helps make those changes. So, when I was looking into possible degrees, I was like, okay, Poli-Sci could be the one. In political science, which was another reflection I had, I can’t know what to change in the system if I’m never part of it. So right now, I am minoring in teaching. I do want to do two years of teaching under Teach for America to see how that system works, and then go into educational policy from there.

Alicia also seeks to affect change by studying policy. She is now studying government with a focus on Social Policy at Hartenford.

My ultimate goal is to do policy work, and so I’m hoping to empower disadvantaged groups through policy. I think that the reason I chose this particular route is because of the specific focus on policy. I know that Hartenford has political science, but I’m not necessarily interested in political frameworks. What I’m interested in is how tangible policies can be used to affect change.

Denise also wants to pursue Political Science and wants to minor in Spanish at

Stoffer University. In the future, she wants to be a politician because it “just seems natural” since she is a good public speaker, but she is also interested in business. She stated, “I want to own my own company. I took a few business courses, too.”

C wants to be a lawyer, so she was a part of the Mock Trial Team. This fall, she began her first year at Johnson University. “I wanted to do communications, and the program that they had at Johnson was Strategic Legal and Management Communications and you could pick a specific concentration within that, and I want to be a lawyer, so I just picked legal.” C is motivated by social justice issues and explained the following.

That’s the field that I want to go into in my career. I would say kids, I like helping kids when it comes to learning in school. So, I did lot of volunteer work around that . . . ; I did a lot of community service in high school . . . ; I’m probably going to keep doing community service because it’s something I really do like to do.

Gilman graduated from Southern State University spring 2022 with a major in Political Science. She stated that the reason she wanted to pick that major was because “[she] wants to change the world.” This fall Gilman started her first year as a law student at American University. The field that she is going into is “politics and policy.” She wants to change the world by being a lawyer.

Being “woke,” for the girls in the study, is more than mere awareness; it is a call to action. The participants demonstrated through their counter-storytelling that you cannot just acknowledge the injustices through being “woke” but must find ways to address them. This change was fueled by being surrounded by other women like them and their families and being involved in like-minded organizations. Their support

systems rewarded the enthusiasm that accompanied their “woke-ness” and helped them move their knowledge and awareness through phases of considering how they could facilitate change and supported them in the actions they chose. In being changemakers, the girls are taking steps not to be a token Black girl but to be a prototype of what Black girls in gifted programs have the potential to be.

Being a Token Black Girl

Tokenization is a term coined by Rosabeth Kanter in the late 1970s. In a multidisciplinary review, Watkins, Simmons, and Umphress (2019), explored the tokenism theory through various research mediums from 1991 to 2016 based on four criteria to examine the effects of being a token. The researchers explored Kanter’s three perceptual phenomena: visibility, contrast, and assimilation. The dimension of visibility focused on tokenized people having high visibility in the workplace. Thus, others are more aware of them, which leads to stress to perform and fear of making mistakes. Tokens can be isolated because of the differences between them and the dominant group, which defines the concept of contrast. Due to contrast, tokens may need to assimilate or integrate into the environment. “The experience of being a token may continue to be a reality for members of traditionally underrepresented groups within society . . . and may become a new reality for those who have typically held high-status positions with similar others, for example, men” (Watkins et al., 2019, p. 359).

The participants in this study have been subjected to all three perpetual phenomena. Some participants experienced visibility more than others, but all have experienced it at some point in their educational journeys. Alicia, C, and to an extent Denise, all had to navigate the spaces in which they were the minority because of the

schools they attended. Gilman and Stephanie experienced this phenomenon in their post-secondary institutions. As we examine the theme of *Being a Token Black girl* and how they navigated White spaces while carrying the label, Kanter's theory of tokenism related to visibility was quite evident.

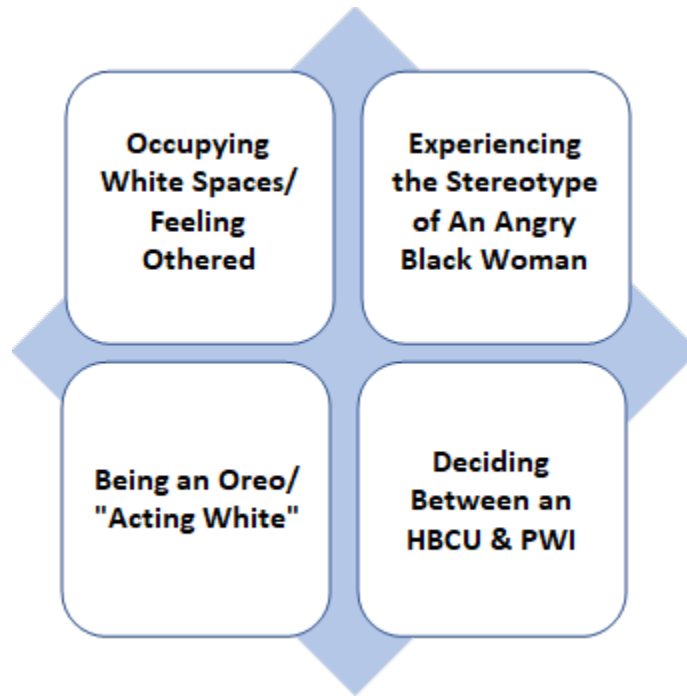
Considered the token Black girl, the girls learned to occupy White spaces in which they felt "othered," while simultaneously experiencing the stereotype of being deemed an "Angry Black Woman," considered an "Oreo," or "Acting White," and at the same time having to decide whether to attend a PWI or an HBCU for college – a decision which was influenced by the degree to which they wanted to assimilate into society at large or be surrounded by other Black students in a controlled environment. The theme was divided into four categories including *Occupying White Spaces/Feeling Othered; Experiencing the Stereotype of An Angry Black Woman; Being an Oreo/ "Acting White" and Deciding Between an HBCU & PWI*. At some point in their educational journey, the girls *occupied White spaces* and felt *othered* within those spaces simply because they were the minority and, in most cases, a double minority. Not only were the participants affected by the intersectionality of race and gender, but they may also suffer from perfectionism, which creates a trifecta of negative behaviors that may lead to a lack of self-efficacy. Due to high visibility, the participants felt similar to Alicia, "I've always been aware that I didn't belong, necessarily, or that the spaces that I was in weren't built for me." Within those White spaces, the participants had to navigate White fragility. Ford, Green, and Gross (2022) described White Fragility as,

Given that White individuals disproportionately occupy 'gatekeeping' positions of power, one key barrier to systemic change is rooted in White individuals'

emotional (and emotion-regulatory) responses when considering their own role in racism (e.g., involvement in racist systems, biased actions).

Figure 7

Categories for Being a Token Black Girl



Note: This theme was refined after merging three separate but related themes under the umbrella of “Being a Token Black Girl.” The other themes that I considered were made into categories as evidenced above. The only category that was not considered as a stand-alone theme was “Deciding Between an HBCU & PWI.”

The girls also had to deal with societal stereotypes that impacted their experiences in gifted and advanced programs. Stereotypes and, by extension, stereotype threats can spill over and contribute to performance gaps because people may feel that their behaviors are constantly being judged (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Inzlicht et al., 2011). Delpit (2012) summarized stereotype threat as suppressing the negative stereotypes placed on them by society. Anderson and Martin (2018) also speculated that the perception of women’s traditional roles coupled with societal stereotypes of Black

women can impact the potential of Black girls. The stereotypes placed on the girls that were evident in the interviews related to a Black woman's dispositions are consistent with those seen outside the educational realm in literature, like being an angry Black woman (Levy, 2023; Wallace, Limberg & Linich, 2023). Another stereotype the girls grappled with is being an *Oreo* or *acting White* (Ford et al., 2008). The girls felt that people equate intelligence with *acting White* and an urban vernacular and other stereotypes with acting Black with stark lines of demarcation of the two stereotypes.

Through attending college and *occupying White spaces* the participants have begun, whether consciously or unconsciously, to dismantle systems of oppression. As a Black girl in gifted programs and a first-time college graduate, I had to decide between attending a Predominately White Institution (PWI) or a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Since neither of my parents had attended college, I leaned heavily on my high school counselor to help make the decision. She insisted that I attend the number one HBCU in Florida. However, after visiting and hearing stories from friends who attended HBCUs, I decided to go to the University of a Southern State. In fact, I only applied to PWIs. The girls had to make a similar decision whether to attend a PWI or an HBCU with varying degrees of influence including parental, societal, and monetary. Each of these categories pertaining to being a token girl are discussed below.

Throughout their interviews it was noted the girls valued: Success/High Standards; Advanced Courses/Gifted/IB Program; HBCUs; Hard Work; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Policy Work; Education; and Good Teachers/Black Teachers. In upcoming sections I unpack how these values were evident in their narratives and impacted how they occupied White spaces.

Occupying White Spaces/Feeling Othered

For Alicia, the tokenization issue arose in her philosophy class when the class discussed the effects of tokenism in society. As soon as Alicia logs in, the teacher calls her out. According to her story, the teacher said ‘Alicia, I want to hear from you, because you’re tokenized.’ The reason that he felt she was tokenized was because she was “at the forefront of one of [her] teacher’s political campaigns to show that he, quote, “likes Black people.” Alicia continued,

Tokenism, or at least the way we were talking about it in philosophy, is just the practice of doing something to avoid criticism or to create the appearance or effect that people are being treated equally. I feel it downplays the work and the merits that people of color earned to get to the spaces they were in. For example, my philosophy teacher says that I’m tokenized because I’m the student council president or that I earn certain things because my skin color.

C described how a lot of times she was the only Black person in her class. This led to the phenomena of visibility and contrast that Kanter (1977) described in her study of minorities in the workplace. Due to her valuing hard work instilled by her parents, she wanted to make sure she excelled in her classes.

My senior year in my literature class, I won’t say it was my teacher, but I would say it was the students where you kind of feel like you have to go the extra mile to stand out and show how good of a student you are. There were only two other Black girls in my class, which was normal. There’s been times where I’m the only Black girl in my class, the only Black person in general, not just Black girl . . . ; I went to a really big school; my graduating class was 860 something. It’s a big

school in general, big classes. So even though there's so many kids, there's only this many Black people, even smaller numbers when you're talking about being in advanced classes, because even though there is a small amount, it kind of cuts itself in half even more when you talk about AP and honors classes . . . ; So, it was very common that there wasn't a lot of Black kids in my class at all.

Although Denise attended a predominately Black school for high school, she said that she still felt like the "token Black child" at both her predominately Black high school and predominately White middle school. She described this feeling to the other participants during the focus group interview.

I know that Alicia mentioned a little bit of her experience, the flip phenomenon of people confusing her as that token Black child. I would say that when I was at Successful Ladies' Preparatory, a predominantly White school, I also had the same thing. That was something that I just didn't like When it came to high school, people still did the same thing. So even though I was in a predominantly Black school, I was still considered that token Black child. I guess it may be associated with a lot of the stereotypes attributed to an urban school. For example, at Sunshine, it's in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Miami Dade County Public Schools . . . , I still endured certain things, maybe not against the opposing race, but even in my own race.

Both Alicia and Gilman participated in debate in high school. Debate at a competitive level is an example of a White space in M-DCPS. Although all schools that have debate programs are invited to attend, the only schools that make it to higher levels in the competition are White schools. Being a debater can help a double minority, like

Gilman and Alicia, to be exposed to scholarship opportunities and recruitment by top-tier universities. Not having access to this space can mean the difference between attending a state school and an Ivy League for some students. Both of the girls valued the opportunities that debate afforded them but because they might have been the only Black face in auditoriums full of White people, they felt “othered.” Alicia explained this phenomenon,

The summer going into my sophomore year, I attended ISD, which is Speech and Debate camp. The way it works is they run you through a bunch of diagnostics and place you in a lab based on your performance. In my freshman year, I was in what was known as the top lab, the highest lab. So, I was surrounded by a bunch of older kids basically and I was the only Black person in that lab. There were other girls in there but not only was I the youngest person, but I was the only Black person. I remember, they didn’t say out loud, but their mannerisms, the way they interacted with me, the way they went about having conversations with me, I could tell that they thought that I didn’t belong. I could tell that they thought that I was stupid in comparison to them. When we talk about racialized experiences, I think it has a lot to do with what’s said, also, what’s not said, and how people go about treating people of color, Black people, in rooms where they’re the minority. I think that particularly with ISD, and Speech and Debate camp, it was a lot of the things that I felt. The way I was treated. I was definitely othered.

Gilman had a slightly different experience in debate because she attended a

predominately Black school, and most of the debaters on her team were Black. Whereas Alicia felt isolated on her team being a Black girl, Gilman had the support of the shared identity of her teammates. Alicia had no one on her team or in her events with which to empathize. Gilman expressed that she felt “othered” at debate tournaments and her attitude was that being othered in White spaces was systemic.

I won't say I was racially discriminated against going to debate tournaments. We would joke all the time, that's when we saw White people. I really didn't see White people like that unless it was my teachers. We would go to these predominately White schools because they have robust programs, and they were really equipped to host We would be the only group of Black people every time That was when it was like, “Oh, we are different. We are others.”

Stephanie felt “othered” the most in her political science course at the University of a Southern State because she “was the only African American woman in most of [her] classes.” She felt that if she picked a major in which there were “more people that look like me or more people I could relate to, I'll be doing myself a disservice and doing a disservice to the things I want to achieve.” Her value for education, led her to seek situations where she would stand out and decided that “if you stay in those atmospheres long enough, you can create change for it.” On campus in general, people mistakenly thought that she attended the local community college. However, she asserts that,

“ . . . it fuels me to just continue to strive for the things I want in life.” I'm at the mindset where I just want to prove people wrong. Even hearing comments like, “Do you attend USS?” and knowing that I'm doing above and beyond. I'm representing this campus in various leadership roles, receiving Dean's list back-

to-back ensuring that, yeah, people are making these comments, but the evidence shows that I deserve to be here, and I'm more deserving to be here, actually. In a sense, I don't try to let it faze me too much but rather take those negative comments and those false stereotypes and use it as a way to push myself to be better.

C felt that in going to a large predominately White high school, she did not believe she had the opportunity to participate in change-making organizations like SGA because "You're already dealing with those stereotypes from administration, teachers and students." She felt as if she "was just a regular kid, and nobody listens to you," and "You kind of have to be aggressive and push for yourself because that's the only way that your voice is going to be heard."

For Alicia seeking to be in White spaces means that she had to validate her existence in those spaces. While doing an internship for the mayor of Miami Beach, when someone found out that she was attending Hartenford, their comment towards her was "Hartenford was tough," "as though I don't have the ability to persist in spaces like that. I think as it relates to the professional space. It has also sort of motivated me to take up space." Alicia values diversity, equity, and inclusion, and thus, her intention to persist in these spaces is one of representation. She wants to "also fight and advocate for inclusion for these spaces to welcome people who look like [her]."

In these White spaces, Alicia had to learn how to navigate White fragility particularly with her philosophy teacher and the tokenization incident. Her counselor who was a "woman of color" helped her to process and then address the incident with her teacher. Her counselor suggested that she approach her teacher with a positivity

sandwich: “To say, like, we’ve known each other for so long, so I know this is never your intent, the negative of how it made me feel, and then sandwich that in with another positive.” Although her teacher had committed this act of microaggression toward her, she felt that in order to maintain a relationship, she had to address the issue.

Alicia also had to navigate White fragility with the PTSA president after the 5000 Role Models situation. She wrote a letter to the PTSA president because “oftentimes the president is the one who takes responsibility for the actions of the organization . . . ; I don’t know if that parent was ever individually addressed. I do know that their comment caused a lot of harm.” Later, she described her relationship with the parent’s son, who commented to the 5000 Role Models. “Then the incident happened. I remember it being awkward. For a while, we didn’t really talk. He always felt the need to explain to me that his mother wasn’t racist. He always felt the need afterward to say that he wasn’t racist.”

These educational and racial pressures affect how the girls view themselves in these spaces. Due to high visibility, contrast, and the dichotomous desire to both stand out and assimilate, the girls may face the pathological aspects of perfectionism which include depression and anxiety (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010). This psychological stress may stem from the intersectionality of their race and gender and feeling devalued (Barrie et al., 2016). Gilman experienced a mental health crisis in which she was experiencing stress and anxiety from finding out her father was drug trafficking and money laundering and the pressures of doing well on her IB tests.

I just remember I used to cry a lot and just stress and anxiety from all the tests . . .
Ms. Schmidt sat me down and was like, “you’re going through a mental health

crisis right now.” I learned what the anxiety was and all this stuff. When I talked to my mom about stuff, we never talked about therapy and XYZ. When I asked for therapy, she was like, ‘Who is going to pay for therapy.’ I know my mom knew what therapy was, she’s against therapy. I think that comes with the stereotype of Black families like not subscribing to that. It could be your business in the house and staff. I never really had that outlet when all that was happening to me. Ultimately, I passed all my tests but at the extent of myself.

C was motivated by fear of failure or not being successful. “I set a lot of goals out for myself. I guess my biggest fear would be not being able to achieve them. Then I kind of just end up in a position that I don’t want to be in.” She was particularly hard on herself when it came to her struggles with math.

At times, it was hard for me to visualize actually doing well because I was struggling, especially when it came to math. I had a teacher who really wasn’t that big of a help He was just a bad teacher, in all honesty. So, that kind of discouraged me a lot when it came to being able to work through stuff when it came to math. I always told myself, you’re just bad at math. You’re good at everything else, but you’re just bad at math when, honestly, that wasn’t the case. I just needed a little more extra help. I didn’t have that support from my teacher. That was the point that I had to find elsewhere. It kind of took a lot for me to be able to build myself up to where I am now when it comes to school and being confident in my abilities.

Denise had the opportunity to graduate from college at 16. However, her mother

did not “want her 16-year-old child to go to someone’s college. She wanted me to enjoy all that high school has to offer too.” Not only was Denise academically advanced but she also participated in a number of community organizations. By overextending herself, she felt like “she was putting too much pressure on [herself].”

Sometimes, it overwhelms me. I remember in elementary school, my teacher was like, “Denise, you have to calm down. If you don’t, you’ll end up suffering in the end. You may develop tumors and ulcers because of the stress.” So, I will say that that’s always something that I’ve had to deal with. I’m grateful that even in those times, even I don’t know why I was stressing.

Alicia experienced several instances of microaggressions or blatant acts of racism which she had to process later. Being “woke” gave her a whole new layer of awareness and ability to identify these microaggressions which had a visceral effect on her. After the 5000 Roles Model situation, she comforted her Assistant Principal. “I remember hugging my Assistant Principal, the Black one, as she broke down into tears.” With the tokenization issue, she remembers “logging out of the class and I remember crying. I remember calling my sister, and not being about to describe what I felt.” Even the comments left on a social media post about her elicited a feeling of anger.

I feel like in the moment, I laughed at it. I definitely felt feelings of anger. I was definitely upset but I think that in many ways, over time, I become desensitized to a lot of the comments that were made about my race, slash gender by the individuals who I was in school with. I think that I don’t know, there were a lot of instances of subtle racism throughout my time in school. This obviously was a lot more explicit. I do think that over time, just having all those instances of

microaggressions, and explicit racism . . . you just become desensitized to it. I laugh about it now and I laughed about it before, but I think that in many ways, it's probably, I don't know, I don't feel hurt about it. I think that the fact that I have not hurt about it says a lot about the trauma and the harm that has been done.

This feeling of being othered was heightened by the stereotypes that society assigned to Black women particularly those of being an angry Black woman. There is a precarious balance between being assertive and being aggressive for Black women. This stereotype adds to the girls feeling of being token Black girls in advanced classes because of what Watkins, Simmons, and Umphress (2019) described as contrast, in which Black girls stand out in gifted and advanced classes because of their difference. Assertiveness may not be a characteristic that is found in women of other cultures and therefore seeing it in Black women is foreign and may be misconstrued as anger. Black girls experienced the effects of this stereotype which are discussed in the following section.

Experiencing the Stereotype of Being an Angry Black Woman

For the girls, the angry Black woman stereotype stemmed from either being assertive in the classroom and in occupying White spaces, having strong opinions, or in their role as advocates. This stereotype was not attributed to all of the participants, however. Watkins, White, Simmons, and Umphress (2019) concept of contrast as it relates to tokenization was in play, when it came to asserting themselves in class. Gilman thought people may have placed this stereotype on her because she was “a natural born leader” and was “strong enough to handle it.”

That has always been a burden that I try to shake. It's not my responsibility to carry. As a Black woman . . . people place the burden on us like we should be able to handle it. There's an expectation for us to handle it. Quite frankly, I'm not interested in doing that anymore. I don't intend to try to cater to your feelings. I'm a Cancer. So, I'm very nice, very personable in that regard . . . I'm not going to let people change that about me . . . I feel like people pick on me because they think I'm strong enough to handle it. It's a title that I don't appreciate. Someone can attribute that not only to being a Black woman but being a woman, as you know, a natural nurturer; we want everything to be good. We look out for everyone and sometimes at the extent of ourselves. I think the environment that I was around encouraged that, and I kinda of sometimes wish that I didn't because I don't want to have to be that strong, to be honest.

Gilman always had a "mean girl persona attached to [her]" since she was in elementary school. This characteristic, I believe, led to her having the stereotype of being strong or assertive also attached to her. In high school, Gilman felt as if she had to continuously dim her light because of how she was perceived by others. However, at Southern State, she had to "unlearn that behavior very quickly, because these people here are ruthlessly going after what they want."

It's almost like a defense mechanism that I've built around my identity as a woman, as a Black woman, where I'm like, okay, I can't come off too strong. Even when I go after it, I have to be mindful of how this person is going to take this because I am an assertive person. I know what I need to say, and I intend to articulate it that way. I recognize how for some people that could be

strong . . . In high school where I wasn't being mindful of my identity, but I was mindful of the impact that I was having. I'm just learning that that was because of those identities.

Alicia tried to “strike a balance between being characterized as passionate versus the angry Black woman. I think that speaks very true to the intersection of being Black and being a woman within predominantly White spaces.” Alicia found that this label was primarily placed on her during debate tournaments.

At the very beginning of my speech and debate career, at least the type of debate I did, we competed in the National Speech and Debate Association. Speech and debate is split into two categories: speech, which is the more emotional, creative side, and debate, which is the more analytical, research, and argumentation. I remember at the very beginning of my speech and debate journey being told that I should not be part of debate, rather, I should be part of the speech side. I was told that I was emotional when it came to making arguments. I was just in many ways pushed away from debating. I remember just having to push back against my coach, having to prove to my peers that I was good enough to be on the debate team. The emotions that came with that. I remember several times wanting to quit debate because you walk into tournaments, you walk into rooms and you're the only Black person or the only Black girl.

This stereotype of being an angry Black woman can have long-lasting effects on their concept of self but also their professional advancement opportunities. A counter characteristic is being an Oreo or acting White, which may be considered a form of assimilation and may not be met with resistance by the majority but has a negative

connotation for how the girls may be perceived by their Black peers. Assimilation is another facet of being tokenized (Watkins, White, Simmons & Umphress, 2019).

Henfield, et al.'s (2008) study on hidden challenges for African American students in gifted education findings were consistent with the girls experiences on being accused of acting White by their nongifted African American peers.

Being an Oreo/ "Acting White"

Being an Oreo is being "White on the inside" and "Black on the outside" like Denise so simply stated. All of the participants were labeled as Oreos or were accused of "acting White" by "people in their community." Blackness is not equated with excellence and by "acting White," the girls were acting superior to their Black counterparts. This concept of Blackness being associated with inferiority is one that is supported by Delpit (2012). In Henfield, et al.'s (2008) study, the participants agreed that "nongifted African American students felt that certain attributes, such as being gifted or speaking Standard English, were not representative of Black people" (p. 440). Alicia described being called an Oreo by her peers.

Another thing that I can remember before high school, and this is something that continued into high school, was the comments this is by my Black peers, specifically at Morningside, being called like an Oreo, saying that I speak White, but I'm Black. It's just being in the middle, you know, not being accepted by the people who look like you but also by the people who don't look like you. You're Black, but you speak White, but you act White. You are reading a book when other people are playing sports, things like that.

C's attitude towards being called an Oreo was that it hurt her feelings. She

shared her experiences during the focus group when another participant shared her experiences.

I've definitely been called an Oreo, too. It hurts my feelings. Just because I have advanced classes or I was raised a certain way, it doesn't mean that I want to be White. That's just how I am. It's just who I am, and that doesn't take away from my Blackness. To hear it from people who look like you definitely makes it hurt more. To hear it from somebody of another race, it feels a little weird, but it doesn't hurt that bad, but to hear it from somebody who actually looks like you, yeah, that hurts a lot. Just because you may think I'm smarter than you, even though we probably are just about the same. I just want advanced classes; it doesn't mean that I'm trying to fit in with the White people or be White.

Denise was always confronted with the label of acting or speaking White especially at the Title I high school that she attended. She attributed this misconception with her school being in the urban community and because "they automatically attribute these people to not being able to be successful and . . . intelligent." So, because she "speaks properly . . . I have to be White rather than being Black. I just find that very weird because there are educated Black people." Another perspective was that people were proud of her for representing the school in such a positive manner.

I remember when I became a supervisor, people were like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm so happy that you did this because people need to see that at Sunshine, not everyone who comes out is . . . ghetto or raunchy. I guess that just relates to that stereotype of Black people not being educated.

Gilman went to a predominately Black and Haitian high school and did not really

have that label placed on her in high school. She commented on the other girls' experiences of being accused of acting White or being called an Oreo. "I'm really against the part of our society that people want to associate Whiteness with intellect. I don't think people recognize that when they're calling us Oreos and things like that what they're doing and that they are promoting that stereotype."

Stephanie attended the same high school as Gilman. She shared her reflections on how detrimental this Oreo ideology was for the culture.

Allow me to reflect on how counterproductive this is for us as a race. We want individuals to be chasing different dreams and getting to their positions because it not only helps them but helps the community to have people represent different aspects of life. But when I came to the realization that the same people who were saying certain things like that in high school, or now being in college, the way that they approached me or talked to me, it's a whole different tone. It's more so appreciative, like, "Oh wow, you're doing good. You're in college. You're doing well." It's like you're saying these things now, but honestly, it doesn't feel like it's genuine.

The girls described how both stereotypes had detrimental effects on them. Acting White may be thought of as a form of assimilation and contribute to the girls being tokenized. This assimilation has a negative effect on them in their own communities. Barrie et al. (2016) examined how negative racial stereotypes impact an adolescent girl's self-esteem. The researchers surmised that "it is important that African American girls develop the competence to critically deconstruct images, messages, and stereotypes, develop the ability to engage in self-determination, and foster a healthy self-concept"

(Barrie et al., 2016, p. 436). These stereotypes and the feeling of being othered may sway their decisions on what college or university to attend.

Deciding between a PWI and an HBCU

College is the ultimate goal of being in advanced programs, and the perception is that girls should continue their education at predominately White institutions. Some girls knew that they always wanted to attend a historically Black college or university, and their experiences acted as a catalyst to make the final decision. Some of the girls never had any desire to attend a PWI. The decision to attend an HBCU or a PWI ultimately was affected by whether the girls wanted to be tokenized in their post-secondary spaces. C shares the decision she made and why.

Johnson is always where I wanted to go since I was in seventh grade. That's always the school I wanted to go to. I knew I wanted to go out of state; I wanted to experience something other than Miami . . . I wanted to go to an HBCU just based on my experiences in school, and I'm not trying to sound like mean or ignorant, but like literally just like being surrounded by like almost all White people for 4 years it really does something to you, and I could not do it anymore.

Denise applied to several post-secondary institutions and got into Georgetown, Vanderbilt, Emory, USS, UM, UCF, SSU, Stoffer, iCad and Johnson and eventually settled on Stoffer. She leaned heavily on her mom to help her decide on where to go. However, she shared that she always wanted to go to an Ivy League but "was either denied or waitlisted." In addition, her boyfriend got into Hartenford and, [according to Denise],

when he saw his financial aid, they were asking for 40k a year even if I do get in,

which I didn't; I know that I won't be able to afford this. I ended up choosing Stoffer, like a few months ago, because they gave me a full ride...I knew that the sisterhood was something that would really be great for me, too. I can say, over the last few weeks, something else that I'm happy about too is, aside from the sisterhood, aside from the city itself, aside from the money, it's just the experiences that it will offer me. I think that it'll help me learn a lot more about my history and my culture, and they'll make me more comfortable in my skin. Something else is the opportunities there are incomparable to any other school.

Gilman initially did not want to go to a PWI. Her first time ever on campus was during sorority week and she said it was "the first time I ever saw that many White people in one place." However, she described SSU as "welcoming" but not as much at American University, where she is attending law school, she can "already see the difference and [she hasn't] even gone to a classroom yet. Gilman's experience at SSU was her first-time experiencing tokenization. She knew when she stepped on campus she was going to experience what Watkins, Simmons, and Umphress (2019) described as visibility. She shared a "contrasting perspective."

I cried for 3 days. I got accepted into Johnson. I got my financial aid package, and I was like, I'm going to go, it's going to be fine. I got half of what Johnson's cost of attendance was, and I was like, "Oh my God." Then I got accepted into SSU, and I was in IB, which meant it was a full ride automatically. My mom was like, "Yeah, you're going to SSU," and I cried.

During the focus group Stephanie analyzed the phenomenon of the participants

having to decide between choosing a PWI and an HBCU. She stated that “there was a root cause that we all want to do it for different reasons.” She summed it all up by stating, “It was also interesting to see how attending different high schools where there’s a different demographic really shapes how individuals seek different universities and how that all plays a role in the thing they aspire to do with those degrees.” She decided to attend a PWI.

For me personally, I went to a predominately Black high school, middle school, and elementary school . . . I wanted to go to a PWI to have the opportunity to face the reality of what my workforce will look like. I think being at an all-Black high school kind of showed me certain things that I wasn’t fully aware of, certain interactions I may have in my future . . . I want to have that taste of what it feels like and learn to maneuver through it as I’m going to college before getting thrown into it when I get into a career that I want to be in.

Alicia went back and forth with deciding on whether she was going to attend a PWI or an HBCU. As early as middle school, a teacher tried to sway her to take the HBCU route and go to Stoffer. Ultimately, the decision was made based on her future trajectory.

I remember my sophomore/junior year sort of grappling with whether I wanted to attend a PWI or an HBCU. I will never forget the conversation that I had with educators and my siblings. I think that sort of the answer that I arrived at is, while an HBCU does have that community component, I’ll feel empowered, I’ll be around people who look like me. I think, in many ways, attending an HBCU would be a disservice to me because I feel like the spaces that, at least profession,

the trajectory that I'm on, are dominated by White people. I'm not necessarily going to be surrounded by a bunch of people who look like me, and so I think that attending a PWI helps me get accustomed to being around people who don't look like me, helps me get accustomed to being okay with being comfortable. The reality is that I won't be surrounded by Black people...all my life.

Later in the focus group follow-up interview, she summed up the reasons of wanting to attend a PWI or an HBCU nicely.

It's interesting, just everyone's perspective; we all want to essentially go into the same or similar fields of work. It's interesting that some of us chose to go to PWIs because we know that that's the environment we're going to be in for the next several years, and some of us decided to go to HBCUs because they wanted to feel empowered and surrounded by people who looked like them. I think it's interesting that sort of striking a balance between getting yourself prepared for what the rest of your life is going to look like versus finding a community and feeling empowered by it.

Regardless of the reason why they choose an HBCU or a PWI, the girls family did them a choice on whether or not they are going to attend college. Attending a post-secondary institution was an outcome of being in advanced programs. Being token Black girls in their programs, the girls had to decide whether they wanted to continue to be a token at a PWI or whether they wanted to be surrounded by people of similar racial backgrounds at an HBCU. For some of the girls in the study, the pressure of being a token Black girl was too much to bear and they chose to attend an HBCU. Regardless of what type of post-secondary institution they attended, the outcome was that they attended

college which is a buy-in for the program. Essentially, being in advanced programs served as a vehicle for their academic advancement.

Buy-In: Getting into College

The end goal of being in advanced programs is access to post-secondary education. In attending college, the girls were subjected to being introduced to tokenization or continuing tokenization as they navigated White spaces at a PWI. However, in being the token Black girl, the participants were expected to attend college by their support systems and the people at their high schools. The advanced programs prepared them for the rigor of the curriculum, time management, and managing stress in college. Alicia solidified her position on the matter. “I think that the rigor of the work that I was completing will also prepare me for the future because I will continue to be a part of rigorous programs.” She continued by describing how it helped her with writing.

I think that the programs that I was a part of certainly prepared me for the tracks that I’m going on, particularly being part of the IB program. A lot of the work that we did was writing-based, and I know that when I get to college, a lot of things will be writing-based, and I know that when I get to college, a lot of things will be writing-based. The programs that I was a part of definitely prepared me well.

Denise felt as if the accelerated programs helped boost her GPA, which helped her chances of getting into college. Ultimately, she got into Georgetown, Vanderbilt, Emory, USS... UM. I got into UCF, SSU, Stoffer, or course, iCad, Johnson. She stated,

I would say that taking all those accelerated courses, it helped boost my GPA...

For example, I would say dual enrollment, AP courses, because I did well in those

courses, it made my GPA higher . . . Being put in those environments in which I was able to take those higher courses . . . was very beneficial for me in that way because it helped propel me into a different playing field. Me being put in those advanced classes, helps me excel academically.

Stephanie believed that gifted programs prepared her for college because it changed her mindset when it came to the purpose of taking these courses.

I think that the way that they were able to do so was we stopped learning just to pass an exam but learning to actually internalize the information and understand how the information impacts our day-to-day lives and how the information is part of a greater picture. I think looking from the inside out, most students, when they take exams . . . their main goal is to pass the class and just pass the exam. Even in college now, which is quite funny because I really just stopped looking at grades, and that honestly made my grades even better. With my papers, I try to find a bigger connection . . . what does this actually even mean?

Gilman agreed with Stephanie's assessment of the benefits of the IB program. "During pre-IB, I was learning for the test. I wasn't learning for enrichment. With IB, even though we would be taking a test, it was a different type of test." The IB program not only helped her get into IB, but also prepared her for the rigor of college.

I think IB helped me so much to prepare for what college is now in terms of the types of questions we're asked to do. It's ten times easier. The things that they said we would never get away with in college, Jesus, I probably could get away with less. I think there's just a lot of flexibility that's offered here . . . I also do have a major that some people will say is easier. As a Political Science major at

SSU, you can make this program very easy. I know that my aspiration is to attend law school, and they look at the rigor of your classes. I also do have the privilege of having the state pay for my education. So, as a first-gen student with immigrant parents, I wanted to maximize what I was actually learning and not just getting a piece of paper. I'm that student who gets bored in the classroom if I don't care, and I'll fail out if I don't... I'm at the end where I take way more 4000 level classes. The level of nuance is just as complex as IB but the workload to me doesn't compare.

By being in advanced programs, which were not meant for them, and attending college, the girls were dismantling systems of oppression. These systems of oppression included tokenization. The very fact that they were attending college validated their existence in those spaces because they were excelling academically but also because it combatted tokenization. The more Black girls that attend college, the less would tokenization affect them in these spaces. Other ways in which the girls dismantled systems of oppression will be discussed in the next section.

Dismantling Systems of Oppression

In and of itself, Black girls being in advanced programs is a form of dismantling systems of oppression. Advanced programs, specifically the gifted program, were not created for Black children, as C stated, which leads to underrepresentation in these programs. The girls spoke about the need for representation in the gifted program. Alicia stated that she "just hopes to see more representation." She continued,

The topic of representation is also something that stuck with me from the focus group: how the things that we read, the characters in the books, none of them look

like us. If they do, they're always the villain or antagonist. I just want representation in spaces like this to go up. I want people's awareness to become more clean. I want them to realize the implications of their actions and realize . . . when people are being implicitly racist. I want them to realize the implications of their actions and realize that they are being racist because while it's sort of become normalized to us, . . . I think it's true on the other side of the coin, where the people who are doing things and saying things don't realize that they're being racist some of the time. So, I think it happens both ways. My hope is that awareness increases, representation increases, and ultimately, that the people who look like us that are reading this study feel empowered and understand that they can make it through.

Stephanie thought that if "there was a more diverse representation of teachers . . . It will shape the program very differently." Stephanie ultimately valued having a Black teacher to guide her and felt that it was "very telling on the route [she] decided to choose to go with for [her] career." One of the very few teachers that she had that was African American was in high school history. She described the impact the teacher had on her and her decision to pursue a career in Political Science.

My history teacher was an African-American woman; I had her for 4 years of my high school experience. She really shaped how I viewed history and how history is one of my favorite subjects. I think being able to connect with a teacher because they look like me, also they understand what it's like to be an African American woman trying to do certain things . . . My teacher was part of a gifted program as well. Just her understanding of the experiences and the struggle of it

made things a bit more refreshing. It made me be more drawn to that subject. I will say for the teachers that weren't of the same identity or gender as me, the same racial identity and same gender as me, there wasn't a sense of connection with the work that they were . . . teaching us.

C's attitude was that this group of five participants was a small representation of a larger group. "I'm sure there's more kids who were just like us who were in gifted and honors classes, who experienced a lot of the same things that we did. So yeah, I think that was a very, very small portion of a much, much larger group and much, much larger issue." C believed that change starts at the micro level within the schools. This change will dull the effects of tokenization.

I would like to see more action taken when things are going wrong in schools. I heard a lot of stories about how these girls were basically harassed and bullied and nobody did anything just because of who the person was, and I think that that's unacceptable. Regardless of who you are, if you're doing things, like what they were doing to those girls, then it's some type of action needs to be taken, whether it be a teacher or a student, something needs to happen. You can't keep having these people in these places, because then nothing is ever going to get solved. They're just going to keep doing the same thing. Some type of actual action taken against these people, whether it be a suspension or firing them, or them being expelled from school, something has to be done.

Gilman thought that this study is helping to dismantle systems of oppression by impacting educators. Although she knew that it would potentially impact "Black girls the most", she acknowledged that it probably will not be as accessible to students.

I don't foresee it being in front of students so much but I would hope that as an educator, when people see the study, they're like, 'oh, I need to be more intentional about how I interact in this space, or serve as an advocate for my students, or create the space for my students to be themselves and succeed...' I know for me in my program because I did exceptionally well compared to my peers, that often translated into for other people that I didn't need support, or I didn't need guidance or anything like that. It wasn't that I didn't need it. I just wasn't getting it. So, I just had to figure it out and I wish that that burden wasn't placed so heavily on high achieving students that, 'oh, yeah, you're successful so we don't have to worry about you.' I think it is a disservice. I know, for me, it was definitely a disservice.

Being an example of representation for other Black girls and promoting diverse populations are how these girls are dismantling systems of oppression. The girls hope that this study will have an impact on teachers and on providing a culturally responsive curriculum. More representation could address being a token Black girl and feeling othered by making it less comfortable for people to employ microaggressions. With more representation, the girls would not be accused of being an Oreo because being Black in gifted and advanced programs would not be the exception but the norm. To combat representation, the issue of underrepresentation in these programs must first be resolved and this can be done through evaluating one's perception of the construct of giftedness.

Advanced Programs as a Vehicle to Success

Although there is an underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and accelerated academic programs (Henfield, et al., 2008), these programs are often a vehicle to academic success for Black students who participate in them. Gifted programs, specifically, expose children to accelerated curriculum and educational experiences they may not be privy to in their personal lives (Vega & Moore, 2018). High achievers who were not identified as gifted are tracked in the same courses as gifted students and thus are given the same opportunities. However, it is evident with its exclusionary identification methods that gifted programs are systems of privilege. Gilman's statement about the IB program inspires this theme: "I don't regret it at all. It definitely served as a vehicle for me to attain things I would never have the opportunity to." *Recognizing gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success due to its connection to college entry, these girls also recognized (or described) the programs as a system of privilege not originally intended for them, yet they appreciated the challenge and opportunity to dismantle the system of oppression by not just participating in these programs, but excelling in them.* Alicia agreed and explained that by being in advanced programs, Black children are infiltrating systems that weren't meant for them, which inspired the subtheme of gifted being a system of privilege. Alicia was not identified for gifted services, nor was Denise. However, both girls were high achieving Black females.

The buy-in for participating in gifted and advanced programs is the access to scholarship opportunities and admission to post-secondary institutions. Top-tier universities and high-yielding scholarship opportunities require higher GPAs and

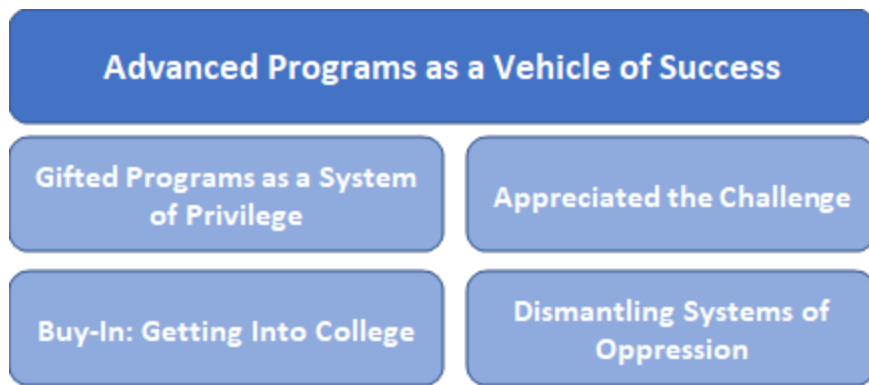
evidence of accelerated courses for students to be considered. Under the being “woke” theme, we explored the participants’ decisions about attending a PWI or an HBCU. To quote Gilman, college for all participants “wasn’t a question on, am I going, but where am I going and how I pay for it?” Therefore, the choice to participate in gifted and advanced programs and to persist in programs was easy and required them to value not only being in these advanced programs and education in general but also high standards. In addition, the participants appreciated the challenge that these programs afforded them. Gilman stated that she was the student who would get bored in class and expressed that she would not be able to last in a “regular class.” C needed the push that she had in gifted and advanced courses to succeed.

Middle school was noted as being a period of change in the participants’ academic careers. Marked differences from elementary school included multiple teachers, moving from class to class, and an accelerated high school curriculum was introduced. School became more exclusionary for them as they moved in cohorts with other accelerated students. In Title I schools, there may only be one advanced cohort, and students in this cohort form a tight knit relationship because they share all the same classes. Some of the participants started taking these accelerated courses as early as sixth grade, even though students are usually allowed to take advanced math and science courses starting in seventh grade. To stay on this accelerated course, students had to continue performing well on the standardized state assessments and end-of-course exams. Later in Chapter 6, I discuss that help from teachers and counselors in transitioning to middle school would be a strategy for success for the girls leveraging gifted and advanced programs.

Figure 8 illustrates the categories for *Advanced Programs as a Vehicle to Success* which are discussed in the following order: *Gifted Programs as a System of Privilege*, *Appreciated the Challenge*, *Buy-In: Getting into College*, and *Dismantling Systems of Oppression*.

Figure 8

Categories for Advanced Programs as a Vehicle for Success



Note: The theme, *Advanced Programs as a Vehicle for Success*, had four categories that supported how advanced programs, like gifted, prepared the girls for college and, in the process, assisted them in dismantling systems of oppression that may not have been created for them.

Gifted Programs as a System of Privilege

In elementary school, getting pulled out or another teacher pushing into the class creates a sense of special treatment thus being thought of as a system of privilege. This privilege, whether they wanted it or not, allowed them to use these programs as a vehicle to success. Throughout middle school, gifted and advanced students travel in cohorts separated from the “regular kids.” In high school, being in advanced programs perpetuated this seclusion from other students. C mentioned that AP classes were spaces tailored as predominately White. Denise thought that gifted programs were created to “in a sense, hinder us and hold us back.” For some Black girls, gifted and advanced programs

can be an isolating experience (Mayes & Hines, 2014). The participants realized how much of a difference their advanced classes were from the regular classes.

It was different every year for me, honestly. In third grade, I would go to different work groups within my teacher's class. I didn't leave the class. I would always be with the same people. Whereas in fourth grade it was more of . . . a pullout program where we were getting removed from our classes . . . They started experimenting with you go here at this time of the day for your S.T.E.M. and then you go here for English and Social Studies. It was my math classes that I recognized that difference where I was going to . . . a teacher no one else had.

Stephanie also started gifted in third grade and was identified through her SAT scores. She remembered the gifted students in elementary not intermingling with the other students.

For elementary gifted programs, it was vastly different. The environment we were placed in was more so exclusionary compared to middle school and high school. In my gifted programs in elementary school, the gifted students had classes in different pods . . . So, all the gifted students will be in the same class. There was no intermingling. There would be specific block periods for gifted students for specific content areas.

C took her gifted test in second grade and started gifted in third grade. "The way that they did it is that we would have our regular classes, and then we would go to the gifted classes for math and science." What stood out to her the most about those science courses was that they did more experiments than the "regular classes would do." C

repeatedly stated that she wasn't good in math, so she didn't "really remember much about the math."

Although Alicia was never identified as gifted, she had "been in advanced classes for as long as [she] could remember. I'd say, like, truly, the distinction I found started when I was in middle school because I was not categorized as gifted. I wasn't tested." She also took advanced classes in fifth grade and had high test scores on the Florida Standards Assessment. A reason that she might not have been tested was because she switched schools. The predominantly White elementary school she attended successfully pushed her and her brother out. Henfield et al. (2008) found that teachers may believe that "African American students lack the intellectual capacity to function successfully in gifted programs" (p. 439) and, therefore, may not identify them for such programs. Alicia could have also fallen victim to being a "false negative," as described by Lakin (2016), and simply was missed by the screening tool. However, Alicia still participated in advanced programs in all grade bands. She describes how exclusionary the program was in high school.

The program I was in, because I feel like the program itself is sort of a bubble and we're not necessarily integrated with the rest of the school, was predominantly White but the school itself is a mix of predominantly White and Hispanic. So, there's like Hispanic and White.

Denise was in a similar situation to Alicia. However, she did get tested for giftedness. She has been in advanced programs since elementary school.

They did test me, but I don't remember when. It was one of the years. I don't know if it was second grade or third grade when I took it. From my

understanding, I don't think I classified as gifted even though the following year, I got a perfect score. They never tested me again. So that's what happened from my understanding.

Denise started taking Algebra in seventh grade in middle school while their friends were in pre-Algebra. In eighth grade, she was "adamant about dual enrollment" but her Black counselor denied her the opportunity because she thought she wasn't ready for it. Later, Denise took the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.). In high school she took several dual enrollment courses and several certificate courses at the local college. Being in exposed to these advanced programs at an early age, which is a strategy described in Chapter 6, the girls were leveraging gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success.

Stephanie and Gilman were both introduced to IB in middle school. In order to be placed in the program the girls had to receive a recommendation. "Students who are accepted into it, they have to be recommended by an advisor but in order to remain in IB they had to sign a contract. Gilman describes her understanding of the IB program.

I think that they were setting students up, honestly. Again, when you go to the tour, they actually say, 'Did you take a language in...middle school? If it was an IB school, then you were told to sign this paper and you were going to be in IB and you sign an IB contract. When you sign it, there's no 'this is the International Baccalaureate program.' I didn't even know. I knew I had a learner profile, but I didn't know what that meant. It wasn't until like junior year, we were learners in the program.

C had strong feelings about why gifted and advanced programs are a setup which

she shared with me during one of the interviews. She shared,

I think it's kind of a setup. There's a lot of things in the educational system that are a setup. You start off with college; that was a setup. Black people weren't meant to go to college, that's how they set it up. That's why we had to create HBCUs in the first place. The amount of people getting bachelor's degrees increased so much over the years that now people are saying that a bachelor's is basically worth a high school diploma. So now, you need a higher educational degree, like a master's or a doctorate or a PhD, to even get a really good job. That just sets us back even more because people can't afford it or have access to the resources that they need to be able to pursue those degrees. I think advanced learning as a whole is a setup to remain predominantly White.

Getting into gifted and advanced programs involves validation of others not only with their grades and test scores but sometimes their behaviors as well. Black students are underrepresented in gifted programs but overrepresented in special education programs (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Barlow & Dunbar, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2014; Henfield, et al., 2008; Hérbert & Anderson, 2020). This correlation may indeed show the difference between gatekeeping programs that were not created for Blacks and conversely opening the floodgates for programs like special education that were created to further segregate Black students. By being in advanced programs, these Black girls have breached the systems of privilege that were not created for them and leveraged them as a vehicle to success. In the next section, we explore how they took advantage of these programs.

Appreciated the Challenge

Receiving a challenging curriculum was a byproduct of being in advanced programs. C felt she needed the push to do well and that she works better in higher-stress classes. Gilman challenged her teacher, Dr. Jean because she wanted to learn. She “needed that challenge in the classroom.” Appreciating the challenge and rigor of advanced courses was confirmed as a benefit of gifted education in Henfield, et al. (2008) study. Gilman realized that the IB program provided her with a “quality education” that other students in the building did not receive. Again the system of privilege that gifted and advanced programs created allowed the girls to use them to succeed.

I would not have received that if I was not in IB whether I had my gifted notation or was not in advanced classes. I would not have people who could advocate for me. I would not have been challenged. I wouldn’t have been exposed to worldly views because I wouldn’t have access to that. It’s unfortunate that that is the system that we’re a part of but it wouldn’t have been helpful at all.

Advanced courses also offered her a challenge that being in regular classes would not. “In high school, I loved calculus. I loved it. It was hard. It was challenging, but I like a challenge. I was that gifted student where if I’m disinterested, or bored, I’m going to fail.” However, what she learned in advanced programs helped prepare her for life in general.

I think exposure is definitely one of them because we got to learn about why things are. I got to learn why the world, or the bare minimums of you know why the world is the way it is. We had this one class called Theory of Knowledge. That was the most mind-boggling thing. We would try to speak to

our other friends about the complexities of what we were learning. It's like, we can't even start the conversation . . . now when I talk about principles and theories and understand how to apply those things. In the real world, so not just in academia, but when assessing real-world issues, that was the idea of the class . . . being able to process and analyze real-world situations as they're happening.

Stephanie appreciated being in gifted programs because of everything she learned from the program.

It allowed me to look at things in a different scope . . . If I wasn't in the gifted program, there wouldn't be certain conversations that I'm having. There wouldn't be certain thing that I know about . . . I think that being able to be part of this program, and taking the time to utilize what I know to probably give back to the community to those who aren't part of these programs who may benefit from these resources, or this knowledge, I think was very beneficial. I wouldn't change that.

Denise also would not change her decision to be in advanced programs. In high school, Denise took all the advanced courses her high school had to offer so she resorted to taking dual enrollment courses. She graduated with her AA degree before she graduated from high school.

I would just say that being in them, they not only allowed me to enjoy high school for what it had to offer, but it also pushed me. It allowed me to take classes that I wouldn't have taken otherwise. It allowed me to learn new things, things that aren't taught in high school. It was just really great in that way. I was able to graduate with my associate degree, which is something I wouldn't have been able

to do had I not taken accelerated courses . . . I think it's just something good to do, which is to challenge yourself. That's something that I've always been adamant about...challenging myself, because quite frankly, you only live once. You only have one brain, if you don't use it, it will die . . . I've always tried to push myself trying to learn anything. That's something that advanced, accelerated courses taught me.

Challenging courses and a rigorous curriculum attracted these advanced students to participate in gifted programs. In participating in gifted and advanced programs, the girls were leveraging their participation and academic achievement as a vehicle to success. However, the ultimate buy-in was getting into college and essentially paying for college. For the girls in the study, the goal for participation in these programs were achieved by attending college and being offered scholarship opportunities to do so. Leveraging gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success was an effect of participation in these programs, but girls would not be afforded these opportunities if they were not identified for these programs at an early age. Identification was based on the perception of the construct of giftedness and how the girls exhibited the characteristics of giftedness.

Perception of the Construct of Giftedness

The underrepresentation of Black children in gifted and advanced programs is predicated on how one defines giftedness. A positive correlation exists between college readiness and positive educational outcomes from participation in gifted and advanced programs (Hodges et al., 2018; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Vega & Moore, 2018; Wright & Ford, 2017). Identification of Black children for advanced programs is being hindered

by the emphasis that states place on intelligence as the primary definition of giftedness, teachers' biases, and lack of parental knowledge of the identification process (Allen, 2017; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Hodges et al., 2018; Lakin, 2016; Luria et al., 2016). The perception of others, specifically teachers, can determine whether or not a student gets identified as gifted.

“Teachers typically nominate students who conform to their expectations of what gifted students look like, how they perform on various measures of achievement, how they behave in the classroom, and how they use existing ideals based on dominant cultural assumptions to guide their judgments of giftedness” (Bianco et al., 2011).

How stakeholders perceive gifted students can also impact their self-esteem and contribute to their sense of isolation in gifted and advanced courses. Perceptions of being the “smart kids” caused a division between them and their friends who were not in gifted and advanced programs. Gilman’s metaphoric description of what it was like to be different was analogous to Hester wearing a scarlet letter. “It was like we’re walking around with IB on our backs. You did have friends who were in non-IB classes but . . . we were discarded like, ‘oh they think they’re better than us . . . when we really didn’t.” C’s attitude towards the matter was that people perceive gifted students as being smarter.

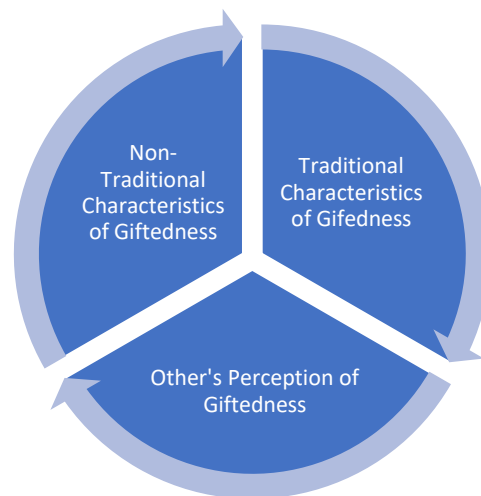
The girls used both traditional and non-traditional characteristics of giftedness to describe their giftedness. All of the girls, whether or not they were identified and staffed for gifted, were asked to describe what makes them gifted. The word gifted took on a double meaning not only as an adjective for the characteristics that make them

exceptional in the gifted program but also what makes them special in general as a nod to how they thought and viewed the world.

The theme of the *perception of the construct of giftedness* is illustrated in Figure 9 and discussed in the following order: *other's perception of giftedness, traditional characteristics of giftedness, and non-traditional characteristics of giftedness*. Within this theme the girls valued success and high standards, hard work, and education. *Valuing success, hard work, and education, the construct of giftedness as defined by participants far exceeded the traditional trait of "intelligent" and represented their "innovative," "open-minded," "out-of-the-box," "creative," and "inquisitive" thinking and "problem solving" characteristics.*

Figure 9

Perception of the Construct of Giftedness



Note: How the girls perceived their giftedness was influenced by what others may consider as traditional characteristics of giftedness, non-traditional characteristics of giftedness that relate to their personalities, and how others perceive their giftedness.

Other's Perception of Giftedness

The girls were perceived as intelligent by others. This perception and standardized test scores led to their identification with gifted programs. Being smart Black girls gave them high visibility in their schools and in the communities that served them. Even with their parents or their families, the perception of intelligence motivated them to push the girls to educational success. The perception of intelligence also afforded the girls opportunities for advancement because their teacher, like C, stated, “never made me doubtful of my abilities.” C proclaimed that she was a standout student. C described how her friends perceived her.

A lot of my friends, pretty much all of my friends, none of them were in advanced classes. I was kind of always seen as the smart friend out of the group just because I always took those higher-level classes. My friends are probably just as smart as me. They just never got into those classes. The reason that I started taking classes was because of my parents, and then eventually, I just kind of realized, it'll give me credit. It looks good on college apps. I might as well.

Her friends viewed C as the smart kid but because of the way that she looked others may not know that she is smart. That perception of intelligence also extended beyond her circle of influence.

I think that when people look at me, if they don't know me, they don't realize how smart I actually am. They don't realize the type of person that I actually am. So, I think they may have some type of perceived notion about me just based on stereotypes and just things that they probably hear or see, not even about me specifically but just in general. I think that once people see my abilities, and what

I can do, it comes as a surprise, because I think that they don't really expect that from people who look like me. Especially when someone who looks like you are doing better than you in school, has a higher GPA than you, has a higher-class rank, higher test scores and things like that. I think that they're surprised that that actually is reality.

For Alicia, her intellectual abilities were respected by others. She stated that people knew that she was fully capable in an educational sense.

I've been told that I think differently. I think that I carry this sense of confidence about myself, even if internally, I may feel a little bit hesitant. I think that while there are people who attempt to downplay my intelligence or that tend to downplay me as a student, as an individual, etc. I do think that the majority of people that I'm surrounded by do have a level of respect when it comes to me in an educational sense because of the way that I carry myself in educational settings. So yes, there are racialized experiences. Yes, there are people who are explicitly and implicitly racist, but I do think that the way I carry myself in educational settings, because I know what I am capable of when it comes to academics, makes people have a level of respect when they do approach me.

Gilman believed there is a difference between how giftedness manifests in Black and White people. This difference all boils down to "privilege and access."

I recognize the society that I'm in, right, and how there are these even more extraordinary people, which is why it's hard for me to see myself as extraordinary . . . Amongst my peers at North Miami, I am to some people, brilliant. It's hard to call myself smart, sometimes, but brilliant? Then here at Southern State amongst

people who have had access to those things like laboratories and extern opportunities, and these spectacular field trips, the way that they're able to excel is different in the way that we're able to excel because we haven't even been able to push that envelope.

For Stephanie, she thought that "people believe that a gifted student is solely based on the statistics of students, like GPA, examination scores." For others, how they perceive giftedness goes beyond intelligence. In Stephanie's words, she stated that,

I think perception is based on what someone themselves perceived giftedness to be, if that makes sense. I think that society as a whole focuses on the statistics of it, like the actual quantitative aspect of it rather than qualitative aspects and holistic aspects. I think that plays a huge role because I believe there are students who are more than capable of being part of programs like this but aren't provided the opportunities or the resources to get it. To be gifted and to have that state of mind and being able to acquire knowledge and look into different perspectives is not something that a test could assess. A test isn't the only way for students to learn.

The way that others viewed Denise was more so related to their perception of her involvement and how she operated in the spaces she was in. They perceived that she was busy and that she didn't make any mistakes.

People always say that I'm busy . . . They know that I do a lot because they see it... They see the organizations that I'm in . . . They see that I'm hard working just from those things, even with my academics. Me getting my associate's because there were only three students this year who graduated with an associate

degree out of 20 who were supposed to . . . Me getting straight A's, they know that from that. My SAT scores. Me being involved in the community. My school always said that I was a student advisor, so everybody knew that. You know, they knew I represented all the students, and then I was actually the president. Then they also knew that I was hard working from the cores that I got . . . For the most part, people knew that I was hardworking . . . People also thought, "You're this perfect person." So that in the event that you do make a mistake, judgment automatically follows.

Alicia commented that there was definitely a divide that differentiated the gifted students from the regular kids.

I do think that there was a divide. There was this perception that those of us in the IB program thought we were better than everyone else and thought we were elite in some sort of way. I can also agree with what C said about the idea that people thought we were smarter, and we didn't have to work as hard to achieve some of the same things that our peers did.

Under the theme of Being a Token Black Girl, the concept of being an Oreo was explored, which relates to how people viewed the participants. This perception directly correlated with their intelligence and how other people perceived intelligence in Black students. Denise believed that people who viewed speaking properly as "acting White" was a "stigma of our community. The fact that because I speak properly, I have to be White rather than Black." Denise felt these comments were more prevalent from her "own people," and so did Alicia. These comments can lead to the girls feeling isolated

from their Black peers. How others perceive the girls is necessary but not as important as how the girls perceive giftedness in themselves.

Traditional Characteristics of Gifted

Traditional characteristics of gifted, as discussed in Luria et al.'s (2016) study, are “academic and intellectual talent, leadership ability, excellence in visual and performing arts, creative or productive thinking, and psychomotor ability” (p. 44). For the girls, the first characteristic they leaned on was intelligence because society has constantly drilled into them that being gifted was equated with being intelligent. C described her gifts as “I would say it would obviously be my intelligence, just how well I’m able to do in school. I’m able to do well, I would say, in high-stress situations when it comes to taking difficult classes. I thrive in that type of environment.” She also described her giftedness as being able to excel in accelerated courses. “I personally feel like I do better in higher-level classes.” Although the girls did not directly assign this characteristic to themselves, in speaking about how others perceived them, they talked about this characteristic.

Non-Traditional Characteristics of Gifted

Most of the girls leaned toward non-traditional characteristics of giftedness. They cited attributes like being a hard worker, innovative, and open-minded as contributing to their giftedness. During the individual interviews, I intentionally asked this question without giving the girls context of the research regarding the definition of gifted and the characteristics of gifted students. However, during the focus group, I read them the federal definition adopted in the Marland Report of 1972, which includes the following six domains: general intellectual ability, specific academic ability, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability. Florida

defines giftedness as “one who has intellectual development and is capable of high performance” (Special Instructional Programs for Students who are Gifted, 2002). Whereas Florida’s definition only focuses on the cognitive component of giftedness, the federal definition is broader and encompasses different domains of giftedness.

Although Alicia was never tested for gifted, she believed that thinking out of the box made her gifted. This definition is consistent with the federal definition of giftedness, but not all states recognize creative thinking when identifying giftedness because it is not an easily quantifiable characteristic (Luria et al., 2016). Alicia’s response expands this perception.

I would say that I’m someone who likes to think outside of the box. When it comes to the way that I approach situations, the way I approach situations in academia but also outside of academia. I think that just my interpretation of things and my analysis of things is not typical. That’s how I would describe it. I like nuance. I like to exist in the gray area . . . I maintained this thought process that there was more than what met the eye, and that was for everything that I did. It caused me to persevere, and it caused me to just think of new innovative ways to get to the places that I wanted to go.

Denise was tested for gifted, but did not reach the minimum score for placement in the program. In Miami-Dade, once a student is identified and tested for gifted, they may not be tested again. Denise received a perfect score on the math standardized test in fourth grade but was not tested again. She described what made her special,

What makes me special? I will definitely say that I'm a hard worker. I'm very interested in always pushing myself and ensuring that I have the educational wherewithal to succeed in all spaces. I'm really about just making sure that I have a diverse perspective. I think that Successful Ladies' and Miami Sunshine definitely helped cultivate that . . . But just to answer your question, I guess what does it mean to be gifted? . . . I'm engaged academically. Even like with dual enrollment, just starting as early as I did. I've always been that way, trying to ensure my academic success.

C also stated that her giftedness lies in her ability to persist in advanced courses and also her ability to think creatively. She feels as if she does better in "higher stress classes" and that it pushes her to do better. She described her out of the box thinking in her second interview.

For a lot of the stuff that we had to do, it kind of forces you to think outside the box and come up with things that you wouldn't think of regularly like solutions or just ideas that you wouldn't regularly have. I think that helps a lot. I kind of learned how to be independent when it came to school where I knew if I needed help, I could ask for it. A lot of the time, it would just force me to work to try to figure things out for myself.

Gilman humbly stated that she has "to accept that in certain contexts, I'm extraordinary. I perceive these as normal things. That has always been an expectation in my house." Being extraordinary is not a recognized characteristic; however, Gilman later went on to describe her "innovative mind" and her skill as a "problem-solver."

I think it's the fact that I have such an inquisitive mind, honestly. I want to know why things happen the way they do. What's the impact they have on things? Why did we come to this decision? What were the alternatives? I'm a problem solver. In speaking to someone recently about, you know, the skills I offered, she was able to simplify it into 'you're a problem solver. You go into something, you fix it.

Montoya et al. (2016) explored gifted and talented programs in Denver Public Schools. DPS adopted an extended definition of giftedness, including 12 traits: "motivation, interests, communication skills, problem-solving, memory, inquiry/curiosity, insight, reasoning, imagination/creativity, humor, intensity, and sensitivity" (Montoya et al., 2016, p. 133). How the girls in this study perceived their giftedness is more aligned with the DPS definition than Florida's definition. More research is needed in this area as it would benefit educators to be more informed to understand the importance of increasing representation in these advanced programs.

Conclusion

In Chapter 5, I discussed the five themes that I constructed after data analysis, which addressed the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs. The chapter also includes descriptions of the Black girls' perceptions of the construct of giftedness, whether or not they were identified for gifted services. It illuminates the types of microaggressions that these Black girls experienced in and out of the classroom, and how Black girls make meaning of their experiences. The girls shared their counterstories, creating a bond through their experiences and aspirations, and felt their voices were heard. Their awareness of current racial tensions and the disparities they witnessed in

their schools have made them changemakers. The participants offered recommendations for enacting change at the district level, which includes increasing the representation of Black teachers, implementing consequences in the schools for microaggressions and explicit acts of racism, cultural diversity training for teachers, and culturally responsive teaching and curriculum. Some of these recommendations are expounded in Chapter 6.

The last chapter of the dissertation revisits some key details of the study, which include the overview of the problem, purpose statement, answering the research questions, review of the methodology, and exploration of major findings. The major findings were connected with the literature used throughout this study. Implications for action that I extrapolated from the narratives and recommendations from the participants themselves were also discussed. Finally, some suggestions for further research are explored.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Gilman Smith made a statement during one of her interviews that resonated with me throughout the process. “As Black people, we carry the burden of identity.” This burden is even heavier for Black girls in gifted and advanced programs because they must be cognizant of their identities in three worlds: a male-dominated power structure, White society, and their immediate surroundings (Evans-Winters, 2014). The narratives the girls shared told of resiliency in straddling these environments and retaining a sense of self as they did so. Being the only Black girl or one of the only Black girls in advanced programs is evidence of the problem of underrepresentation that led the girls to value diversity, equity, and inclusion. Alicia stated, “I can be that representation for other people who want to infiltrate these spaces that were not meant for us.” However, the trend of representation did not only apply to the students in the classroom but also school personnel and the curriculum.

The problem surrounding gifted and advanced programs starts with representation. Black students are underrepresented in gifted programs across the nation (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Hodges et al., 2018; Luria et al., 2016) due to school districts relying solely on standardized test scores, teacher biases, and parental knowledge of the gifted process (Allen, 2017; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Lakin, 2016; Luria et al., 2016). Exacerbating underrepresentation is the very definition

of gifted itself as it varies from state to state (Hodges et al., 2018; Luria et al., 2016; Montoya et al., 2016). Florida's definition focuses on cognitive ability (Florida Department of Education, 2021) while Georgia's focuses not only on intellect but also creativity and motivation (Georgia Department Education, 2021). Still, the Marland Report (1972), which precedes the federal definition of giftedness, includes seven different domains, and some states have started to include *potential* as a criterion. Relying heavily or exclusively on standardized test scores to identify students as gifted poses a problem for Black students as historically minorities score poorly on these assessments (Luria et al., 2016; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Winsler et al., 2013). To combat that issue, Florida lowered its IQ point threshold to recruit English language learners, minority, or low-socioeconomic students (Special Instructional Programs for Gifted Students, 2002). In addition, Black girls in gifted and advanced programs find themselves being double minorities and are subjected to microaggressions based on both race and gender (Compton-Lilly, 2020). Not being identified as gifted can affect access to post-secondary opportunities and hinder girls from reaching their full potential (Hodges et al., 2018; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Wright & Ford, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to paint a holistic picture of the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs and fill a void in the literature. Unfortunately, the stories of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs are not being told. Still, this study will give a small representation that fits the criteria and allow their voices to start filling that gap. Critical race theory (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Tate & Ladson-Billings, 1995; Taylor, 2016) was the theoretical lens through which I conducted this study. As I explored intersectionality (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2016),

microaggressions (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015), and gifted programs as “property of Whites”(Barlow & Dunbar, 2010) through counternarratives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016), I did so using narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016) and five passionate participants.

A narrative inquiry research design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016) was used to recount the stories of Black girls navigating gifted and advanced spaces in M-DCPS. Siedman’s (2013) three-series interviews were used to capture the participant’s stories by establishing context, reconstructing details, and reflecting on the meaning of the experiences. A focus group interview was also conducted with all five participants in which they were able to explore their shared marginalization (Patton, 2015) of being Black girls in gifted and advanced programs. Selective sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to find the participants who identified as Black girls in advanced programs in M-DCPS. Initially, seven girls were chosen for the study, but two could not complete the study due to time constraints. A questionnaire was sent to all the participants once they were selected for the study to get a feel for their experiences before the interview. An interview guide was used for each interview. Siedman (2013) recommended a 90-minute format for each interview. The focus group interview was approximately 2.5 hours, and the follow-up interview I conducted with each participant was 30 minutes. I used video conferencing through Zoom to conduct the interviews and the focus group interview.

In addition to interviews, I took notes and wrote analytical memos, as suggested by Maxwell (2013). To transcribe the interviews, I uploaded the audio files from Zoom

to Otter.ai and used a tape recording to refine the transcripts. Coding commenced once all of the interviews were transcribed. For first round coding, I used in vivo, descriptive, and values coding (Saldaña, 2016) in MAXQDA. During second round coding, I used pattern coding to start grouping the codes into meaningful units (Saldaña, 2016). While engaging in second round coding, I began developing preliminary themes and categories. I engaged in one more round of coding to test out and refine my themes and categories. I also used a values matrix and gifted word cloud to develop themes related to those concepts. I crafted profiles to share the narratives of the girls (Siedman, 2013) as evidenced in Chapter 4 and a discussion of the themes followed in Chapter 5.

Five themes with 16 categories embedded in them were developed from the narratives:

1. Resilience acted as a catalyst for academic success as the girls navigated and occupied White spaces that were not built for them, overcoming microaggressions and systemic inequities.
2. Labeling themselves as “woke,” the girls recognized racial tensions and educational disparities, yet they were empowered and inspired to seek leadership positions to bring about change.
3. Considered the token Black girl, the girls learned to occupy White spaces in which they felt “othered,” while simultaneously experiencing the stereotype of being deemed an “Angry Black Woman,” considered an “Oreo,” or “Acting White,” and at the same time having to decide whether to attend a PWI or an HBCU for college – a decision which was influenced by the degree to which

they wanted to assimilate into society at large or be surrounded by other Black students in a controlled environment .

4. Recognizing gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success due to its connection to college entry, these girls also recognized (or described) the programs as a system of privilege not originally intended for them, yet they appreciated the challenge and opportunity to dismantle the system of oppression by not just participating in these programs, but excelling in them.
5. Valuing success, hard work, and education, the construct of giftedness as defined by participants far exceeded the traditional trait of “intelligent” and represented their “innovative,” “open-minded,” “out-of-the-box,” “creative,” and “inquisitive” thinking and “problem solving” characteristics.

The themes and categories were represented in shortened form throughout the dissertation for readability and flow as: (1) Resilience in the Face of Adversity, (2) Being “Woke,” (3) Being a Token Black Girl, (4) Advanced Programs as a Vehicle of Success (5) Perception of the Construct of Giftedness. Values coding was used to triangulate the validity of the themes. Resilience in the face of adversity addressed the microaggressions in and outside the classroom and the systemic inequities seen and experienced in diverse school settings. Being a Token Black Girl addressed the intersectionality of gender and race and how the girls occupied White spaces and felt othered in these spaces, overcame stereotypes like being an angry Black woman or an Oreo, and decided between attending a historically Black college or university or predominantly White institution. Being “woke” raised awareness of current racial tensions that may have influenced the girls’ decisions, how they were empowered through community, culture, and strong support

systems, and how that led them to be changemakers in their schools and communities. The themes related to giftedness were two-fold: the experiences of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs and the perception of the construct of giftedness. Advanced programs as a vehicle of success focused on how gifted and advanced programs were systems of privilege; the girls decided to participate in these programs because they appreciated the challenge. For the participants, the buy-in for participation was being afforded the opportunity to attend college, and the girls discussed how being able to participate in gifted programs was a form of dismantling systems of oppression. Perception of the construct of giftedness took into account how others perceived giftedness in the girls, the traditional and non-traditional characteristics of giftedness that the girls used to describe their talents. The purpose of this study was to complete in-depth interviews with five Black girls who were enrolled in gifted or accelerated programs and attended a Title I school in Miami-Dade County Public School to answer three questions that will be revisited below.

Research Questions Revisited

In this study, in-depth interviews with five Black girls who were enrolled in gifted or accelerated programs and attended a Title I school in Miami-Dade County provided narratives that helped to answer three research questions (RQ) and two sub-questions.

RQ1: Experiences in Gifted Programs

The first research question included the need to answer two sub-questions, but the overarching question read as follows: What are the experiences of Black girls as they navigate the acceptance to and participation in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools? This was done using profiles in Chapter 4 to describe the racialized experiences

the participants had in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools. The first related sub-question addressed the intersectionality of race and gender: How does the intersectionality of race and gender shape the experiences of Black girls in gifted or advanced programs in Title I schools? The second sub-question focused specifically on the microaggression the girls experienced: How do Black girls experience microaggressions in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools? The brief answer to these questions is that the girls in the study's experiences in gifted and advanced programs in M-DCPS Title I schools as it related to the intersectionality of race and gender and microaggressions varied.

To solicit responses that would satisfy the query, I first posed questions on a questionnaire distributed to all the participants prior to the commencement of the interviews. On the questionnaire, the questions were straightforward, first asking the participants: What racialized experiences did you have in gifted programs? From the written responses, I gleaned that the girls either understood the question and were able to provide experiences or did not understand what I meant by "racialized." I followed up on this during the first interview after explaining key concepts like microaggressions and racialized experiences. The guiding interview questions solicited broader responses as the participants spoke about their early years in gifted and the demographics of the courses that they took. This time when I asked the same question regarding racialized experiences that I asked on the questionnaire, the girls' understanding expanded ranging from no racialized experiences that happened to them directly to direct blatant racism. For the second interview, the participants answered questions regarding their racialized experiences outside of the school and how they handled microaggressions both in the

school setting and outside the school setting. In the last interview, the girls shared the impact that the racialized experiences had on both their everyday lives and their academic success. The stories that the girls shared were synthesized and crafted into a profile shared in Chapter 4.

The racialized experiences that the girls shared ranged from nonexistent to blatant. Denise shared that she didn't have any experiences that happened to her personally. "That's not to say I didn't have issues because I do, but none of them were racially motivated, or at least I don't think they were," she said. However, she shared experiences that others told her and its impact on her life trajectory. C also had limited experiences but was quite "woke" when it came to being aware of world issues that affected how she experienced the predominantly White school that she attended and the mostly White gifted program that she participated in, as well as the type of university she attended after high school. Gilman and Stephanie attended the same high school and had disparate experiences with the same science teacher. Alicia, however, had the most racialized experiences in her predominately White school within advanced classes and extracurricular activities.

The initial barrier to answering this question was that the girls had to overcome their misunderstanding of microaggressions. To mitigate any misconceptions, I gave the girls a definition of microaggressions and examples I experienced in school. This helped solicit narratives of their racialized experiences, and it was a lesson I learned early on during the pilot interviews. Nonetheless, Gilman Smith stated that she didn't know what microaggressions were and that now she is just being able to recognize them and is learning to "call them out." She explained further,

Reflecting back then, there's so much that I probably did experience, and they were microaggressions, but they were normal. Last year, the Black Student Union here hosted a general body meeting, and I was the . . . navigator and all that. Something happened at our university. A student was giving her experience, and she was casually saying, and this is what made me cry because everybody was crying that moment, . . . it followed a really bad experience with racism. 'Before that, microaggressions, we can take that, that's normal.' In my day-to-day experience, wow, that's really what it is. Being able to process what microaggressions are now and reflect on the fact that it's so ingrained into my life and how I present that type of disrespect is normal to me, where I can't even identify it as disrespect or back then connect to disrespect was a harsh reality to accept. Wow, I get disrespected on a daily [basis], and I just take that because that is just what it is.

This concept that microaggressions were normal resonated with all the participants. C stated, "I can say that the idea that it's so normalized has definitely affected the way that I address those situations . . ." Alicia added that,

I think it's more so about the implication of normalizing racism. I feel like the implication has been for us . . . or at least me, becoming desensitized to some of those comments that are not explicit. So, when we talk about microaggressions or smaller instances of people being racist in an implicit way, sometimes it's hard for me now to recognize it because I'm so used to it unless it's very explicit. I think that's sort of an implication of it becoming so normalized.

Alicia experienced microaggressions on a spectrum from subtle acts of

Aggression to explicit racism. From being tenuously edged out of a predominantly White school for being Black to being blatantly disrespected by being called a “slut” because she is “a Black girl,” she showed resilience in the face of adversity. Even though she experienced this microaggression, she was accepted into all Ivy League schools and is in her first year at Hartenford University. She also experienced microaggressions in her philosophy class, where her teacher called her out for being tokenized. Usually, in conversations similar to this, she may not respond; if she wanted to respond, she would have.

Gilman experienced microaggressions in high school from her IB teacher, who teased her and the students in her predominately Haitian-American IB program about being Haitian. However, this same IB teacher was married to a Haitian man and had a Haitian child. Conversely, Stephanie received a little more favor from this teacher because she is “an African American person who is fair-skinned.” However, she described how people in her class who were Black or were not of African descent were treated. “She showed favoritism to students who are of Latin descent and students who were of fair skin.”

Gilman described a gender-based microaggression committed against her by someone that she called a friend. He kept poking fun at her, “hinting towards being an overachiever or depict me as the teacher’s pet. The teasing hit a nerve one day because it would hurt Gilman’s feelings, and “she exploded.” The teacher had to pull them away.

Microaggressions are not exclusive to the classroom. The Black girls in this study had racialized experiences both inside and outside of gifted and advanced classrooms that shaped their perspectives and worldviews. Alicia shared her experiences

as the only Black girl on an all-White male debate team. Alicia shared, “I was just, in many ways, pushed away from debating. I remember just the push back, having to push back against my coach, having to prove to my peers that I was good enough to be on the debate team.” Conversely, Gilman shared her experiences on an all-Black debate team in predominantly White spaces. “At tournaments, we would be the only Black, not like other Black people but amongst a Whiter crowd.” Although Gilman had the support of her teammates and Alicia did not, both girls felt othered at debate tournaments. “We would be the only group of Black people every time. That was when it was like, ‘oh we are different.’ We are others,” Gilman shared.

Alicia also shared instances of gender-based discrimination on the debate team as the only Black girl.

By my senior year, I was the only girl. My junior year, there were three girls. My sophomore year, COVID kind of played a role in that, but there were four girls. My freshman year, there were five girls. So, every year, there were just less girls. As a girl on the debate team, she as a Black girl, she was a double minority. Actually, my freshmen year, there were two Black people on the team, me and another Black girl. But after that, it was just me.

Alicia’s debate coach claimed she was too “emotional when it came to making arguments.” So, instead of tapping into that as a strength, he wanted her to do speech instead of debating. Alicia described the gender-based microaggressions she experienced from her debate coach as the only girl on the team.

Stephanie also experienced microaggressions later on in her educational journey

as a Political Science major at the University of a Southern State, she was “one of a few” African American women. “I will say my classes consist of hundreds . . . of students, and I’m always probably one or two . . . African American women in my class.” What affected her the most was their discussion of policy, specifically abortion laws.

Although the first sub-question was initially created to solicit responses related to the intersectionality of race and gender, the stories the girls shared spoke to other marginalization, including classism, ageism, and texturism. Gilman shared that in elementary and middle school, her experiences had more “to do with classism, and you know, elitism and things like that, but not really racialized experiences . . . Again, in elementary and middle school, you know, the stereotypical school, kid playground stuff.” Denise experienced ageism as she was the youngest on many of the committees she served on. Denise served as the student representative on the School Board and was also the youngest member of the student government board in 10th grade. In both of those positions, she struggled to have her voice heard. As a student representative on the School Board, she usually had to wait until the School Board member spoke before she could speak. On the student government board, she had a young lady on the board that did not like her. The SG advisor told her, “Denise, you know, I don’t know if you realize it or not, but you’re in the 10th grade; you’re doing things that she wishes she would have done.”

Another interesting experience that the participants had was with texturism. For Black girls, wearing natural hair can impact how they are perceived and comes with its own implicit biases, specifically in the corporate world and educational settings (Rowe, 2022). Although people of other races committed some of these acts of subtle aggression

were committed by people of different races, the girls also had experiences related to texturism committed by Blacks. The dilemma begs the question of whether texturism would be considered a microaggression if it were committed by people who looked like them? Regardless of the response, this issue is worth exploring further.

Stephanie stated that texturism had a “damaging” effect on Black women because people invaded their personal space by touching their hair. People would ask if they can touch her hair. She said, “That shouldn’t be something someone’s comfortable saying or doing.” Alicia did not consider texturism a racialized experience until the other participants spoke about it in the focus group interview. “I think the focus group certainly made me think about experiences in another way because I didn’t really consider the hair thing a racialized experience until after the focus group.” For C, people touching her hair was a “pet peeve.” Black people would ask her what she was “mixed” with when she wore her hair straight. “Why does me having long hair imply that I’m mixed? . . . I think that ties into what she was saying about colorism and racism, and I definitely agree with that.” Denise also experienced this phenomenon from people who looked like her and her family members. “I think that it comes back to this idea of more Eurocentric ideas being promoted, rather than traditional African American features being appreciated.”

As a result, the experiences that the study's female participants had while navigating gifted or advanced programs in M-DCPS Title I schools varied. Some of their racialized experiences were directly related to the color of their skin rather than their intellectual abilities or academic achievements. However, other microaggressions that they experienced were not related to either race or intelligence. Therefore, narrowing the

answer to the question to a more direct one, I would say the racialized experiences traversed a territory that included gender-based microaggressions, classism, ageism, and texturism which impacted how they navigated these traditionally White spaces. In summary, the experiences of these Black individuals in various contexts, including schools and career settings, were definitely influenced by racism and discrimination.

RQ2: Construct of Giftedness

The second research question explicitly referred to the perception of the construct of giftedness: How do Black girls in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools perceive the construct of giftedness? The girls in the study perceived their giftedness as heavily dependent on their intellect but also considered other non-traditional characteristics like being a “hard worker,” “problem-solver,” “out of box thinker,” “innovative,” and “open-minded” as contributing to their giftedness. Although there is a federal definition of giftedness (Marland, 1972), the definition of giftedness varies from state to state. Being considered gifted can have negative connotations for a child who wants to be “treated as *normal*” (Coleman et al., 2015, p. 362), but for Black students, this desire can be amplified (Coleman et al., 2015; Ford et al., 2008; Snyder et al., 2013). These girls had quite the opposite reaction; they expressed that they would not survive in “regular” classes. Not all of the girls were identified for gifted services but they considered themselves intelligent and able to persist in those spaces.

The girls viewed themselves as having high cognitive abilities; others also perceived them similarly. Initial identification for gifted programs starts with scores on standardized tests but relies on teacher and counselor recommendations as validation. Parents may also recommend their children be tested for giftedness. Russell (2018)

found that high school teachers viewed giftedness and gifted education as having to be fostered through challenging curricula to reach their full potential, and parents lacked the knowledge to advocate for their children. Not being identified for gifted services can negatively affect children, including regression to the norm, boredom, unhappiness, and limited gifted ability development (Zhbanova et al., 2015).

In M-DCPS, students not identified as gifted may still end up being “tracked” with gifted students because there may not be enough staffed in the program to warrant a teacher allocation. Therefore, high-performing students who are not identified as gifted will be placed in advanced classes that are double-coded for gifted and honors students. There may only be one gifted/honors cohort in Title I schools. Placement in these programs is dependent on how others perceive their intellectual capabilities.

C stated that her teachers never made her doubtful of her abilities. C believed that she was a standout student. However, her friends, who were not in advanced classes, thought she was “the smart friend out of the group just because I always took those higher-level classes.” People who did not know her, she said, may look at her, and “they don’t realize how smart I actually am.” That perception was based on “stereotypes” of Black people. Giftedness in Black students can be deemed as acting “White” and considered conforming to European American ideals (Coleman et al., 2015).

By being in gifted programs, the participants were accused by other Black students of acting “White” or being Oreos. Ford et al. (2008) described acting “White” as “getting good grades, being intelligent, speaking standard English, dressing in certain ways, having White friends, and other attitudes and behaviors.” Denise described being an Oreo as “White on the inside” and “Black on the outside.” Being Black or acting

Black can conform to deficit-based thinking regarding the intelligence of Black people. Alicia stated, “It’s just being in the middle, you know, not being accepted by the people who look like you but also by the people who don’t look like you.” For C, being called an Oreo hurt her feelings. “Just because I have advanced classes or I was raised in a certain way, it doesn’t mean that I want to be White . . . It’s just who I am, and that doesn’t take away from my Blackness,” she said. Denise thought that being called an Oreo degraded the intelligence of Black people “because there are educated Black people.” Being called an Oreo did not apply to Stephanie and Gilman because they attended a predominantly Black high school. However, Stephanie still believed that this label is “counterproductive . . . for us as a race,” and Gilman stated that “I’m really against the part of our society that people want to associate Whiteness with intellect.” This label had a negative impact on the participants, but not enough to affect their grades, but enough to affect their perception of the world.

Another stereotype placed on some of the girls was that of being an angry Black woman. This label stemmed from the girls being assertive in the classroom, occupying White spaces, having strong opinions, or their roles as advocates. This stereotype could have a long-lasting impact on their concept of self but also their opportunities for academic advancement. This stereotype was not attributed to all participants, but I observed that the girls labeled as angry Black women were darker-skinned and spoke passionately. Gilman confirmed that people thought of her this way because she was a “natural born leader” and was “strong enough to handle it.” However, that trend started with a “mean girl persona” attached to her since elementary school. Alicia also

experienced the effects of this stereotype. She tried to “strike a balance between being characterized as passionate versus the angry Black woman.”

Alicia felt that her intellectual abilities were respected by others, specifically how she thinks “differently.” Regardless of how much validation she receives for her intelligence, “there are still people who attempt to downplay my intelligence or that tend to downplay me . . .” Gilman believed that the difference between how giftedness manifests in Black people versus White people boils down to “privilege and access.” She described how students she attended school with at SSU had “access to those things like laboratories and extern opportunities, and these spectacular field trips...” Stephanie believed that giftedness is “based on what someone themselves perceived giftedness to be...”

How the girls themselves perceive giftedness can affect their motivation and engagement (Ford et al., 2008). Although Denise did not qualify for gifted and Alicia was never tested, both girls still answered questions regarding how they viewed their giftedness. In speaking about how others perceived their giftedness, the girls acknowledged their intelligence but focused on non-traditional characteristics of giftedness. The Marland Report (1972) is more comprehensive in describing gifted characteristics encompassing six domains including 1) general intellectual ability, 2) specific academic aptitudes, 3) creative or productive thinking, 4) leadership ability, 5) visual and performing arts, and 6) psychomotor ability (p. 2). Their perceptions fell within the creative and productive thinking domain.

The girls described themselves as being hard workers, innovative, and open-minded. Alicia believed that thinking outside of the box was what made her gifted. She

elaborated, “I like to exist in the gray area . . . I maintained this thought process that there was more than what met the eye, and that was for everything that I did.” Denise described what made her special as being a “hard worker,” meaning being “engaged academically.” C felt she “thinks outside the box” and did better in “higher stress classes.” Gilman attributed her giftedness to her “innovative mind” and her ability to be a “problem-solver.”

In summation of the findings, the girls perceived giftedness in traditional and non-traditional terms. All of the girls, regardless of whether they were formally identified as gifted, used intellect as a foundation to describe their giftedness. Participants were confident in their cognitive abilities, and others validated their intelligence. In addition to high intellect, the girls also described their giftedness as the ability to think “differently,” being a “hard worker,” “problem-solver,” out of box thinkers, innovative, and open-minded.

RQ3: Making Meaning

The final research question read as follows: How do Black girls in gifted and advanced programs in Title I schools apply the meaning they make of their experiences to life skills, social interactions, education, and beliefs about gifted programs and giftedness? The themes that emerged from the data point to two different avenues of attaching meaning to their experiences in gifted programs. These two avenues were related to the opportunities that arose because they participated in these programs (i.e., advanced programs as a vehicle to success). The other avenue was how being in gifted programs impacted the way they perceive the world, the way they live in it, and the way

the world perceives them as gifted Black girls (i.e., being “woke” and being a token Black girl).

The benefits of participation in gifted programs are innumerable, including exposing children to accelerated curriculum and educational experiences that they may not otherwise be exposed to with general education (Vega & Moore, 2018). Being in advanced programs also provides Black children the opportunity to attend top-tier post-secondary institutions and the ability to pay for them through scholarship opportunities. Gilman summarized her experience in gifted and advanced programs by stating, “I don’t regret it at all. It definitely served as a vehicle for me to attain things that I would never have the opportunity to.” Alicia agreed that she had no regrets about being in advanced programs because it allowed her to “infiltrate systems” that weren’t meant for Black people. The participants also made meaning as illustrated in the discussion regarding their perception of the construct of giftedness. The way that they defined giftedness for themselves impacted their confidence as they navigated gifted and advanced programs.

Gifted and advanced programs as systems of privilege was a theme that emerged as the girls spoke about the exclusivity of these advanced programs. M-DCPS identifies students for gifted programs through standardized tests and teacher recommendations. Recently, the district adopted universal screening in first grade to identify potentially gifted students. However, all of the participants that were identified as gifted were identified through standardized testing. Mayes and Hines (2014) confirm that gifted and advanced programs can be isolating for Black girls. The exclusionary nature of being gifted was more apparent in elementary school. In elementary, students may be in a self-contained gifted class, a pull-out program, or a push-in program. Regardless of the

delivery of the gifted curriculum, gifted students may be separated from the “regular kids,” and that could be misinterpreted to mean they receive special treatment or privilege. In third grade, Gilman went to different work groups in her class to receive enrichment. However, in fourth grade, she participated in a “pullout program where we were getting removed from our classes.” Stephanie started gifted in third grade and remembered, “all of the gifted students will be in the same class. There was no intermingling.” For C, the experience was a little different. “The way that they did it is that we would have our regular classes, and then we would go to the gifted classes for math and science.” The nature of the program created this sense of separation from the students in general education that perpetuated the idea that gifted programs are systems of privilege.

Alicia and Denise were not labeled gifted but still participated in advanced programs since elementary school. Alicia was never tested for gifted services but had “been in advanced classes for as long as [she] could remember.” Alicia may not have been tested for gifted despite having high test scores on the state standardized tests because she switched schools when she would have traditionally been tested for gifted services or did not move to Miami until she was in first grade. Alicia could have also fallen victim to being a “false negative,” as described by Lakin (2016), and simply was missed by the screening tool. Denise was tested for gifted but was not “classified as gifted even though the following year, I got a perfect score.” Once Denise was identified, tested, and did not qualify, the school may not have expended any additional resources to test her again despite her perfect score. Although neither of them was in gifted programs, they still performed well enough to be tracked with the gifted students.

Middle school is when the distinction of being in advanced or gifted courses became more pronounced. Alicia confirmed this by saying, “I’d say, like, truly the distinction I found started when I was in middle school . . .” Denise started taking Algebra in seventh grade, and in eighth grade, was “adamant about dual enrollment.” Stephanie and Gilman were both accepted into IB in middle school through the recommendation of an advisor, but to remain in the program they had to sign a contract. In middle school, students that tested high on standardized tests in elementary school begin taking high school courses. In addition, the way the students experience the school day changes as students have more teachers and classes in the day. Advanced students also have to adjust to the rigor of the curriculum.

A challenging curriculum is the benefit of being in advanced programs. Henfield et al. (2008) confirmed that a challenging and rigorous curriculum was the benefit of gifted education. C felt she needed the push to do it and that she worked better in high-stress classes. When Gilman went through her crisis experience with her science teacher, she shared that she just wanted to learn and “needed the challenge in the classroom.” She continued to speak about the “quality education” that IB provided her. “I wouldn’t have been exposed to worldly views because I wouldn’t have access to that.”

The participants shared that advanced courses helped them prepare for life in general. Gilman needed the challenge to succeed, so she appreciated calculus so much. Her learnings in IB not only set her up for academic success but also helped her for life in general. “I think exposure is definitely one of them because we got to learn about why things are.” Stephanie also appreciated everything she learned in gifted programs because “it allowed me to look at thing in a different scope . . . if I wasn’t in the gifted

program, there wouldn't be certain conversations that I'm having." Denise also wouldn't change her decision to be in advanced programs. In high school, she took all the advanced courses her school had to offer and had to take dual enrollment courses. She graduated with 83 college credits, her associate degree, and several certifications.

The motivation for their buy-in to the rigor and extra work of these programs, however, was access to post-secondary education. The advanced programs prepared them for the rigor of the curriculum, the time management skills needed and the experiences of coping with stress that are needed to be successful in college. Alicia stated, "I think that the rigor of the work that I am completing will also prepare me for the future because I will continue to be a part of rigorous programs." For Denise, advanced programs helped to boost her GPA, which increased her chances of getting into college. Stephanie also felt gifted programs prepared her for college because they helped change her mind set about taking advanced courses.

I think that the way that they were able to do so was we stopped learning just to pass an exam but learning to actually internalize the information and understand how the information impacts our day-to-day lives and how the information is part of a greater picture.

Gilman agreed, "During pre-IB, . . . I was learning for the test. I wasn't learning for enrichment." Not only did the IB program help her get into college, but it prepared her for the rigor of the courses in college.

An issue that the girls were confronted with that is unique to gifted Black children is deciding between attending a predominantly White institution or attending a

historically Black college or university. Some of the girls knew that they always wanted to attend an HBCU and never had a desire to attend a PWI like C. She shared that,

I wanted to go to an HBCU just based on my experiences in school, and I'm not trying to sound mean or ignorant, but literally just being surrounded by almost all White people for four years it really does something to you, and I couldn't do it anymore.

Denise wanted to attend an Ivy League but "was either denied or waitlisted." She ended up choosing Stoffer, an all-girls HBCU located in Atlanta, out of all of the institutions that she was accepted because "they gave [her] a full ride . . . I knew that the sisterhood was something that would really be great for me, too." Gilman also wanted to attend a HBCU but settled for Southern State University because she received a full ride automatically since she graduated with an IB diploma. Alicia also grappled with a decision on whether to attend a PWI or an HBCU. Ultimately, she decided on a HBCU institution based on her future trajectory.

While an HBCU does have that community component, I'll feel empowered. I'll be around people who look like me. I think, in many ways, attending an HBCU would be a disservice to me because I feel like the spaces that, at least profession, the trajectory that I'm on, is dominated by White people. I'm not necessarily going to be surrounded by a bunch of people who look like me and, so I think that attending a PWI helps me get accustomed to being around people who don't look like me, helps me get accustomed to being okay, with being comfortable. The reality is that I won't be surrounded by Black people . . . all my life.

Being the token Black girl in gifted and advanced classes often meant that the girls were isolated because of their high visibility and the difference between them and the dominant group (Watkins et al., 2019). This feeling of isolation or contrast led them to try to assimilate into these spaces. The participants discussed how they occupied these White spaces and navigated White fragility. “I’ve always been aware that I didn’t belong, necessarily, or that the spaces that I was in weren’t built for me,” Alicia said, but these sentiments resonated with all the girls.

The tokenization issue arose for Alicia in her philosophy class. Alicia defined tokenism as “the practice of doing something to avoid criticism or to create the appearance or effect that people are being treated equally.” The teacher called her out as being tokenized in another teacher’s campaign “to show that he, quote, ‘likes Black people.’” After being impacted by the incident, she sought the help of her counselor, “a woman of color,” on how to process and address the incident with her teacher. Although her teacher had committed this microaggression towards her, she felt that she had to address the issue to maintain a relationship. Another instance in which she had to navigate White fragility was with the PTSA president of her school after the 5000 Role Model incident. In school, she also had to navigate dealing with the parent who commented about the 5000 Role Model’s son who “felt the need to explain to me that his mother wasn’t racist. He always felt the need afterward to say that he wasn’t racist.”

As the only Black person in her advanced classes, C felt she had to “go the extra mile to stand out and show how good of a student you are.” Her parents instilled in her the value of hard work. Still, in these classes where she was “the only Black girl in [the] class, the only Black person in general,” she had to try even harder because “there’s so

many kids, there's only this many Black people, even smaller numbers when you're talking about being in advanced classes." Conversely, Denise often felt like the token Black child in her predominantly Black high school and predominantly White middle school. She attributed this treatment to the stereotypes attributed to urban schools and how she didn't fit that stereotype.

Alicia and Gilman experienced being othered in debate, but their experiences differed slightly as Gilman attended a predominantly Black school and Alicia attended a predominantly White school. "I think that particularly with ISD and Speech and Debate camp, it was a lot of the thing that I felt. The way I was treated, I was definitely othered," Alicia shared. Not only was Alicia othered by the predominantly White crowd but also within her team, where she was the only Black girl. Gilman conversely shared how she felt by being on one of the only all-Black teams at the debate tournaments and felt that being othered in White spaces was systemic. She shared, "We would be the only group of Black people every time . . . That was when it was like, 'Oh, we are different. We are others.'" Stephanie felt othered in her political science course at the University of a Southern State because she "was the only African American woman in most of [her] classes."

Due to high visibility, contrast, and the dichotomous desire to stand out and assimilate, the girls might face the pathological aspects of perfectionism, which include depression and anxiety (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010). For Gilman, this anxiety manifested in a mental health crisis when she found out her father was drug trafficking and money laundering on top of dealing with the pressures of doing well on her IB tests. "Ultimately, I passed all my tests but at the extent of myself," she remembered. C was

motivated by the fear of failure or “not being successful.” Denise felt this stress from being in academically challenging courses but also from participating in several community organizations, which led her to feel as if “she was putting too much pressure on [herself].”

Being woke was a colloquialism popularized by the Black Lives Matters Movement and the Me, Too Movement to indicate “an awareness of the specific injustices and abuses targeting the African American community” (Babulski, 2020, p. 74). The participants were influenced by current racial tensions, leading to them being woke and empowered by the people around them to be changemakers. Although these events happened outside of the classroom, the girls were able to acknowledge the systemic issues with schools coupled with the current racial tensions that impacted how they made meaning of their experiences.

Gilman was so impacted by the racialized event of the summer of 2020 that it started to affect her health and mental state. “One of the symptoms was excruciating headaches, like, can’t even open my eyes type of headaches, but I was still on Zoom organizing,” she said. She realized that she couldn’t internalize the work that she does. The deaths of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and Ahmad Abury made Denise “more woke although [she didn’t] experience much.” Stephanie experienced microaggressions at the University of a Southern State, where she questioned whether or not she wanted to continue attending. She was also entuned with the history of Blacks on campus, and she believed that the promises of equal opportunities for minorities were not fulfilled by the university and that the history of the school was stained by racism. The

participants also expressed their disdain for Donald Trump. Denise's attitude was that Trump's motives were not good after she watched a Netflix documentary about him.

Although current racial tensions influenced the girls, the people around them empowered them to make changes. The girls forged a bond during the focus group interview because it created a sense of community of like-minded individuals with similar experiences and aspirations. Alicia said the focus group "[gave] me hope that there are people like us who are trying to use our experiences for the better." That collective bond resonated with all the participants. C agreed that it was "refreshing to be able to hear everybody's different views and to hear what everybody had to say and to hear that you're not alone in the struggle." Denise congratulated all the girls on their accomplishments. Gilman thought the focus group was great and appreciated "just the way we were able to support each other as we also reflected on those experiences as we went through the questions." Stephanie was moved by Alicia's story and her perseverance in the face of insurmountable microaggressions. Herbert and Anderson (2020) argued that Black girls who "displayed high levels of racial pride scored high on total self-esteem and self-concept."

Empowerment, for Alicia, is a passion. She is "passionate about empowering marginalized communities, and helping people realize their potential." Gilman and Stephanie were both empowered by their shared culture and the Haitian community. Their familial support systems empowered all of the participants. Mayes and Hines (2014) discussed how parents are included in planning for career and college. Gilman valued her mom's opinion about the school she attended, the programs she was involved in, and helping her navigate dealing with the administration regarding the issue with Dr.

Jean. Denise's mother also helped her make educational decisions. C's parents were very involved in her academic journey. She was the only child, and her parents invested time and resources in her to be successful in school. Alicia found support in her oldest sister, who sacrificed so much, including an acceptance to Princeton to raise Alicia and her siblings. Gilman also found like-minded communities in college to ease her transition from her community, where everyone shared the same identity as her, to being the minority. However, Gilman also found that "all skinfolk ain't kinfolk" to signify that not everyone who looks like you may have the same values, attitudes, and beliefs.

All the participants impacted their schools and communities by assuming leadership roles. A surprise that emerged from the focus group was the girls' future aspirations. Denise described that she chose a political science major "because of [her] involvement and just being able to advocate for [her] community is something that [she] realized that [she has] a passion for." She also participated in SGA at her school and the district, was a Youth Commissioner, the student representative on the School Board, and an advocate in the community. C served in school and civic organizations in the community, including Jack and Jill of America, the Mock Trial Team president, and a Black Student Union member. In the future, she wants to be a lawyer. The incident with the 5000 Role Models inspired Alicia to pitch a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion course for M-DCPS volunteers. She was also class president, Student Council President, part of the flag football team, Math Honor Society, Health Information Project (HIP) and the student EESAC representative. Alicia is studying government, focusing on social policy at Hartenford University, and her ultimate goal is to do policy work. Gilman was a part of student government on the high school and collegiate level. Gilman wants to change

the world by being a lawyer. Stephanie served in change-making organizations at the University of a Southern State, including the Black Student Union, Vice President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, President of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the external affairs director. Stephanie aspires to be the first Black female superintendent of M-DCPS.

Being in gifted and advanced courses greatly impacted the girls in the study's life skills, social interactions, postsecondary trajectory, and beliefs about gifted and advanced programs. The consensus amongst all the participants is that they did not have any regrets about being in gifted and advanced programs. If given the opportunity, they would choose to participate in these programs again because they gave them access to a challenging curriculum that prepared them for the rigor of post-secondary institutions and life in general. However, by participating in gifted and advanced programs the girls were "woke" to the disparities in the educational system, identifying gifted programs as a system of privilege, and recognizing social injustices around the world. This knowledge empowered them to be changemakers in their schools and communities.

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the experiences of Black girls as they navigate acceptance and participation in gifted or advanced programs in Title I schools. The racialized experiences of these girls encompassed a multifaceted terrain, marked by gender-based microaggressions, classism, ageism, and texturism, all of which had a profound impact on how they navigated traditionally White spaces. Moreover, their perceptions of giftedness extended beyond cognitive abilities, encompassing attributes such as being innovative, out-of-the-box thinkers, problem-solvers, and hard workers. These perceptions not only influenced their self-esteem but also how they approached life

skills, social interactions, education, and their beliefs about gifted programs and giftedness.

More importantly, the participants in this study demonstrated a strong sense of confidence in their abilities, and they received validation from others regarding their intelligence. Their experiences in gifted and advanced programs significantly shaped their life skills and social interactions, preparing them for the challenges of post-secondary education and life in general. Despite the recognition of disparities within the educational system and the identification of gifted programs as a system of privilege, these girls expressed no regrets about their participation. In fact, they expressed a desire to continue being part of such programs as they believed it empowered them to be agents of change in their schools and communities. In essence, the findings highlight the resilience and determination of Black girls in gifted and advanced programs, who not only excel academically but also emerge as advocates for social justice and equity.

Limitations

Due to the inability to get viable contact information for prospective participants from the district's gifted coordinator and a local assistant principal, I had to resort to using gatekeepers to recruit participants. Initially, my thoughts were to recruit girls before they graduated to participate in the study the summer after they matriculated from high school. Unfortunately, due to district-wide testing, I could not schedule a meeting with the girls before the end of the year. By using gatekeepers, the number of prospective participants dwindled. I had to rely on gatekeepers with contact information for these girls. The study was broadened to include girls who participated in gifted programs and those not identified as gifted. My goal was to recruit three girls who were

identified as gifted and three girls who were on an advanced track. I managed to find another girl who had not tested for gifted but was a high-performing Black girl in advanced programs, but I lost her due to scheduling conflicts right before the focus group interviews. In addition, I would have preferred face-to-face interviews as it would have provided me an opportunity to be more intentional with taking observational notes, reading body language, and capturing the nuance of speech and language during the interview. Conducting interviews on Zoom, as mentioned earlier, posed a problem with both the interviewer and the participants remaining present.

Call to Action

During the focus group follow-up interview, the girls had the opportunity to share their wishes for the study's outcome. I decided to ask this question to solicit responses that could help school districts like M-DCPS enact change regarding the education of gifted and advanced Black girls, specifically Black and minority children. The girls spoke about the need for representation in gifted and advanced programs in three areas: personnel, student demographics, and curriculum. Alicia shared, and the same theme resonated with all the girls, "My hope is that awareness increases, representation increases, and ultimately, that people who look like us that are reading this study feel empowered and understand that they can make it through."

Stephanie expressed the need for a "more diverse representation of teachers." All participants found a shared identity with teachers and administrators that looked like them. They felt they could discuss their concerns and be utterly understood by Black teachers in the classroom. Stephanie and Gilman had a Black history teacher who impacted their experience in high school. Alicia also spoke of community in her

predominantly Black middle school. The teachers there supported her with academics but with life in general. However, the sphere of influence and support went beyond the classroom for some participants, with Black administrators also being the representation the girls leaned on for support. For Alicia, she and her Black assistant principal leaned on each other for support after the incident with the 5000 Role Models. C found that support in her Black assistant principal, who helped her with tardies.

In addition, the girls wanted to see an increase in minority students in gifted and advanced programs. Being identified and staffed for a gifted or placed in advanced courses negatively affects a student's social-emotional health as they navigate spaces in which the majority of the students do not share the same racial background as them. Affinity to one's race and culture builds self-esteem and resilience in children (Buckley & Carter, 2005). M-DCPS has made strides in increasing the number of minority students by providing universal screening to all first-grade students, which Peters and Engerrand (2016) hypothesized could help close the gap. However, changing the state's definition of giftedness would also go a long way in recruiting more minority students. Wright and Ford (2017) felt states should adopt the word potential in their definition and work to get children enrolled in rigorous early childhood programs that develop language, psychomotor development, and personal-social characteristics to prepare them for gifted programs.

The girls wanted to see representation in the literature they read in their courses. Denise felt educators should try "to make the texts that are being read are more inclusive and representative of the community that we're serving, rather than just promoting, in a sense, White literature." Gifted curriculum, according to Milner and Ford (2005), is

developed based on the concept of colorblindness, but that is to the detriment of racially diverse students who do not see themselves in the curriculum. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) suggest a four-level model for implementing a multicultural curriculum: contribution, additive, transformational, and social action approach.

Alicia and her assistant principal developed a Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity training program for all volunteers. Their proposition went all the way to the School Board. Whether or not it was implemented is not known. However, a course like this is necessary to start conversations moving toward these three ideals. Teachers go through similar training to become teachers, but it is not necessarily required to volunteer in the school system. Training all stakeholders in these concepts will promote the district's core value of equity.

Although none of the girls expressly stated this, comments were made regarding more support from counselors transitioning the girls from high school to college. Milner and Ford (2005) mentioned in their article about getting gifted Black girls in college and career-ready that Black girls underutilize counselors. C's parents paid for a tutor in high school that had a "college prep program." She mentioned that this tutor helped her more with college and scholarship applications than her school counselor, who had too many students to provide that individualized support. Stephanie expressed how students in the IB program were not made aware of how to apply for top-tier schools even though there were educators in the school who attended those schools. Gilman also talked about her lack of support from the school in transitioning to college. Mayes and Hines (2014) suggested that counselors adopt eight components of college and career readiness endorsed by The College Board National Office of School Counselor Advocacy,

including college aspirations, academic planning for college and career readiness, enrichment and extracurricular engagement, college and career exploration and selection process, college and career assessments, college affordability planning, college and career admissions processes, and transition from high school graduation to college enrollment.

Implications for Practice

The call to action was written based wholly on the participants' wishes for the outcome of the study. This section, however, are my implications for practice deduced from the narratives the participants shared with me. These assertions were made after careful analysis of the narrative profiles. After rereading the narrative profiles in Chapter 4, specifically how the girls addressed microaggressions, how they became "woke," how they navigated being the token Black girl in White spaces, and how they used gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success, I extrapolated strategies for educators that would assist Black girls in navigating gifted and advanced programs.

During the interviews, the girls were asked to describe how they would handle microaggressions committed inside of the classroom and outside of the school setting. Whether the responses were based on their own experiences addressing microaggressions or hypothetical, the participants decided that certain conditions must be met to elicit a response. In the school setting, the girls were torn between addressing microaggressions head on or letting it go. However, in the world outside of the school setting, the girls were more apt to address the person committing the microaggression because they did not fear social backlash. From their responses I gathered, I developed following list of strategies to address microaggressions.

Addressing Microaggressions:

1) Recognition and Awareness:

- a. Recognize that the normalization of microaggression can hinder identification.
- b. Ground response to microaggressions in ownership of recognizing the other person's problem and intentionally choosing whether to respond.

2) Strategized Response:

- a. Strategize when and how to call the microaggressions out while maintaining respect.
- b. Choose when to respond to microaggressions to not take on the responsibility of another person's behaviors and inappropriateness every time someone commits a microaggression.

3) Contextual Approach:

- a. Adapt responses to microaggressions based on the environment, the person committing the microaggressions and the social repercussions of responding.

To identify microaggressions required an awareness of social injustices. Most of the girls possessed this quality and considered themselves “woke.” Some of the girls determined that they did not have any racialized experiences that were directed towards them, but they spoke about the experiences of others and were able to identify the transgressions committed against family and friends. I questioned whether they were truly “woke” or whether microaggressions had become so normal that they were difficult

to identify and thus left unaddressed. After careful consideration, I leaned towards the latter. In reading their narratives, I identified three characteristics for being “woke.”

Being “Woke” and Aware:

1) Social Consciousness:

- a. Give credence to one’s awareness of racial tensions around the world and the educational disparities one witnesses in the school system.

2) Community Engagement:

- a. Seek leadership positions within their communities in which to enact change.

3) Empowerment and Identity:

- a. Be empowered by your communities, culture, and support systems to be agents of change.
- b. Acknowledge who you are and make decisions on who you want to be in society.

Being aware of racial injustices around them allows the girls to navigate White Spaces successfully. Girls in gifted and advanced programs toggle between worlds; their own communities and White spaces in which they felt othered. Being othered is not a blatant act of racism but it is even subtler than microaggressions. It is a mere feeling of not belonging. The girls struggled not to lose their identity in spaces that were not built for them, while trying to assimilate into gifted and advanced programs. Often the girls found that they were tokenized in their classes, but there is a possibility that they will be tokenized the rest of their lives. The following strategies can help Black girls navigate being the token Black girls in White spaces:

Navigating White Spaces:

1) Dealing with Othering:

- a. Learn how to navigate White fragility by acknowledging the individual's emotional response, sharing how it made you feel, and ending on a positive note.

2) Strategies for Success:

- a. Validate your place in advanced programs by excelling academically.
- b. Find a support system to help navigate White spaces.
- c. Assert oneself in leadership positions to seek equity of voice.
- d. Motivate oneself to persist in White spaces.
- e. Protect one's social emotional well-being by seeking therapy and counseling when applicable.
- f. Balance one's social and academic responsibilities to mitigate burnout.

Gifted and advanced programs offer the girls possibilities for academic advancement that they may not be afforded in regular programming. In gifted programs, children are exposed to advanced curriculum that enrich their understanding of the concepts and develop their critical thinking skills. These skills are necessary to prepare them for post-secondary institutions. Gilman Smith described her giftedness as a weapon, but I described it as a vehicle to success. The places that advanced programs would take the girls is innumerable. Below are implications on how to use gifted and advanced programs as a vehicle to success.

Leveraging Gifted and Advanced Programs:

1) Early Engagement:

- a. Participate in gifted and advanced programs at an early age.

2) Strategies for Success:

- a. Maintain a high G.P.A. to increase access to top-tier universities and scholarship opportunities.
- b. Make friends within the programs while maintaining friendships outside of the program.
- c. Seek help from teachers and counselors in transitioning to middle school.
- d. Build relationship with educators as a support system.
- e. Accept the challenge of being in gifted and advanced programs.

In conclusion, the narratives and experiences shared by the girls in the study navigating White spaces, particularly in gifted and advanced programs, offer profound insights and strategies for educators and those supporting these students. The strategies identified are not just theoretical assertions, but practical, informed solutions derived directly from the narratives of these young individuals. Ultimately, the comprehensive set of strategies proposed is a testament to the need for an inclusive, supportive, and empowering educational environment for Black girls. It emphasizes the significance of fostering not just academic growth but also emotional resilience, social assimilation, and a strong sense of identity within these academic settings. Implementing these strategies requires a holistic approach that encompasses not only the academic aspect but also the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the students. It calls for a collective effort from educators, support systems, and the broader community to create an environment that enables Black girls to thrive and succeed in these educational spaces.

Suggestions for Future Research

In preparing my literature review, finding research related specifically to Black girls in gifted or advanced programs or high-achieving Black girls was difficult. This study will add to the existing literature, but additional research on Black girls in gifted programs should be explored. A longitudinal study similar to Winsler et al. (2013) tracking the academic journey of Black males in Miami-Dade County Public Schools should be completed with Black girls. This study would generate data on how many girls are identified as gifted and determine early predictors of giftedness. Another longitudinal study on the long-term effects of microaggressions in gifted and advanced programs along the same vein as Compton-Lilly's (2020) study on the impact of micro/macroaggressions on minority children should be conducted but specifically for Black gifted girls.

In addition, this study should be extended with a larger representation of students. I would be interested to see the outcomes of a similar study conducted in another large school district like Los Angeles or New York. Certain dynamics, like the state's definition of giftedness, how students are identified and staffed in that district, and the method of delivery of the gifted curriculum, may change the study's outcome. The study should include an even number of gifted Black girls and Black girls that were not staffed for gifted but were tracked with gifted students.

Final Thoughts

This past week my daughter shared with me that she was called a "nigger" by a boy in her class. This was the first time that she had experienced such a blatant act of racism, and she was speechless on how to address it. In completing this study, I realized

I have never had a conversation with her about how to handle this type of degradation. When confronted with people taunting her about her height, weight, or any other playground nonsense, she came back with a witty response, but to this one word, she was shocked speechless. To see my beautiful, gifted daughter struggle with how she should feel validated my interest in this study.

Microaggression and blatant racism being considered normal by the participants resonated with me. Students of color are so desensitized to this disrespect that they ignore it rather than address it. The girls in the study had to decide whether addressing it would fall on deaf ears and be worth the effort or, in addressing it, would they be considered aggressive or angry, falling into the stereotype placed on Black women. It is the epitome of a rock and a hard place, and no child should have to be able to choose between the best of two evils.

During the focus group, something in my spirit moved and confirmed that this study would help enact change in M-DCPS. I am a proud product of M-DCPS and have served in the same district that taught me and raised me for 13 years in various positions. I was moved by the significance that advanced education in this district had on the way the girls in this study persisted in spaces not built for them. By occupying these spaces, they were dismantling the very system of oppression that was built to keep them out. Each participant thanked me for allowing their stories to be told and their voices to be heard but the truth is, it is my honor to serve as a footnote in their narratives. By telling their stories, I am telling my own, my daughter's and all of the Black girls in advanced programs whose voices until now have been muted.

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Appendix A:
IRB Approval



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

Protocol Number: 04178-2021

Investigator: Viviana Lumpkin

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Richard Schmertzling

Project Title: *Being Gifted, Black, and Female: The Experiences of Minority Girls in Gifted Programs in Title 1 Schools.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

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

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *This approved protocol is authorized to begin at Miami-Dade County Public Schools effective 10.26.2021.*
- *As a VSU student conducting research, it is required that you use your VSU issued email address for all research related correspondence.*
- *Exempt protocol guidelines **permit** recording of interview/focus group sessions provided recordings are made to create an accurate transcript. Upon creation of the transcript, the recorded interview/focus group session must be deleted immediately from all devices.*
- *Exempt guidelines **prohibit** the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings.*
- *To maintain participant confidentiality, pseudonym lists are to maintained in a file separate from corresponding name lists, email addresses, etc.*
- *As part of the informed consent process, interview recordings must include the researcher reading aloud the consent statement, confirming participant's understanding, and establishing willingness to take part in the interview.*
 - *As documentation of informed consent, the transcripts should include the reading of the statement, confirming understanding, and establishing willingness to participate.*
 - *Participants must be offered a copy of the research statement.*
- *Upon completion of the research study 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.*

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

Elizabeth W. Olphie

08.05.2021

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator

Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

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

Appendix B:
Questionnaire



Being GIFTED, BLACK, and FEMALE”

The Experiences of Minority Girls in Gifted Programs in Title I Schools Research Study

Name: _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____

Phone Number: _____ What is the best time to call? _____

Email: _____

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Race:

_____ Black

_____ White

_____ American Indian or Alaska Native

_____ Asian

_____ Native American or Other Pacific Islander

Are you Hispanic or of Latino origin? Yes _____ No _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION:

When were you identified for gifted? _____

To the best of your knowledge, how were you identified for gifted?

Did you graduate from a Miami-Dade County Public School? _____

Which school? _____ What year did you graduate? _____

How long were you in the gifted program? _____

What advanced courses did you take in high school? _____

Are you currently in a post-secondary institution?

If so, what institution? _____

GIFTED EXPERIENCES:

What racialized experiences did you have in gifted programs?

*Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to **Viviana Smith-Lumpkin** at vrsmith@valdosta.edu. 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.*

Appendix C:
First Interview Guide

Interview 1: Life Story and Experiences

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to meet with me.

This is the first interview in a series of three for my dissertation research study which explores the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs. The current research focuses on Black boys in gifted programs but I would like to study the experiences of Black girls in gifted programs to paint a holistic picture of the experiences of Black children in gifted programs. As a former gifted Black girl, the mother of a gifted Black girl and a gifted teacher, I know that children may deal with issues related to race in their classes, especially their gifted classes. Also Black girls may deal with intersectionality: the intersection of race and gender in classes. Those are the types of experiences that I am looking for and hopefully you will be able to help by sharing your experiences.

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. When did you graduate from high school? What high school did you graduate from?
4. How long were you in the gifted program?
5. What advanced courses did you take in high school?
6. Tell me a little about yourself.
7. Describe how you were identified as gifted?
8. Describe your early years in the gifted program? What was the demographics of the students in your classes?
9. What racialized experiences as have you had as a Black girl in gifted programs?
10. How do you describe your giftedness?

The second and third interview questions will be based on the information from the previous interviews.

Appendix D:
Second Interview Guide

Interview 2: Present Detailed Experiences

1. Are you currently in college? What are you studying? Why did you choose this particular course of study?
2. *(If answer to number 1 is yes.)* Describe how being a gifted program prepared you for college.
3. *(If answer to number 1 is no.)* Describe how being a gifted program prepared you for life.
4. What are some things that you are passionate about? What motivates you to succeed?
5. In our first interview you described some racialized experiences you have had as a Black female in gifted programs or advanced programs. Can you describe in details some of these experiences? Take yourself back to that day and describe everything that happened.
6. Describe any racialized experiences you may have experienced outside of school.
7. How do you handle any microaggressions committed against you by your classmates or teachers?
8. How do you handle any microaggressions committed against you by people outside of the school setting?
9. How has your giftedness played a part in your academic achievement? Personal achievement and successes?

The second and third interview questions will be based on the information from the previous interviews.

Appendix E:
Third Interview Guide

Interview 3: Making Meaning

1. How have these racialized experiences impacted your everyday life? Your academic success?
2. How does your perception of giftedness impact how others see your giftedness?
3. Reflect on your experiences. Would you change your decision to be in a gifted program? Why or why not?
4. Could you have done anything different in school that would have garnered different treatment? Elaborate.

Appendix F:
Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Introduce yourselves to each other. Tell us what school you're going to or attend and what you are planning to or are majoring in.
2. Florida defines giftedness as students who have superior intellectual development and are capable of high performance. According to that definition, all of you qualify as gifted whether or not you were formally identified as such. The Marland Report, which serves as the federal definition, defines giftedness as "children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas:
 - a. General intellectual ability
 - b. Specific academic ability
 - c. Creative or productive thinking
 - d. Leadership ability
 - e. Visual and performing arts
 - f. Psychomotor ability"

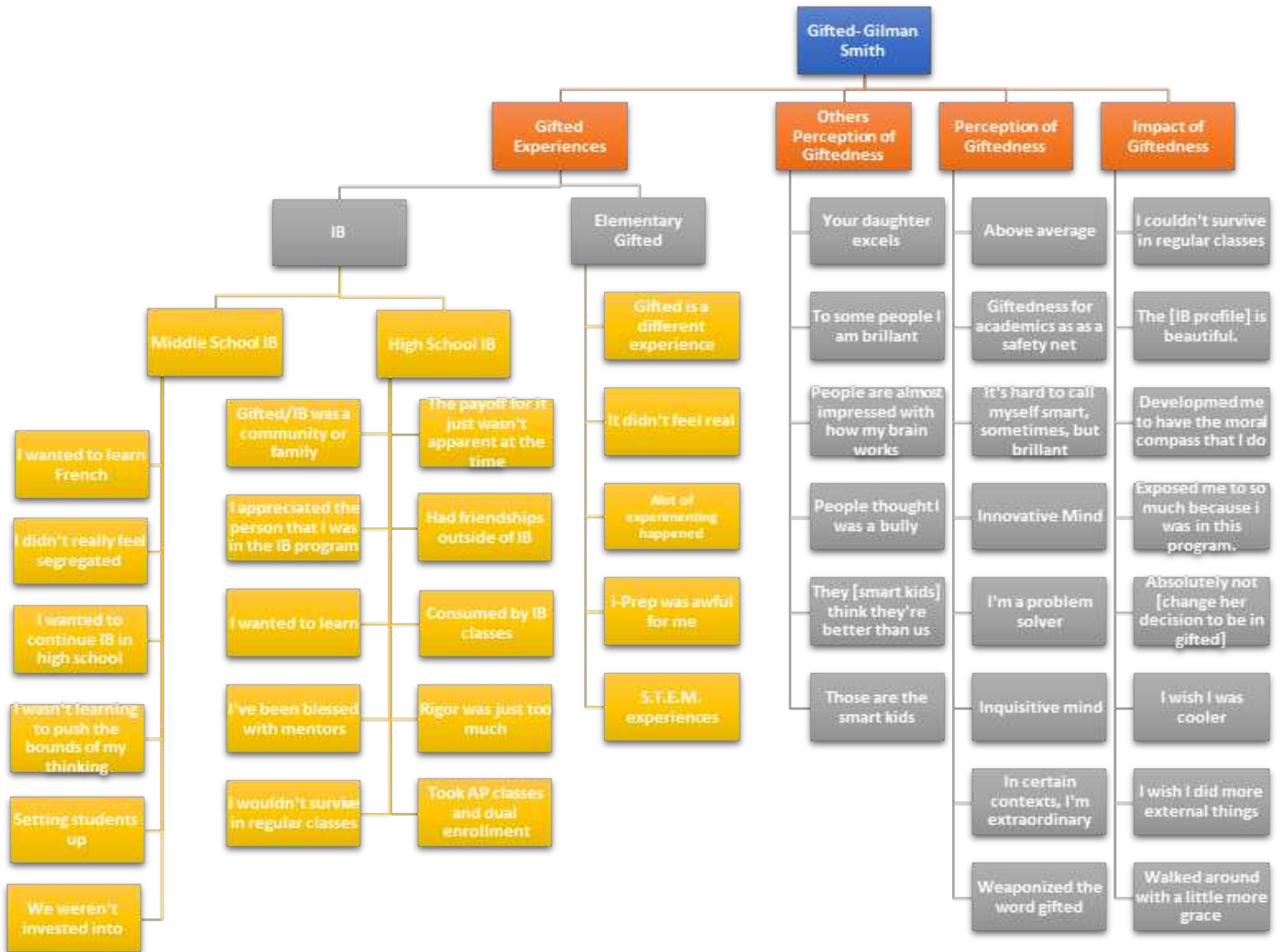
Based on Marland's definition, how do others perceive your giftedness?
How do you perceive your giftedness?

3. Have stereotypes of Black women like being aggressive or being too strong impacted you throughout your educational journey? Or do you think that describes you at all?
4. How does the stereotypes of Black girls from their own race like being called an Oreo or a token Black girl make you feel?
5. Share one of your racialized experiences.
6. Gilman shared in her interviews that she felt microaggressions were so normal. What do you feel about that statement?
7. Why did you choose a PWI or an HBCU?
8. Do you believe that gifted and advanced classes are predominantly White spaces or created as White spaces?
9. Would you change your decision to be in a gifted or advanced program?
10. Is there anything else you want to add?

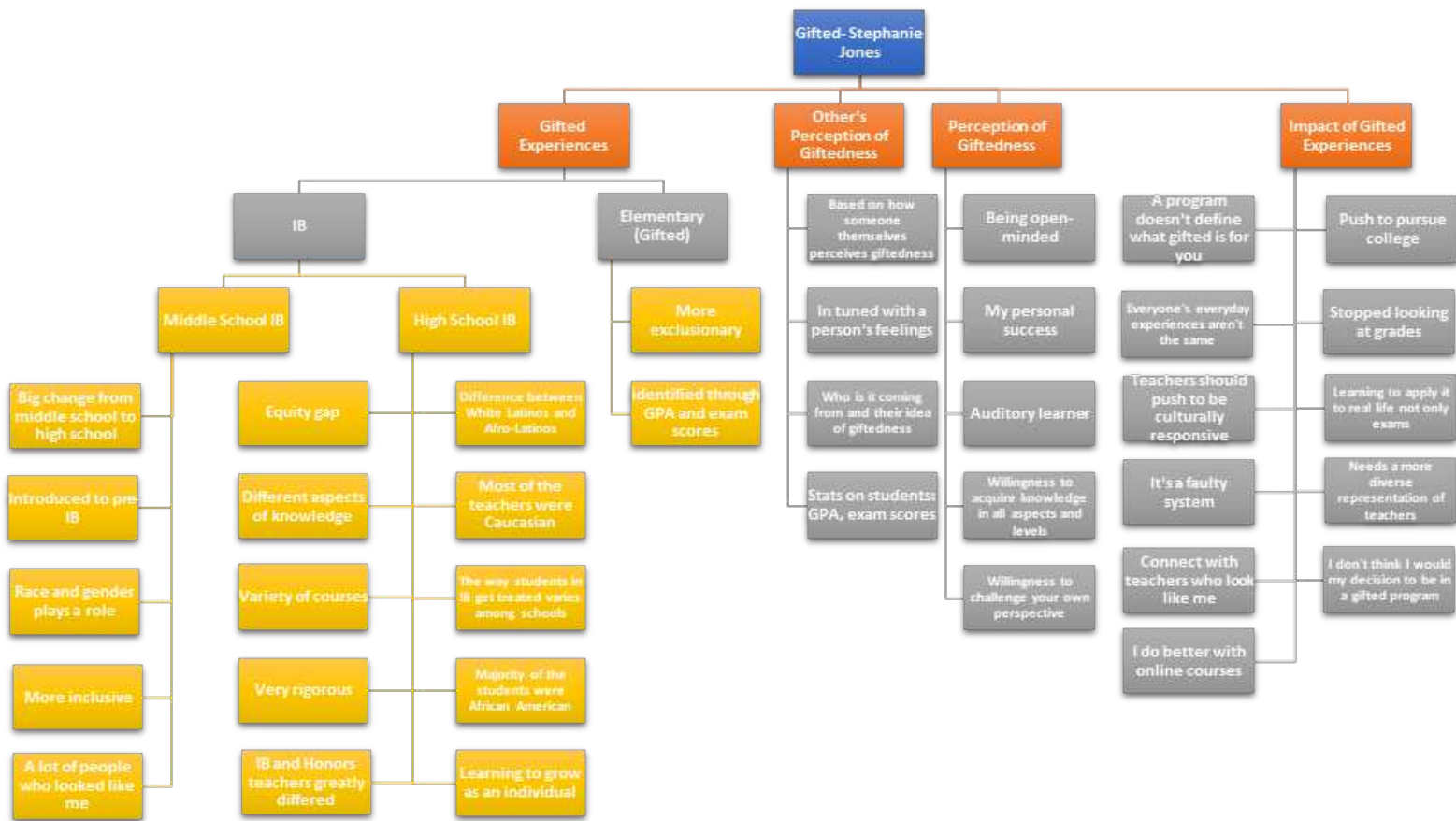
Appendix G:
Focus Group Follow Up Interview

1. Reflect on yesterday's focus group. What was your initial reaction?
2. Being introspective about the experiences you heard, reflect on your experiences. Did you have any additional racialized experiences?
3. What resonated the most with you from the focus group?
4. Are you surprised by how alike your experiences and life goals are?
5. Anything else you found surprising or interesting?
6. Who do you think this study will impact the most?
7. What change would you like to see as a result of this study?

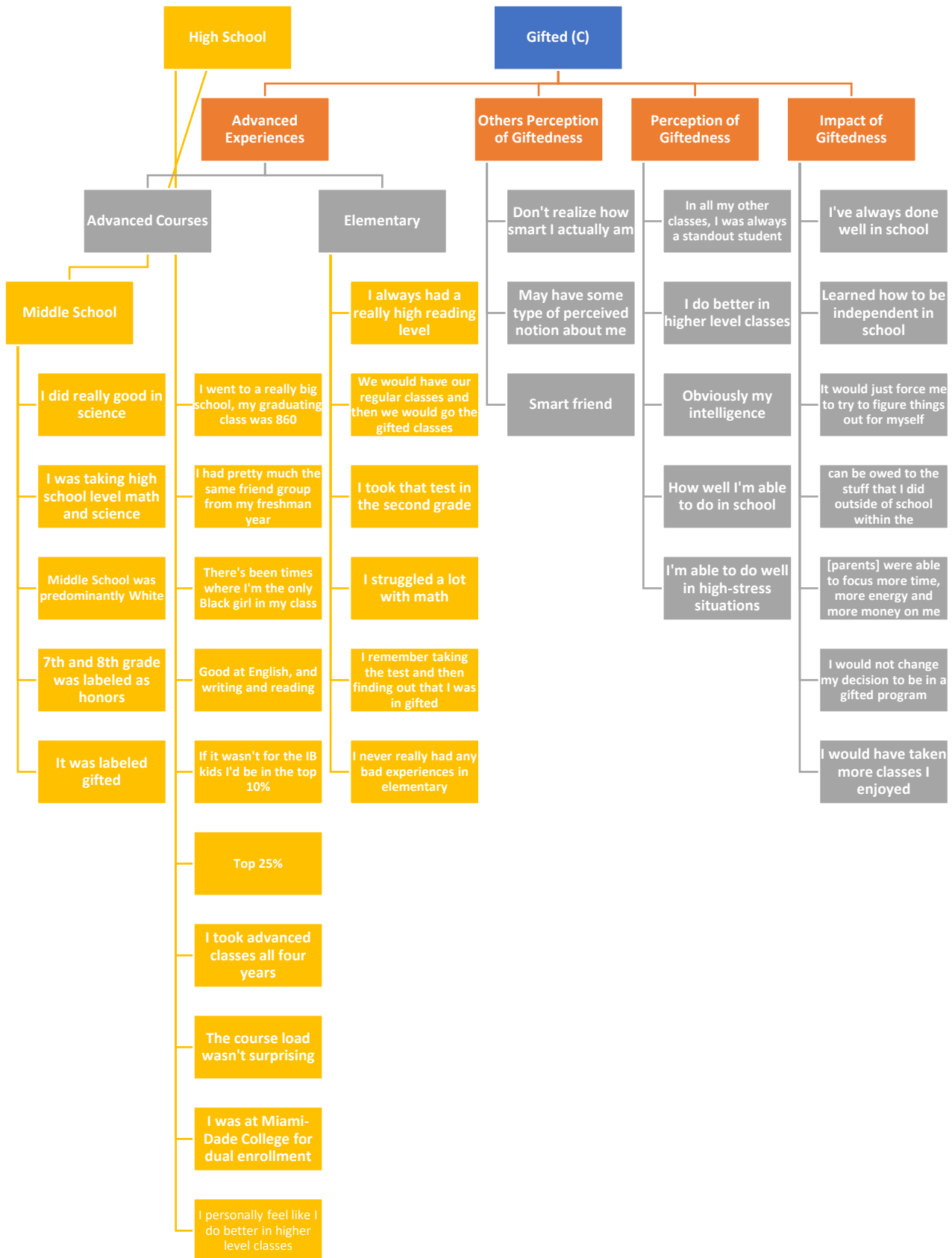
Appendix H:
Gilman Smith Gifted Concept Map



Appendix I:
Stephanie Jones Gifted Concept Map



Appendix J:
C Gifted Concept Map



Appendix K:
Denise Gifted Concept Map

Gifted (Denise)



Appendix L:
Alicia Gifted Concept Map

